COMMUNITY GARDENING
AS SOCIAL ACTION
THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY GARDENING MOVEMENT
AND REPERTOIRES FOR CHANGE

Claire Nettle
Bachelor of Environmental Studies
Master of Applied Science (Social Ecology)

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The problem is not only to know what is occurring in the world, but to understand it and derive lessons from it—just as if we were studying history—a history not of the past, but a history of what is happening at any given moment in whatever part of the world. This is the way we learn who we are, what it is we want, who we can be and what we can do or not do.

Marcos 1997
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DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

An earlier version of Appendix 1 was published as


Parts of Chapter 6 were published in


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There has been a resurgence of community gardening activity in Australia over the past decade. This coincides with increasing concern about food security, urban sustainability, social isolation and the preservation of community space. Community gardening has been adopted by divergent actors, from health agencies looking to increase fruit and vegetable consumption to radical social movements seeking symbols of non-capitalist social and spatial relations. This thesis contributes to a systematic research account of the Australian community gardening movement by considering community gardening as a site of collective social action.

Drawing on a tradition of activist research, the analysis focuses on ethnographic case studies of three key organisations within the Australian community gardening movement. These case studies portray community gardening activity at three scales: a garden, an organisation supporting and promoting community gardening at a city-wide level, and the national community gardening organisation.

Drawing on social movement theory, the thesis investigates the ways community gardeners in these organisations approach environmental and social justice issues and considers the relationships between community gardening and wider movements. In particular, the thesis considers the political logic of community gardeners’ collective practices, revealing the specific methods community gardeners use to enact social change. It then considers whether community gardening can be seen as a form of political praxis. The thesis shows that community gardening is used strategically and intentionally as a performance to make collective claims. In some contexts and to the extent to which it is so used, it argues that community gardening can be understood as a social movement practice. Finally, the thesis contends that community gardeners’ strategies are part of a repertoire of collective action, which offers both a contribution to existing understandings of collective action and a critique of current conceptualisations of activism.

The thesis foregrounds community garden organisers’ analyses of the change they wish to see, the tactics they choose, and the role ‘constructive’ and prefigurative repertoires play in movements for change. In doing so it makes a unique contribution to the existing literature on both community gardening and environmental social movements.

Keywords: Community Gardens; Alternative Agrifood Movements; Repertoires of Contention; Social Movement Tactics; Activist Research; Ethnography.
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My son Innis added the word ‘thesis’ to his vocabulary before he was two years old, and has counted down the days to its completion. Innis delivered me plates of toast and sustaining cups of tea while I was cloistered in my study, and occasionally took me by the hand and demanded that I stop writing and step outside.
CHAPTER 1.
COMMUNITY GARDENING IN AUSTRALIA:
FROM SUSTAINABLE LEISURE
TO SOCIAL ACTION

Although the act of growing food in the city might seem like a small gesture towards sustainability, it is often through these seemingly minor acts of pleasure and shifts in thinking that change happens.

Donati, Cleary and Pike 2009 p. 219

Community gardens are places created by groups of people to grow food and community. They are spaces where a broad spectrum of activities take place: gardening for pleasure and for food production; formal and informal learning; collective management processes; community building events; research and development of environmental strategies; festivals and rituals; arts and cultural production, just to name a few. While some community gardens involve just a handful of dedicated gardeners, others host thousands of visitors each year. Community gardening in Australia is both a practice—the creation and development of community gardens—and a movement—a network of people, groups and organisations with shared aims and analyses seeking to create social change.

Through community gardens, people address multiple issues and enact multiple visions. Community gardeners seek to contribute to food security, question the erosion of public space, conserve and improve urban spaces, develop technologies of sustainable food production and urban living, foster community engagement and mutual support, and create neighbourhood commons. Community gardening is enjoying significant growth in Australia, with several hundred garden sites established around the country and more emerging. There has, however, to date been almost no systematic research on the Australian community gardening movement, and very little research internationally that considers community gardening as a form of social action.
The aim of this thesis is to gain a greater understanding of the Australian community gardening movement by applying a contextual and theoretical framework that considers community gardening as a way that people engage in collective social action. I do not seek to argue that community gardening is only a form of social action, nor even that it is best understood this way. Instead, I contend that collective social action is a central aspect of community gardening praxis and one that has thus far received an inadequate amount of attention. Viewing community gardens as sites of collective social action enables a richer and more complete understanding of community gardening and of its potential contributions to understandings of activism, community, democracy, gardening and culture. In this thesis I address the lack of empirical and theoretical attention given to community gardening in general, and argue for the significance of community gardening as a socio-political practice. My particular focus is on understanding the repertoire of collective action used by community gardeners to enact social change.

In this chapter, I introduce the community gardening movement in Australia and present an overview of my research. My intention in this chapter is to widen the lens of how we view community gardens, from one that focuses on community gardening as a form of leisure activity (with health and social benefits) to one that also encompasses its role as a form of collective social action. Working towards this end, the chapter begins by describing the three waves of community gardening activity that have occurred in Australia since the 1970s and offering a brief review of the literature on community gardening in Australia, the United Kingdom and North America. From here, I turn my attention to the possibilities and implications of viewing community gardening through the lens of collective social action. I examine the various ways the practice of community gardening has been framed in terms palatable to governments and policy makers, and the simultaneous adoption of community gardening as a political performance by radical social movements. This incongruity raises a number of questions about community gardening as a practice concerned with both social service and collective social action. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to discussing the particular questions that are the focus of this thesis and the theoretical and methodological frameworks that informed the research. This includes my use of social movement theory and of ethnography as activist research. I introduce each of my three research sites, including their areas of work and organisational structures. I conclude by offering a synopsis of my argument about the ways in which community gardening can be seen as a form of social (and social movement) action, and how I develop this over the thesis as a whole.

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1 In this thesis my discussion of comparative community gardening movements is generally limited to the United Kingdom and North America, with occasional references to European experiences. This is primarily because community gardening movements in these regions share significantly overlapping histories and literatures, and because they differ substantively from collective gardening and urban agriculture in majority world countries. It also reflects the practical limitations of my ability to access sources in languages other than English and the need to constrain the scope of my research. On urban agricultural movements in the majority world see Smit, Ratta and Nasr (1996); Bakker, Dubbeling, Guendel, Sabel-Koschella and Zeeuw (1999); May and Rogerson (2000); Mougeot (2005); Zezza and Tasciotti (2010).
COMMUNITY GARDENING IN AUSTRALIA

In order to set the scene for this thesis, I offer here a brief overview of the history of community gardening in Australia, the current state of the Australian community gardening movement, and the existing research on community gardening in this country.

Community gardens began growing around Australia in the late 1970s and early 80s. This first groundswell was followed by a second crop in the mid-1990s, and community gardening has enjoyed another flush of growth since 2005. Many of the first community gardens in Australia were established in Melbourne between 1977 and 1981. Nunawading Community Garden is widely recognised as the first (Elliott 1983; Phillips 1996; Gelsi 1999; Bartolomei, Corkery, Judd and Thompson 2003; Hatherley 2003; Astbury and Rogers 2004; Hering 1995; Gaynor 2006; Grayson 2007a, 2008b; Kingsley, Townsend and Henderson-Wilson 2009). However, there may have been community gardens established in Canberra and Adelaide before Nunawading was created (see Appendix 1). Community gardens were also established in Perth in 1983 and Sydney in 1985.

Despite emerging around the country at a similar time, there were few connections among these early community gardens, and many were unaware the other gardens existed (Phillips 1996). Most of these first community gardens continue to flourish. In the mid-1990s a number of new community gardens began to grow alongside them. In 1994 several flagship projects were established, including Northey Street City Farm (Brisbane), East Perth City Farm, Wynn Vale Community Garden (Adelaide), Randwick Community Garden and the University of New South Wales Community Permaculture Garden (both in Sydney). During this period ties among community gardens strengthened and a national body, the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (ACFCGN) was established to support and advocate for community gardening (see Chapter 4 and Appendix 4). Between 2005 and 2010 there was a new surge of interest in community gardens, with many new gardens established, increased public interest, and community gardeners becoming increasingly organised. Attendance at Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network national conferences mushroomed from 70 in 2004 to over 750 in 2007. Coverage of community gardens in the media also proliferated, with numerous stories in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television (a detailed history of community gardening in Australia is presented in Appendix 3).

The recent growth of interest in community gardens can be partly attributed to the increased prominence of food issues and the development and popularisation of a range of alternative agrifood initiatives, such as farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and consumers’ cooperatives (Hinrichs 2000; 2003; Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman and Warner 2003; Baker 2004; Wekerle 2004). Associated perspectives such as slow food (Petrini 2007), community food security (Winne 2009), food justice (Levkoe 2006), civic agriculture (Lyson 2004), and food sovereignty...
(Desmarais 2007) have provided new frames for promoting community gardening. Community gardeners have become increasingly allied with broader food movements, and have successfully positioned themselves as a form of practical action on issues of food security, sustainable food production, fossil fuel dependence, climate change and water conservation.

While it is clear that there has been significant growth in community gardening in recent years, the full extent of community gardening activity in Australia remains unmapped. Even the number of community gardens operating in Australia is not known with any precision. In June 2010 the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network's website listed contact details for 212 established community gardens and mentioned others in development. While this is the most comprehensive available listing of community gardens in Australia, it has significant gaps and is likely to be a gross underestimate of the number of existing community gardens. The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network has not carried out an audit of community gardens since 1994 (published as Phillips 1996). The details ACFCGN lists are those submitted by individual gardens and local community garden organisers. Gardens that are not in contact with local and national community gardening organisations are not listed, nor are gardens in regions without an active ACFCGN presence, such as in central Australia, and areas of Queensland beyond the capital. Significantly, it also omits gardens in Victoria where there is an active ACFCGN presence and a flourishing community garden movement. Having attempted to maintain a listing of all the community gardens in South Australia for the past seven years, I have become aware of the difficulty in identifying and maintaining contact with geographically dispersed community gardens, and have been regularly surprised to discover gardens which have been operating successfully within their local communities without contact with wider community garden networks.

There has been little research, and even less analysis, on community gardens in their uniquely Australian manifestation. The first published study about Australian community gardens was Christine Elliott’s (1983) report, Growing in the City: Employment, Education, and Recreation in Australian City Farms and Community Gardens. Commissioned in Sydney, it surveyed the 13 community gardens and two city farms Elliott identified in Melbourne at the time. Darren Phillip’s widely distributed (1996) Australian City Farms, Community Gardens, and Enterprize Centres Inventory was the first (and until

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3 ACFCGN listed 13 in the Illawarra region, NSW south coast, 35 in greater Sydney, 3 in the ‘Rainbow region’ of northern NSW, 6 in Darwin, 30 in Brisbane, 39 in Western Australia, and 13 in Canberra. This figure only includes ‘community gardens’ and not other organised collective gardening projects, such as school gardens. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the definition of ‘community garden’.
4 For example, while the ACFCGN website listed 38 gardens in Western Australia on 25th June 2010, Growing Communities WA listed 100 community gardens in a report released in the same month (Goodall 2010).
5 Both of these regions have active community gardens. See Green (2009) on community gardens in Remote Aboriginal Communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
6 There are at least 60 community gardens within Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria (Hujber 2008 p. 58) and several well-established examples in regional areas of the state.
7 I have also become aware of a small number of community gardens (often working with vulnerable client groups) that prefer not to be listed in public community garden directories, so tend to be left out of garden counts.
this thesis only) study with a national scope. The report gives details of 38 of the community gardens, city farms, and 'enterprise centres' operating around the country at the time. From the mid-1990s to the present, most of the research on community gardens in Australia has been conducted by honours and masters students (Wright 1992; Barnett 1996; Sullivan 1997; Stocker and Barnett 1998; Crabtree 1999; Gelsi 1999; Joss 2003; Harris 2008; Hujber 2008; Green 2009). These studies have produced important descriptive data, often about individual gardens, and some useful analysis. Refereed publications have been few and far between (Stocker and Barnett 1998, Perkins and Lynn 2000; Corkery 2004b; Somerset, Ball, Flett and Ceissman 2005; Kingsley and Townsend 2006; Kingsley, Townsend and Henderson-Wilson 2009—see Appendix 1 for a full review of Australian publications). When a group of researchers at the University of New South Wales (Bartolomei, Corkery, Judd and Thompson 2003) released the report, *A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo Sydney*, it was promoted as ‘the first significant study of community gardens in Australia’. This publication detailed a qualitative interdisciplinary research project on the role of community gardens in a Sydney public housing estate, focusing on community development and neighbourhood improvement (see also Corkery 2004a, 2004b). The first academic conference about community gardening was held at the University of Canberra in October 2010 (see Turner, Henryks and Pearson 2010 for proceedings).

In North America, and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom, there has been a comparative burgeoning of research on community gardens, much of which is useful in understanding the Australian experience. However, in drawing on international literature, it is important to note significant differences between community gardening in Australia, North America and Britain, particularly with regard to patterns of urban land use and histories of government urban agriculture programs. United States community gardens are most commonly associated with urban blight sites, and the process of abandonment of inner-city properties (Warner 1987 p. 5). They are frequently interpreted as grassroots responses to the processes of poverty and urban decay (Fox, Koeppel and Kellam 1985; Warner 1987; Schmelzkopf 1995; Carlsson and Manning 2010). Carlsson (2008 p. 92) evokes the environments in which early gardens were planted and nurtured in vacant lots ‘amidst crumbling, abandoned tenements full of heroin shooting galleries, gun-toting dealers, and high levels of street crime and mindless vandalism’. The complex relationship between community garden development and gentrification has been important in accounts of US community gardening history. Australia’s urban and suburban land-use patterns have not followed the same trajectory as the US, and while some Australian community gardens are in areas affected by poverty and urban neglect, reclaimed blight sites are not common locations for community gardens. Another significant difference between the Australian and US community gardening movements is the role of

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8 In the past two years there has been an increase in ‘Guerrilla Gardening’ in Australia, which has focused on abandoned lots, public parklands, and small cultivatable parcels, such as sidewalks. On guerrilla gardening, see Tracey (2007) and Reynolds (2008).
governments. In United States histories, writers argue that the influence of government campaigns during Wartime was significant to the development of community gardening (Warner 1987; Kurtz 2001; Lawson 2005). More recent government-funded programs have supported the development of many contemporary gardens. In contrast, other than the school gardening push of the Federation era (Hunt 2001; Libby 2001), there is no real history of Australian government imperatives for communal food cultivation on public land, and community gardens in this country have not received government funding or support on anywhere near the scale of their US and UK counterparts. While government and quasi-government agencies have begun to run community garden programs (see Appendix 3 for details), most gardens in Australia begin as participant-initiated projects and receive little government support or intervention. In addition, ‘community garden’ is often defined more broadly in US literature than in Australian accounts. For example, in Australia community gardening is understood to involve food production, whereas in the United States, some ‘community gardens’ grow only ornamental plants (this discussion is taken up in more detail in Chapter 2).

Despite being produced across a number of disciplines, the focus in international literature on community gardening has been reasonably narrow. Most of what has been published has been either descriptive (Landman 1993; Hynes 1996; Alaimo and Hassler 2003; Saldívar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004) and/or focused on enumerating the benefits of community gardening (Blair, Giesecke and Sherman 1991; Patel 1991; Armstrong 2000; Twiss, Dickinson, Duma, Kleinman, Paulsen and Rilveria 2003; Saldívar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Shinew, Glover and Parry 2004; Alaimo, Packnett, Miles and Kruger 2008; Voicu and Been 2008—see Appendix 2 for a review of the ‘benefits’ of community gardening). Academics who have thought and written about community gardens have taken their social role seriously, and almost all have designed their research to be of use to community gardeners. Much of the literature produced about community gardens has aimed to strengthen the legitimacy of community gardening and to identify and demonstrate the range of tangible outcomes community gardens provide to individuals and communities. This focus has generated a literature which has been valuable to people working to promote and defend their gardens, and has certainly been useful for promoting community gardening as a tool for people engaged in community, health, planning, environmental, and education work. Many rich descriptions and a clear picture of the importance and benefits of community gardens in people’s lives have been produced by this research, often framed in terms that are agreeable to funding bodies, policy makers and development assessment panels and therefore of great practical use to community gardeners.

An emphasis on framing community gardens’ benefits in palatable instrumental terms has also resulted in a paucity of critical or theoretical attention and the avoidance of more contentious aspects of community gardening. Accounts of community gardening as a form of collective social action are rare. The focus on framing the ‘benefits’ of community gardening in moderate and instrumental terms has even led to some arguing that community gardens have become implements of neoliberal
governmentality, implicit in the shifting of social and economic responsibility from the state to the household and ‘community’ (Pudup 2008; Guthman 2008c; Hobson and Hill 2010 forthcoming). Interestingly, Australian writers Donati, Cleary and Pike (2009) found that in order to ‘capture the essence’ of how community gardening might contribute to creating sustainable communities, they needed to resist the temptation to align their findings with existing policy frameworks and language (p. 211). They found that the gardens they studied were arguably ‘far richer and more complex than the benefits of physical exercise, fresh produce or skill development that may have interested government agencies and funding bodies’ (p. 217). In my research, I similarly found that the range of impacts of community gardens far overflowed the bounds of existing policy-oriented research. Social action provides a useful frame for capturing some of the experiences and perspectives of community gardeners that lie beyond the bounds of policy discourse.

VIEWING COMMUNITY GARDENING THROUGH THE LENS OF COLLECTIVE SOCIAL ACTION

Community gardens, with their multiple meanings and dimensions, can be glimpsed from many viewpoints. Partial, but nonetheless useful, views of community gardening have been provided by accounts of them as sites of leisure (Crouch 1989a, 1999, 2000a), of health promotion (Blair, Giesecke and Sherman 1991; Armstrong 2000; Twiss, Dickinson, Duma, Kleinman, Paulsen and Rilveria 2003; Somerset, Ball, Flett and Ceissman 2005; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds and Skinner 2007; Alaimo, Packnett, Miles and Kruger 2008; Allen, Alaimo, Elam and Perry 2008; D’Abundo and Carden 2008; Kingsley, Townsend and Henderson-Wilson 2009), of community development (Warman 1999; Schukoske 2000; Salvidar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004), of urban greening and sustainability (Sullivan 1997; Crabtree 1999; Holland 2004; Matteson, Ascher and Langellotto 2008), of the development of social capital (Glover 2004; Glover, Parry, and Shinew 2005; Kingsley and Townsend 2006), of learning (Fusco 2001; Doyle and Krasny 2003; Corkery 2004a, 2004b; Krasny and Tidball 2009), of inter-cultural interaction (Shinew, Glover and Parry 2004), of cultural maintenance and production (Corlett, Dean and Grivetti 2003; Mathews 2005), of urban agriculture (Howe and Wheeler 1999; Garnett 2000), and of self-provisioning in times of economic need (Bassett 1979, 1981; Lawson 2005). Each of these perspectives reveals evidence of some of the impacts and significance of community gardens. These partial views also inevitably neglect important aspects of community gardening praxis, and the role of community gardening as a strategy for social and political change is an area that has received little consideration. While academic analysis of community gardening in terms of social change is limited, the use of community gardening for social change has been receiving attention within social movements and in movement-produced literature. This provides a starting point for further analytical development.
Community gardening has recently been adopted as a political performance by a number of radical social movements. Community gardens are frequently mentioned in writings from and about broad global justice/anti-capitalist movements, for example. Within these movements, there has been some shift in emphasis away from the mass protests and ‘summit hopping’ that were associated with the movement following the ‘Battle of Seattle’ and ‘Global Carnival Against Capital’ in 1999 (see Smith 2001; St John 2008), and towards creating alternatives to capitalism and the state, building community infrastructure, and developing sustainable cultural practices (Shukaitis 2003 p. 61; Kingsnorth 2004; Klein 2001). Community gardens have been identified by movement writers as an exemplar of this alternative-building approach, along with co-operatives, community assemblies, and neighbourhood associations (writers who consider community gardens within ‘global justice’ movements include Benholdt-Thomsen, Faradas and Von Werlhof 2001; Wolfwood 2001; Notes from Nowhere 2003; Starhawk 2003; Starr 2001; 2005; Shepard 2007a, 2009; Graeber 2009). As well as looking to community gardens as pockets of non-capitalist social and spatial relations (Atkinson 2007; Shukaitis 2003), anti-capitalist and global justice activists have used ‘community garden’ installations in political actions including protests against new motorways and Reclaim the Streets parties (Wood and Moore 2002 pp. 28, 34; Franks 2006). ‘Guerrilla’ plantings of herbs and vegetables have become common features of anti-capitalist and global justice protests (these are discussed in Chapter 6). Global justice activists have also worked with local communities to create more permanent community gardens in parallel with preparations for mass protests, including those at the meetings of the World Trade Organisation in Melbourne in 2000 and Cancun in 2003, and the G8 Summit in Glasgow in 2005. ‘Anarchist and global-capital protest-literature now habitually includes sections on gardening’ (Atkinson 2007 p. 250). In short, although mentions of community gardening have become frequent in writing from and about social justice and environmental activism, there has been little analysis of the relationships between community gardening and social change.

The entry of community gardening performances into the repertoire of radical social movements in recent years raises a number of questions: How has gardening entered into the repertoire of radical social movements? In what ways are the temporary and longer term ‘community gardens’ established by radical social movements similar to and different from the community gardens established within other contexts? Are community gardening performances at protest events part of a broader community gardening movement? To what extent has diffusion taken place through relationships between radical social movements and established community gardening networks? To what extent is community gardening, when not associated with protests or radical social movements, a strategy for social change? Can community gardening be considered part of a ‘vanguard of radical political action’

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9 As another example, in the 2010 ‘Anarchist Survey’ (n = 2504, primarily in North America and Europe) 866 respondents listed community gardens as among the ‘most useful’ ‘tactics/practices’, placing them above protests (747 respondents), black blocks (361 respondents), and culture jamming (488 respondents) (Knoll and Eloff 2010).
How do community gardeners go about enacting social change? Why do people choose to enact social change through community gardening?

These are questions that have not been addressed in academic literature (nor, to my knowledge in movement-produced writings). Along with my personal involvement with community gardening and research interests in organics, grassroots community development, and environmental politics, these questions influenced the research I undertook and the way I analysed my findings. However, the specific questions that structure this thesis emerged gradually and inductively. My primary intent was to gain a better understanding of community gardening in Australia and to help make community gardeners’ work more widely known. With community gardens being claimed by both radical anti-capitalist movements and by alternative agrifood movements and also being taken up by local governments and social service providers, my primary interest was in how community gardeners saw their own work.

In order to learn more about community gardeners’ perspectives, practices and analyses I undertook ethnographic research. My approach was informed by practices of ‘activist research’ (Bevington and Dixon 2005) in which the hybrid activist/academic position of researchers is embraced, and knowledges produced are understood as partial and situated rather than disembodied and objective. My focus was on people who acted as organisers in three leading organisations within the wider Australian community gardening movement. These represent community gardening at three scales: a local community garden, a city-wide organisation promoting and supporting community gardening, and the national community gardening organisation. The local garden, Northey Street City Farm (NSCF), is a four-hectare community garden in Brisbane, which is gardened collectively (without individual plots), offers numerous education programs and hosts a weekly organic farmers’ market. The second case study organisation, Cultivating Community (CC), was created to promote community gardening across the city of Melbourne, Victoria. It manages community gardens on high-rise public housing estates, provides training and consultancy in community gardening, school gardening and horticultural therapy, supports groups establishing new community gardens, and develops local food security initiatives. The third organisation, the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (ACFCGN) was formed by community gardeners in 1995 and aims to support, connect and promote community gardening around the country. Its major activities are sharing information and resources and advocating for community gardens. The ACFCGN operates a website, email listservs, and organises regular conferences and ‘gatherings’ (see Chapter 4 for further information on each of these organisations). I spent several months carrying out participant observation with each of these organisations, and also visited more than 60 community gardens around the country.

I visited community gardens in South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.
After preliminary analysis of my fieldwork data, I found strong resonances between my findings and the concerns of social movement theory. I began applying analytical tools developed by social movement scholars, and found them valuable for understanding the practices and analyses of community gardeners. In particular, I found Tilly’s (1977; 1995) concept of ‘repertoires of contention’ useful for analysing the ways community gardeners understand and go about enacting social change. My use of this concept is inflected with insights from anarchist and feminist writers on the nature of protest and social action (see Chapter 3). Through inductive analysis of interviews and fieldnotes, influenced to some extent by the broader questions I brought with me to the field, I came to focus my further research and writing on a smaller number of interconnected questions:

- Under what circumstances can community gardening be seen as a form of political praxis?
- To what extent are community gardens used strategically and intentionally as a performance to make collective claims?
- What are the specific methods, tactics and strategies used by community gardeners to enact social change?
- To what extent can community gardening be understood as a social movement practice?
- Do community gardeners’ strategies constitute or contribute to a repertoire of collective action?
- What would be the implications for social movement theorising if community gardening were recognised as a site of collective social action?

These questions enabled me to focus on community gardeners’ ideas and actions and to explore the ways community gardeners contribute to knowledge about how social change can be achieved.

In seeking to understand the political logic of community gardening, I adopted an inclusionary approach to political theory. This enabled me to recognise multiple forms and targets of collective social action and to maintain a clear focus on the analyses of community garden organisers by avoiding the imposition of a singular external analysis. While critical of some Marxist approaches to the study of social movements, particularly those which employ narrow conceptions of the political, I engage with Marxian, feminist, queer, poststructuralist, and particularly anarchist traditions in order to shed light on the range of strategies and logics operating within the Australian community gardening movement.

Viewing community gardens in terms of their contribution to social change offers another partial view of a complex practice. It is a lens that may provide more insight into some community garden projects than others—just as intercultural interaction or food security are central to the aims of some community gardens and of negligible interest to others. In a literature that has focused on enumerating the instrumental benefits of community gardening, contentious and political aspects have largely been overlooked. However, in my visits to over 60 community gardens, and immersion in the Australian community garden milieu, I have found that many community gardeners understand
their work as enacting social, political and environmental change. With community gardening being espoused by anti-globalisation activists and alternative agrifood movements, and also being adopted by local governments and social service agencies, the absence of voices of grassroots community gardeners and the distinctive ways of working they have developed detracts from the possibility of using community gardens to achieve sustainable food systems, connected communities, liveable urban environments, and social justice goals. I aim to address this absence through a focus on the perspectives of community garden organisers and attention to the analyses and repertoires of collective action they have developed.

**OUTLINE OF THESIS**

This thesis works to attend to several gaps in the existing community garden literature. It gives attention to community gardening in Australia. It sees community gardeners as enacting social change. It links community gardening to literature on social movements, and repertoires of collective action in particular. The particular contribution of this thesis comes from privileging of the voices of community garden activists and ethnographic enquiry from a hybrid activist-academic position. The development of my argument throughout this thesis follows a similar trajectory to the development of a community garden. I begin by identifying a space and exploring its landscape and boundaries, as I have begun to do in this chapter. I engage with people in the community to develop ideas (a theoretical framework) and bring them together to inform a plan (a research methodology). Finally, I get my hands in the soil, offering stories of the results and sharing the harvest. Here, I outline the process I have taken to define and carry out this community gardening project.

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I focus on mapping the landscape of community gardening in Australia as a site of collective social action. In this chapter, I have suggested a shift from viewing community gardening simply as a passive leisure activity or a means of enacting social policy to considering community gardens as sites where people are also engaged in enacting collective social and political change. In Chapter 2, I begin to uncover stories of social change embedded in the literature about community gardening, and propose a definition of community gardening that enables an understanding of community gardens as products and processes of collective social action.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I develop the theoretical context for the research problem at the centre of this thesis, set out the specific research questions that have framed the analysis of my empirical data, and describe the research methodology I have used in order to understand and analyse the repertoires of collective action used by Australian community gardeners. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical frameworks I have used to structure my analysis. I argue for the relevance of social movement theory to understanding community gardening as collective social action and explain my particular focus on repertoires of collective action. Chapter 4 describes my approach to gathering and analysing empirical data for this thesis, combining reflective participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews,
and analysis of a range of material sources. I introduce my three fieldwork locations, and describe the rationale used in the 20 interviews conducted with community gardening organisers. This chapter also engages with the activist research literature that has informed my research practices.

Chapters 5 to 9 are based on my ethnographic research with organisations within the Australian community gardening movement. Chapter 5 focuses on the personal biographies and activist trajectories of individual community gardeners to further develop a picture of community gardening as activism. Chapters 6 to 9 describe and analyse the specific repertoires of collective action used in the Australian community gardening movement, grouped into categories of gardening (Chapter 6), community building (Chapter 7), cultural production (Chapter 8), and alternative creation (Chapter 9). Chapter 9 in particular connects the social change repertoires of community gardeners with those of other social movements, and argues that they are part of an important but under-recognised set of strategies for enacting of social change.

Throughout, I argue that community gardeners’ practices and analyses deserve attention and consideration with respect to their potential contributions to understandings of collective social action.

These new forms reveal glimpses of a future world, of the possibility for liberation existing in the present ... these movements embody not just practices to adapt and creatively redeploy, but are in themselves ways of understanding the world and forms of research into action. To treat practices as forms of knowing, and knowledges as forms of doing, means rejecting the idea that theory and practice can ever truly be separated: they are always interconnected and woven through each other.

(Shukaitis and Graeber 2007 p. 37)
CHAPTER 2.
GARDEN VIEWS:
SEEING COMMUNITY GARDENS
AS SITES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

I did forest activism for a while and went to protests. I went to Canberra to protest about forests, but I always felt like that wasn’t getting anywhere for me and I wanted to do something positive about the change that we were talking about. So for me, community gardening is that. I think it’s really important that we protest and that we write letters and all those kinds of things, but I guess I’ve moved away from doing that and towards looking at what are the solutions that we want to present. For me community gardening is one way of presenting an alternate way that we could be managing our parklands and cities.

Jodie, NSCF, in interview

For activists like Jody, community gardening is a way of acting with others to do ‘something positive’ towards environmental and social goals. It is a way of enacting social change. In the existing literature on community gardening, it is rare to see community gardens analysed as sites of collective social action. As discussed in the previous chapter, there have been significant efforts to describe and substantiate the benefits community gardens bring to individuals and neighbourhoods, and to frame community gardening in funding and policy-oriented terms. However, despite its narrow focus, the existing literature on community gardens also contains numerous openings to considering community gardens as sites of social action. In this chapter, I focus on accounts of the history of community gardens.

11 Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis to refer to community gardeners with whom I conducted interviews and research conversations. My use of real names and pseudonyms is discussed in Chapter 4.
12 Some accounts in the academic literature on community gardening do note community gardens’ current and historical role in effecting social change (see for example Hynes 1996; Glover 2003) and many more provide openings to considering this aspect of community gardening praxis (these are discussed below). Beyond these passing acknowledgements, analytical attention has rarely been focused on community gardens’ role as a site for collective social action (those who have attended to the role of social action in community gardens include Jamison 1985; Buckingham 2003; Shepard 2009; Irzabal and Punja 2009; Martinez 2009). There is also a body of literature that addresses the use of protest by community gardeners defending threatened garden sites in New York (see Appendix 5). While these publications attend to community gardeners taking collective political action, their focus is on the use of conventional protest repertoires rather than on community gardening itself as a form of social action.
gardening to examine the discursive construction of community gardening and to identify ways in which various accounts of the history of community gardens open and close possibilities for seeing community gardens as sites of collective social action. To provide context for this discussion, and for the thesis as a whole, I begin the chapter by offering an overview of the range of community gardens in Australia, including their physical forms, organisational structures, and objectives. Through consideration of both the current practice of community gardening in Australia, and the discursive construction of community gardening in published sources, I conclude the chapter by proposing a set of criteria which I argue can be used to define ‘community garden’ for the purpose of analysis. This definition describes community gardens in their uniquely Australian manifestation and enables a reading of community gardening as a site for social change, thereby providing a basis for my arguments throughout the rest of this thesis.

COMMUNITY GARDENS IN AUSTRALIA

There is considerable diversity among Australia’s community gardens in terms of size, activities, management and site design. While Australian community gardens have much in common with their overseas counterparts, they are also distinct, with forms of land tenure and the ways they are started differing from those typical in other parts of the world. In order to help contextualise the arguments presented about community gardening in the following chapters, I offer here a brief overview of the range of community gardens in Australia.

There is significant variation in the physical characteristics of community gardens. Key differences include size, fencing, and the presence or absence of individual plots. The smallest community gardens occupy only a few square metres. The Goody Patch in suburban Adelaide, for example, is a 40 square metre garden between a tennis court and dog exercise park tended by around 15 local residents and visited by children from a neighbouring school and childcare centre. Larger community gardens include Northey Street City Farm, which inhabits four hectares of a Brisbane public park, and Collingwood Children’s Farm, which is located on seven hectares in Melbourne. Some community gardens, such as Jane Street Community Garden in Brisbane and Duck Flat Community Garden in the Adelaide Hills, are totally open and unfenced. Many community gardens are surrounded by fences, some with low with open gates, others high and limiting access. Some community gardens are locked, with only members or plot holders having keys. Most of these have open access for the general public for at least part of the week. Other gated gardens are open during daylight hours and locked only at night. Some community gardens are cultivated and harvested communally, others are comprised partly or mostly of plots leased to individuals and groups. Amongst plot-based gardens, some of the smallest plots are at Gravel Hill Community Garden in Bendigo, Victoria, where children and new gardeners are allocated a one metre square patch of earth to cultivate. After a season gardening this area, newcomers are offered the option of a larger plot. Nunawading Community Garden, also in Victoria, has plots of around 36 square metres (Hering
1995), possibly the largest in the country. Most Australian community garden plots are between two and 15 square metres in size. Plots are usually leased on an annual basis, and many community gardens have waiting lists of people wishing to take up plots when they become available.

Unlike in the United States, where community gardens are often established on derelict privately owned land, in Australia most community gardens are established with the support of local councils or public housing authorities. There is also a small but growing number of informal and ‘guerrilla’ community gardens, created on privately and publicly owned land—including parklands, sidewalks and urban blight sites—without permission. In my research I have not found any instances of community gardens in Australia owning the land they cultivate, or successfully establishing community land trusts or similar. Some community gardens have formal leases with landholders, often paying a peppercorn rent and needing to renegotiate tenure every year or two. Still other community gardens are on church, school, or community centre land. Despite generally being sanctioned by local or state governments, security of tenure is an ongoing concern for many community gardens.

Community gardens in Australia have been initiated and maintained by many different groups, agencies and communities: groups of local residents, environmental activists, community centres, welfare agencies, permaculturalists, organic organisations, health centres, public housing departments, student organisations, and schools. The particular focuses and activities vary according to the needs and aims of organisers and participants (who may or may not be the same people). In some gardens, members come when they please to tend individual plots and participate in working-bees with other gardeners several times a year. Others invite more intensive collaboration, growing, harvesting and distributing food on a communal basis. Most gardens have regular social activities, such as shared meals, times for gardening together and meetings. Some community gardens are used as venues for other local groups, in much the same way as community centres and neighbourhood houses. They are used for playgroups, public meetings, performances and parties. Educational activities at community gardens range from informal knowledge sharing between gardeners to organised skill-shares to accredited education programs in horticulture, permaculture and other areas. Some community gardens offer programs for primary and secondary school classes, while others provide internships to university students in public health, community development, education, and environmental management. Some community gardens host cultural events, inviting the wider community to participate in open days, festivals, seasonal activities, and performances. Many community gardens contain artworks that have been produced by gardeners, often in collaboration with community arts workers.

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13 Some ‘guerrilla gardeners’ operate individually, taking over areas of land and turning them into ornamental or food producing gardens. Other ‘guerrilla gardens’ are created by groups of people, and have an agenda of creating community—both amongst the gardeners and amongst people who visit the gardens—as well as urban beautification and food production. It is the second form of guerrilla gardening that I suggest can be seen as a form of community gardening.
Community gardens operate for the most part on a shoestring budget. Very few have stable core funding, and for most, fundraising is an ongoing activity. Australia has no Federal government programs aimed specifically at supporting community gardens. Aside from programs targeted at gardens on public housing estates by the Victorian and New South Wales governments (see Hatherley 2003 and Urbis Keys Young 2004 on the Sydney program), there have been no long term state-government run community gardening programs either\textsuperscript{14}. This marks a significant difference between community gardens in Australia and their counterparts in the US, which have been supported by government funded programs such as the USDA sponsored Urban Gardening Program established in 1976, which promoted vegetable gardening and community gardens in 23 US cities (Lawson 2005), and Philadelphia Green, founded in 1974, which in its first twenty years assisted in the development of over two thousand community gardens in low-income neighbourhoods (Hynes 1996 p. xiii)\textsuperscript{15}. For some smaller Australian community gardens, expenses are covered from the purses of gardeners in an ad hoc manner. For many, fundraising activities, annual plot rental fees, small grants, and in-kind support cover costs. A number of community gardens have used Federal government employment schemes, such as ‘Work for the Dole’ to provide labour and funding for program management.

Offering workshops and training has provided a solid income stream for some gardens. Other community gardens are supported by agencies such as community health centres and neighbourhood houses, which may allow their staff to contribute to the garden. Larger community garden projects, such as CERES (the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies) in Melbourne and Northey Street City Farm have paid staff, who usually work part time and on short-term contracts, subject to ongoing funding being secured. Most gardens are operated entirely by unpaid activists and volunteers. One way of making sense of the considerable diversity of community gardens in Australia is through developing typologies of their different forms, which will be considered in the following section.

**CATEGORISING COMMUNITY GARDENS**

Community gardens in Australia are often classified in two ways, either by their layout or by their origins and management structure—that is by whether they are communally gardened or have individual plots, and by whether they were ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ initiatives. In practice, there is significant overlap between these categories. Gardens that are mainly composed of individual plots almost always have communal areas of plantings and shared social space such as seating and shelters. Many primarily communally gardened sites put plots aside for specific persons or purposes. Likewise,

\textsuperscript{14} State government grants have been received for short-term projects to support community gardens, for example the Community Gardening in SA Project received funding from SA Health and Growing Communities WA received lotteries funding. See Appendix 3 for details.

\textsuperscript{15} This contrast is also true historically, with the US having had a number of government supported urban gardening programs since the 1890s (see Lawson 2004). In Australia, other than the school gardening push of the Federation era (Hunt 2001), there have been no government imperatives for communal food cultivation.
the distinction between top-down and bottom-up initiatives is blurry. Gardens initiated by grassroots groups rely on resources and advocacy from multiple sources—local governments providing land, grants from a range of agencies, allies in NGOs, partnerships with educational institutions, enabling legislation, and advocacy from planners, to list just a few. Conversely, gardens initiated by agencies require significant community input and a sense of community ownership to be successful.

Much of the literature about community gardens focuses on or assumes their similarities. As Kurtz (2001) argues, this literature has missed important differences. Russ Grayson from the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network has developed a useful typology of different kinds of community gardens in Australia, based on the Sydney experience and incorporating feedback from ACFCGN members in other states. This is, to my knowledge, the only attempt at creating a typology of forms within the Australian community gardening movement.

**FIGURE 1: Grayson’s typology of community gardens in Australia.**

I will briefly discuss each of the community garden types Grayson identifies. The most common of these models is the self-managed community garden, where community members collectively manage the garden, with varying degrees of support from other organisations. Forms of community self-management range from elected committees voted in by Robert’s Rules of Order (Robert 2000 [1886]) to decisions made by all-in consensus over the compost heap. There is only one council...
managed garden in Australia, which operates in Sydney along the lines of a British allotment\textsuperscript{17}, with the local government authority leasing individual plots. Under the definition of ‘community garden’ I advocate below, this garden would not be considered a community garden. Social housing community gardens are prominent in Melbourne’s public housing estates and also exist in Sydney. Participation in these gardens is usually limited to residents of the estates, although they are also used for other community programs, such as those supporting newly arrived refugees, and host events open to the wider community. In Melbourne, the management of public housing community gardens is outsourced to Cultivating Community. Agency facilitated gardens may be initiated by a health centre, welfare agency, community centre or similar and can involve the on-going support and involvement of a professional community worker, or support during the start-up period while moving towards collective self-management. These gardens may seek to involve the general public or particular communities or client groups. Private community gardens generally have little contact with the wider community gardening movement, and are not listed in any of the ACFCGN community garden directories\textsuperscript{18}. In contrast with Grayson, I would argue that the ‘Council Volunteer Model’ is not so much a distinct form of community garden as a strategy self-managed community gardens have used for gaining resources. Public liability insurance is a major expense for community gardens and local councils in Sydney have assisted by classifying community gardeners as council volunteers, thereby covering them under the council’s insurance. In recent years, local governments have initiated community garden projects, often as a way of managing community requests. While councils may provide staff and resources in the start-up phase, local council initiated community garden projects to date have been designed to become self-managing without ongoing council input. Extrapolating from Grayson’s typology, I would argue there are three main types of community garden that are generally recognised as part of a community gardening movement in Australia (see Figure 2).

\textsuperscript{17} The term ‘allotment’ is sometimes used in Australia to refer to a small parcel of land within a community garden that is gardened exclusively by an individual or small group, often on an annual lease basis. In this thesis, these parcels will be referred to as ‘plots’ to avoid confusion with ‘allotments’ in the British and European sense. British allotments are clusters of individual food-producing garden plots generally managed by municipal authorities and leased on an annual basis. Allotment refers both to the individual plot, and the cluster of plots. Each allotment plot is usually much larger than an Australian community garden plot. In the UK there is legislative right to an allotment to produce food. These allotments are precursors to community gardens in Australia, the US and Europe but are not classified as community gardens in the UK or in this thesis because they are not collectively managed and do not necessarily have a community building focus. In the UK there are community gardens as well as allotments. Community gardens in the UK have much in common with those in Australia. To add confusion, British community gardens are sometimes located within existing allotment sites.

\textsuperscript{18} In innercity Adelaide, for example, the medium-density Christie Walk co-housing development has a private community garden used by its residents for food production. Common Ground, a high-density social housing development has a communal vegetable garden space available to its residents. People involved with both of these projects have attended SA Community and School Garden Network events, but neither garden is listed in the Network’s directory of community gardens.
Grayson’s typology, and the typology I base on it, focus on community gardens’ management systems. By comparison, Kurtz (2001) focuses on differences between fenced and unfenced community gardens, arguing that the accessibility of gardens crucially affects people’s usage and experience of community gardens. Community gardens could also be categorised according to their main focuses. Based on a review of documentary sources, including gardens’ annual reports, brochures and web sites, and my fieldwork, I would argue that several distinct patterns of engagement can be identified in Australian community gardens. These include

- Community development
- Urban agriculture/ intensive food production
- Health promotion—including social engagement and nutrition promotion
- Social change/ collective action
- Food security/ community food systems development
- Environmental/Permaculture/Alternative technology demonstration and education
- Therapeutic—including horticultural therapy

Some community gardens—particularly the larger scale projects—focus on a number of these areas. Whether these different emphases significantly affect people’s experience of community gardens is a subject requiring further research.

The ways community gardens have been understood and categorised is influenced by the ways they have been ‘storied’ in literature. Our knowledge about community gardens is informed not only by experiences and observations of the gardens themselves, but by the ways meaning has been attributed to them, and the ways the gardens have been seen within particular contexts, political environments
and relationships. Histories of community gardening provide a window into how different meanings and associations have been attributed to community gardens in various accounts.

**STORYING COMMUNITY GARDENS**

The stories we tell ourselves about the past become the past ... As we remake the past, we alter the way we see ourselves in the present and the way we cast ourselves into the future.

*(Johnston 1993 p. 2)*

Stories are a fundamental way we organise, interpret, and understand our experience (Mair 1988; Polkinghorn 1988; Van Manen 1990; White and Epston 1990). The narratives generated by and surrounding social movements can assist scholars in understanding their emergence, development, longevity, and impacts (Polletta 1998; Fine 1995). Community gardens have been storied in various, sometimes conflicting, ways. They are associated with both government campaigns and anti-authoritarian social movements; middle class moral reform and working class recomposition; charity and self-help; environmentalism and civil rights; community organising and gentrification; leisure and labour; economic need and artistic expression.

In looking at community gardening as a means of social change, I am interested in the discursive construction of community gardens, the ways the stories we tell about community gardens come to define the ways community gardens are seen and can be seen. These stories ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention’ (Foucault 1974 p. 49). My particular focus is on how the discursive construction of community gardening hinders and enables readings of community gardening as socio-political praxis. One of the places in which the meaning of community gardening is constructed and disseminated is in accounts of the history of community gardening. Historical accounts show community gardens as ‘products’ of particular influences—whether the agency of social movements, the actions of governments, or the impacts of economics and world events. While accounts emphasise different influences, most at least intimate that community gardening is associated with social change. Here, I outline four ways community gardens have been storied in historical accounts: (1) as a continuation of urban gardening programs from the 1890s and 1900s, (2) as a form of poverty alleviation, (3) as recreating commons, and (4) as new social movement initiatives. I discuss the implications of each of these frames for the ways community gardening is understood in the present, and particularly, for how community gardening can be seen as a form of collective social action.

There have been few attempts at writing a history of community gardening in Australia. Most writing about community gardening in English-speaking countries, and most accounts of community gardening history, have been published in and about North America. Australian writers have tended to adopt narratives of the emergence and development of community gardening in North America to
account for community gardening in Australia, transplanting both historical events and arguments about their meaning and significance. It can be argued that the evolution of community gardening in Australia occurred along a different trajectory to that in the United States and Canada. However in lieu of comprehensive Australian accounts, North American narratives remain dominant in framing the history of community gardening in this country. Thus in this section, the accounts I discuss mainly originate in and address the United States. Where information is available, additional information about the Australian experience is offered in footnotes.

**Community gardening as a continuation of urban gardening programs**

In community gardening histories from the United States, community gardens are often situated within a long history of urban food production (for example Bassett 1979; 1981; Hynes 1996; Warner 1987; Lawson 2005). In her history of ‘A Century of Community Gardening in America’ Lawson (2005) describes projects from the vacant-lot cultivation associations and school garden programs of the 1890s to the subsistence plots and co-operative farms of the Depression era to the community gardens of the 1970s as constituting a ‘near continuous chain of communal garden efforts’ (2005 p. 1). Community gardens are portrayed as the direct descendants of these earlier urban gardening programs, and are thought to be manifestations of values and goals that have animated city garden projects for over a century: providing opportunities for connection with ‘nature’ in cities, educational objectives, food provision and self-help.

In these accounts, the Victory Gardens established during World Wars I and II are a frequently cited precursor to contemporary community gardens. In United States patriotic campaigns during WWI, five million US urban gardeners produced a staggering amount of food, an estimated $520 million in 1918 alone (Hynes 1996 p. xi). During WWII, Victory Gardens produced 40% of the vegetables consumed in the US in 1943 and 44 (Bentley 1998). Some US Victory Gardens that were established on public land during WWII are still operating, and have become community gardens (Warner 1987 p. 21; Kurtz 2001 p. 662; Lawson 2005 p. 13). Some of the individuals involved with Victory gardens

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19 For example, in the Australian experience, there is little connection between historical examples of communal urban food production such as Wartime ‘Victory Gardens’ and the contemporary community gardening movement. Australia did not have allotments prior to the community gardens established in the 1970s, as did the US and UK. Research evidence also suggests that economic need has not been a dominant contributor to the development of community gardens in Australia (on the primarily non-economic reasons for the development of Australian community gardens, see for example Percival 1981; Gaynor 2006; Hujber 2008).
during WWII were central to the development of community gardens in the 1970s (Carlsson 2008 p. 83).

Accounts that portray contemporary community gardens as the heirs of a long urban gardening tradition provide a legitimating lineage and a source of inspiration—the hope that urban food production on the scale of the Victory Garden campaigns could be repeated. Less helpfully, these accounts tend to conflate contemporary community gardens with historical examples of communal food production, often assuming that arguments about earlier urban gardening programs can be applied directly to contemporary community gardening projects. They do not generally offer an adequate account of the particular circumstances in which the wave of community gardening activity has grown since the 1970s. They also tend to merge state-initiated urban agriculture campaigns and grassroots initiatives, which poses difficulties for those interested in analysing one or the other.

**Community gardens as poverty alleviation**

Since Bassett’s (1979) thesis, most North American accounts of the history of community gardening follow an economically driven trajectory (see for example Quayle 1986; Warner 1987; Williamson 2002; Lawson 2005; Draper and Freedman 2010, each of whom base their work on Bassett 1979; 1981). Histories trace urban gardening programs from the 1890s to the present with waves of collective gardening activity associated with cycles of economic downturn. As in the accounts above, this episodic narrative frames present-day community gardening activity as a continuation of historical examples of urban food production, which are understood as responses to political and economic crises—war and depression. Contemporary community gardens are constructed as a means of survival during ‘pronounced and recurring cycles of capitalist restructuring [with] their tendency to displace people and places through investment processes governing industries and urban space’ (Pudup 2008 p. 1229). Bassett described community gardens as ‘a buffering mechanism… which has helped support the cultural system during periods of social and economic stress’ (Bassett 1979 p. 2). These portrayals are in line with accounts of other examples of public urban food production in

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20 The idea that Victory Gardens led to the contemporary community gardening movement has been transplanted to some Australian accounts (for example Astbury and Rogers 2004; Corkery 2004b; Groening 2005; Kingsley and Townsand 2006). However, there is little evidence to support their presence in Australian community garden histories. In Australia, the Wartime ‘Grow Your Own’ campaign was focused not on public land but on increasing commercial production and producing food in home gardens (Gaynor 2006 p. 107). Despite a handful of examples of collective cultivation on public land (for example McKernan 1983 p. 162) the prevalence of large home gardens meant that the focus of the Australian Wartime gardening campaign was on individually tended private land, not collective gardening in public spaces. Even the so-called ‘community gardens’ established by the Young Women’s Christian Association’s Garden Army were on land owned by private householders (Gaynor 2006 p. 114). Food produced in these urban gardening efforts was not for household consumption, but for military use. None of the Wartime food gardens established on public land remain. In the Australian case, there is little evidence of connections between Wartime food production and contemporary community gardens.

21 Distinctions between state-initiated and grassroots urban agriculture projects are far from clear-cut. The Wartime Victory Garden campaigns in the US can be seen as a quintessential example of a state-run urban agriculture program. However Tucker (1993 pp. 121 – 139) argues that it began as a spontaneous popular movement, originally opposed by the USDA, which saw the gardens as a threat to industrialising agriculture. They were only later co-opted into a government campaign.
developed countries, which generally see episodes of collective gardening as the result of a combination of economic need and government policy\textsuperscript{22}.

Economically driven accounts enable readings of community gardens as sites for the cultivation of community resilience, creativity, and mutual aid in times of hardship. However, they focus on production of food rather than the production of community or culture. In their emphasis on the determining role of economic cycles, and on state-initiated programs, these narratives neglect the agency of gardeners in imagining, initiating, planting and protecting community garden projects. In their focus on community gardens as a stabilising force in times of change, mitigating against collapse or oppositional mobilisation, they neglect the role community gardens have played in radicalising communities and bringing people together for collective action. In the US at least, the dominance of the idea that community gardens are primarily an emergency response to households not being able to afford to access food from retail sources has also maintained community gardens’ status as a marginal use of urban land. Although US administrations and local authorities have championed and subsidised urban agricultural movements in periods of fiscal crisis, when crises end (at least for some), governments have generally withdrawn their support, turning to ‘focus instead on profitable real estate development on the former garden plots’ (Schmelzkopf 1995 p. 364). Gardens become framed as an obstacle to development rather than a public good (McClintock 2010 p. 199).

Community gardens, whatever their participants’ aims, have been seen by governments as a short-term emergency measure, and this view of community gardens as temporary has led to their exclusion from planning and long-term support, particularly in times of relative prosperity (Francis 1987; Lawson 2004; McClintock 2010).

\textit{Community gardens as recreating commons}

Some accounts of the history of community gardening go back even further than the 1890s to include the enclosures (that is, privatisation) of the British commons, which lead to the development of allotments in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century (examples of accounts beginning in the British commons include 22 For example, accounts of the history of allotments in Britain (Crouch and Ward 1988; Howe, Bohn and Vilojoen 2005) and other parts of Europe (Van Molle and Segers 2008) explain the expansion and contraction of allotment usage in primarily economic terms, in the context of world events and government initiatives. Both World Wars provoked fears of severe food shortages and government campaigns led to a dramatic increase in urban agricultural production (Howe, Bohn and Vilojoen 2005). The number of allotments in Britain, each typically 250 square metres in size, roughly tripled from between 450 000—600 000 in 1913 to around 1.5 million by late 1917, producing more than 2 million tons of vegetables (Crouch and Ward 1998). Interest in allotments declined after WWI ended, but remained higher than 1913 levels, and increased in the late 1920s in association with mass unemployment. The British government launched its Dig for Victory campaign at the beginning of WWII, bringing the number of allotments back up to 1.5 million and producing half the nation’s fruit and vegetable requirements (Crouch and Ward 1998; Howe, Bohn, \textit{et al.} 2005). The end of the Dig for Victory campaign was followed by a sharp decline in urban food production. Land was returned to leisure or lost to development. The decline of allotments after the War has been attributed to the rise of the welfare state, lessening unemployment and increasing prosperity. A similar pattern can be observed in other parts of Europe, with urban food production and allotments flourishing during Wartime and declining sharply soon after. These accounts, with their emphasis on the economic necessity of self-provisioning, and the role of government campaigns, present a dominant reading of the reasons for allotments gaining and losing popularity in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century. While allotments have always had multiple and disputed meanings—controlling and placating the poor, moral improvement, leisure, nationalism, charity, self-help, ecological imperative—I would argue the above account is a reasonable one.}
Crouch and Ward 1988; Warner 1987; Irvine, Johnson et al. 1999; Carlson 2008; and Australian publications including Eliott 1983; Gelsi 1999; Hunt 2002; Bartolomei, Corkery, et al. 2003; Astbury and Rogers 2004; Donati and Pike 2007; Grayson 2007a; City of Burnside 2008). In these accounts resistance to the enclosure of the commons is seen as the impetus for the creation of the *Allotments Act*, which compensated the displaced commoners and provides the basis for the current day allotment system in Britain. The British allotment system was a key inspiration for the instigation of community gardens (and their precursors) in both North America and Australia. Many of the people who established community gardens in Australia in the late 1970s and early 80s were inspired by visits to—or stories of—allotment gardens in the United Kingdom. The local council Member who initiated the Nunawading Community Garden, for example, got the idea from reading a book about English allotments in his local library (Brandenberg 1978; Herring 1995). For some time, many Australian community gardeners felt a stronger sense of connection with the British allotment tradition than with the other community gardens emerging in their own country (see Appendix 3 for more detail on early Australian community gardens).

Some histories of community gardening have emphasised the idea that community gardens are part of a long line of defenders of community commons (Crouch and Ward 1988; Wilson 1999; Parker, Fournier and Reedy 2007; Carlsson 2008) linking them with movements in resistance to the enclosure and encroachment of commons—both literal and metaphorical—around the world. Community garden advocates consider community gardens as commons ‘because they are a communal resource to meet current needs associated with subsistence, protection, and civic functions’ (Lawson 2005 p. 3). The commons have become a powerful metaphor for the collective sphere in general, including not just land but political and social ‘space’ in all its forms (Klein 2002 p. 242; Wilson 1999 pp. 20 – 21). This positioning is not unique to community gardeners—stories of people working collectively in the defence of the commons have become part of the mythology of a number of contemporary movements. The story of the Diggers, for example, agrarian socialists who planted revolutionary vegetables on St George’s Hill in response to the encroachments and enclosures of the commons in the 1600s (Hill 1984 [1972]; Bradley 1989; Sutherland 1991), has been strategically deployed by a number of social movement story-tellers to add legitimacy and bring depth, a sense of solidarity and, ironically, hope to contemporary movements. George Monbiot, who, with *The Land is Ours*, has

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23 The enclosure of the British commons belongs in an account of community gardening in Australia not only as the precedent to the allotment system, but also as a precedent to the colonisation of Australia. The enclosure of the commons created great disturbance in Britain. Commoners’ livelihoods were destroyed by enclosure, resulting in ‘an explosion of crime’ (Endersby 2000 p. 315) and, consequently, Britain’s convict problem. The enclosure of the British commons, and the social disruption it caused, was a major factor leading to the colonisation of New South Wales as a penal outpost. Many of those transported to Australia had been convicted of poaching on the newly enclosed land or stealing to feed themselves—the crimes of people forced into poverty by the loss of the commons. A substantial proportion of the first Europeans to arrive in Australia were victims of the *Enclosure Acts* (Endersby 2000 p. 315).

24 The Diggers’ utopian experiment lasted barely a year. The land that the Diggers occupied is now an exclusive private golf course surrounded by mansions (Monbiot 2007).
been involved in campaigns to reclaim commons from cars and commercial interests, describes the story of the Diggers as inspiring ‘thousands of modern activists’ (Monbiot 2000). In his telling, Gerard Winstanley is depicted as a ‘coherent and persuasive revolutionary, pioneering some of the ideas and tactics widely deployed by protesters today’ (Monbiot 2000). What movement participants can take from the story of the Diggers—and other historical harbingers—is a sense of solidarity, of being part of a honourable lineage with ‘historical allies going back a long way’ (Monbiot 2007).

Accounts that begin with the British commons address one of the myths of foundation of the community garden movement, revealing the ways that community gardeners construct their own genealogy of resistance and imagination. These accounts tend to show community gardens as resulting from gardeners’ own agency and analyses rather than determining external conditions. This enables a reading of community gardening as an inherently social and political—rather than merely economic—practice. Accounts that leap from the Diggers to contemporary community gardeners can sideline other histories and knowledges about urban agriculture and collective cultivation, brought to community gardens by people with gardening experiences and traditions from around the world. Woodward and Vardy’s (2005) book about people involved in public housing community gardens in Melbourne provides clues to an alternative account, revealing community gardens as repositories for diverse cultural and horticultural knowledges and showing them as shaped by the skills and experience of all their participants, not just those inspired by the British and North American experiences. Community gardeners may also look to their roots in traditions of community organising, community cultural development, squatting and autonomous space movements, public health, civil rights activism, and organic agriculture, and environmental justice movements, each of which can be seen as stemming from social movement action.

Community gardens as new social movement initiatives

While Hynes recounts the history of Potato Patches and Victory Gardens to demonstrate that productive gardens in American cities are ‘not altogether new’, she argues that in important ways, the community gardens of the 1970s were different to their predecessors. They were not the result of

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26 Writers who situate contemporary community gardens within the tradition of British allotments tend to interpret the allocation of allotments as a result of the sustained campaigning and self-help activities of landless commoners and working class people, including squatting, mass trespass and riots (Crouch and Ward 1988 pp. 18 – 19). In these analyses, allotments are associated with ‘the friendly societies, the trade union and the co-operative movement’ (Crouch and Ward 1988 p. 11). In contrast, those who distance community gardens from the British allotment tradition interpret the allocation of allotments as a result of charitable campaigns, philanthropy and self-interest on the part of landholders—and therefore as a means of social control (as does Warner 1987. See also Hoyles 1991; Burchardt 2002; Scott 2005). This historical debate gives context to Warner’s argument that community gardens have a new, distinct politics of ‘self-help and local empowerment’ rather than a ‘politics of charity or reform of the poor’ (1987 p. xiii). His argument is that this new politics originates in the US Civil Rights movement rather than the British allotment tradition.

27 Howe and Wheeler (1999 p. 4) note that urban agriculture in majority world countries is often on a scale ‘staggering by western standards’.
charity, nor philanthropy, nor war relief, but of grassroots action ‘rebuilding neighbourhood community and restoring ecology to the innercity’ (Hynes 1996 p. x). While having aims and practices in common with previous urban garden programs, the community gardens of the 1970s came for the first time to represent ‘community empowerment and grassroots activism’ (Lawson 2005 p. 14). This is significant for a view of community gardening as a practice of social action that is distinct from other forms of urban and collective gardening.

Whether seen as a new wave within a continuous stream of urban gardening manifestations or as a new and distinct movement drawing on historical precursors, the emergence of community gardening internationally in the early 1970s is often attributed to an increasing awareness of ecological issues. The authors of *A Bountiful Harvest* state that Australia’s first community gardens ‘can be directly attributed to an increasing concern for environmental issues’ (Bartolomei, Corkery *et al.* 2003 p. 26). Gelsi (1999 p. 12) also argues that the first Australian community gardens were created by people responding to concerns raised by the environment movement. As demonstrated by these studies, a focus on environmental issues and raising ecological awareness has been central to many, if not most, Australian community garden groups’ visions from the 1970s to the present, in common with their counterparts overseas.

An increased attention to issues surrounding food was one characteristic of environmental movements at this time, and community gardens were bolstered by food safety scares and new approaches to food ethics—increased interest in vegetarianism, organics, ‘whole’ and uncontaminated foods, a questioning of commercialisation and a desire for ‘authenticity’ (Crouch and Ward 1988 p. 78; Belasco 1993; Pollan 2006). In the United States, community gardening has also been associated with the environmental justice movement (Bullard 1994; Cole and Foster 2001). Ferris, Norman and Sempik (2001) believe that all the various community gardens in North America serve ‘to contribute to the objective of promoting environmental justice by reconciling people, land and sustainability’ (p. 561). Ferris, Norman and Sempik argue that the contemporary community gardening movement emerged directly from environmental and social justice campaigns. Community gardens can be viewed as ‘environmental justice self-help’ (Schukoske 2000 p. 359).

The role of (new) social movements in the development of community gardening is not limited to environmentalism. ‘Thousands of tributaries, emanating from the civil rights, women’s liberation, environmental, and social justice movements,’ fed into the community gardening movement of the 1970s and beyond (Hynes 1996 p. xiv). Warner (1987 pp. 20 – 23) argues that America’s contemporary community gardens are the ‘child’ of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Community gardens, particularly in the US, are often a response to poverty, crime and pollution in areas that are home predominantly to people of colour. ‘The community garden movement in the USA is, in part, one of the positive responses in the struggle to restore these damaged
neighbourhoods to ecological and social health’ (Ferris, Norman, et al. 2001 p. 567). Warner argues that the first community gardeners were experienced activists, who had been involved in antiwar movements, the NAACP\textsuperscript{28} and the Peace Corps. Their social ethical commitments drew them to the inner-city at a time when many were retreating to the suburbs. The gardens they created were a response to myriad political frustrations, including nuclear testing and the war in Vietnam, as well as environmental pollution and food issues. As Warner notes, ‘to gather together, to party, to make noise, to debate, and to garden… were the very antitheses of war, interstate highways, and urban renewal land takings’ (Warner 1987 p. 22).

Accounts of community gardens as the initiatives of social movements are in contrast with those which see them primarily as means of producing food in times of economic crisis. They correspond more closely with the complex range of reasons that people cite for becoming and remaining involved with community gardening, from access to green space for children to forming social networks and improving neighbourhood blight sites to enacting ecological values (see for example research by Nemore 1998; Armstrong 2000; Blair, Ciesecke and Sherman 2001; Holland 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004 and discussion in Chapter 5). Recognising the role of social movements enables attention to the agency of community gardeners themselves and gives space to readings of community gardens as the product of people’s social and moral aspirations and commitments, as a manifestation of visions and values, inspired by other models, rather than simply responses to crises or deficits. These accounts also view the contemporary community gardening movement as historically distinct, which is useful in asking questions about community gardening in its specifically contemporary, and social movement initiated sense. Accounts which emphasise the role played by (new) social movements in the creation of community gardens may have less utility in understanding community gardens that are local initiatives concerned solely with increasing the beauty and function of the immediate neighbourhood, and community gardening as a part of a professional health promotion practice or social work intervention.

While overlapping, each of these historical accounts frames community gardening in a different way, and they vary in the extent that they invite readings of community gardens as sites of social change. Because community gardens have been storied and defined in such diverse ways, I want to clarify what I mean by community garden. In this thesis, I address an idea of ‘community gardening’ that is bounded in three ways: geographically, as community gardening is practiced and understood in Australia, historically, as a phenomenon that emerged in the 1970s, and by practice, as a specific form of collective gardening that is distinct from other organised gardening activities.

\textsuperscript{28} National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
DEFINING COMMUNITY GARDEN

The central aim of this thesis is to draw upon the knowledge of community gardeners—and community garden organisers in particular. Therefore the way ‘community garden’ is defined for this thesis begins not with academic literature, nor with a discursive project to reframe community gardening, but rather, with the understandings and analyses of Australian community gardeners. During the course of my research, I found that community gardeners in Australia had a clear, shared understanding about what constitutes a community garden—and what does not. I believe that the key criteria used by community gardeners in Australia to define a community garden can be summarised in four points: community gardens are sites that (a) self-identify as community gardens, (b) produce food, (c) are primarily voluntary, and (d) have collective or participatory management structures. These criteria are discussed in detail below. No peer reviewed Australian sources have discussed the definition of ‘community garden’. However both academic writing and popular discourse about community gardening in Australia assume a similar understanding of what constitutes a community garden. The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network’s website offers a broad description of community gardens as ‘places where people come together to grow fresh food, to learn, relax and make new friends’ (ACFCGN 2002, still online in July 2010). However, in practice the national community gardening organisation has a more specific understanding of ‘community garden’ and has recently sought to protect the term from being used in less precise ways. In a submission to a policy review process by the City of Sydney (Grayson 2010), ACFCGN strongly recommended that school gardens and verge plantings be placed in a separate category to community gardens, referring particularly to the different design, management, and council support needs of each of these forms of gardening, and arguing that these exclusions were in keeping with common usage of the term ‘community garden’. In this submission ACFCGN also made a distinction between school gardens that are tended in class and break times by students and teachers (and which are not considered community gardens), and community gardens on school land that invite the involvement of the wider community (which are considered community gardens).

In the United States, where the majority of scholarly literature about community gardening in the English-speaking world has been produced, ‘community garden’ is used in a less specific way. The American Community Gardening Association defines community garden as ‘any piece of land gardened by a group of people’. After much debate, they have adopted a very broad definition of community garden.

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29 There is some local variation in use of the term ‘community garden’ in Australia. In Melbourne, community garden is sometimes used informally to refer specifically to areas of individually leased plots, so for example, CERES in Brunswick is not referred to as a community garden, but the area of plots within it is. Although CERES was originally designed as and called a city farm, it is now more often described as a Community Environment Park and the organic farm within CERES is now referred to as a city or urban farm. In the terms as defined in this thesis, the whole of CERES could be considered a community garden.

30 A rare example of ‘community garden’ being used in a divergent way is Bampton’s (2010) article describing H.V. McKay Gardens in Sunshine, Victoria—an eight acre municipal leisure park established in 1909, featuring a tennis court, pavilion, bandstand, bowling green, conservatory and church hall—as a community garden, presumably in reference to its community building function.
community garden, emphasising that it can be urban, suburban, or rural, it can grow flowers, vegetables or community. It can be one community plot, or can be many individual plots. It can be at a school, hospital, or in a neighborhood. It can also be a series of plots dedicated to ‘urban agriculture’ where the produce is grown for a market. (ACGA 2008).

In the North American academic literature, community garden is similarly used to refer to a wide range of communal gardening endeavours including present-day programs such as therapeutic gardens, prison gardens, school gardens, and urban market gardens and also historical examples, such as wartime Victory gardens and 19th Century allotments. This broader usage of ‘community garden’ in much of the US literature poses a number of problems for those wishing to draw on it to inform their understanding of community gardening in Australia, and also for looking at community gardening as a distinct form of collective social action. Pudup (2008) has argued that ‘community gardening’ (as it is used in the United States) has become so encompassing that it is no longer a useful frame for analysis. Her contention is that the term ‘community gardening’ is used for a range of projects with significantly different meanings and modes of operation. Pudup finds the term ‘community’ particularly vexed, carrying as it does multiple connotations and moral imperatives, and being particularly problematic in situations where participation in a ‘community garden’ is compulsory, as in some school and prison programs31. Pudup proposes a new—even broader and more inclusive—term as a frame for analysis in place of ‘community garden’. She argues that ‘organised garden project’ is preferable as it avoids the ambiguity and prescriptiveness of ‘community’ and focuses on a defined ‘cultivated social geographical space’ (Pudup 2008 p. 1232)32. I have found Pudup’s ‘organised garden project’ term useful as a way to talk about forms of communal gardening, such as school, hospital, detention centre and prison gardens, that do not fall within the definition of community garden as it is used in this thesis. However, it tends to be a descriptive vocabulary which does little to provide an analytical framework for understanding community gardening as a distinct form of organised gardening activity that emerged in the US, UK and Australia in the 1970s33.

Community gardens as historically distinct

Community gardening, as I employ the term in this thesis and as generally understood in Australian usage is a practice that emerged in the 1970s. It did not spring forth fully formed out of nowhere, and has roots in several precursor movements (discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 6), and the histories of urban food production discussed above. However, community gardening can be best

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31 Other state-run urban gardening programs in the US have also been conducted on a less-than-voluntary basis. During the Depression of the 1930s, for example, US urban gardening campaigns changed from exhortation to garden to compulsion, with participation in garden programs becoming mandatory for those receiving relief payments (Carlsson 2008 p. 83).

32 Lawson (2005) takes a similar approach, using ‘community gardening’ in the title of her book, but addressing a broader range of what she refers to as ‘urban garden programs’, a term analogous to Pudup’s ‘organised garden project’, but with more emphasis on the ‘programmatic’ aspect of urban gardening (Lawson 2005 p. 15).

33 Interestingly, two authors (Hobson and Hill 2010 forthcoming) have recently adopted Pudup’s model of ‘organised gardening projects’ in examining an Australian case. Like Pudup, they focus on a program—the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation’s school garden program—which is not, in either common Australian usage or Hobson and Hill’s analysis, a community garden program.
understood as a historically distinct practice of collective gardening, not, as is sometimes argued, as a simple continuation of earlier urban and communal gardening experiences, such as British Allotments or Wartime Victory Gardens (Von Hassell 2002 p. 31).

Community gardens began growing around the English-speaking world in the 1970s. The first were in the United States (Spudic 2007 p. 13). While the term ‘community garden’ has been used in the US since World War I (Lawson 2005 p. 5), the contemporary community gardening movement can be seen as originating with the establishment of People’s Park in Berkeley in April 1969, which included vegetable production as well as space for civic engagement and recreation (Carlsson 2008) and the birth of the Green Guerillas in New York in 1973. The Green Guerillas were a group of activists who used ‘seed bombs’—balls of seeds and clay soil sometimes cased in Christmas tree ornaments—to beautify blight sites on New York’s Lower East Side. They began taking over vacant lots, clearing out building rubble, abandoned cars and mountains of rubbish, and turning them into community gardens. Despite initial opposition, the City of New York eventually issued leases to the Green Guerilla gardeners, and numerous other local residents became inspired to create gardens in abandoned lots in their own neighbourhoods (Schmelzkopf 1995; Smith and Kurtz 2003).

Community gardens were created in Britain at around the same time, with the first ‘city farm’ established in 1972. The UK’s Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens attributes the emergence of community gardens to the rise of community self-help initiatives, which inspired groups of neighbours to transform derelict land into community gardens that were run by communities to meet their own needs. The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens also describes the growth of the community garden movement in the United States as a direct inspiration (Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens c. 2006). Australia’s first community gardens were established just a few years after these British and North American gardens, with the first including Elizabeth Community Garden in Adelaide’s north, thought by members to have been established in 1975 and Nunawading Community Garden, established in 1977 (see Appendix 3).

The community gardens established in the 1970s can be seen as distinct from earlier forms of urban collective agriculture for several reasons. Over time, these early projects came to see themselves as part of a shared movement, with an increasingly self-conscious collective identity as community gardeners. An early indicator of this was the establishment of national community gardening movement organisations. The American Community Gardening Association was established in 1978. The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens in was formed in the UK in 1980, indicating that community gardeners saw themselves as distinct from allotment-holders (a national organisation of allotment-holders, National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, had been established

34 The Green Guerillas spell their name with one ‘r’.
since 1901). Unlike European allotments, which are managed by municipal authorities, these new community gardens emphasised participation and collective self-management models. Unlike Wartime Victory Gardens, the community gardens originating in the 1970s were citizen-initiatives, not government-sponsored programs. Community activism was the driving force for these community gardens, with concerns of civil rights movements (Warner 1987) converging with nascent environmentalism (Crouch and Ward 1980; Schukoske 2000) to address issues of urban decay and community self-help (Harvey 2007).

**Defining characteristics of Australian community gardens**

My intention in offering a bounded definition of ‘community garden’ is to articulate the usage of the term by community gardeners in Australia in order to enable me to analyse the particular repertoires of social action developed in the community gardening movement that emerged in the 1970s as distinct from a plethora of other, often unrelated, collective gardening practices of the past and present. I hope to avoid ‘imposing arbitrary limits on creative communal responses to local need’, as Ferris, Norman and Sempik (2001 p. 561) fear precise definitions of community garden may do. Instead, I propose a broad definition that accommodates community gardeners’ understandings of the scope and boundaries of their own practice. Based on analysis of my ethnographic research, I suggest a set of characteristics that represent Australian community gardeners’ shared understanding of what defines a community garden, and also provide a definition that enables an analysis of community gardens as sites of collective social action by distinguishing them from other forms of organised gardening activity. The distinguishing features of community gardens can be summarised as: (a) self-identity as community gardens, (b) food production, (c) primarily voluntary participation, and (d) collective or participatory management structures. Each of these characteristics is discussed below.

**Self-identity as community gardens**

Identity is fundamental to the study of social movements. In order to be legitimately analysed as part of a community gardening movement, sites must identify as community gardens. Many community gardens in Australia have ‘community garden’ as part of their name, clearly identifying their intent to be recognised as community gardens. A number of Australian community gardens have ‘city farm’ in their title. In Australia there is no real distinction between city farms and other community gardens. City farms are generally larger than other community gardens, and exist in cities, whereas some

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35 The European Federation of City Farms was established in 1990, with its membership comprised of national community gardening and urban agriculture bodies from around Europe. The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network in 1996.
36 I have avoided descriptive criteria in which current practice limits the future potential of community gardens. For example, Honours students Crabtree (1999) and Harris (2008) both describe community gardens as ‘small areas of land (usually less than one hectare)’ (Harris 2008 p. 11). This denies the potential of community gardens to become larger, and excludes a number of currently existing community gardens, including Northey Street City Farm, Collingwood Children’s Farm and CERES.
community gardens are in rural areas. There is otherwise no discernable difference between them. I use community garden as the broader, umbrella term encompassing city farms, and believe this would be acceptable to projects describing themselves as city farms.

Food production

Food production is the major use of cultivated space in Australian community gardens. Most community gardens also grow flowers and ornamental plants. However within the Australian community gardening movement, the gardening implied in ‘community gardening’ is growing food for consumption (see Chapter 6). Food production is seen by community gardeners as a key distinguishing feature of community gardens and this makes them different from other forms of community managed open space, such as children's gardens and pocket parks. The central role of food production is a feature of the Australian community gardening movement that distinguishes it from its US counterpart, which, although also focused on food production, also includes collectively cultivated ornamental gardens (Kurtz 2001; Glover 2002; Parry, Glover and Shinew 2005). In terms of social change, this may position Australian community gardens more firmly within movements addressing agrifood issues (see Chapter 3).

Primarily voluntary participation

Community gardens are voluntary in two senses: people participate of their own free will, and they participate without seeking to profit monetarily. Voluntary participation makes community gardening distinguishable from other forms of communal food gardening, such as gardens in prisons and some school gardens—where participation is a requirement—and for-profit urban agriculture projects. Community gardens do not grow food commercially. In this way, community gardens are distinct, in Australian usage, from profit-oriented urban agriculture projects. This distinction has been easy to maintain while there have been few for-profit urban agriculture projects operating in Australia. However, as urban food enterprises begin to develop, differences of perspective within the Australian community gardening movement about what constitutes ‘commercial’ production may come to the fore. Most of the food produced in community gardens is consumed by plot-holders, shared among garden participants, contributed to services to house-bound or homeless persons or community kitchens or shared through produce-swaps and informal gift networks. However some community gardens do have small-scale enterprises. These are generally social enterprises, aiming to support the garden or provide training to participants, and are not considered commercial or profit generating. However, many community gardens’ rules stipulate that food produced in the garden must not be

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37 ‘City farm’ is used somewhat differently in Britain. There, a city farm may be a commercial urban agriculture venture, often with a community-building or educational aspect, but with a primary focus on food production. According to the UK Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, community gardens in Britain are by definition without animals (Spudic 2007 p. 13), so any project with animals becomes a city farm. In Australia, some quite small community gardens have animals, such as chickens and rabbits and this is not seen as converting them from community gardens to city farms.

38 For example, the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance, which includes community garden organisations among its members, defines community gardening as ‘A DIY approach to growing food in our cities’ (SFFA 2009)
sold for whatever purpose. At this time, a general commitment to non-commercial production can be discerned within the Australian community garden movement, but the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial production have yet to be clearly articulated.

The lines around ‘voluntary’ participation are also blurred. Some people participate in community gardens as part of government employment programs or correctional services programs, which involve varying degrees of compulsion or coercion. A garden created specifically for these programs would probably not be seen by members of the Australian community gardening movement as a community garden. However, gardens in which the majority of users freely choose to participate would still be seen as community gardens, even if they sometimes host people contributing non-voluntary labour. Some community gardens in which the majority of gardeners at the site are volunteers also employ paid workers who are paid a wage, rather than earning a profit from production.

**Collective or participatory organisational structure**

Community gardens are organised in many different ways. However, Australian community gardeners understand community gardens as necessarily having some form of collective or participatory management structure. This implies ongoing opportunities for garden users and ‘the community’ to have meaningful input into garden design, decision-making and management. The meaning of ‘community’ varies from garden to garden, sometimes implying the general public or neighbourhood residents, sometimes referring to a more bounded group, such as residents of a public housing estate or participants in a health program. Community involvement can mean gardens being initiated by groups of grassroots community members, but collective or participatory management may also co-exist with gardens that are ‘managed’ by agencies, such as community health centres or community garden support organisations. Community involvement is often described by community gardeners in terms of ‘ownership’. Ownership in this sense refers not to legal tenure, but to a sense of belonging and responsibility. Hester’s (1975) idea of ‘symbolic ownership’, which he believed was necessary for the success of public spaces, is a near concept. Symbolic ownership involves a sense of jurisdiction over a space, valuing the place and activities which take place there, and feeling that the space responds to its users’ particular needs (Hester 1975 pp. 57 – 61 in Walter 2003 p. 10).

Community involvement makes community gardens distinct from agricultural display and education centres, such as Fairfield City Farm in Sydney’s south-west and Edendale in Melbourne’s north-east, which, though similar in some ways to community gardens, do not invite community input into their management and decision-making processes, and which are not generally viewed as community gardens (Grayson 2007a p. 3).
Community garden as movement and community garden as strategy

The four defining features I have described above apply to individual gardens that can be situated within a broader community gardening movement. However, as I indicated in Chapter 1, the idea of community gardening has been taken up by a number of other social movement groups and used in varying ways. In the context of radical social movement praxis the installation of a ‘community garden’ can become an ephemeral political performance. In Chapter 6, I describe the planting of ‘guerilla’ community gardens in Australia, Britain and the United States by groups like Reclaim the Streets, for whom temporary ‘community garden’ installations in public places—sometimes in the middle of roads—are short-term autonomous zones, symbols of land reclaimed from commodification for community space, beauty and food production (Wood and Moore 2002; Duncombe 2002a; Franks 2006; Shepard 2007; 2009; Hou 2010). In this usage, the creation of ‘community gardens’ becomes an easily replicable tactic, comparable with Food Not Bombs (Butler and McHenry 2000; Heynen 2010), Indymedia Centres (Pickerill 2003; 2007; Pickard 2006), and autonomous social centres (Chatterton and Pickerill 2007; Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006), forms of ‘non-branded’ contentious praxis that spread in a viral way without anyone taking ownership of them or trying to control their use (Day 2005 p. 19). For example, while a number of groups use the name ‘Food Not Bombs’, there is no central Food Not Bombs organisation, and the practice of publicly serving free food that might otherwise go to waste can be replicated freely. As non-branded strategy, these temporary community garden performances have significant differences from the practice of community gardening within the community gardening movement. Most obviously, the process of acquiring long-term security of tenure is eliminated, as is the need for the development of ongoing collaborative management systems. Additionally, because I am interested in community gardening as a movement, networks of connection and solidarity are important to my understanding of community gardens. Reclaim the Streets and similar groups often use community garden imagery and practices without contact with existing community garden networks (this discussion is taken up in more detail in Chapter 5). Thus the ephemeral ‘community garden’ installations that are sometimes used as part of protests and other political performances would not meet the criteria I have described above. I believe that most Australian community gardeners would see temporary ‘community garden’ installations as inspired by their longer-term community gardens—and many are interested in their emergence. However they would not understand a temporary installation of plants, shelter and seating at a protest or festival as constituting a community garden. In the following chapters, I make references to the use of temporary community gardening performances, but do not include them within my analytical definition of community garden.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have looked at some of the ways community gardening has been discursively constructed, through historical accounts and contemporary typologies. I have argued that seeing
Community gardening as a historically distinct phenomenon—drawing on numerous harbingers—best enables an understanding of community gardens as sites of social change. I have also aimed to provide a sense of the diversity of community gardens in Australia, and the range of variation in their size, appearance, accessibility, and management systems. Despite their diversity, community gardens in Australia have important characteristics in common, and these, I have argued, can form the basis of a definition of ‘community garden’. Taking the voices of community garden organisers and participants as a starting point, I contend that community gardens in Australia can be defined by self-identification as community gardens, food production, primarily voluntary participation, and management structures that are collective or participatory. This enables distinctions to be made between contemporary community gardens and other past and present forms of communal gardening activity. While I believe these criteria would be uncontroversial in Australia, they map out a key difference between my approach and one common in North American literature, which has conflated a wide range of collective gardening activities with community gardening. By offering a narrower definition of ‘community garden’, I have aimed to establish a category of investigation that avoids the theoretical confusion created by the more encompassing usage of ‘community garden’ as a catch all phrase, and enables an analysis of community gardening as a distinct phenomenon. This definition defines my analytical focus for this thesis, and has enabled me to consider community gardening, in this historically and geographically specific form, as a site of collective action and social change. In the following chapter I build on this definitional work by considering the extent to which community gardening can be understood as a form of activism.
CHAPTER 3.
THEORISING COLLECTIVE ACTION

*Something Positive and Practical*
Under the shade of a huge mango tree, one of Northey Street’s founders, Iain, stood on a chair and warmly welcomed the assembled seminar participants. In his speech, Iain compared the ‘explosive’ growth of city farms and community gardens in Australian cities with the development of Landcare groups in Australian farming communities fifteen years earlier, using both as examples of people ‘taking positive communal actions’ to address environmental problems. He talked about organisations like The Wilderness Society as typifying one aspect of the environment movement—the defence of threatened wild spaces—and suggested that community gardening was at the forefront of another, where people are ‘doing something positive and practical to fix things up—acting locally… and making a significant contribution to the process of change that is needed to make our cities and towns sustainable’.

To explore and analyse the findings of my ethnographic research, and to assist my understanding of community gardening as a means of collective social action, I have drawn on the work of a number of social movement scholars. During my research, I found that some community gardeners saw their work as a form of social action and described those who practice community gardening as part of a

39 Landcare has been interpreted in various ways, from being a ‘bottom-up, community driven, self-facilitated and empowering process’, as Iain clearly intends it to represent, to being ‘a classic example of hegemony at work’ which co-opts local initiative and transfers responsibility for land degradation to farmers (both quotes from Vanclay 1994). This can be explained by the different agendas of local Landcare groups and the government bodies which seek to direct them. See Vanclay 1994; Lockie and Vanclay 1997 for discussion.
‘movement’40. As I read theoretically informed accounts of social movements (particularly Wall 1999; Seel, Paterson and Doherty 2000; Doherty 2002; Shepard and Hayduk 2002), I began to see that the practices of community gardeners and the ways that community garden organisers, like Iain speaking under the mango tree at Northey Street City Farm, reflected on and theorised about community gardening had much in common with themes addressed by social movement scholars.

My aim in this chapter is to identify the conceptual tools, drawn from social movement theory and literature, that have informed my understanding of the ways in which community gardeners enact social change. I focus particularly on the concept of repertoires of collective action (Tilly 1977; 1995; Tarrow 1998; Rupp and Taylor 2003), which I will draw on throughout this thesis to explore community gardeners’ practices and strategies41 and the extent to which these can be understood as social movement action. My use of the concept of repertoire is influenced by anarchist and feminist analyses of the nature of protest and political action and these influences are also discussed. In order to review the ways community gardens have been seen within existing social movement milieux and scholarship, I begin this chapter with an overview of the ways community gardening has been located by activists and scholars within broader social movement families, specifically environmental movements, organic agricultural movements, permaculture, and alternative agrifood movements. I then consider whether community gardening itself can be usefully and legitimately understood as a social movement. In discussing various conceptual definitions of ‘social movement’ I note that while community gardening clearly shares characteristics with ‘ideal type’ social movements—a network structure, shared analyses, solidary ties, collective claims making—its particular ways of enacting change cannot be equated in a simple way with narrow understandings of ‘protest’, which for some is a defining feature of social movement action. In my research, I found that some community gardeners’ understandings and analyses had much in common with those of other environmental and social justice movements. However the particular tactics they adopted to enact their values and make claims differed markedly from those of other movements. Community gardeners chose making gardens over making petitions, organising community cultural events over organising rallies, planting radishes over provoking riots. In order to further interrogate the idea of ‘protest’ and contentious political action as defining of social movements, I argue that an understanding of this unconventional repertoire of collective action is central. In this chapter, I introduce the theoretical tools I have drawn on to answer questions about the nature of protest, drawn from the branch of social movement literature concerning repertoires of collective action, and in particular, theoretical tools that seek an alternative to the cultural/political dualisms that pervade much social movement writing.

40 I use the term ‘movement’ in a general sense, to refer to a group of people and organisations working together to advance their ideas, and ‘social movement’ in a more specific sense, as defined by social movement theorists such as Doherty (2002) and Diani (2000), see discussion below.

41 Taking Jasper’s (2004 p. 14) point that the military tradition’s distinction between strategy (decisions made by a general) and tactics (implemented by lower officers) negates the strategic decisions continuously made by all involved in conflict, in this thesis I deliberately avoid drawing distinctions between strategies and tactics, and rather use the terms interchangeably. My rationale for this position is discussed more fully in Chapter 9.
SOCIAL MOVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP
AND COMMUNITY GARDENING

Using social movement theory to understand community gardens

As I heard community gardeners describing their work as a form of ‘activism’ and a way to collectively effect change, I looked to social movement literature—the area of scholarship that most directly addresses these themes—to see if it could inform my understanding of community gardening. As Graeber (2007a p. 86) writes, ‘the point of any theoretical concept is to allow one to see things one would not be able to see otherwise’. Applying social movement theories to my research enabled me to see the ways community gardeners developed tactics and practices, formed understandings and analyses, drew on activist biographies, created solidary bonds, and operated within social movement milieux and networks. It also enabled me to make comparisons with other movements. A social movement lens provided a way of looking at community gardening that went beyond the benefits analysis that has dominated academic writing on community gardening, and enabled me to explore an important but under-recognised aspect of community gardening practice: its role as a form of collective social action.

Social movement theory has rarely been applied to community gardening (Jamison 1985 and Martinez 2009 are perhaps the only examples). This can perhaps be explained by social movement scholars’ tendency to focus on either protest or cultural elaboration, to the neglect of practical ‘alternative building’ projects (see below and Chapter 9); and community garden scholars’ focus on documenting the benefits community gardening brings to participants and neighbourhoods, to the neglect of community gardeners’ more contentious aims (see Chapter 1 and Appendix 1). However, without particular reference to theories of social movements, a number of writers have situated community gardening within wider (social) movements or movement families. Community gardeners themselves have also reflected variously on how their work relates to social change work being carried out in other movements. In order to situate community gardening within wider social movement milieux and scholarship, and to suggest ways community gardening might intersect with existing social movement theory, I will discuss the ways community gardens have been situated within, or claimed by, a number of social movements: the broad environmental movement, the organics movement, permaculture, and community foods or alternative agrifood movements.
Community gardening as an environmental movement

Community gardens are an important part of the environmental movement worldwide, probably one of its most effective components, even if they have enjoyed little notice so far. (Meyer-Renschhausen 2006 p. 3)

In Australia, community gardens have often been viewed in terms of their contributions to ‘sustainability’ (Sullivan 1997; Crabtree 1999; Corkery 2004a; 2004b; Davison 2006) but have rarely been analysed in relation to wider environmental movements. However the community gardening movement has significant overlap with (other) environmental movements. They respond to a similar range of concerns and have overlapping analyses, networks, movement cultures and solidary ties. The emergence of the community gardening movement around the world in the late 1960s and 70s has been attributed to the influence of the environmental movements which proliferated during this period (Crouch and Ward 1988 p. 78; Lawson 1994; Bartolomei, Corkery, et al. 2003). Accounts of the rise of community gardens in this period emphasise the influence of a growing ‘ecological awareness’ and point to the impact of particular publications, such as Rachel Carson’s (1962) Silent Spring, and the Club of Rome’s Limits to Growth Report (Meadows, Meadows et al. 1972), which popularised the idea of the finite capacity of the earth. From these accounts, community gardening could be described as a ‘spin-off movement’ (McAdam 1995), drawing on the frames and strategies developed by the environment movement, and applying them in an environment that had already been transformed by the actions of the ‘initiator’ environment movement.

The ‘environment movement’ is perhaps best understood as being comprised of many distinct movements sharing somewhat overlapping frames and symbols, but with considerable differences (Doyle 2005 p. 2). The particular environmentalism expressed and practiced in community gardens is peopled, urban, and often working-class (Buchannan 1975; Crouch and Ward 1988; Pollan 2001. For an analysis of anti-urban bias in environmentalism, see Light 2001). In this sense, community gardening has characteristics in common with ‘anarchist traditions… in which the politics of urban space and community were more central than the natural environment’ (Doherty 2000 p. 66, writing in reference to Reclaim the Streets) and with ‘participatory restoration’ forms of environmental action (Light 2001). Community gardening is heir to a conservation ethic rooted in the collective care and use of community commons (Judd 1997), an ethic that is agrarian rather than wilderness-based or romantic (Wirzba 2002; Pollan 2001). As discussed in the previous chapter, community gardening in the United States has been strongly associated with the environmental justice movement (Bullard 1994; Cole and Foster 2001). Environmental justice activists have sharpened environmental movements’ awareness of issues of social justice, particularly the links between urban environmental hazards, poverty and racism. They have also presented a challenge to wilderness-focused environmentalists to address environmental issues directly affecting the health of human communities. Community gardens, particularly in the US, are often a response to poverty, crime and
pollution in areas that are home predominantly to people of colour (Ferris, Norman, et al. 2001 p. 567).

The Australian community gardening movement can clearly and usefully be seen as part of the broad environmental movement, particularly its green (Doherty 2002) and environmental justice aspects, which emphasise caring for people and communities and creating cultures of nonviolence in addition to the protection of natural systems. Situating community gardens within environment movements is a reminder that concerns relating to food, agriculture and human health have been central to the development of ecological perspectives and movements. Ellen Swallow Richards, who introduced the term ‘ecology’ in the 1890s (Clarke 1973; Heller 1993; Hynes 1985) founded the United States’ first ‘pure food movement’. Her ideas about ‘home ecology’ linked social and ecological systems, connecting the health of soil and water with human health and nutrition. Rachel Carson’s (1962) book, *Silent Spring* brought wide attention to damage to human and ecological health caused by agrochemicals, concerns that had been raised by the organic movement since these chemicals came into use42. A communal food gardening project—People’s Park in Berkeley, California—is credited with introducing ecological ideas to the American counter-culture in the 1960s (Belasco 1993 pp. 19 – 22; Carlsson 2008 pp. 84 – 5). In the 1980s, the links between environmental issues and community participation were strengthened. Peopled urban environments became a focus for environmental movements, and there was even greater interest in participatory urban design, and in producing food in cities (Warburton 1998 p. 10). Some of the community-based strategies that were seen in the early forest protection campaigns found a new application in the city.

The Australian community gardening movement also has strong commitments and networks that could be seen as falling outside of the environment movement. If community gardening is to be seen as an environmental movement—as it is in this thesis—it is also necessary to recognise the role of these non-environmental aspects in the emergence and development of community gardening as a movement43.

**Community gardening as part of the organic movement**

Community gardens throughout the US, UK, Canada and Australia are overwhelmingly organic in their outlook and practices. Crabtree writes, ‘perhaps the core philosophy and practice underlying all forms of urban community gardening is organic gardening. This is not a specified set of practices, so much as a guiding principle’ (1999 p. 17). However, in movement-produced and academic literature,

42 Interestingly, Carson has been said to have ‘put considerable distance’ between herself and the organic movement (Guthman 2004 p.7).
43 In the US, a number of writers (Warner 1987, Ferris, Norman et al. 2001) have argued that the community gardening movement in that country emerged from the Civil Rights rather than environmental movement, and have focused on community gardeners’ work addressing poverty and racism. In both Australia and the US, traditions of community development and community organising have also contributed to the development of community gardening movements (see Chapter 7).
Community gardens have rarely been situated within the organic movement. The influence of the long-established organic movement is often overlooked in favour of environmentalism or permaculture, which both arose out of organics (Kaufman 1986). The coalescence of a community food movement has led to the development of stronger ties among community gardens and other organic groups, and suggests that the role of organics within the community gardening movement deserves greater attention (see Chapter 6 for further discussion).

**Community gardening as a permaculture movement**

Coined by Australian environmental designers David Holmgren and Bill Mollison (Mollison and Holmgren 1979; Mollison 1988; Holmgren 2002b), permaculture takes a systems design approach to sustainability. Permaculture is most often applied to gardening and agriculture, but also addresses housing, energy, economics, and community in an effort to design sustainable and ethical human environments (see Mulligan and Hill 2002 for a critical review of the history of permaculture). Permaculture is not only a design system, but an international movement which has strong connections with community gardens. At the International Permaculture Convergence held in Western Australia in 1996, Bodel and Anda described community gardens as ‘an integral part of the global permaculture solution’ (1997 p. 5; see also Ball and The Urban Permaculture Consultants 1985; Hopkins 2002). Holmgren has described the community gardening movement as ‘in a lot of ways an outcome of the permaculture movement’ (interviewed in Fenderson 2004). Permaculturalists have indeed played an important role in the Australian community gardening movement (Phillips 1996; Crabtree 1999; Gelsi 1999). Graduates of permaculture courses have been inspired to contribute to the development of community gardens. The physical layout of many community gardens is influenced by permaculture design concepts and community gardens often offer permaculture workshops and courses. Many of the community garden organisers who I interviewed and spoke with had completed training in permaculture. Community gardeners, particularly from Northey Street City Farm, were also centrally involved in the process of gaining government accreditation for a program of competency based permaculture training, including a Diploma of Permaculture Design. Within ACFCGN, there is overlap with permaculture networks. There has perhaps also been an over-emphasis on the part of some permaculture advocates on the contribution of ‘permaculture’ ideas, practitioners and networks to the development of community gardening in Australia, and while community gardens have been aided by permaculture practices and people, permaculture is one of many influences on community gardening, and its role should not be overstated (permaculture is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

**Community gardening as an alternative agrifood movement**

Social movements concerned with issues of food and agriculture have existed for some time and a number of these have been referred to already: the Diggers who resisted encroachments and
enclosures of the British commons in the 17th Century (Hill 1984 [1972]; Bradlely 1989; Sutherland 1991); ‘pure food’ movements from the 1890s (Clarke 1973; Hynes 1985; Heller 1993), the organic movement, particularly from the 1940s (Howard 1940; Balfour 1943); permaculture from the 1970s (Mollison and Holmgren 1979). Drawing on the work of these ‘initiator’ movements, a diverse range of initiatives have developed to challenge and provide alternatives to the dominant systems of food production, distribution and consumption.

Alternative agrifood movements are associated with a particular constellation of institutions and interventions, such as farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and organic farm gate stores, and with concepts such as community food security (Winne 2009), food justice (Levkoe 2006), civic agriculture (Lyson 2004), food sovereignty (Desmarais 2007), bioregionalism (Kloppenberg, Hendrickson and Stevenson 1996; Sale 1985; McGinnis 1999; Carr 2005), and ‘slow’ and locavore diets (Petrini 2007; Smith and Mackinnon 2007).

In the early 2000s, academics began writing about what they called ‘alternative agrifood initiatives’ or AFIs, and the new field of ‘agrifood studies’ (sometimes referred to as ‘agro-food’ studies in Britain) emerged. Researchers from a range of disciplines—sociology, anthropology, geography, economics, leisure studies—focused their attention on grassroots initiatives. Many of these researchers had a background in sustainable agriculture research (Hinrichs 2000 pp. 295 – 6) or rural studies and, while referring to AFIs as a ‘movement’, have tended to analyse them as forms of sustainable agriculture. While AFIs have sometimes been described as new social movements (Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman and Warner 2003; Baker 2004; Wekerle 2004), there has been little application of social movement theories within agrifood studies (Tovey 1999; Hassanein 2003; Allen 2004 are exceptions). Community gardens are often claimed by agrifood writers as alternative agrifood initiatives. Allen, FitzSimmons, et al. (2003 p. 64) summarise the ‘core forms’ of alternative food initiatives in six key academic articles. Five of these articles include community gardens as AFIs. The only other forms receiving as many mentions were CSAs and farmers’ markets. However, while community gardens are often listed in agrifood studies, they are not often analysed. In the academic literature, alternative agrifood initiatives are generally understood as small scale, often direct, marketing and distribution systems for commercially produced local food. While community gardens in Australia have been important in the development of farmers’ markets (Fulton 2005), their central practice is about the non-commercial production of food in a community setting. The agrifood literature has been limited thus far in its contribution to understanding the particular strategies and analyses of community gardeners.

The Australian community gardening movement did not emerge from an alternative agrifood milieu, but in recent years community gardeners have increasingly seen themselves as acting in solidarity with what is often described as a ‘community food movement’ alongside seed saving advocates, permaculturalists, organic producers and developers of alternative distribution systems. The program of the 2007 national community gardening conference organised by ACFCGN perhaps best
illustrates the community gardening movement’s recent positioning as part of a broader community foods movement. Many of its invited speakers, including Vandana Shiva and Helena Norberg-Hodge are at the forefront of alternative food movements. The Seed Savers’ Network’s annual conference was also encompassed in the proceedings, further emphasising the focus on food biodiversity and security. The situating of community gardens as part of a community food movement has assisted community gardeners to develop new networks, and created opportunities to consider new information and ideas and to develop new framing strategies.

Community gardens have been adopted by or situated within environmental, organic, permaculture and agrifood movements. Some of these are commonly understood as social movements, while others, such as the agrifood movements with their enterprise-based approach (Allen 1999; Guthman 2008c), are perhaps less clearly established as falling under this rubric. This brings us to considering whether community gardening can be considered a social movement in its own right, or at all.

COMMUNITY GARDENING AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

In adopting a social movement approach in this thesis, the question arises of whether community gardening is—or can legitimately be conceived as—a social movement. Perhaps the most important factor in identifying community gardening as a social movement is that community garden activists refer to their network and their shared project as a social movement. While I see no reason not to accept this self-identification, in order to link my findings with existing social movement scholarship, particularly in regard to the strategies used in environmental social movements, and the extent to which collective action that is not understood as state-directed protest fits within the concept of social movement, I have found it important to explore the extent to which community gardening can legitimately and usefully be theorised as a social movement. This is an issue that I investigate throughout this thesis and my intention here is not so much to offer an answer, as to introduce some of the theoretical tools I have used to explore the question. If social movements are understood broadly, as intentional collective efforts by activists to transform the social order (Buechler 2000), then my research indicates that some community gardening activity can be understood as social movement action, and some—that which involves minimal collectivity, or that which has no intent to transform the social order—cannot. It is not my intention to suggest that all community gardening activity is activism, or that all community gardening activity can be understood as social movement activity. How, then, to decide what does and does not constitute social movement action?

46 Tools from social movement scholarship have been applied to groups that are not considered part of a social movement (see for example Doherty, Paterson, Plows and Wall 2003).
Defining social movement

There is no clear consensus on what defines a social movement, or on what distinguishes a social movement from an interest group or political campaign. ‘Social movement’ has become a broad and all encompassing term, ‘used very loosely to refer to almost any political activity by groups outside political parties’ (Seel, Paterson et al. 2000 p. 9). The term social movement has been applied to everything from religious sects to political organisations; single-issue campaigns to revolutions (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1998; Diani 2000 p. 155; Allen 2004).

In proposing or adopting definitions of social movement, theorists from different perspectives have emphasised different characteristics. Resource mobilisation theorists (for example McCarthy and Zald 1977) have focused on the role of social movement organisations. Political process theorists (for example Tilly 1995) focused on interaction between social movements and ‘political opportunities’. New Social Movement theorists (for example Touraine 1981; Melucci 1989) have emphasised the ways social movements create cultural change and focus on collective identity. Doherty (2002) attempts to synthesise various definitions of social movement (Rucht 1998; della Porta and Diani 1999). He offers a set of four elements that he argues characterise social movements and make them distinct from other forms of collective action. These are:

- Taking action outside of political institutions—primarily via public protest, which he defines broadly
- A consciously shared collective identity
- A network structure that is broader than membership of formal organisations
- Rejection of or challenges to dominant forms of power and culture (Doherty 2002 p. 1, 7, see also Doherty and Doyle 2006).

Similarly, Diani (2000) argues that there are significant shared understandings of what constitutes a social movement, even among apparently disparate approaches. He identifies a set of characteristics that he argues are shared by social movement scholars across the major schools (including McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1984; Melucci 1989; Touraine 1981; Turner and Killian 1987 [1959]). He suggests that most social movement scholars share an understanding of social movement as a process whereby several different actors, be they individuals, informal groups and/or organisations, come to elaborate, through either joint action and/or communication, a shared definition of themselves as being part of the same side in a social conflict.

(Diani 2000 p. 156)

Diani identifies identity, a network pattern of relations, and conflict as the three essential characteristics that are either implicit or explicit in most scholars’ use of ‘social movement’. He argues that additional criteria, such as ‘anti-institutional styles of political participation’ and use of protest (the number one criteria in Doherty’s definition) cannot be taken as a fundamental characteristic of social movements. This reflects both Diani’s observation that this criterion is not shared across
definitions of social movement from various perspectives, and also his argument that social movement practices cannot be limited to specific forms of political action. Diani argues that his synthesis of social movement definitions is sufficient to enable social movement to be used as an ‘analytical, rather than merely evocative’ concept (p. 199).

These two accounts, by Diani (2000) and Doherty (2002) which draw together various strands in a definition of ‘social movement’ illustrate the tenuous position of a movement like community gardening within contemporary understandings of the term. In some ways, the match between community gardening and social movement is clear: the Australian community gardening movement is composed of fluid networks of interaction among individuals, gardens, and other groups and organisations, and has connections with wider social movement networks, including green and environmental networks; members of the movement see themselves as acting in solidarity with each other and as having shared beliefs, analyses and ways of doing things. However, community gardeners, whose emphasis is on practical, ‘alternative building’ and demonstration projects—and growing vegetables—are not often associated with what is usually understood as ‘protest’ and antagonism towards dominant forms of power and culture. The options, then, for considering community gardening as a social movement, are either decentring protest in favour of a less specific emphasis on claims making and contention, as in Diani’s definition, or further interrogating the idea of ‘protest’. A criterion of claims making and contention is easy for community gardening to meet. In the most obvious case, in staking a claim on land for community use and food production, community gardeners enter into conflict with dominant models of land use and land management, and with others with competing claims and agendas for the same land. I felt, however, that considering the emphasis in much social movement literature on protest, a more detailed consideration of the role of ‘protest’—that is, specific tactics of contention—in social movements was necessary to more fully determine the extent to which community gardening can be understood as a form of social movement action. In order to explore this question, I turn to literature on ‘repertoires of collective action’.

**REPERTOIRES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Activists adopt and adapt tactics used by others so they do not have to keep reinventing the wheel (McAdam and Rucht 1993 p. 58; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004 p. 266). Repertoires of collective action are the established ways of enacting change—the box of tools and tactics, strategies and practices

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47 ‘Contention’ is used somewhat differently by different social movement scholars. Diani, for example, uses it to refer to any engagement in conflict or argument, whereas Tarrow (1994 p. 181) uses contentious to refer to disruptive and violent repertoires. Protest, for example, is seen by Tarrow as ‘noncontentious’. I use contention in its broad common usage, rather than in Tarrow’s more specific sense, and therefore use the terms ‘repertoires of contention’ and ‘repertoires of collective action’ interchangeably.

48 Some have argued that a continued emphasis on specific protest repertoires is untenable in the light of current social movement practice. Andrews and Edwards’ (2005) research on local environment groups in the US, for example, found that less than half of those groups surveyed used protest or disruptive tactics, yet 90% identified as part of a social movement. See also Day (2005); Armstrong and Bernstein (2008); Young (1997).
drawn on by social movements. Tilly, who introduced the concept of repertoires to social movement analysis (1977), describes repertoires as the ‘whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals and groups’ (Tilly 1984 p. 4). Repertoires both facilitate and constrain action. They provide a set of scripts that can be readily performed, enabling movements to find forms to express their demands. They are limited by the knowledge, experience and networks of activists: ‘many technically possible contentious transactions never occur because the potential participants lack the requisite knowledge, memory and social connections’ (Tilly 1995 pp. 43 – 44).

In considering community gardening as a site of collective social action, and the extent to which it can be understood as a social movement practice, I have focused on the concept of repertoire. While I found that community gardeners’ understandings and analyses had much in common with other, mainly environmental, social movements, the particular means they adopted to enact their green values and to make collective claims differed substantially from the familiar routines of lobbying, protest, and oppositional direct action that characterise environmental movements in most accounts. Community garden activists also offered nuanced accounts of how they had selected their particular set of tactics and how these fitted within broader repertoires of collective action (see Chapter 5 in particular). The study of tactics is central to scholarly research on social movements (Taylor and Van Dyke p. 263). Within social movement literature, the study of repertoires of collective action is the field that engages most with strategies and tactics—of what social movement participants actually do, and how they choose to enact change. A focus on repertoire has enabled me to emphasise one of the major contributions I believe community gardeners can make to understandings of social change—namely the important role played by ‘constructive’ or prefigurative repertoires of contention—and to explore in more depth the extent to which movements which do not adopt state-focused protest as their primary strategy can be understood as social movements. Here, I outline the ways repertoires have been analysed in social movement literature, and introduce the particular conceptualisation that has more informed my analysis of community gardeners’ ways of enacting social change.

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49 Repertoire tends to be used at the level of population, rather than individual groups or strategies. Tilly and Tarrow talk about repertoires as the whole available set of strategies available to all movements at a particular time. For example, Tilly (1995) describes a complex of strategies: strikes, demonstrations, marches, and public meetings as constituting a new 19th Century repertoire, in contrast with an 18th Century repertoire of food riots, grain seizures, armed rebellions and carnivalesque public rituals. Other scholars refer to more bounded repertoires, such as those of particular movements. Some writers use ‘repertoire’ to refer to particular performances or strategies (for example Traugott 1993 p. 321; Bogad 2005). In this usage, a specific strategy, such as holding a vigil or staging a blockade can be referred to as ‘a repertoire’. In this thesis, my use of repertoire usually refers primarily to the set strategies known and used within minority world environmental movements, and sometimes to the role of particular sets of strategies—such as community gardening—with in the broader green repertoire. While some scholars (for example Larson and Soule 2003) have argued that there is a gap between distinct literatures discussing tactics and tactical repertoires, I have found more evidence of overlap, and have treated work on both tactics and tactical repertoires as a single body of literature.
Existing scholarship on repertoires of collective action

Although Jasper (2010) argues that analysis of repertoires of contention is a practice characteristic of the resource mobilisation tradition, the concept of repertoires has been used in both ‘structuralist’ and ‘cultural’ studies of social movements, though in somewhat different ways. The study of social movements has been dominated by the structural metaphors of resource mobilization and political process theorists (Jasper 2004 p. 1), in which the agency and subjectivity of participants is downplayed and focus is directed at organisational resources and political opportunities. The study of repertoires of contention emerged out of the political process current within North American social movement theorising and became part of what has been described as the ‘classic’ North American social movement agenda (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001 p. 15). With its theatrical metaphors, which suggest that established repertoires shape activists’ strategic choices (Tilly 1978), early studies of social movement repertoires had a clear structural bias, focusing on ‘factors that are relatively stable over time and outside the control of movement actors’ (Goodwin and Jasper 1999), rather than on agency and innovation. Within the ‘classic’ social movement agenda, repertoires are often seen as defined by ‘political opportunities’ (Sherman 2008). Scholars examining social movement repertoires from political process and resource mobilisation positions have concentrated on a narrow range of state-focused ‘instrumental’ strategies, such as strikes, demonstrations, petitions, public meetings, and riots (Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009 p. 865 – 6, referring particularly to Tarrow 1988 and Tilly 2008). However repertoires are sites of innovation and creativity as well as constraints, and a number of social movement scholars have challenged the structural and instrumental biases of early theorising on repertoires of collective action (Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Jasper 2004). Drawing on cultural and social psychology perspectives, including a focus on emotions and the subjective experiences of activists, and on feminist and poststructuralist analyses of power, more recent scholarship has extended understandings of what repertoires contain and how they evolve. Social movement scholars with a focus on cultural aspects of social movement action, and on the agency of movement participants, have disputed narrowly state-focused and instrumental understandings of what constitutes social movement action. They have documented a wider range of strategies, taking into account culture and consciousness (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Jasper 2010).

The different theoretical orientations of scholars have had a striking impact on the findings of studies of social movement repertoires. A major focus in structuralist studies of social movement repertoires has been the pace and processes of change in the established repertoire. Social movements are seen as performing both set pieces and innovative improvisations, a ‘paradoxical combination of ritual and flexibility’ (Tilly 1977 p. 22). However, as scholars like Tilly and Tarrow argue, social movements generally choose from a surprisingly limited range of routines. One of the constraints on innovation

50 Including resource mobilisation (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and political process (Tilly 1995) approaches.
51 Including ‘culture theory’ (Ryan and Gamson 2006) and new social movement theory (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1989), approaches.
is the expectations of the culture in which social movement action takes place (Sewell 1992). Social movements seek to balance creativity and legitimacy. The strategies they choose are often intended to communicate readily and to win support. Tactics that are unfamiliar, unexpected or seen as illegitimate may be less well received than those that are easily understood and accepted, and therefore familiar routines are often selected. Structuralist social movement scholars see repertoires as changing slowly, with innovation occurring at the margins of established forms, as people make incremental modifications to familiar routines (Tilly 1977; Tarrow 1994 p. 30; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001 p. 41). As ideas that started out as creative innovations circulate among movements, they tend to become distilled, refined and routinised, taking on characteristics of the established repertoire. Despite constant experimentation, these scholars argue that social movement repertoires remain relatively stable and that enduring additions to the repertoire are rare. Tarrow (1993) uses strikes as an example of the pace of change. In the 1870s, strikes were seen as unconventional and were generally condemned. It took until the 1960s for cultural change and social movement action to make strikes an accepted element of collective bargaining (Tarrow 1993 p. 298). This perspective on the pace of innovation contrasts markedly with more recent culturally oriented studies of social movement repertoires, in which a wider range of social movement practices such as ‘culture jamming’, street carnivals, media production and the use of humour are acknowledged (for example Gamson 1989; Staggenborg 2001; Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Duncombe 2002b; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Bogad 2005; Staggenborg and Lang 2007; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009; Shepard 2009, 2010). These studies tend to see social movements as cultural innovators, constantly creating, adapting, subverting and deploying cultural forms, with new additions to the repertoire spreading rapidly. By abandoning an exclusive focus on forms of social movement action that targets the state or other elites, these theorists have attended to a wider repertoire of citizen participation. This has enabled them to challenge the conclusion that repertoires are limited and slow changing (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005 p. 249).

These different approaches to analysing repertoires of collective action nest within wider currents and debates within social movement scholarship—particularly with regard to understandings of the nature of ‘the political’. A strong cultural/political dualism has pervaded much social movement theorising. Within both political process and resource mobilisation approaches on one hand and cultural and ‘new social movement’ approaches on the other, cultural and expressive action has been seen as separate to instrumental and externally oriented action. The political, in many approaches to the study of social movements, has been equated with protest and in particular, protest that is aimed at the state (for example McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001 p. 5) or other elites (for example Doyle 2000; Wapner 1996 pp. 10 – 12). Other social movement practices are seen to have ‘cultural’ rather than political significance (for example Melucci 1989 p. 72). This over-emphasis on narrowly-defined and state-focused protest creates an impression that ‘all other aspects of the movement are a form of preparation for action directed against the state’ (Doherty 2002 p. 11). With protest in the centre,
other social movement activities are seen as relevant and ‘political’ only in so far as they enable protest, for example as assisting the formation of an activist identity (for example Wall 1999; Taylor and Whittier 1999; Staggenborg 2001) or as communicating visions which may help attract new people to protests (for example LaRocca 2004). Melucci’s (1999) concept of a social movement ‘milieu’ is an example of a ‘culturally’ focused approach re-enforcing the distinction between the cultural and the political. Melucci sees much of the activity carried out by social movements as cultural and expressive—creating cultural symbols and ways of living that facilitate the construction of activist identity and the maintenance of latent networks which can be remobilised in future protest actions (see also Polletta 1999; Diani 1999). Social movement milieux, sometimes theorised as ‘free spaces’, ‘havens’, and ‘spheres of cultural autonomy’ (Polletta 1999), enable experimentation with ‘new cultural models, forms of relationships and alternative perceptions and meanings of the world’ (Maddison and Scalmer 2006 p. 81). While Melucci sees the creation of alternative culture as equally important to protest and instrumental strategies, and as a significant way of expressing opposition within everyday life, Melucci and theorists who draw on his work still tend to see cultural aspects of social movement mobilisation as distinct from ‘political’ aspects, and portray them as important in so far as they facilitate the main agenda of protest (for example Polletta 1999; Wall 1999; Staggenborg 2001; Whelan 2002; LaRocca 2004). Within this dualistic framework, strategies aside from protest are frequently understood as ‘lifestyle’ or ‘consumer’ practices, even when they are the result of collective action. The basis for an alternative analysis can be found in understandings of politics as ‘purposive social action directed at the conditions of social existence’ (Magnusson 1996 p. 67). This enables the recognition of the political in a wider range of actions, irrespective of their adherence to ‘the forms imposed on popular politics under state hegemony’ (ibid). The fact that movements find ways of enacting change beyond the bounds recognised forms of protest and lobbying can, Magnusson argues, be taken as ‘evidence not of their prepolitical but of their political character—of their capacity to found or create new forms of political community, political identity, political action’ (Magnusson 1996 p. 67, italics in original).

The artificial distinction between culture and politics, though surprisingly pervasive, has been strongly criticised. Butler (1997), for example, identifies the tendency of some Marxist scholars to locate some social movements within political economy, while relegating others to the ‘merely’ and exclusively cultural. She argues that this division ignores Marxist and socialist feminist analyses of ‘cultural’ institutions, such as the family, as essential to producing subjects that serve the interests of capital, and that clearly, the ‘cultural’, the ‘political’, and the ‘economic’ are deeply entwined. Day (2005) concurs, arguing that social movements ‘appear “merely symbolic” or “merely cultural” only in the eyes of those for whom economic concerns are the only important concerns, and who do not perceive the ways in which identity-based issues are intertwined with economic issues’ (Day 2005 p. 69). Activists, particularly in feminist and anarchist traditions, have long argued for an end to political/cultural dualisms. Anarcha-feminists ‘insisted that an anarchist or revolutionary egalitarian
politics must be feminist, meaning that it must transcend the division between public and private by putting its political principles into practice in daily life’ (Epstein 1991 p. 95). A ‘radical’ approach, argue Osterweil and Chesters (2007), one that gets at the ‘roots’, requires ‘that we refine traditional definitions of capitalism as being simply an economic system, and recognize that is it a system that is present and premised in the minutiae of our everyday lives’ (2007 pp. 260 – 1). They argue for an understanding of ‘politics as cultural’ (p. 254). In order to adequately address the full range of strategies and tactics enacted by social movement activists, their deeply entwined cultural and political significance must be recognised (see Chapter 8 for further discussion).

An approach to repertoires of collective action for this thesis

Community gardening is an activity with goals and implications that can be seen as instrumental and ‘political and as ‘expressive’ and cultural, as will be explored in depth in the following chapters. Throughout my work on this thesis, I have searched for social movement scholarship that is not premised by an artificial distinction between culture and politics, because the movement I was studying explicitly refuted this dualism. An analysis that favoured either extreme would fail to grasp the scope and significance of community gardeners’ ways of understanding and enacting social change. I was encouraged by Jaspers’ (2004) suggestion that the study of movements’ strategic choices could provide an avenue to overcome the structural bias of much social movement scholarship (and blind spots in much ‘cultural’ social movement theorising) by attending to movement participants’ agency and decision-making rather than the structural context. A focus on strategy also brings academic study closer to the concerns of movement participants themselves, who must continually address in an ongoing fashion the question of ‘what is to be done?’ (Jasper 2004 p. 4; Ennis 1987 p. 520). This is a fitting convergence for a thesis grounded in an ‘activist research’ methodology (see Chapter 4). Rupp and Taylor (2003) provide practical tools for such a project. In their study of drag as social protest, Rupp and Taylor confronted similar theoretical problems to those I encountered during this research, in particular the question of what makes certain types of cultural expression—whether drag performance or vegetable gardening—political; to what extent they (sometimes) function as ‘protest’ tactics:

How do we know when cultural forms such as music, comedy, ritual, art, theatre, and spectacles are rituals of affirmation, when apolitical entertainments, and when actions geared towards changing or opposing change in institutions of social life? When is cultural performance a form of protest?

(Rupp and Taylor 2003 p. 214)

They answered these questions by offering a conceptual definition of social movement tactics that enabled them to judge when cultural forms, practices, and institutions were being used for political purposes (p. 217). Drawing together the work of both ‘contentious’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly 2005; Tarrow 1998) and ‘constructionist’ (Snow 2004; Melucci 1989; Polletta 2002) theorists, they propose three criteria that can be used to determine when a cultural performance can
be understood as part of a repertoire of collective action. First, an action must involve *contestation*, in which practices, symbols, identities and discourses are negotiated, framed and deployed in order to effect change. Second, practices must be used *intentionally*, as a conscious, strategic tactic to make political claims. Thirdly, they argue, ‘cultural repertoires’ create and draw on *collective identity*, therefore having the internal, movement building, function of creating solidarity and oppositional consciousness as well the external function of addressing opponents and garnering public support (Rupp and Taylor 2003 p. 217; see also Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009 p. 867). This model has enabled researchers to develop ‘powerful evidence for moving beyond the rigid distinction between culture and politics that characterizes mainstream theorizing in social movements’ (Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009 p. 885) by considering the influence of ‘cultural’ repertoires on instrumental action. It has enabled me to better understand the extent to which the ‘cultural’ practices of community gardeners can be understood as part of social movements’ repertoires of contention, and I reflect on this in the context of Rupp and Taylor’s definition throughout this thesis.

**Repertoires in context**

The focus in this thesis is on the particular strategies used by community gardeners, and the extent to which they can be seen as part of a repertoire of collective action. However, I have not studied forms of contention in isolation. Social movements are more than series of contentious performances (Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009 p. 867) and repertoires of collective action exist within webs of social relations, both within social movements, where new strategies or tactics are invented, polished and circulated, and between movements and those to whom they address their grievances (Tarrow 1993 p. 282; Tilly 1995 p. 44; Zald 1996). The wider concerns of social movement scholarship, including collective identity formation, framing, resource mobilisation, and active and latent networks shape and are shaped by repertoires of collective action. I have therefore engaged with aspects of social movement theorising beyond repertoire where they assist in answering my core questions in relation to strategy and repertoire.

Different approaches to the study of social movements enable us to see different, partial views of complex and changing social forms. There is currently a general consensus in social movement scholarship that traditionally distinct theoretical approaches, such as resource mobilisation (McCarthy and Zald 1973; Klandermans 1984), political process theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; McAdam 1999), New Social Movement theory (Touraine 1974; Melucci 1989), and more recent ‘cultural’ approaches (Jasper 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 2004) have significant points of overlap (Rochon 1990; Rucht 1990; Bergmann 1993; Tovey 1999; Diani 2000) and can be drawn on eclectically (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Reed 2005; Doyle and Doherty 2006). Within the activist research framework that this thesis adopts (see Chapter 4), the emphasis has been on gleaning what is useful from various established approaches, and avoiding becoming diverted into scholarly debates about competing vantage points and emphases (Bevington and Dixon...
2005). In this thesis, I have drawn selectively and critically from differing schools of social movement analysis—and a number of strands of political theory—to make sense of my empirical research, focusing on movement relevance and a non-dualistic approach to culture and politics. I have also been influenced by Day’s (2005) argument that social movement theory must be reconsidered, not simply reapplied, in the light of contemporary social movement practice, particularly in response to what Day describes as the ‘Newest’ social movements, such as those constituting the global justice movement, whose non-hegemonic political logic ‘escapes the categories of traditional social movement theories’ (Day 2005 p. 45).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to move from a general consideration of community gardening as a form of collective social action to a more specific focus on the particular research questions that structure the rest of the thesis. I have drawn on social movement scholarship, and particularly work on repertoires of collective action, to identify tools for determining the extent to which community gardening can be considered a form of social action, and whether it can be seen as a social movement. A particular rubric identified in this chapter has been Rupp and Taylor’s criteria for assessing the use of ‘cultural’ repertoires as political protest: contestation, intentionality, and collective identity. I have applied Rupp and Taylor’s analysis throughout this thesis. Having identified the ways in which community gardeners enact social change as the fundamental point of difference from other environmental social movements, and shown how literature on repertoires of collective action can help understand them, the following chapter describes the ways in which I investigated the strategies and tactics of the Australian community gardening movement.
In seeking to understand the social movement practices of community gardeners, and in particular their specific tactics of collective action, I adopted a qualitative approach, drawing on poststructuralist ethnographic methods and informed by literature on activist research. The data gathering methodology was threefold: reflective participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and analysis of a range of material sources. My research began in a very open, exploratory, and inductive way, becoming more focused and deductive as themes, concerns, and priorities emerged. I chose three case study locations, which enabled comparisons to be made, contrasts to be identified, and a sense of scope and roundedness to be achieved. I interviewed 20 community garden organisers, and research conversations with many other community garden organisers and participants also informed my understanding and analysis. I also visited more than 60 individual community gardens around Australia. These methods enabled me to witness community gardeners’ ways of enacting social change in a number of contexts and to join with community gardeners in reflecting on their meaning and significance. In this chapter, I introduce the main influences on my research methodology, outline how I selected the sites for my case studies, provide an overview of the way I gathered and analysed empirical information, and reflect on the process of this research. I begin by drawing together the key elements of my argument in this thesis so far and explaining how this led me to specify the research questions that shaped the analysis of my data and the writing of the thesis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In response to the problematic outlined in the preceding chapters I have focused the writing of my empirical research on several interlinked questions, which have aided me in exploring community gardening as a site of collective social action. Although the focus of this thesis is on community gardening as a form of collective social action, I do not wish to argue that community gardening is
always a political activity, nor that people always become involved in community gardening in order to effect social change. Therefore, I explore the question

- Under what circumstances can community gardening be seen as a form of political praxis?

In order to address this question, I draw on Rupp and Taylor’s (2003) analysis of social movement repertoires in which they propose criteria for evaluating whether cultural practices can be considered forms of ‘protest’. This enabled me to pose the more specific question of

- To what extent is community gardening used strategically and intentionally as a performance to make collective claims?

In order to understand how some community gardeners go about enacting social change through community gardening, and to compare and contrast this with the tactics of other, particularly environmental, movements, I explore the question

- What are the specific methods used by community gardeners to enact social change?

To link my findings with wider literature on collective social action, specifically that produced by social movement scholars, I have asked

- To what extent can community gardening be understood as a social movement practice?

As a way of engaging in debates within social movement scholarship about the ways social movement activists go about working for change, I ask

- Do community gardeners’ strategies constitute or contribute to a repertoire of collective action? and
- What would be the implications for social movement theorising if community gardening were recognised as a site of collective social action?

These six closely linked questions are both substantively meaningful and theoretically important as they concern a means of collective social action that has had little analysis, despite its increasing popularity, and which presents a significant departure from the narrow range of tactics that have dominated accounts of social movements. They also provide a basis for constructing an account of the Australian community gardening movement that goes beyond benefits analysis to explore the agency, activities and ideas of community garden leaders.
RESEARCH APPROACHES

I’m sitting at a table under a mango tree with Vicente, Sheela, Iain, and Jake. I tell them that I’d like to come back to Northey Street for my PhD research. It seems like they have quite a few students through here, and I try to tell them a bit about the research I am hoping to do and they joke about building me a hide so I can spy on the gardeners in their natural environment. I reflect about these people’s skillfulness, their constant holding out of solidarity, even with pesky students, and how laughter reaches out between people. In the afternoon, Iain invites me into the office, gives me the computer passwords, and tells me ‘help yourself to anything you want’—all their records, their grant applications, their resources... absolutely everything. I’m overwhelmed.

Later, I’m sitting in the back of Jake’s van, driving to Iain’s place for dinner. I’m smiling. They’re talking in acronyms about permaculture training and accreditation and I’m hearing names and places I know well from the other side of the country. Alice brings out olives and grapes and cheese and beer. There are partners and children, people talking excitedly over good food and generous easy hospitality. Harvey arrives and sits next to me. I am happy to be meeting him around a dinner table on an open verandah on a sweaty night, rather than seeing him speak from a podium at a conference or arriving as an honoured guest at a forum... I’m firmly convinced that dinner is essential in building community, that these connections are much harder forged at conferences and convergences. I’m becoming convinced that dinner is essential to research too.

(Journal, 11th February 2004)

As a researcher and a community gardener, my research experience was characterised by a high degree of commitment to community gardening and the people involved. I was interested from the outset in providing information that would be relevant and useful to community gardeners. I hoped to put community gardeners’ experiences and analyses into a broader context, so they could be more widely known and understood. Clearly this required a qualitative approach, and one that was tentative, exploratory and generating of hypotheses, rather than testing of a prior theory. I sought to shift between etic and emic frames, and attempted to produce research documents that communicated to the movement under study as well as academic readers.

Much of the research on repertoires of collective action in social movements has been conducted within a protest event analysis methodology (Koopmans and Rucht 2002. Studies using this methodology include Tarrow 1993; Sherman 2008; Larson and Soule 2003; Doherty, Plows and Wall, 2007) frequently relying on newspaper reporting as a primary source of data (Fillieule and Jimenéz 2007). While media-based protest event analysis has made significant contributions to understandings of social movement repertoires, these accounts have been limited by their data sources. They have focused on a narrow range of protest events that fulfil journalistic criteria of newsworthiness, such as size, novelty and violence, taking place at an easy to access and photograph location (Mueller 1997; Earl, Martin, McCarthy and Soule 2004). It is estimated that the press ignore between ninety and ninety eight percent of protest events (Fillieule and Jimenéz 2007, p. 261, see also Herman and Chomsky 1988). Those who have sought to expand the study of repertoires of collective action...

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52 Doherty, Plows and Wall (2007) provide an interesting contribution within the protest event literature insofar as they find that autonomous direct action groups’ repertoires were focused on ‘challenges to the norms underlying political and capitalist institution’ (p. 805), rather than influencing government or elites.
beyond state-focused protest by examining ‘cultural’ tactics and practices have tended to use qualitative methods, including ethnography and in-depth interviewing, which can provide access to events that go unreported in the media (for example Gamson 1989; Staggenborg 2001; Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Bogad 2005; Staggenborg and Lang 2007; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009; Shepard 2009, 2010). This difference in methodology may contribute to the different conclusions of ‘cultural’ and ‘political process’ scholars about how repertoires of collective action function and evolve (see Chapter 3).

In seeking to understand a movement that has had relatively little written about it, whose activities are not reported in newspapers and whose tactics have not been mapped in academic literature, I adopted an exploratory, open approach in order to identify the community gardening movement’s practices, analyses, and networks. The study of political repertoires, their creation, diffusion, and adaptation, required a focus on the particular, the way practices vary from place to place, and on change (McAdam, Sampson, Weffer and MacIndoe 2005 p. 2). Because of my desire to recognise the breadth and depth of community gardeners’ ways of theorising and developing repertoires of social change, it was important to recognise small, everyday acts of care, creation and resistance, as well as large, obvious and public achievements. This required a methodology which could ‘articulate the theoretical necessity of care, of love and of passion’ (Probyn 1993 p. 146) and recognise knowledges and experiences that often pass unnoticed and unnamed, including in social movement literature.

I adopted a broadly ethnographic approach, combining participant observation with in-depth semi-structured interviews and analysis of material sources, and applied this with consideration to issues raised by ‘activist research’, including addressing power relationships between researcher and researched, and producing research that is accessible and relevant to activists. Activist researchers, Bevington and Dixon (2005 p. 198) argue that in order to produce movement-relevant theory, researchers should locate and examine the issues of most importance to the movement. I felt that short visits would be inadequate to gauge this, and that longer periods of participant observation would better enable me to understand the kinds of discussions that were taking place within the movement, and to reflect with garden activists about issues of importance to them. In focusing particularly on repertoires of collective action, an ethnographic approach also enabled me to address McAdam’s (1996 p. 341) contention that it is essential for theorists to attend to what activists do, rather than just what they say.

**Activist research**

This thesis was conceived as a project of ‘activist research’. Activist research is characterised by collaboration between researchers and people involved in movements under study, and by hybrid activist/academic identities on the part of researchers. Activist research explores questions that matter to activists as well as researchers, incorporates feedback from activists, and makes findings
available in a place and form that is accessible to activists as well as academics (Bevington and Dixon 2005). An activist research approach enabled me to develop a reflexive standpoint as an active member of the movement I was studying who has a commitment to serving the community gardening movement, and also to rigorous social research. As an embedded participant within the community gardening movement, my approach was intentionally ‘empathic and interactive rather than extractive and objective’ (Chatterton and Pickerill 2006). However, unlike many studies of community gardening, I was interested not only in the ‘benefits’ of community gardens, but also in taking a critical and reflexive stance. Personal engagement has the capacity to contribute to richer research outcomes. Activist researchers, it has been argued, have ‘deeper and more thorough empirical knowledge of the problem at hand, as well as theoretical understanding that otherwise would be difficult to achieve’ (Hale 2001 p. 13). In addition to these benefits, adopting an activist research approach also involved tensions and ethical dilemmas, which are discussed below.

**Research for the movement**

I’m writing this for two reasons. First I want to give credit to the ... organisers who did a brilliant and difficult job, who learned and applied the lessons of the last twenty years ... And second, because the true story of how this action was organised provides a powerful model that activists can learn from ... We have before us a task of building a global movement to overthrow corporate control and create a new economy based on fairness and justice, on a sound ecology and a healthy environment, one that protects human rights and serves freedom. We have many campaigns ahead of us, and we deserve to learn the true lessons of our success.

(Starhawk 2002 p. 56)

I am hopeful that some of the information in this thesis may be useful to community gardening and other activists, and may help proliferate the innovative repertoire community gardeners have developed. However I recognise that a doctoral thesis is likely to be read by few people. I acknowledge that the main beneficiary of this thesis is probably me, whether or not I expect to pursue a career in academia. At its most basic level, activist research implies the production of research that is useful to, and accountable to movements (Bevington and Dixon 2005 p. 186). An intention to do research ‘for’ as well as ‘on’ the community gardening movement meant that I had wider aims for this research project; and that producing a thesis, which is primarily a documentation of my learning process and reflections, was one of several outcomes. In order to make some of my research findings and analyses more widely available and to translate them into terms more directly germane to community gardeners and others outside the academy, I have produced a number of other research documents which are more accessibly written, and more directly address findings that I believe are of greatest interest and relevance to the community gardening movement (often in response to specific requests). I have also sought to develop resources, circulate information, and provide tools for other researchers. Research carried out in the process of writing this thesis has been used to support submissions regarding new gardens, in support of threatened ones, and in response to local government policy formation processes.
I hoped to negotiate open, reciprocal, mutually beneficial agreements with the people and organisations I researched. When I originally approached Northey Street City Farm to discuss the possibility of conducting research with them, they related stories of students coming to study at the Farm, in which the students and their research disappeared never to be seen again as soon as their fieldwork was completed. I have since heard similar accounts from a number of other community garden groups. Researchers have often been criticised for doing research on particular groups and then never letting them know about the findings and conclusions, or even using research against them (Doyle 1999 p. 242). Northey Street City Farm members asked that whatever research I produced be shared with them. I have sent hard copies of this thesis to each of the research sites. I have also produced a brief document summarising my findings and argument, which has been sent to all of the research participants I have been able to contact and will be put on the internet for public access. A digital version of this thesis will also be made available online. Three major publications from this research project, in addition to this thesis, were the website and 100 page booklet, Community Gardening in S.A: Resource Kit (Fulton 2004), which was later revised, substantially expanded and published in book form as Growing Community: Starting and Nurturing Community Gardens (Nettle 2010a), and Community Gardening: An Annotated Bibliography (Nettle 2008) a second edition of which was published in 2010 (Nettle 2010b) (see Appendix 1). A number of community gardeners whom I consulted for this research thought that the 2004 Resource Kit was my PhD thesis, and were satisfied that I had used their input in a useful way. I have also given presentations about community gardening to numerous audiences, including environmental conferences, residents’ associations, social service sector bodies, groups starting gardens, community development organisations, environmental educators, permaculture students, academic conferences, and organic gardening organisations. I have written widely for movement publications, including The Planet, Chain Reaction, and Community Harvest, as well as contributing to flyers and information sheets, zines, community gardening websites, and gardening magazines.

Ethnography as activist research

For some, activist research, with its emphasis on collaboration, implies a participatory action research methodology. In common with action research advocates (Freire 1970; Greenwood and Levin 1998; Wadsworth 1997), I was committed to accurately and respectfully reflecting activists’ views, and tried to create situations where I could gain the input, perspectives, and feedback of the community gardeners whom I consulted for this research. I sought feedback on multiple occasions, both during fieldwork and interviews, and as drafts were prepared. On the completion of a draft of the thesis, a preliminary summary report was sent out to all interviewees and some provided responses. However, despite sharing some of the goals of action research, I decided against taking this approach. A PhD is a sole authored document, and I felt that in order to minimise exploitation of research subjects (Naples 2003 p. 13), it was inappropriate to ask busy activists to contribute to the design and analysis of my research, in addition to allowing me to conduct participant observation and record interviews
with them. As far as possible, I took responsibility for the labour involved in my research, and I attempted to contribute as much as possible to the projects that I studied.

People I interviewed and interacted with during participant observation actively supported and guided my research in many ways, inviting me to meetings or events they thought I should witness and providing me with background information they thought relevant, even when it did not show them or their organisations in the most flattering light. In particular, community gardeners helped me understand that what I was observing was not the way it had always been, and that current practices would continue to change and evolve. They continually emphasised the long, slow processes, the huge effort that was behind the gardens and the community processes I saw, revealing the labour and creativity involved. In these and other ways, they were active participants in the research project.

An alternative to action research approaches within activist research is ethnography. Activist researcher and anthropologist, David Graeber (2004), has argued that ethnography provides a model for how a ‘non-vanguardist’ revolutionary intellectual practice might work. Through ethnographic methods, researchers observe activists’ practices and tease out their underlying logics. Ethnography enables researchers to look at those experimenting with political repertoires, to consider the larger implications of what they are doing, and to offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities, gifts (Graeber 2004 pp. 11 – 12).

In activist research practice, ethnographic approaches combine poststructuralist ethnographic research with measures to ensure ‘mutually beneficial relations among scholars and those with whom knowledge is made’ (Cushman 1999 p. 332). This implies a critique of power relations in traditional ethnographic practices. Poststructuralist analyses often seek to reveal power—and resistance—as pervasive, diffuse and constituting. A focus on ‘the multiplicity of force relations’, the micro-level of power which exists everywhere and originates everywhere (Foucault 1976 p. 334) assisted me in being able to recognise community gardeners’ ‘ordinary resistances’, the kinds of everyday social action Pinn and Horsfall (1999 p. 7) describe as ‘acts of creativity, emergence and becoming’ and which Foucault terms ‘mobile and transitory points of resistance’ (Foucault 1980 p. 96). The neglect of these by social movement theory became a focus in itself. Poststructuralist approaches have been significantly developed by feminists arguing for situated and embodied knowledges. Donna Haraway, for example, describes ‘unlocatable’ knowledge claims as irresponsible (1988 p. 583). In their place, she advocates

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53 On recent use of ethnography in the study of political movements see also Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007 – particularly chapter by Tilly; Schatz 2009. On ‘militant ethnography’ as activist research see Juris 2008b.
politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.

(Haraway 1988 p. 195)

I have been influenced by the body of feminist literature (Stanley and Wise 1993; Roseneil 1993) that advocates abandoning pretences of value-neutrality and embracing a commitment to research for as well as about social movements, often from a standpoint of being passionately and politically engaged in the issues under study. A commitment to reflexivity has been central to this formulation of feminist research.

**Positioning myself in the research**

If a writer on a political subject manages to preserve a detached attitude, it is nearly always because [s]he doesn’t know what [s]he is talking about. To understand a political movement, one has got to be involved in it…

(Orwell 1968 p. 348)

the researcher (the knower) is directly implicated in the knowledge he or she produces. In other words, my own subjectivity fundamentally shapes the pictures… that I produce, according to the assumptions that I make, the questions that I ask, the concepts and excerpts I prioritise, the analysis I compose, and the interpretations that I generate … The dynamics of each and every interview, including the questions of personality and timing, will influence the things that interviewees tell me, how they tell me, the slant they put on a given event, what they leave out, what they forget, and what they remember…

(Mason 2002 p. 30)

This thesis was intended from the outset as activist research, by an active participant in the movement under study54. All research is positioned. Rather than seeking to cut off personal commitments from research, activist research endorses ‘the contrasting tack of making our politics explicit and up-front, reflecting honestly and systematically on how they have shaped our understandings… and putting them to the service of our analytical endeavor’ (Hale 2001 p. 14).

Many have argued that the inclusion of an ‘intellectual autobiography’ (Roseneil 1993 p. 182) is essential to feminist, post-positivist epistemology, enabling readers to situate the author in his or her particular social and cultural context, and writers to acknowledge and draw upon their embodied subject positions. Activist researchers have emphasised the importance of researchers’ connections

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54 My personal support of and commitment to community gardening has inevitably influenced my research findings. I believe this has largely been an asset rather than a liability for this research. My involvement with community gardening enabled easy access to many community gardens and to people in leadership positions within the movement. It assisted my understanding of what I observed, my ability to ask pertinent questions, and my unobtrusiveness in carrying out participant observation. Rather than being unable or unwilling to form criticisms of the movement, I saw myself as being able to contribute in some small way to the development of community gardening by offering a critical perspective. I was also able to gain a partial ‘outsider’ perspective by choosing research sites I had no previous contact with, and in case of Northey Street City Farm and Cultivating Community, my relationship was primarily a research one.

My first community gardening experience—and my first gardening experience—was as a 16 year old high school student. An anarchist-influenced environmental collective I was part of took on the care of a plot at a local city farm. Our main focus had been on nuclear and transport issues—organising what was perhaps the first ‘Reclaim the Streets’-style action in Australia and campaigning against uranium mining in our state. However, we also liked eating well, and were attracted to the idea of nurturing something hopeful, as well as opposing things we saw as threatening.

After some years of involvement with protests to protect old growth forests, anti-nuclear activism, and organising activist training, with semesters here and there of university study, I became interested in permaculture. I spent the next two years learning about permaculture and organic growing, including doing a Permaculture Design Course with Bill Mollison, an internship at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, and visiting numerous farms and communities as a WWOOFer (Willing Worker on Organic Farms). When I returned to South Australia, I became involved with the Permaculture Association of South Australia, organising festivals, trainings, and events and editing their journal.

After completing my undergraduate degree (in Politics and Environmental Studies) I was accepted into a Masters program in the innovative School of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney. Towards the end of my studies there I took courses in qualitative research methodology and completed a thesis on networks in the Australian organic movement. My thesis research touched on the community gardening movement. It was the best research experience one could hope for, with skilful encouragement and guidance, ample freedom to explore, an expectation of academic rigour, and permission to include heart and soul. I was hooked, and began my doctoral research the following year, now at the closer to home University of Adelaide.

Prior to commencing the research for this thesis, I had increasing contact with community gardens and people involved with community gardening as a form of activism. I had agreed to ‘plot-sit’ for holidaying friends at several local gardens, included articles about community gardens in the permaculture journal I edited, and attended community gardening and horticultural therapy conferences. I was peripherally involved with setting up a new community garden in my neighbourhood and there was overlap between the permaculture networks I was part of and community gardening networks. Just before I began my thesis research, I was offered a position as a
project officer in a short-term program to support and extend community gardening in South Australia. Through this position, I became involved in re-establishing the South Australian Community Gardening Network, and have continued to volunteer as an organiser for this group. As my research project developed, I began to devote less time to permaculture and other activist work, and more time to community gardening activities. In addition to conducting participant observation with the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, I co-ordinated its 2006 national conference and, since 2009, have been a member of the organisation’s executive. My involvement will continue after the submission of this thesis and has influenced the ways I have conducted participant observation with other community gardeners.

* Negotiating activist and academic positions*

Social movement scholars need not, and in fact should not aspire to be detached from movements. Instead, the researcher’s connection to the movement provides important incentives to produce more ‘objective’ research to ensure that the researcher is providing those movements with the best possible information. Indeed, the engaged researcher has more of a stake in producing accurate findings than one with no stake in the movement.

(Bevington and Dixon 2005 p. 192)

In the end, the only acceptable answer I could find to the question ‘Am I qualified to write this book?’ was that my membership and my affection were my qualifications. When I judge these people, I judge myself.

(Myerhoff 1980 p. 28)

The politics of identification with, and integration into researched communities has been a major preoccupation for activist researchers. Multi-positionality—as person, activist, academic—can enable and enrich ethnographic research but also raises ethical and methodological concerns. For many writers who have reflected on the dilemmas of activist research, and of multi-positionality, activist commitments have developed through the process of academic research (for example Anderson 2002; Fuller 1999). Like Roseneil (1993), who conducted activist research on Greenham Common, my activist identity preceded and is stronger than my academic one. While I sometimes managed to integrate, or move easily between positions, at times, the relationship between my ‘activist’ and ‘academic’ roles was uncertain and uncomfortable. I was acutely aware of arguments about academic research contributing to the domestication of social movements:

the process of research nullifies the radical potential of what is studied. Contemporary capital thrives on its ability to ingest previously radical movements and re-integrate them through commodification and management… This is even more horrific when you consider academics often bring movements and rebellions they have been involved with—and are deeply invested in—[into] this process of recuperation. All the little rebellions that make life liveable are encouraged to enter the spotlight of legitimate research… The result of this process is the draining of radical content from both the object of study and our very lives.

(Eden 2007 p. 270)

In particular, I was concerned to work against the possibility of being an academic parasite, gaining myself a doctorate on the back of the real work being carried out by committed activists. I hoped it
might be possible to re-imagine research in which academics could be effective allies to the rebellion of others, and sought ways to do so throughout the process of research, analysis and writing.

During this research process, I came to see myself as an insider within the community gardening movement, and a visitor within the three organisations I studied. Being a visitor meant that I had an experience of coming to a site for the first time, noticing and not taking for granted how things ran, and asking ‘outsider’ questions. These ways of describing my relationships with the community gardening movement were helpful, to some extent, in making sense of my academic/activist position. However, they remained a source of reflection and some anxiety throughout research and writing of this thesis. Insiderness and outsidersness are shifting and permeable identities/locations, not static, and are experienced differently by everyone. Naples (2003) is critical of the framing of researchers as ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, calling on ethnographers to ‘reexamine taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes “indigenous” knowledge and how researchers draw on their commonalities and differences to heighten sensitivity to others’ complex and shifting world views’ (Naples 2003 p. 49). Naples argues that ethnographers are never fully inside or outside a community, and that relationships are negotiated with each individual in each interaction. Certainly I am in agreement with her conclusion that self-reflexivity about the operations of power within research relationships is essential.

Having what could be described as a ‘partial insider’ position enabled me to negotiate ‘entry’ to each of my research sites with great ease, and helped to build trust. My involvement with permaculture and organic networks meant that mutual friends and colleagues were quickly identified by the people whose movement I was researching, so there was a sense that I could be ‘checked out’ through them (though I’m not sure that anyone actually asked questions about me). Having basic gardening, administration and organising skills meant I was able to make myself somewhat useful, and that I could have more naturalised conversations with people while sharing the labour of turning compost or planting out seedlings, much as any other fellow gardener would do, rather than as a more passive observer. Sasha Roseneil reflects that her identity as an activist facilitated an ‘intimacy’ with the people she interviewed for her research on Greenham Common, because the women knew she was ‘a Greenham woman and a feminist first ...and a sociologist second’ (Roseneil 1993 p. 191). She argues that her findings have ‘a high level of validity… because of, not in spite of, my own involvement’ (Roseneil 1993 p. 192). I also found that having a shared vocabulary and experiences enabled richer research conversations. People shared their experiences, and the shortcomings of their projects with sometimes surprising candour and honesty. I was at times concerned that my activist research approach made research participants more vulnerable to exploitation than a more detached, positivistic methodology would have. My perception that people within the community gardening movement viewed me as a fellow garden activist, rather than simply as an academic meant that I was often uncertain of my role in a particular interaction.
Activist researchers have often found that the people whose movements they research do not appear to draw clear lines between activist and academic roles. Maxey (1999), for example, found that people considered other connections much more important than research and so focused on these—whereas the impact and ethics of the research role were important in his mind (Maxey 1999 p. 204). Routledge also found that his identifying himself as an academic did not make much of an impression on the activists he worked with and wrote about, except that it meant he had writing skills he could contribute to the movement (Routledge 1996 p. 405). My experience was that the people who assisted me in my study did not relate to me primarily as a ‘researcher’. I identified with Maxey’s description of being ‘at various points a friend, acquaintance, rather enthusiastic… activist… of course the list goes on… we are all constantly (re)performing our identities and relationships’ (Maxey 1999 p. 204).

In many activist research accounts, issues of power and ethics are portrayed as playing more on the mind of researcher than those being researched. In my case, there was much soul-searching about what ‘data’ was appropriate to include in my research accounts and what to keep private, and about what degree of critique or theoretical analysis to incorporate. I found myself in agreement with Fuller’s (1999) description of activist research as necessitating ‘constant repositioning of identity, reassessment of motives and multiplicity of roles’ (p. 222).

In negotiating sometimes incongruous activist/academic positions, I aspired to the reflexive stance offered by Routledge (1996), who suggests there can be ‘encounters between academia and activism where neither site, role, or representation holds sway, where one continually subverts the meaning of the other’ (p. 400). From this fluid perspective, there is ‘potential for unexpected encounters to flower between one site and another’, enabling insights that couldn’t exist from one or other vantage point (p. 407). This approach seeks to challenge the dualism between academic and activist, personal and professional by finding and inhabiting a ‘third space’ of critical engagement between the two, spiralling between binary positionings to gain new perspectives, understandings and analyses of both. I found that my attempts to balance, reconcile, and subvert my roles as activist and academic were generative of new insights, and ‘unexpected encounters’. However, I struggled to find an elegant ‘third place’ between them, inhabiting more often a position of sometimes debilitating nervousness and a sense of great, and somewhat overwhelming responsibility. It was a difficult space to inhabit. I was encouraged by Judy Pinn’s (2001) contention that embracing and ‘writing in’ our nervousness and anxieties, rather constructing a narrative of ease and clarity, can lead to new creative possibilities and provide openings for ethical and theoretical innovation. Pinn’s conclusion that it is ‘often important that we hold knowledge tentatively and lightly’ also provided a welcome alternative to dominant accounts of research that value authority and univocality.
CASE STUDIES

This thesis is based on case studies of three sites of community gardening activism: a city farm, an organisation that supports and advocates for community gardens, and the national community gardening organisation. The three research locations were chosen for several reasons. Each involved people who were interested in and engaged with the broader (local, national, and international) community gardening movement and had begun taking on leadership roles at each of these scales. Each included a number of people who were interested in reflecting on their work. The differences among the sites enabled me to explore some of the diversity of the community gardening movement in Australia. These sites were not intended to be representative of community gardens in general or of various models of garden organisation—indeed they are not—but rather were organisations that other community gardeners were looking to for guidance and inspiration. Including the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (ACFCGN) enabled me to look at the ways community gardeners organise, and the kinds of agendas they develop beyond the flourishing of their individual garden projects. It also enabled me to speak with people with in-depth knowledge of the variety of localised community garden forms and experiences, increasing not only the geographical coverage of this project, but also significantly adding to the range of perspectives that I was able to include. In addition to extended periods spent with each of these three organisations, I visited more than 60 community gardens around the country, attended state conferences and gatherings in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, and participated in four national community gardening conferences. Thus while the focus of my research is on three leading organisations, it is also rooted in ongoing contact with community gardeners working on projects from the tiny and intensely local to the broad and ambitious. In this section, I provide a brief introduction to Cultivating Community, Northey Street City Farm and the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network. More detailed profiles and organisational histories are provided in Appendix 4.

Cultivating Community

Cultivating Community is a non-profit, non-government organisation that promotes and supports community gardening in Melbourne. It was formed in 2000 by a group of people looking to promote community gardening and urban agriculture. In 2002, Cultivating Community accepted a contract from the Victorian Department of Human Services’ Office of Housing to assist tenants in developing and managing plot-based community gardens on the grounds of high-rise public housing estates. Cultivating Community became responsible for the management of 17 public housing estate gardens in 2002 and by 2010 was managing 21 public housing gardens. This has become the core of Cultivating Community’s work. In addition to assisting community gardeners on public housing estates, Cultivating Community supports other community gardens and community garden networks in Victoria and nationally. It has organised gatherings and conferences, produced information resources, and provided support to local groups establishing community gardens. Cultivating
Community has run a number of programs, sometimes in collaboration with other organisations, such as assisting Veterans to establish gardens in their homes, establishing community food security initiatives including not-for-profit fresh food markets, developing training programs for teachers, community workers, and horticultural therapists, and providing consultancy on food gardens in schools. The organisation collaborated with chef and writer Stephanie Alexander on the Kitchen Garden at Collingwood College between 2000 and 2007. Cultivating Community is also involved with coalitions addressing food security and urban agriculture.

Cultivating Community has a fairly conventional organisational structure with a board, Chief Executive Officer, part-time staff (6 in 2005, 14 in 2009) and volunteers. Cultivating Community experienced rapid growth from 2002 when it had $5000 in the bank, to 2009 when it managed an annual budget of $750 000. Cultivating Community’s organisational structure has developed and changed as the organisation has grown and taken on new projects. In 2010, it was operating with a number of teams, each with a team leader, focusing on various aspects of Cultivating Community’s work, including managing public housing community gardens, its ‘Edible Classrooms’ project, and community food systems.

**Northey Street City Farm**

Northey Street City Farm is a four hectare community garden located three kilometres from the centre of Brisbane. Northey Street City Farm grows on public parkland on the banks of Breakfast Creek, overlooked by the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital. It is unfenced and always open. Its grounds are tended collectively with no individual plots. The Farm has extensive, certified organic demonstration gardens and orchards, a bush foods arboretum, a cabinet timber woodlot, and areas of creek-side native revegetation. Northey Street has Queensland’s only certified organic retail nursery, community composting facilities, and a weekly organic farmers’ market. The site also includes an outdoor classroom, numerous sitting and eating areas, art installations, interpretive signage, a performance stage, and a community kitchen in which lunch is prepared each day. Northey Street functions as a sustainability education centre, and is a hub for permaculture, community and sustainability initiatives in Brisbane.

Northey Street was established on site in 1994, after two years work by a group of friends who had previously been involved with environmental activism and grassroots community work. The Farm is run by volunteers and part-time employees. However lines between employees and volunteers are blurred. The Farm has a policy of treating volunteers as ‘equal coworkers’, and workers are acknowledged as being volunteers ‘in that their commitment to the Farm goes way beyond their paid hours’ (NSCF 2008 p. 61). Its organisational structure is flat and dispersed, reflecting its values of diversity and non-hierarchical relationships and intended to model co-operative ways of working and organising. There is no one person in charge. Management systems balance a commitment to non-
hierarchical ways of working and the relative autonomy of working groups with formal systems of accountability and strategic planning. The Farm has a general commitment to consensus, but individual teams and working groups may develop decision-making processes to suit their needs. The main day-to-day operations of the Farm are facilitated by ‘Teams’ relating to the various areas of the Farm’s work. Teams are largely empowered to make their own decisions, within their budget and annual planning cycles. A representative from each of these teams attends a monthly Team Reps Meeting (sometimes also called a Workers’ Collective Meeting), which is the major whole-of-organisation communication and decision-making forum. In addition to on the ground decision-making, a management committee, comprised of volunteers, takes legal responsibility for the Farm, and maintains a focus on strategy and long-term planning. The management committee is elected each year at the organisation’s Annual General Meeting of members (there were 230 financial members in 2009). The management committee has the usual roles of treasurer and secretary, and has two co-ordinators rather than a president.

In addition to food production, Northey Street City Farm’s major focus is on sharing skills and knowledge for living sustainably in the city. As a sustainability education and training centre, it offers a program of workshops and courses throughout the year, including accredited permaculture and horticulture qualifications, in which students attend the farm several days a week over weeks or months for classes and practical activities. It also offers an extensive range of day and half-day long workshops on topics including organic gardening, cooking, bush foods, seed saving, preserving harvests, keeping chickens, bicycle maintenance, bee keeping, natural fibre weaving, sustainable housing, and renewable energy. In 2009, over 2000 school students participated in the Farm’s school programs, which include workshops on bush food and medicine, farm life, and feeding the world’s people.

**Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network**

The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network is an organisation aiming to support, connect and promote community gardening around the country. The ACFCGN was originally established in the mid-1990s, but by 2000 it was largely dormant. In the early 2000s, a new generation of community garden activists were looking to strengthen connections around the country and to build a stronger community gardening movement, and the ACFCGN was reinvigorated. Currently, the ACFCGN’s major functions are providing a public face for community gardening through its website and newsletter, fielding increasingly frequent media inquiries, and facilitating networking among community gardeners through an email listserv and national conferences. Regional networks within the national umbrella maintain directories of established and emerging community gardens, facilitate local information sharing, and organise ‘gatherings’ of community gardeners.
The ACFCGN was officially launched in 1996. It was initiated by Darren Phillips. A plant pathologist with a PhD in his field, Phillips undertook a Masters program in Environmental Education at the University of Canberra in 2004. His studies of community involvement in environmental management lead him to undertake the first—and as yet only—audit of community gardens in Australia. In *Australian City Farms, Community Gardens, and Enterprise Centres Inventory* (Phillips 1996), Phillips identified 38 community gardens, city farms and enterprise centres around the country. Significantly, he found that each of these projects had emerged in relative isolation—connections among them were few and weak, with little communication, sharing of information and resources or collective problem solving. Many were completely unaware of the other garden projects. Phillips recommended the establishment of a national organisation of community gardeners, and worked in permaculture practitioners in Sydney and South East Queensland to create one. Network contacts were established in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, and soon after in Western Australia (see Appendix 4 for a detailed account of the development of ACFCGN).

**CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH**

**Participant observation and witnessing**

My approach to fieldwork at each of these sites was essentially ethnographic: I arrived and settled in. I was attracted to the idea of ‘witnessing’ rather than observing a stance for ethical and engaged research. Scheper-Hughes’ description of witnessing also resonated with my desire to avoid applying metaphors from natural sciences to social research:

> If ‘observation’ links anthropology to natural sciences, ‘witnessing’ links anthropology to moral philosophy. Observation, the anthropologist as ‘fearless spectator,’ is a passive act which positions the anthropologist above and outside human events as a ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’… seeing I/eye. Witnessing, the anthropologist as *companheira*, is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being…

(Scheper-Hughes 1995 p. 419)

Furthermore, I was attracted to the connection with Quaker practices of social action through bearing witness. The call for researchers to develop practices which are ‘personally engaged and politically committed’ (Scheper-Hughes 1995 p. 419), to the extent of acting as an ally or ‘companheira’ emphasises the breadth of responsibilities entailed in activist research.

In this context, I spent a continuous period of at least nine weeks each at Northey Street and with Cultivating Community during 2004, generally spending five days a week on site and also socialising after hours. I also made several shorter visits of several days duration before and after these longer immersions and maintained regular contact. My contact with ACFCGN included attending conferences in 2003, 2004 and 2005, executive meetings in 2009, and organising and attending a national conference in 2006. I also monitored email discussion lists, and was permitted to observe online discussions of the ‘executive’ between conferences. Visiting on a number of occasions, and
seeing people at conferences at different locations, enabled me to build up familiarity and trust over

time. Longer term immersions enabled me to deepen my understanding, and to enter more fully into

the daily practices of the gardeners.

While conducting field work at Northey Street City Farm and with Cultivating Community, I joined

in what ever was happening—cooking lunch, turning compost, filing membership forms, attending

management and working group meetings, wrestling with the photocopier, accompanying people

making presentations at conferences, hanging out and chatting over garden beds. Cultivating

Community was undergoing a review by one of its funding sources during my time there, and I was

able to observe the ways Cultivating Community members described and justified their approaches in

this context. I took notice of the things people were interested in reflecting on and tried to explain

my research interests and approach to them in more detail. I experienced people as interested and

engaged in a day to day reflection and analysis of their work, as well as in the doing of it, and found

that many were pleased to have someone ‘asking questions’ as a stimulus to their own thinking.

I generally avoided taking notes in front of people and chose instead to make ‘scratch notes’ (Sanjek

1990) after interactions, often sitting somewhere in view but unobtrusive. I made rough jottings and

reminders about important things, quotes and ideas, and then typed them up in full in the evenings. I

did not hide my note taking, and people were aware I was doing it. On the other hand, they were

unaware of exactly what I was writing—if I was quoting them, for example. I hoped this low profile

note-taking would enable people to be less self-conscious. My field notes included ‘reflection,

preliminary analyses, initial interpretations, new questions and hunches to be answered and tested in

the next days and weeks of observation’ (LeCompte and Schensul 1999 p. 18). I wrote down things

that were relevant to my interests, things that were emphasised by the people I was researching, and

also things I felt that I did not understand or was puzzled by. My preconceived interests shaped the

initial focus of study, but I consciously allowed the interests, curiosities and priorities of others to

influence what I noticed and the questions I posed to myself and asked others about. My notes for

each site became increasingly focused and ‘pre-coded’ in the later stages of research as I identified

and honed in on relevant themes. In addition to my fieldnotes, I kept extensive journals throughout

my fieldwork and after. These journals included observations, preliminary analyses, and questions.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

Interviews were carried out towards the end of my stays at Northey Street and Cultivating

Community, and at several intervals with ACFCGN organisers. This gave me time to get to know the

people and their projects, and to have more informed conversations with them. It also gave people

time to ask me questions and consider whether they wanted to record an interview. The interviews

allowed me to check the validity of the ‘hypotheses’ generated through my observation and reflection,

and to invite people’s reflections on things I had noticed. The interviews also provided an
opportunity for people to draw my attention to other areas, and helped me to understand
interviewees’ perspectives and experiences in more depth. Interviews are ‘one of the primary ways
researchers actively involve their respondents in the construction of data about their lives’ (Blee and
Taylor 2002 p. 92). I used the interviews as a way of inviting the people whom I consulted in my
research to influence the content and analysis of my research.

Lieblich notes that much research is carried out on people with no particular interest in the subject
being studied. ‘The aspects of their behaviour that are evoked and measured are frequently marginal
and irrelevant to their deeper concerns in real life’ (Lieblich 1996 p. 173). This study took the
opposite approach. I interviewed people who were passionately involved with community gardening,
and for whom it is of central importance in their lives. The people I interviewed were organisers and
leaders, in both formal and informal capacities, not a representative survey of people involved with
these projects. They were people interested in reflection about their work. Blumer (1969 p. 41) writes
of the importance of ‘seeking participants who are acute observers and who are well informed ... A
small number of such individuals brought together ... is more valuable many times over than any
representative sample’. A desire to meet and learn from community gardeners who are ‘acute
observers’ and reflective thinkers was one of the reasons why I spent some weeks at each location,
rather than attempting to carry out interviews during briefer visits. The research focus on community
garden organisers—people who had taken on formal and informal leadership roles in community
garden projects and the wider movement—is a significant point of difference from the majority of
studies, which have focused on plot-holders and casual participants.

The number of interviews I conducted was largely determined by the number of people at each site
who were interested in recording an interview with me. I was drawn to Stephen Gaddis’s idea that the
number of interviews should be determined by how many people’s stories can be fully fleshed out
and explored in a piece of research. He notes that ‘attempts to account for lots of stories risk losing
the important nuances, dilemmas, and contradictions that exist in individual stories’ (Gaddis 2004 p.
43). I found it preferable therefore, to choose a smaller number of interviewees, and to attend more
carefully to them. I carried out 20 interviews, each 1 – 2 hours (5000 – 15 000 words) in length.
Interviews mostly took place in quiet corners of community gardens (sometimes interrupted by
hungry peacocks seeking broad bean snacks). I digitally recorded and later transcribed each of the
interviews. I interviewed 11 men and 9 women. Ten were involved with Northey Street City Farm, 7
with Cultivating Community, and 11 with the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens
Network, including 8 who were involved with either Northey Street or Cultivating Community as
well as the national organisation (and who were interviewed about their involvement with these
organisations) and three whose primary involvement was with ACFCGN. Because interviews were conducted after I had spent some time at the research sites, I had already collected much of the factual data I was seeking. I did not need to use the interviews to establish narratives of dates and events or to learn about formal organisational processes. I attempted to ask questions that enabled reflection and consideration. People often identified new connections and insights through the interview process. In this way, ‘data’ was produced rather than simply collected during the interviews. In careful repeated readings of interview transcripts, there was no clear line between data production and analysis, as the interviews involved both.

In considering ways of conducting the interviews, I was influenced by thinkers about the role of questions in generating social action (for example Peavey, Levy and Varon 1985; Slim and Thompson 1995; Peavey 2000, 2001). From them, I took the necessity of asking questions about values, dreams, hopes as well as the current situation. Questioning, Fran Peavey (2000, 2001) argues, ‘is a basic tool for rebellion. It breaks open the stagnant, hardened shells of the present, revealing ambiguity and opening up fresh options to be explored’ (2001 p. 4). Peavey’s emphasis is on communication that facilitates the generation of new information, and ‘uncovers deep desires of the heart’ (2001 p. 3). She claims that with her ‘strategic questioning’ approach, knowledges about potential action can be generated and expressed in respectful, collaborative and dynamic ways. I find the way Peavey uses questioning in her social change work exciting and useful. However, my thinking about framing and wording interview questions was informed less by Peavey, and more by the work of Lobovits and Seidel (1994), who draw on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1975) in suggesting questioning approaches that invoke ‘thick descriptions’ and reflection. Lobovits and Seidel explore ways to foster a ‘collaborative attitude’ between interviewer and interviewee and seek ways to diminish the effects of power relationships. A key theme in their work is negotiation, and the responsibility of an interviewer to consistently invite collaboration with questions like, is this a relevant thing to be talking about? Are you interested in this? Would it be fair to say your interpretation is X? and by avoiding taking ‘devil’s advocate’ positions. Doherty (1991) has described this type of approach as negotiating meanings versus dictating a theme.

The people who allowed me to interview them were speaking at particular points in their trajectories as community gardeners and in the development of their community garden projects, and these interviews do not necessarily reflect their current thinking at the time of this thesis’ completion. Most of the interviews were recorded in 2004 and a few in 2009 when I returned to study after a period of

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55 One of the limitations in this study may have been the recruitment of interviewees. I wanted to interview a diversity of community garden activists who were interested in reflecting on their experience, and to some extent I was successful in this. However, my sample reflects the people I was successful in building rapport with, and it is possible that I was more able to build rapport with people with whom I shared similar perspectives. Being conscious of this potential bias enabled me to actively seek contact with people with different demographic and attitudinal characteristics to my own, and in the interviews I certainly encountered views that were new to me and different to mine.
leave. Much changed in the community gardening movement and in individuals’ lives during this period. I treat the interviews as snapshots in a continuing process rather than as definitive statements of position and understanding. A schedule of interviews is provided in Appendix 6, which gives some temporal context to the material sourced from interviews.

In most of the text, interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms. While some were happy for their real names to be used, others were unable to be contacted at the time the manuscript was being prepared, so for consistency all interviewees are referred to by a first name pseudonym. The exception to this is Appendix 4, which address the history of community gardening in Australia. In this section, gardeners are referred to by their full names. Included are people who are referred to by pseudonyms elsewhere, and some who I consulted specifically about historical details and who are not included in the cohort of interviewees referred to in the rest of the thesis. I made the decision to use real names in this appendix in consultation with those mentioned in order to give due credit to the people involved with developing the Australian community gardening movement and because some of the information was already on the public record. While the people who were interviewed for this thesis were not promised anonymity, I was also concerned that because people were often readily identifiable in this appendix, their anonymity would have been diminished in other chapters had the same pseudonyms been used.

**Additional sources**

Activist researchers have observed that activists are not only reading widely but also writing and conversing: meetings, email discussions, conferences, online essays, public talks, zines, study groups, magazine articles, trainings, cultural events, social forums, encuentros, and consultas are all well-used, vibrant means through which activists are self-consciously analyzing movements, exchanging ideas, and debating direction. Indeed, much of the most current and incisive material is only or mainly available through these media, not books.

(Bevington and Dixon 2005 p. 194)

In addition to ethnographic research, I integrated movement knowledge through analysis of movement-produced materials. A wide range of material sources were assembled and analysed to supplement the ethnographic and interview data gathered. These included

- The websites of community garden organisations
- Email listservs, particularly the ACFCGN’s national and executive listservs
- Media reports, including articles in newspapers, gardening magazines, radio and alternative press
- Posters and flyers about community gardening and events taking place in community gardens
- Newsletters and other movement publications such as recipe books
- Organisational documents, minutes, constitutions, annual reports
- Submissions and grant applications prepared by community gardeners
- Photographs of community garden sites, including ‘before and after’ images
Community garden sites.

One source of data about the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network was email listservs. Plows (2002) discusses the use of email listservs as a source of qualitative data. She sees monitoring email listservs as a combination between participant observation and interviewing. ‘The vast amount of first hand accounts, personal narratives, complex articulations of political and ethical motivations which surface on these lists on a daily basis are a highly important supplement… to in-depth interviews’ (p. 79).

### Data analysis and interpretation

My approach to data analysis was primarily inductive. I began my fieldwork with a general interest in community gardens as sites of environmental and community activism, but was open to identifying other focuses. The development of specific research questions was the result of interpretation of my data, rather than a proceeding hypothesis. I did not begin drawing on social movement theory until after I had completed most of my empirical research and a substantial amount of data analysis. To some extent, data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously. As described above, the process of coding and analysing data began ‘in the field’ as part of my ethnographic research process and was further developed during interviews. Ideas were generated, tested and refined throughout the process of data collection and this process of recursive analysis continued until the thesis was completed.

More formal processes of data analysis—the long slow process of transforming reams of field notes, journal entries, interview transcripts, newsletters and photographs in to a thesis—took place after I had completed most of my observational research. Interviews were transcribed, transcripts, field notes and other material catalogued, and events cross-referenced. Everything was filed away for easy retrieval. Accounts of particular events, particularly those recorded in multiple sources (field notes, interview transcripts, newsletter articles) were refined and rewritten. While I did some broad pre-coding of data while I was at the research sites, more detailed coding schemes were developed after I left the field to identify significant concepts and categories of analysis. As themes of activism and social change emerged strongly, I began to locate my research more specifically within social movement scholarship, using the concerns of social movement theory to focus my selection of data. A second stage of data analysis, following my decision to situate my research within social movement scholarship, involved careful repeated re-readings of all my data, noting repeated themes, particularly those that developed over the course of my observational research and also ideas and issues that were emphasised by interviewees and other community gardeners I spoke with.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has been written as part of an activist research project, in which I have tried (and often struggled) to balance various aims: producing an individual research account of my own learning and the analyses I have developed along the way; acknowledging my debt to the experiences, knowledges and theorising of people within the community gardening movement; constructing an account that might satisfy the criteria of PhD examiners; producing writing and analysis that is accessible and useful to the community gardening movement; developing an authorial voice; representing the voices and shifting perspectives of others; sustaining relationships within academia and within social movements.

In this chapter, I have described the methodological tools that have informed my research practice, and assisted me in the hesitant, messy and transformative task of producing a completed thesis. Activist researchers have provided examples of how to negotiate hybrid activist/academic roles and inspiration to develop movement relevant theory and research documents. Poststructuralist ethnographic practices within and beyond activist research have informed my research praxis, providing rich models of field research and analysis, and helping me to identify ways of involving the people whom I consulted in this research in the construction of a research account of their movement. My methodology, from participant witnessing to conducting interviews to constructing a research narrative, was informed by a poststructuralist epistemology, which acknowledges the partiality of all knowledge, and necessitates self-reflexivity and transparency on my part, in order to provide readers with an understanding of the position from which I made my observations and analyses.

This research methodology helped me to address the research questions I set out at the beginning of the chapter by affording me access to observe community gardeners’ methods, practices, strategies and tactics, and to join with community gardeners in reflecting on their meaning and significance. In the following chapters, I explore four of the sets of tactics community gardeners use in order to effect social change: using community gardening as activism, growing vegetables, creating community and producing culture.
This chapter investigates the extent to which the community gardeners I interviewed for this thesis saw community gardening as a form of social action and themselves as activists. It contributes to my overall argument about community gardeners’ understandings of and contributions to repertoires of collective action in two ways. Firstly, the chapter explores the extent to which community gardening may be seen as a form of activism by considering whether community garden organisers position their community gardening work as political action and themselves as political actors. Secondly, the chapter investigates the extent to which community gardeners consciously and strategically choose community gardening as a tactic to effect social change, and therefore whether community gardening can meet Rupp and Taylor’s (2003) criteria of intentionality, in order to be considered a form of political action (see Chapter 3). These two themes enable me to develop a more detailed and precise analysis of community gardening as a mode of collective action.

The agency and individual experiences of activists are often missing from accounts of social movements, particularly by scholars whose focus is on the structural determinants of social movement action. In this chapter, I build on Jasper’s (1999) argument that in order to understand social action in ways that avoid structural determinism ‘we must examine individual biographies’ as well as ‘the resources and strategies of formal groups’ (p. 101). The ways activists choose particular methods of collective action from the repertoire available in their society is an aspect of the study of repertoires of contention that has been relatively under-theorised (Crossley 2002). I attend to this gap by providing examples of individuals’ trajectories towards community gardening, often after significant experience enacting contention in other forms across multiple movements. Unlike most existing studies of community gardening, my focus in this thesis is on community gardening organisers, those who have taken on co-ordinating and leadership roles in individual community gardens and—
particularly—in the wider Australian community gardening movement. In this chapter, my focus is on the individual stories of these community garden organisers.

The chapter begins with a critical review of ‘activism’ and its role in the analysis of social movements. I argue that acts of resistance and creation beyond mass protests and individual heroism—including those within everyday life and those not performed by a separate class of ‘activists’—must be recognised under the rubric of activism. In this context, community gardeners’ positioning of community gardening as activism can be seen as an intervention in understandings of activism and of what constitutes a repertoire of social movement action. By relating stories of individual community garden activists and their processes of ‘becoming’ part of the movement they are co-creating, I attempt to develop some precision about community gardening as a particular kind of activism, and to introduce some comparisons with activism in other movements. I relate accounts of becoming involved in community gardening via a gradual process, involving multiple factors: commitments to moral beliefs, chance encounters, sought out opportunities, and numerous small decisions. I find that commitment to the movement is strengthened by the development of strong affective ties, the satisfaction of working with others who share similar views, and experiences of being effective in achieving desired outcomes. Inspiring people—both personal mentors and people known only through the books they have produced—were important conduits between people with a developing commitment to social and environmental justice and ways to effectively enact those values—their knowledge of repertoires of collective action. These community gardeners sustained their involvement not by remaining free of other responsibilities, but rather by actively juggling needs and commitments. Creating social enterprises and other opportunities for paid work in community gardening have been important to some people’s ongoing involvement. In this chapter, I argue that becoming a community gardening activist involves not only identification or consciousness, but also performing actions consonant with one’s beliefs (Andrews 1991 p. 164). Therefore notions of activism are of central importance in considering social movement repertoires.

**EXPANDING UNDERSTANDINGS OF ACTIVISM**

An individual and collective ‘activist identity’ is seen by many as a marker of social movement participation (Melucci 1989; 1996; della Porta and Diani 1999; Snow and McAdam 2000). New social movement scholars see social movement activity as conducted by people who identify as activists and are embedded within activist communities. If we are to consider the extent to which the community gardening movement’s strategies can be regarded as part of a social movement repertoire, and hence the extent to which community gardening can be regarded as a social movement activity, the activist identity of community gardeners demands attention. However ‘activist’ is a fraught term, sometimes embraced, sometimes rejected by social movement participants themselves (on rejection of activism, see X 1999; Chatterton 2006). Bobel (2007) found that many people who ‘do’ activism do not identify as ‘activists’. The attribution of an activist identity to community garden organisers is further
complicated by the disjunction between the practices of community gardeners and dominant accounts of social movement action. The discursive production of ‘activism’ tends to be narrow and exclusionary, leading to a commonly held association of activism with large scale, confrontational protest, often directed at the state and particularly emphasising ‘dramatic, physical, “macho” forms’ (Maxey 1999 p. 200). The designation of ‘activist’ is often reserved for those who are recognised as making extraordinary contributions to a cause. For example, Searle-Chatterjee (1999) writes that in order to be considered an activist, a person must not only have ‘a leadership role in a campaigning organisation’ (p. 261) but also

very substantial amounts of time and energy should be expended in the ‘cause’. This involved far more than simply writing a few letters, or paying a few subscriptions. Activists spent almost the whole of their spare time in their activism: indeed many ‘greens’ had chosen to be unwaged to devote themselves fully to the ‘cause’.

(Searle-Chatterjee 1999 p. 262)

These narrow views of ‘activism’ can be understood as reproducing oppression by recognising only some forms of ‘activism’, marginalizing the political practices of those who do not fit the ‘macho’ image of the protestor, and those whose part-time contributions, non-leadership roles or inadequate degree of self-sacrifice make them not ‘activist enough’. It also significantly limits our picture of what social movements do and how they operate (Glass 2010 p. 212). Similar arguments about the impacts of narrow conceptions of ‘activism’ have been applied specifically to community gardening. Taking up a critique of dominant constructions of activism, Hynes (1996) argues that the community gardening movement in the United States, which is led by women, has been omitted from accounts of environmental movements because ‘it is considered the minor, insignificant work of many “ordinary” women and not the major, heroic drama of the rare Great Man’ (p. 155). She argues that women’s environmental maintenance and restoration work in general, and community gardening work in particular, has been under-recognised because ‘the billions of examples of “the homely act of earthkeeping”… are neither grand nor romantic’ (Hynes 1996 p. 155). The dominant discursive construction of activism is a model that not only marginalises community gardening, but also excludes most forms of resistance and political action (Wade 1997, Scott 1985).

What is and is not regarded as activism is bound up with what is and is not recognised as part of social movements’ repertoire of collective action, and is therefore of central importance to my argument in this thesis. Social movement theorists have tended to focus not just on public protest, but on big public protest, all but ignoring smaller, localised, and background contributions to social movement action. Although a number of accounts (Taussig 1980; Scott 1985; Ong 1987; Wade 1997) have been produced of small scale, everyday resistance to capitalism and oppression, of people using the tactics that Scott (1985) described as ‘the weapons of the weak’, these accounts have focused on individual acts, rather than movement strategies. With dominant accounts of political action in social movements focusing on large scale, state-directed protest, activism is equated with highly visible engagement in mass rallies, media stunts and acts of daring. Other forms of contention, particularly
those located in the local and the everyday are often ‘trivialised, marginalised and privatised’ (Pinn and Horsfall 1999 p. 5). The forms of participation that are recognised in accounts of social movements are clearly gendered (Thorne 1983; Ferree 1992; McNair Barnett 1993; Payne 1995; Hynes 1996; Robnett 1996; Stall and Stoecker 1998; Hey 1999; Mirza and Reay 2000). In dominant accounts of activism, women’s political action becomes invisible labour. Discussing the US Civil Rights movement, Payne (1995 p. 264) argues that by ‘overemphasizing the movement’s more dramatic features, we undervalue the patient and sustained effort, the slow, respectful work, that made the dramatic moments possible.’ He goes on to argue that the omission of the everyday ‘spade work’ from accounts of the movement has meant that the contribution of women—who were ‘in fact much more politically active than men’ (p. 266)—has been largely unrecognised and unacknowledged (see also McNair Barnett 1993; Robnett 1996). Similar arguments have been made for the community organising work, carried out predominantly by women, that enables the ‘flashy demonstrations’ in other movements (Stall and Stoecker 1998 p. 731). While these authors reinstate the ‘spade work’ of movement building, community organising, and other forms of ‘background’ labour to the realm of ‘activism’, their research still places the ‘dramatic moments’ (Payne 1995 p. 264), ‘flashy demonstrations’ (Stall and Stoecker 1998 p. 731), ‘moments of madness’ (Zolberg 1972) and mass mobilizations at the centre. Activism based within the everyday and activism in which confrontational protest is not central to the repertoire remains relatively invisible (Pinn and Horsfall 1999).

For activism to be a meaningful—and potentially emancipatory—category of social movement analysis, it needs to be reclaimed to apply to a much wider range of practices of resistance and creation. It cannot be ‘bounded off from other aspects of everyday life’ (Maxey 1999 p. 201; see also hooks 1994; Pinn and Horsfall 1999; Vaneigem 2001 [1967] p. 111) nor regarded as constituting a separate ‘class’ of actors (X 1999). In this thesis, I set aside understandings of ‘activism’ that are premised on the centrality of mass protest and the necessity of heroic acts and heroic degrees of commitment. I do not, however, wish to dilute the concept of activism so much that it can be used to apply to all kinds of volunteering, community service and ‘good works’, dietary commitments and selective consumerism. Because my specific interest is in social movement activism—rather than individual acts of resistance, transgression and alternative building—I suggest instead that a definition of social movement activism can be extrapolated from Rupp and Taylor’s (2003) model of social movement action (see Chapter 3). If we take the criteria of contestation, intentionality, and collective identity as defining of social movement tactics (Rupp and Taylor 2003 p. 217), then I would propose that social movement activism can usefully be understood as participation in collective practices that are employed consciously and strategically in order to make political claims, effect social change, create solidarity and build movements. This definition suggests that activism is something that may be objectively recognized—that it may be possible for an observer to determine whether or not a person is an ‘activist’ simply by scrutinizing their actions and expressed analyses, without enquiring as to whether or not the person sees him or herself as an activist. As such, it is less engaged with the
subjectivity of collective and individual identities than other definitions of ‘activist’. I believe that this is necessary when considering the activism of those who are excluded or marginalized in dominant discourses of activism. This objective approach to recognizing activism has enabled me to consider the ways in which community gardening may be regarded as activism without relying on community gardeners possessing a subjective ‘activist identity’. In the face of popular conceptions of activism that demand those identifying as activists have a high degree of commitment and self-sacrifice, make outstanding contributions to a cause, and be engaged in confrontational—perhaps violent—protest actions, the adoption of ‘activist’ as a self-identification can seem like an act of arrogance or conceit (Bobel 2007). One might expect that community gardeners would be shy of claiming for themselves the mantle of ‘activist’. My argument in this thesis that community gardening constitutes a form of social action does not rest on community gardeners claiming their work as activism. However, despite dominant discourses working against the recognition of activities like community gardening as activism, the following section of this chapter focuses on the degree to which the community garden organisers I interviewed did possess a subjective identity as activists in general, and as community garden activists in particular, and on how this claiming of community gardening as activism constitutes part of their repertoire of collective action.

COMMUNITY GARDENING AS ACTIVISM

Many of the community garden organisers I interviewed did draw links between community gardening and other forms of activism, and a number—while generally stopping short of claiming for themselves the identification of ‘activist’—saw community gardening as a form of activism. In the interviews I conducted, I avoided using the language of ‘activism’ or ‘social movement’ in order to avoid pre-judging the understandings community garden organisers had of their experiences. Instead, I employed open-ended questions to invite those I interviewed to describe their activities in their own terms. Nevertheless, most of those interviewed referred explicitly to activism. One of the ways in which this cohort of community gardening organisers situated their community gardening work as activism was in relation to experiences of social movement action that would fall within dominant accounts of ‘activism’. Many recounted previous experiences in environmental and social justice movements before becoming involved with community gardening, and some discussed other movements or groups with which they were concurrently involved. Several community garden organisers related extensive activist biographies across multiple movements.

When we lived in Northern New South Wales back in the late ’70s we were quite involved in the campaign to preserve the rainforests, starting with Terania Creek and right down the coast .... And I’ve been a member of Queensland Conservation Council, [The] Wilderness Society, involved in the Landcare campaign in Queensland, and way back, Save the Barrier Reef stuff when I was a student.... When I left full-time [professional employment] I got involved with an organic food co-op just up in Red Hill, it’s not there anymore but it was really good. Then I was doing some consultancy and lobbying on community health, and then I got into food issues, and

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56 The people I interviewed offered experiences of activism and social movements in response to broad questions such as ‘how did you come to be involved with community gardening?’.
set up a little thing called Ecoconsumer, which was sort of a lobby group with a newsletter addressing food and environment, farming and all that. That led on to a thing called the Consumer Food Network, which I co-ordinated. I was the consumer rep on the Organic Federation of Australia, and got quite involved in the anti-GE campaign…

(Robert, NSCF/ACFCGN in interview)

For the last 20-odd years I’ve been involved in housing co-ops, starting up and being involved in co-ops in the Red Hill area. We were gardening back then, doing a bit of urban green guerrilla stuff, planting up the back of church yards and those sort of things. Part of a soap co-op and a bee co-op and anything that we could co-op we did it! I was part of a household which was magic … out of that came Good Foods Co-op, Red Hill Paddington Housing Collective, and lots of other things—the Tenants’ Union of Queensland, Edible Landscapes …. We were involved with East Timor stuff, and we’d all go along and protest for [Aboriginal] Land Rights…

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN in interview)

As experienced activists, these community gardening organisers described the conscious choices they had made to use community gardening as a form of social change work, citing ideological, strategic and biographical reasons for their decision. Several talked about consciously ‘shopping around’ to find campaigns and groups to contribute to. Others initiated community garden projects after developing analyses about various approaches to social change with community gardening sometimes seen as more effective than previously used modes of contention (see Chapter 9 for further discussion). Henry, for example, described his strategic weighing up of different approaches to activism, and the thinking that led him to focus his energies on community gardening. He saw ‘socialist’ goals, such as accessible education, good healthcare, and a right to decent housing as being ‘core principles’ that underpinned both his previous involvement in confrontational left-wing activism and his current community gardening work. He described his involvement with left-wing activism in Britain and Australia, which included going on anti-Nazi marches of ‘60 to a hundred thousand people’, violent skirmishes with police, and throwing bricks through windows of bookshops that were ‘inciting racial hatred’, as being empowering and ‘great fun’ for those involved, but as ‘just not achieving anything’. He also became increasingly aware of the negative environmental consequences of this kind of activism: ‘big conferences with tremendous amounts of waste’, ‘setting light to a JCB57 or putting sugar in a tank which will cost ‘em money—the shareholders might not get as much returns, and it might delay things a little bit—but environmentally, a disaster’. Henry was introduced to permaculture on a visit to Australia and was attracted to it as a way of ‘people working together, doing social change’. He felt that many of his socialist goals could be achieved by people working together on urban agriculture. Henry described his evolving activist career in terms of continuity, with his ‘left-wing education’ in confrontational activism complementing his studies in permaculture and organics: ‘I see it as a natural progression for me to have started off there and now be here. I think it’s a good knowledge base to come from. I don’t feel like I’ve copped out’.

57 JCB—a brand of construction machinery.
For some of those who had been involved with confrontational forms of contentious politics, such as forest blockades, community gardening was experienced as a more satisfying and less risky way to work on similar issues (on high and low risk activism see McAdam 1986). Rachel spoke about her experiences of protest and community gardening as embodying similar values but having markedly different personal effects:

[forest activism and community gardening] are connected in the sense of feeling connection to earth and feeling a sense of sacredness about the earth… I suppose because the forest protests for me were such a big fight that I feel when I grow food or am involved with a permaculture garden project it's much more peaceful. They're connected in terms of their land connection, but the experience is different. It was a hard time for me in the forest. It was aggressive and it was a big fight.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN in interview)

However, people were generally positive about their previous activist experiences. This contrasts with findings of other studies, in which dissatisfaction and disillusionment were a factor in movement between protest groups and the creation of new groups within movements (see for example Jenkins 1983 p. 531; Wall 1999 p. 154). These accounts (and others to follow) demonstrate that for this subset of community gardeners, community gardening is a consciously chosen tactic to effect change—a form of activism. Those community garden organisers with a background in other social movement activism consistently described a strong sense of continuity between past activist involvement in a wide range of campaigns and movements—forest blockades, unionism, mass demonstrations, co-operatives, political theatre—and their current community gardening work. They saw community gardening as another way of expressing the same hopes and values they had enacted in different ways in different movements. They described community gardening as an alternative way of responding to the issues they had campaigned on previously, building on knowledges and experiences they had developed throughout their activist careers. This sense of continuity suggests that community gardening was seen as another form of activism.

The exception to this was one experienced activist who did not see his involvement in community gardening as a form of activism. For him, community gardening was ‘community work’ and he saw his activism as being pursued through concurrent involvement with a number of other organisations, particularly the Australian Greens political party. Being in paid employment in a community garden meant that Tom was able to invest more unpaid time in party activism. Despite having an activist identity, this was associated with community gardening only to the extent that it represented a way of earning money that was in keeping with his ethical commitments to environmentalism and social justice. Interestingly, Tom had previously committed significant amounts of unpaid time to community gardening, but unlike the other interviewees, had shifted his emphasis away from community gardening towards other ways of enacting change. Tom’s perspective points to an alternative reading of community gardening as community work rather than activism, which I believe is probably more widespread in the community gardening movement than is represented in my
cohort of interviewees. This perspective intersects with debates about the extent to which community work and activism are continuous—a subject taken up in Chapter 7.

As is the case with many movements (see for example Freeman 1973 p. 793; Goodwin and Jasper 2003 p. 22; Tilly 1995; 2008) the cross-movement experience of activists who have become involved with community gardening after working in other movements has given community gardens access to additional skills and resources. Experienced activists are able to draw on ties developed in previous campaigns to support their current community gardening work. Established friendship networks within the local activist milieu were mobilised in the early years of Northey Street City Farm, and continued to provide encouragement and active support years later. ‘All you had to do was put the word out and the gang would roll up’ (Iain, in interview). Moreover, people who came to community gardening from other movements brought a wide range of skills with them—from submission writing and political lobbying to creative ways to get things done with very limited resources. They also brought strong experiences of efficacy (Ennis and Schreuer 1987; Teig, Amulya, Bardwell, Muchenau, Marshall and Lift 2009), which gave them confidence to take on large projects. Iain reflected about how earlier experiences in working with community centres increased his sense of what could be achieved when he shifted his attention to community gardening:

It was certainly a surprise to me about how much we could do… Being involved and actually recognising that what we said was respected, that if we wanted to do something we could do it.

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Previous activist experiences may also contribute to people’s capacity and desire to maintain activist involvement (many researchers have found strong links between past activist and voluntary experiences and people’s capacity and desire to maintain activist involvement, see for example Finger 1992; Melucci 1996; Baum, Modra, Bush, Cox, Crooke and Potter 1999; Baum, Blush, Modra, Murray, Cox, Alexander and Potter 2000; della Porta and Diani 1999; Ryan, Kaplan and Grese 2001; Plows 2002; LaRocca 2004).

During the course of my ethnographic research, I found that people involved with Northey Street City Farm, Cultivating Community, and the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (including a number with dual affiliations) made links between community gardening and (other) activism. However, I was particularly struck by the extent to which being at Northey Street reminded me of experiences in other activist organisations. There was ongoing and earnest discussion of a wide range of political issues and of the most appropriate ways to affect change. Lunch time conversations covered everything from the politics of same-sex marriage—which one gardener summarised as a ‘conservative’ aim, with someone adding that ‘I guess voting is conservative unless you don’t have voting rights’—and representations of cis-gender (gender normative) and transgender in popular culture (in relation to ‘reality tv’ show ‘There’s Something About Miriam’), to the former ACF and
Greenpeace activist and musician Peter Garrett deciding to stand for election in the Australian Labour Party, in addition to issues of food, farming and the environment.

So far in this chapter, my focus has been on the extent to which the community gardening organisers I interviewed saw community gardening as a form of activism, and the extent to which they possessed a general ‘activist identity’. I have argued that while those I interviewed mostly refrained from explicitly claiming the mantle of ‘activist’, they did have a general activist identity, based mainly in experiences in other social movements and, with the exception of Tom, they saw community gardening as a form of activism. Because a shared collective identity is so often seen as defining of particular social movements, I want to turn now to considering a more specific identification with community gardening itself as activism and with a community gardening movement.

**BECOMING A COMMUNITY GARDENING MOVEMENT**

In ‘identity-based’ movements such as feminism, lesbian, gay and bisexual movements, and ethnic and nationalist movements, a pre-existing identity is often seen as being of foundational importance and is used as the basis for organising (Laraña, Johnston and Gusfield 1994). For the community gardening movement, a collective identity as ‘community gardeners’ is clearly not a naturalised identity, but one which might evolve in the process of coming together for collective action. When I began formally researching the Australian community gardening movement in 2003 (after several years of informal participation and observation) a sense of a national—and perhaps international—community gardening movement was just emerging. While community gardeners had actively promoted their work and sought connections with others locally, nationally and internationally since the 1970s, and had formed a national organisation, the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network in 1995, strong connections among community gardeners from different geographical locations were slow to crystallise. Knowledge of the cycles of community gardening movement organising that have occurred in Australia since the late 1970s has been largely lost.

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58 The role of identity, and the related ideas of ‘identity politics’ have been widely debated in feminist and sexuality studies, and within queer and transgender movements. Some have challenged the confines of essentialised and exclusionary identity formations and questioned the idea that movements must have as their foundation a shared identity (see Broad 2002 for a review of literature on identity transgender movements).

59 As early as 1978, the Nunawading Community Garden had a display promoting community gardening at the Royal Melbourne Show. Nunawading gardeners actively courted media attention including ABC TV coverage: ‘Already over 45 minutes of viewing have been broadcast’, wrote Brandenberg in 1978. From the outset, part of the Nunawading Community Garden’s agenda was to inspire, support and resource more gardens (Brandenberg 1978).
between generations of activists\(^6\). However, the cumulative efforts at outreach and promotion did assist in the development of ongoing webs of interconnection, which began coalescing in a more stable and long-lived form with the re-formation of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network from 2003 to the present (see Appendix 4). While many of those who became key organisers within national community gardening networks did not meet until 2003 or after (see Appendix 4 for details), by 2004 an increasing sense of solidarity, shared frames, and an internal movement culture was emerging. These three elements—solidarity, a shared movement culture, and shared analysis or ideology—constitute key themes in the study of collective identity within social movements\(^6\). Considering collective identity in terms of these three elements does not assume an alignment between personal and collective identity (see Bobel 2007; Carlsson 2008 for critiques of approaches that make this assumption) and can be used to understand political alliances which take place across individual identifications, based on a logic of affinity and coalition rather than essentialised identity (see Day 2005 p. 90; Harraway 1991 pp. 155 – 157). With shared analyses being addressed in the following four chapters, and movement culture being taken up in Chapters 7 and 8, in the following section, I focus on the element of solidarity within the emerging community gardening movement by describing elements of the process of movement identity formation within the Australian community gardening movement, from commitment-building within individual organisations to the newly coalescing and more amorphous national movement.

From the outset of my research, I found that community gardeners had very strong commitments to the individual community gardens and community garden organisations they were involved with. Experiences of working together—in good times and bad—formed firm solidary ties among community gardeners, and a sense of community and friendship was important to many people’s ongoing commitment. Community gardening organisations were seen as highly supportive and fulfilling social organisations, meeting personal needs as well as being instrumentally effective.

\(^6\) In 2004, in the midst of an office clear out at Collingwood Children’s Farm, a box of community gardening archives from the 1970s and 80s narrowly escaped the recycling bin. It contained flyers and notes from a national gathering of community gardeners held in Melbourne in 1980. I have found no one who remembers it. National community garden conferences were held in Melbourne at CERES in 1986 and Collingwood Children’s Farm in 1987, but people from these same organisations believed that the national community gardening conference held in Bendigo in 2004 was the first (see Appendix 4). Memories of other initiatives are preserved only in personal collections of flyers and newsletter articles. A Permaculture Association of SA Newsletter from 1988 contained a proposal by the Permaculture Association and Angle Park Community Garden to form a Coalition of Community Gardens. Later editions contained no further information. Around the same time in Melbourne, CERES held another City Farm Conference. A City Farm ‘expo’ was organised by Northey Street City Farm in Brisbane in 1992.

\(^6\) See for example Taylor and Whittier’s (1992) three-pronged approach to addressing identity in social movements: boundary maintenance, shared analysis, and cultural symbols. While widely used, their analysis has been criticised for omitting the social context of identity production, and the complexity of the multiple identity positions of movement participants (Bernstein 2008 p. 279). Others who have addressed the elements of identity include White and Fraser (2000), who found that in Sinn Fein, collective identity had two major dimensions: solidarity and ideology. Others have emphasised the importance of participating in movement communities for the development and negotiation of activist identities (Taylor and Whittier 1992) and that ‘identity includes the culture and ethos of the movement as well as its shared beliefs’ (Doherty 2002). I use the three themes here within an understanding of movement in which membership is defined by actual networks of interaction, not simply shared analyses or campaigns (Doherty and Doyle 2006 p. 704).
(compare Laraña, Johnston et al. 1994 p. 8; Hetherington 1998). The particular qualities of relationships and ways of working were frequently mentioned:

> When I came here there was already this big team and I thought that's great! I really love the sense of camaraderie that we have here and the sense of equality. I just love this. Equal relationships, that’s what I really treasure here. There’s no boss, we all talk around stuff and everybody shares.

> (Judith, NSCF, in interview)

People down at the Farm give so much caring and advice and gentleness and support. And that’s what I’ve hoped for, to be in a place like that. All my life. And it’s good to be able to give as well. It makes me feel good being able to give something back, but I get a lot out of it too. It’s a two way street.

> (Theresa, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

People’s experiences in the collective process of forming community gardening organisations provided a strong sense of a personal stake in particular gardens and organisations within the wider movement.

> There’s been a sense that we’ve all kind of grown up together as an organisation. We’ve had to work everything out ourselves… a lot of stuff we just had to muddle through, which can be an amazing experience, but it can also be very trying and difficult…. You’re in it together every step of the organisation. Which is why people feel so strong about it and so connected to it, we’re so personally tied and connected but at the same time it wasn’t always a really easy road, and it was really difficult with conflict that occurred at that time… It kind of feels a bit like a family. I don’t think it’s something I could leave very easily—or even want to—I mean I really love Cultivating Community!

> (Rachel, CC, in interview)

The particularity of experiences within individual organisations also formed a basis for strong ties between groups from different parts of the country, as shared experiences—often specific to the joys and difficulties of community gardening—were readily identified. As I spent more time conducting participant observation in Melbourne and Adelaide, I found that solidary and intimate ties were also very strong within geographically based local community garden networks, as exist in each capital city in the country and in some regional centres. In Chapter 8, I describe the network building role played by events such as the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at CERES, in which people from a number of community garden groups are brought together in playful celebration. Solidarity is also fostered by the regular ‘gatherings’ of community gardeners, which take place in many cities, in which people—those involved with individual community gardens, community garden support organisations, allied networks such as permaculture and seed saving, and interested others—come together for an afternoon (or in the case of South East Queensland and sometimes South Australia a couple of days) of workshops, shared food, and stories from various community garden projects in the region (see Appendix 3).

National community gardening conferences have been important in the development of shared ties and a sense of collective identity extending from individual projects and organisations to geographically based networks, and from local networks to a national movement. A number of these conferences are described in detail in Appendix 4. Community garden activists I met during my...
research consistently emphasised the importance of face-to-face meetings and the development of strong interpersonal ties in creating national and regional networks among community gardeners—the development of a movement—as well as sustaining their own involvement. Discussions at national gatherings have given importance to maintaining and strengthening friendship links—rather than developing institutionalised roles—among activists. ‘Movement’ and ‘personal’ ties are often closely linked. When a child was born to a Melbourne community garden organiser, gardeners at Northey Street were excited to hear the news and saw it as both a gesture of friendship and of movement building to send a card to the new parents. Community garden organisations create opportunities for gardeners and activists to ‘sit under the mango tree’ and talk, building strong ties, developing shared passions and growing a community of learning and practice. Processes such as group decision-making and the shared development of analyses and tactics are important to generating the political solidarity through which movement participants come to develop commitment to group causes, even when this entails personal sacrifices (compare Hirsch 1990; 2003 p. 94). A community gardeners’ exchange and holiday scheme was one of the first proposals to emerge when community garden activists from around the country gathered at the beginning of the current cycle of community gardening organising (see Appendix 4). While this was discussed with some humour, it has been followed up informally, with some apprenticing themselves as ‘gardeners in residence’ at interstate projects, and many people choosing to spend their holidays visiting other community gardens, facilitated by the hospitality and lounge room floors of other gardeners. This has led to strong personal ties among garden activists, and to substantial sharing of experience and ideas among leading projects, such as CERES and Northey Street City Farm. People returning from visits interstate have inevitably invited gardeners from their local networks to attend a presentation about their adventures and inspirations, ensuring that personal connections become network resources. Stays in each other’s homes have meant that housemates, partners and children of community garden activists have become part of each other’s networks, further strengthening ties within the network. The emphasis on friendly, face-to-face relationships forms an important part of the intra-movement culture of the Australian community gardening movement. As a newly coalescing national movement (see Appendix 4), community gardening is in many ways just beginning to form a shared culture. However, even at the ‘first’ national gatherings in 2003 and 2004, people found that they shared everyday practices and ways of doing things, for example attempting to apply ‘green’ values to their gardening and personal lives, and giving value to hospitality and friendship as ways of affecting social change (see Chapter 7). As more interactions take place, shared experiences and stories develop, and traditions (from abundant organic food to tongue-in-cheek quiz nights to acknowledgement of traditional owners of country) have begun to take root.
BECOMING AND REMAINING
A COMMUNITY GARDEN ACTIVIST

‘Collective identity’ is about the interactive process of ‘becoming’ a member of a social movement. The study of collective identity does not assume that participants are atomised individuals joining for singular reasons of self-interest, but that collective identity formation is an ongoing and interactive process involving the intersection of movement outreach efforts, framing strategies, intra-movement community building efforts, and personal biographies (Melucci 1985; Williams 1995). A collective identity relating to community gardening is something that develops in an iterative and interactive process. It is not given. Because this thesis foregrounds the voices of grassroots organisers within the Australian community gardening movement, I want to focus here on some of the individual stories of the people who have been the primary informants in the thesis through narratives of ‘arriving’ at community gardening, developing commitment, and managing obstacles in order to remain available for community gardening involvement. In the process, these stories also allow some points of comparison with activist trajectories (McAdam 1986) in other social movements, and allow me to consider the ways in which community gardening may be ‘a different kind of activism’.

Arriving in the garden

The International Permaculture Convergence was going to happen in Perth—this was in 1996. I attended that conference and made lots of connections with people. Some of those people were from southern Africa, which is where I spent some of my childhood. So as soon as I had a chance, in late 1997, I got my shit together basically, and went over to southern Africa, partly to go back to where I came from, but also to volunteer in permaculture. Instead of organising myself into an established project, I went with Bill [Mollison]’s advice of ‘just find a gardener and start gardening’. And that happened. I fell into a place… [where] there was a bunch of people creating a community permaculture garden. We were planting in the schools and doing some bush re-gen and also planting permaculture orchards and a nursery. I stayed there for a few months and that felt really good. When I returned from Africa, I went back to Margaret River in Western Australia, where I had previously made networks of connections and friends who were involved in the Carters Road Community. They asked me if I wanted to come and live on that space. I did live there for a few years. Apart from being involved with the forest campaign over there, which took a fair bit of time, I was mostly working really intensively on the land at Carters Road, helping to establish what is now the Sustainable Living Institute. That was a really great experience. But I knew I had to experience other things in life and just move on and see what else I could do.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN in interview)

This small extract from Jake’s account of becoming a community gardening activist touches on many of the themes I will explore in this section. It shows the continuing influence of childhood experiences on the values activists currently cultivate. It refers to connections made through activist networks enabling movement between campaigns and between ways of doing social change work. It moves easily between focuses on different forms of social action—protest, demonstration projects, community building—sometimes combining them. It conveys the pleasure of experiences of efficacy, the importance of friendships in sustaining activism and connecting people with activist opportunities, and the ongoing creative tension between personal and activist lives. It demonstrates
that leaving a particular campaign or group does not necessarily imply exiting activism, nor dissatisfaction with previous activist work, but that activist careers can follow meandering trajectories through many forms of social action.

Social movement researchers have often argued that the most important predictor of whether someone will become active in a social movement is whether the person knows someone who is already involved. Family, friendship, work, church, and civil society networks are thought to be movements’ primary mobilization structures (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980; McCarthy 1996; della Porta and Diiani 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 2003)62. Knowing somebody involved within the community gardening movement was a point of entry for some of the people I interviewed for this thesis. However for others, community gardens’ outreach efforts or the independent discovery of a community garden site meant that they became involved without any previous personal links with community gardening. Moreover, a few became involved without previous links with any form of social movement participation. While personal connections were undoubtedly key to some stories of becoming involved with community gardening, other people’s accounts emphasised the role of discovery and chance encounters. One person became involved after a horticulture lecturer took her students on a fieldtrip to a community garden. Several people stumbled across community gardens while walking or bicycling around their neighbourhoods and were drawn by what they saw to return, ask questions and find out more.

The efforts of community gardeners in promoting their work and organising events to encourage more people into their gardens provide a bridge to new participants without pre-existing personal networks with community gardeners. Community gardeners invest much time and energy giving talks and presentations about their work at schools, conferences, community events, in the media, and wherever else they can find a willing audience. Organising festivals, garden tours, exhibitions, and other events to welcome new people to the gardens is central to their work (see Chapter 8). Some of the people I interviewed became involved with community gardening after attending a cultural event at a community garden, or hearing community gardeners give a presentation about their work. Rachel became involved with community gardening after hearing two community gardeners give a presentation at a music festival.

We went to Woodford [Folk Festival], and at Woodford we heard James and Skye talking about CERES and community gardens and the [Collingwood] Children’s Farm and about Harvey and the work that he was doing here. And we were really inspired by that… That was the thing we took from the whole festival, just being totally inspired by what they were doing.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Hearing the two garden activists, who had travelled from Melbourne to South East Queensland to present at the festival, resonated with work Rachel had previously been involved with and suggested

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62 In contrast, Kitts (2000) examines ways in which networks and friendship ties also inhibit participation in social movements.
new opportunities to put her values and intentions into action. Community garden organisers enthusiastically followed up Rachel’s initial contact, leading to a gradually increasing involvement in community gardening. In a similar fashion, despite having no previous contact with people involved with community gardening, Theresa became involved with Northey Street after attending a seasonal festival at the Farm.

I saw the Harvest Festival advertised and I thought, ‘oh I’ll go to that’… I went there and I tagged on to the end of a farm tour Jake was doing… I thought it was great, I thought he’s got a lot of knowledge!… Then I went and saw someone doing Japanese cooking… they had music and food and stalls, so I stayed there for a fair while, picking up brochures and all sorts of things…. Then there were a couple of talks going on, Jake and Iain spoke… they were both really passionate about what they were talking about… Iain did a spiel about Northey Street City Farm, how it came to be and all that stuff, and I thought ‘oh gosh, they so love their work and what they’re doing’, and I just loved the feel of the place. I thought, ‘got to come down here and volunteer’… So the next week I rang up Vicky and asked to come in and volunteer in the office. (Theresa, NSCF, in interview)

The time between first contact and committed involvement varied considerably among the people I interviewed. Theresa went from tentatively coming along to a public event, to volunteering a few hours a week in Northey Street’s office, to being involved with conference organising and regional and national network building within a few months. Others began by leasing a garden plot in a garden and gradually became involved with co-ordinating their garden and others.

One question here is whether personal networks are indeed, as several commentators suggest, the primary mechanism for mobilization. It is important to note in this context that all the people I interviewed, whether they came to community gardening through personal networks or not, emphasized the centrality of commitments to values and analyses in informing the choices which led them to becoming community garden participants, advocates and organisers. Whatever way people made their first contacts with community gardening, their accounts of becoming and remaining involved with community gardening emphasised the importance of being able to put into practice deeply held values and commitments. Some downplayed the importance of interpersonal connections in becoming involved with community garden activism, though many emphasized the importance of friendship in sustaining involvement. To varying extents, all the people I interviewed came to community gardening with a knowledge of environmental issues and a desire for ‘community’. All recounted past experiences of putting their knowledges and values into action in a wide range of ways—some of which they saw as ‘activism’—and of having other people in their lives who supported and enriched their commitment to these values.

**Pre-existing social and environmental commitments**

In interviews, people reflected on some of the experiences that had been significant in informing their steps towards becoming committed to community gardening. These accounts tended to reflect a gradually developing ‘green’ consciousness, with a history stretching far back into their lives, long
prior to involvement with community gardening. They mentioned important skills and values they had learnt in their families, significant experiences of connection with nature and gardens, and experiences in other social movements. These experiences and deeply held convictions made people ‘attitudinally predisposed’ (Downton and Wehr 1998 p. 535) to engage in social action through community gardening when they had the opportunity, and suggests that community gardeners’ outreach efforts are successful in connecting with people with pre-existing environmental and social commitments.

**Family and childhood experiences**

Several of the people I interviewed expressed gratitude for values and skills they learnt from their parents, some of whom had been involved in activist work in various ways.

Another big influence for me was my mother who was an activist, a social change activist particularly to do with women’s stuff, but prior to that both of my parents were in the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, so I was brought up with social justice, it was really strong in me.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN in interview)

My mother did a lot of voluntary work in the community. My father was involved in trade unions and in his working life was really dedicated to workers’ rights. He had a real passion for social justice. What I got from that was the importance of community and valuing people as human beings.

(Yvonne, ACFCGN, in interview)

People recounted many other examples of their family members putting their values into practice in ways that influenced and inspired them: living simply and frugally, making their home a welcoming place, tending productive gardens and trying to protect their children from limiting stereotypes. Parents were not the only family members who were important in these community gardeners’ stories. Many of the people I interviewed shared stories of the family members they gardened with as children—great aunts who planted by the moon, parents who always grew food for the family table, grandparents who took them to dig in an allotment after school. ‘Exemplary grandparents’ and other family members have been also identified in other accounts of the life experiences of environmental activists (Horowitz 1996 p. 35 – 37).

I’ve since found a whole heap of old photos of me working in my grandfather’s garden among his rows of vegies with his farmers’ hat on and his boots. I don’t remember it, but it was obviously a significant part of my childhood. My mum said that’s where my most favourite place to play was.

(Julia, CC, in interview)

**Connections with nature and gardens**

Childhood experiences of connection with nature—particularly with places in wild nature that were later destroyed—have been identified by researchers as being important to the development of commitments to environmental activism (Tanner 1980; Palmer 1993; Horwitz 1996). However many people have positive experiences of nature in childhood without these leading to taking action on environmental issues (Myers 1997). For many of the community garden activists I interviewed, accounts of experiences of interaction with ‘nature’ were set in a garden. That gardening is a way of
forming strong connections with ‘nature’ has long been promoted by proponents of the biophilia hypothesis (Ulrich 1981; Wilson 1984; Kellert and Wilson 1993) and horticultural therapy (Lewis 1996; Simpson and Strauss 1998), but it has not featured in accounts of activist formation. In the case of community gardeners at least, experiences of connection with nature through gardens have been important in forming the ecological consciousness and commitment that predispose people to activist involvement. All of the people I interviewed mentioned a connection with gardening in their childhood, and recalled experiences like tasting home grown celery for the first time, feeding chickens, and watching things grow. Many of those I interviewed had been practicing organic gardeners for many years before they became involved with community gardening or other activism, and saw it as an important practice of cultivating ecological awareness and connection. For Jodie, gardening—and working with other gardeners—was a pathway into environmental activism.

I became interested in year 11 or 12 in vegie gardening. My mother had a vegie garden that she wasn’t that interested in. I started gardening more than she did. Then I heard about WWOOFing, and through that I got really interested in environmental activism, protesting against forest damage and the destruction of our environment.

(Jodie, NSCF, in interview)

None of the people I interviewed suggested that early experiences in the garden led directly to their current involvement with community gardening, and several spoke of periods of disliking gardening, and not wanting to join their family members’ horticultural pursuits, returning to the garden only after they had developed environmental commitments.

I’d had that experience when I was growing up of being involved with plants and growing some food, herbs and things like that, but when I was a teenager I wasn’t into it at all, it was a drag. Then as I got a bit older I got more into conservation stuff before I got into growing food.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

The ways community gardeners story their early involvement with gardening reflects Myers’ (1997) contention that it is not only experiences in nature, or in the garden, that predispose people to environmental action, but also the meaning and significance they attribute to their experiences. Connections with gardening that might have been storied as ‘a drag’ become significant in the light of current commitments.

**Mentors and Inspirational people**

A number of the community gardeners I interviewed mentioned people outside their families who inspired and fostered their commitment to environmental and social justice, encouraged them to develop their views, and demonstrated some of the possibilities for acting for change. Sometimes, these people’s influence came through the books they wrote. Others were people who took on a mentoring role in community gardeners’ lives. The guidance of these mentors was a factor which

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63 WWOOF: Willing Workers on Organic Farms, a scheme enabling people to visit farms and learn about organic systems while working in exchange for board.
contributed to people’s ability to bridge the often described gap between ecological awareness and its transformation into action (Lai 1998). Inspiring teachers were significant for Iain.

The school that I went to was pretty strong on community… One of my teachers, who taught me zoology, taught me to be fascinated with the beauty of life. At the same time, social justice was presented in a way that you can actually make a difference. They showed me what it was possible to do. I’m so grateful to them for that.

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Others also mentioned inspirational school teachers as well as later educational experiences, such as tertiary study in geography, social sciences, and horticulture. Several mentioned reading books or participating in workshops with deep ecologists and activist trainers such as Joanna Macy and John Seed (Macy 1983, 1998; Seed, Macy, Flemming and Naess 1988).

I never had a language to put my thoughts in order until I started reading deep ecology stuff, Joanna Macy’s books in particular, and did a workshop with Joanna Macy for activists in WA and this whole environmental philosophy—and ecofeminism as well—brought a lot of it together.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

A range of other literature about social and cultural change was mentioned.

I started reading books—Alan Watts on Zen Buddhism, Jack Kerouac, Dharma Bums, On The Road, Shumacher’s Small is Beautiful. These inspired me. I became aware of nature conservation, working in the adventure equipment industry, having friends who were involved in a campaign to save a river in western Tasmania called the Franklin that not many of us had heard of. At that time I came across a book by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison64, a friend of mine introduced it to me, he had an organic garden in his home and we used to read Mother Earth News from the US.

(George, ACFCGN, in interview)

Books about permaculture, particularly those by Holmgren and Mollison were mentioned by a number of the community gardeners interviewed, as was doing training in permaculture and meeting permaculture practitioners. These provided both inspiration and models of ways to act for change, including specific reference to community gardening as a way of enacting permaculture principles and ethics. Pre-existing affinities with nature and gardens, explorations of environmental philosophy, and experiences across other social movements coalesced for many in coming into contact with the community gardening movement, whether through interpersonal connections, visits to community gardens sites, or the outreach efforts of community garden activists.

Activist demographics

While strongly held values inspire ongoing involvement and friendship and solidarity ties help to sustain people’s commitments, these are insufficient to sustain long-term activism. Community gardeners, like other activists, must also be able to meet their basic needs—for food, shelter, support—and fulfill their other commitments, including caring for children and other family members, in order to be ‘biographically available’ (McAdam 1986; McCarthy and Zald 1973) for movement activities. Accounts of becoming an activist often emphasize freedom from personal responsibilities (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1989; Schussman and Soule 2005). Social

64 Mollison and Holmgren’s (1979) Permaculture One
movement researchers have found that people’s initial movement experiences often occur in young adulthood, when people are often relatively free of responsibilities (Downton and Wehr 1998 p. 535). However, ‘attitudinal and situational availability must be continually cultivated by the activists themselves’ (Downton and Wehr 1998 p. 539) if they are to maintain their activism. Long-term activists must consciously and actively shape their lives in order to stay active. Some chose paid employment that allows them free time, whether by ‘appropriating’ time for activism while at work (Carlsson 2008 p. 3; Carlsson and Manning 2010), or by working part-time. Many activists live simply on a low income, both as an expression of moral values and also to minimise the amount of paid work they need to do. Downton and Wehr (1998 p. 539) found that some of the peace activists they interviewed chose, deliberately or inadvertently, to postpone forming partnerships and having children, and to live communally in order to maintain their availability for activist work.

The experiences of the community garden activists I interviewed did not reflect freedom from life demands, so much as finding ways to manage them. For a few of the people I interviewed, lack of biographical availability for paid work or study because of caring commitments or illness actually facilitated involvement in community gardening, where they could more easily determine their levels of involvement. For Julia, illness meant freedom from work and a new focus

... I got ill. I had leukaemia, so I had to give up my career as a nurse and just start healing myself. So part of that journey was learning about how to slow down. I also changed my diet to organic ... I guess when you start being really interested in what you eat, it’s a natural conclusion that you start wanting to grow it, because you want that kind of connection to it. And also, I found myself with the time to plant and I’m a Virgo so that kind of connection to the earth was always obviously somewhere in there waiting to happen!

(Julia, CC, in interview)

For George, illness proved a more complicated business that at first interrupted his activist work. Caring for a family member with Alzheimer’s disease meant leaving the paid workforce, and stepping back from involvement with community gardening. However, after a five year absence, opportunities for employment in the conventional workforce were not forthcoming. George returned to voluntary community gardening organising, finding the movement at a different stage to when he stepped back from involvement, and also found new opportunities for paid consultancy about community gardening and community food systems.

At the inception of Cultivating Community, members’ demographic reflected that seen as typical of social movement participants—educated, aged their 20s and without children. However, as members became parents, the organisation actively sought ways to support their continued involvement. They allowed parents to work fewer hours and welcomed children at meetings and conferences. The founders of Northey Street City Farm were of a wider range of ages, many with children, at the time of the Farm’s initial development. Northey Street has also actively worked to enable the participation of parents, making the Farm a welcoming place for children, embracing workers’ and volunteers’
families and children in the Farm community, and helping to integrate community garden involvement with gardeners’ lives.

Coming to City Farm, at a personal level, it offered me an instant community… Migrants run the risk of isolating themselves very easily, because of language, because of distance or whatever, but here you’re never isolated—you’ve got to run away to have time alone! It’s a great feeling for me after 18 years [of being in Australia] to actually land in a place like this, and not just me, it’s also extended to my family as well—my kids and my partner. They’re also part of it. That comes down to this whole idea of building community that’s a very strong force in our Farm. In that regard it’s been great.

(Vicente, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Northey Street has also provided generous parenting leave entitlement for employees who become parents, including female partners of birthing mothers.

Community gardening may be a form of activism that is more accessible to those who are not ‘young and free from personal responsibility’. The demographics of community gardener activists I interviewed and others I met during my research were more diverse than the young, white, educated, childless, able-bodied, middle-class people working in community and creative professions who are often said to comprise social movement organisations (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1989; Doherty 2002; Lubell 2002; Plows 2002; Schussman and Soule 2005; Epstein 1996). Several researchers have suggested that the class composition of green movements is generally much more varied than the typical demographics described above would suggest (Wall 1999 p. 95). Urban campaigns in particular, such as those of the environmental justice movement in the US have been recognised for their greater diversity than other environmental movements, involving lower class, ethnically diverse communities, and often having women in leadership positions. Several writers, Hynes (1996) in particular, have remarked on the prevalence of women leaders and people of colour in the US community gardening movement, suggesting that community garden movements in general may be more diverse than typical social movement organisations are said to be. The greater diversity of community garden activists may reflect the nature of the work. Community gardening is generally low-risk activism. Although some community gardeners practice illegal ‘guerrilla gardening’, join with other social movement activists in large mobilisations such as those against the World Trade Organisation meeting in Melbourne in September 2000, or protest to preserve threatened community gardens sites, in their everyday practices, most community gardeners do not risk arrest, violence, or social ostracism. Indeed, community gardening, at least in its apparently uncontentious forms, is portrayed sympathetically by the media, and is increasingly gaining favour from government and non-government agencies, which recognise community gardeners’ ability to promote health, grow community, and model environmental strategies. The diversity of community gardening organisations also reflects community gardeners’ efforts to work with diversity, practice inclusion, and develop practical strategies to manage life commitments and enable participation.

65 Activists’ past and present employment ranged from labouring, gardening and landscaping, to community organising and social work, to highly paid professions, as well as unpaid activism and time on government benefits.
Sustaining activism

I think that commitment comes from the fact that we really enjoy what we do, we’re passionate about it and it feels like a privilege to be involved. Maybe being in a group where everyone’s committed to doing their best rubs off on people who come into it. We don’t have pikers\textsuperscript{66}. (Henry, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

There has been much more attention given by social movement researchers to activist recruitment than there has been to activist retention (Goodwin and Jasper 2003 p. 91; Nepstad 2004 p. 43). The people I interviewed had been involved in community gardening for between one and 17 years at the time of our recorded conversations, and many had been involved with other forms of social action for many years longer. All of the community garden organisers I interviewed expressed a strong and ongoing commitment to involvement. They explained their ability to maintain long-term involvement with community gardening by describing the strength of their ties within their organisations and the movement, detailing their experiences of satisfaction and efficacy, and relating their efforts to organise their lives and work so they could remain available for community gardening. They felt it was an effective and worthwhile way of putting their values into practice\textsuperscript{67}. Their responses clearly mirror those found in other studies (Downton and Wehr 1997; Nepstad 2004; LaRocca 2004; Martinez and McMullin 2004). In addition, the community gardeners I interviewed valued ongoing opportunities to learn, develop personally, and create new projects, and saw this as adding to their commitment. Six years after some of the interviews were conducted, almost all of the people I interviewed remain in leadership roles in the Australia community gardening movement\textsuperscript{68}.

The reasons activists remain involved and sustain ongoing activist commitments can be very different from the factors that influenced their pathways into activism. It is too rarely acknowledged that involvement with social movements can be immensely satisfying, rewarding, and even pleasurable, meeting activists’ personal needs for learning, personal development, support, and friendship, as well as their moral and political commitments to working for positive change. Experiences of feeling that their work ‘made a difference’ were a significant factor influencing the continued activist commitment of those I interviewed. This was also the finding of Martinez and McMullin’s (2004) study of over 800 active and inactive environmental non-government organisation members. Community garden activists frequently spoke of their involvement with community gardening as rewarding, satisfying and pleasurable:

From the moment of its inception it’s been one of the passions of my life ... I cry sometimes at the festivals, when I see a hundred people, or 200 or 300 that are there. It’s sort of what the dream was, to grab as many people and have them enjoying themselves in a place that isn’t about

\textsuperscript{66} ‘Piker’—a person who withdraws from a commitment.

\textsuperscript{67} In contrast, Harnik (2010) argues that the United States community garden movement is ‘severely underfunded, poorly organised, and subject to a brusingly high level of burnout and turnover’ (p. 84), noting demise of organisations such as Garden Resources of Washington (GROW), San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG) and Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG).

\textsuperscript{68} All of those I was able to contact in May 2010 were still involved with community gardening, To the best of my knowledge, only two of the 20 interviewees were not involved with community gardening at that time. The dates of each of the interviews is provided in Appendix 6.
mindlessness, it’s about celebrating this community. I really like that. Get a big lump in my throat. And I feel quite proud, it’s a time when I feel, that’s an emotion that I don’t visit much, but I definitely visit it on those nights, I just feel enormously proud. Rewarded.

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Enjoyment of community garden activism was sometimes contrasted with other activism people had been involved with. Part of the joy of community gardening was seeing its effectiveness at achieving the change they wanted to bring about:

It works. I see it working. The vast majority of people who come and spend time here, something really magical happens to them. It might not be ground breaking, we might not even notice the difference, but anybody who’s helped make lunch in there has an experience that’s not just cooking for yourself at home. It’s just not like that. People encounter a lot of new things—new people, new ways of expressing themselves, new plants, new approaches to cooking—it’s really quite a radical shift for many people ... For me the pay off is when somebody comes initially feeling as if they’re forced into the situation [in the case of participation in employment programs such as ‘Work for the Dole’]. There’s something that happens to them in the process of being here that then they voluntarily get involved more and more ...

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

People recounted many stories of milestones, festivals, and events that had made them feel their work was achieving real impacts. They were satisfied with the ways their organisations functioned: non-hierarchical, friendly, and committed to values that paralleled their own. Satisfaction also came from opportunities for personal growth, development, and creative expression:

I’ve always loved it, from day one I’ve always loved it. Sometimes I kind of think, maybe I should start thinking about doing something else. But it’s also the kind of organisation that’s really supportive of you as a person, so I really feel like I’m really allowed to go in other directions, to follow up other kinds of projects—that’s really encouraged. The scope doesn’t feel limited to me. So I can’t imagine that I’ll be working in community gardens on the ground as a support worker forever, and I probably will head off more in the food security sector, whether that be markets or developing programs for the community gardens.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Some community gardens have developed practices of welcoming and supporting new volunteers to maximise their enjoyment, learning and efficacy and to promote long term commitment. Northey Street has a formal program of induction for new members, including a tour of the farm, occupational health and safety talk, and ongoing opportunities to participate in workshops and courses. Everyone who comes to the Farm is invited to create their own projects, or to suggest ways things could be improved, and they are supported to carry out their proposals in consultation with members of the relevant working groups. Daily shared food and conversation is also central to everyone’s experience of the Farm, encouraging the development of friendship and connection. This leads to a strong sense of shared ownership of the Farm, and to the rapid development of strong ties. Community gardeners’ emphasis on learning and skills sharing, and the formal and informal training provided by community gardens, including workshops on everything from preparing and preserving garden harvests to group facilitation to accredited horticulture and permaculture training, mean that there are ample opportunities for personal development and both acquiring and sharing skills and knowledge. This contrasts with Whelan’s (2002) findings about the Australian environment movement in general, in which he identified a significant lack of activist education and development.
Community garden organisations offer a model of ongoing learning and skills development other environment movement organisations may be able to adapt and use.

A number of Australian community gardening activists have undertaken international research journeys, visiting community gardens and community food initiatives in countries around the world. In 2004, Peta Christensen from Cultivating Community and Chris Ennis from CERES embarked on a Churchill Fellowship funded tour of community gardens and food systems in North and South America and Denmark, returning with hundreds of photographs, film footage, and energy, ideas and enthusiasm to reinvigorate projects in Australia (Christensen 2005). Mòrag Gamble and Evan Raymond, two of the founders of Northey Street City Farm and ACFCGN travelled extensively in Asia and Europe, visiting and advising community and school garden projects and producing a documentary film (Gamble and Raymond 2008). One of my interviewees, James, heard about farmers’ markets burgeoning in the United States and United Kingdom, and travelled to research them in person, bringing information that helped add farmers’ markets to the repertoire of Australian community gardeners. Basil Natoli was perhaps the first Australian community gardener to speak about Australian community gardens to an international audience. He presented at the International People Plant Symposium in Sydney in the early 1990s, and later at the American Community Gardening Association conference in Seattle. Organisers from Northey Street City Farm presented a paper at the American Community Gardening Association National Conference in Canada in 2004, and a member of the WA community garden network travelled to Europe to present at the UK Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens Conference in the same year. Henry from Cultivating Community undertook a study tour of community gardens in North America, and presented at the American Community Garden Association’s conference in 2007. Gardeners who had travelled overseas spoke of a heightened sense of being part of a flourishing world wide movement and of their renewed commitment to community gardening work. People returning from visits interstate and overseas have inevitably invited gardeners from their local networks to attend a slide (or powerpoint) presentation about their adventures and inspirations, ensuring that personal connections become network resources. These also add to the shared stories and mythologies of the Australian movement. Local gardeners who have returned from overseas have used their experience, the links they have made, and the new sense of authority they have gained to strengthen the local community gardening movement. They have taken on increased roles communicating about community gardens, presenting at numerous conferences and community events.

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69 Real names are used here where accounts of overseas travel are on public record, for example in works cited, and pseudonyms are used where information is sourced from my original research.
Community gardening as work

Financial pressures can be significant obstacles to ongoing activist commitment (LaRocca 2004). Activists generally have to do some kind of paid work, or deal with government programs to sustain their activism and pay their rent. Time spent earning money means time away from activism. In his book, *Nowtopia*, Chris Carlsson (2008) explores the tensions between paid employment and activist work, looking at the ways people create space outside the constraints of wage labour to collaborate in freely chosen creative practices. One of the strategies community gardeners have developed for balancing their life’s work with earning a living is creating paid positions within community gardens. After many years of working with no pay, Northey Street City Farm organisers used Federal Government employment schemes to create several paid positions. Farm workers became supervisors for unemployed people carrying out projects on the Farm site as part of ‘Work for the Dole’ and similar programs. This enabled Farm activists to earn a part-time income at the Farm, focus on site development projects, and welcome new people into the farm, intending to provide them with a respectful and useful experience, even where they were required by the government to participate in the programs. A number of the people interviewed had some paid work in community gardening, and a couple became involved with community gardening through employment opportunities. All were also doing unpaid community gardening work, and many were working more unpaid than paid hours. Paid work had varying significance for different gardeners. For several of the people I interviewed, employment in a community garden enabled them to earn money doing work similar to what they had been doing as unpaid activists, including in permaculture and Landcare. Three of the people I interviewed became involved in community gardens in response to job advertisements. Each of them had extensive unpaid experience in community and environmental activism. For Tom, paid work at Northey Street was important as it enabled him to do more unpaid environmental activism and to devote time to the Australian Greens political party. Being paid for community gardening work is unusual. Funding for paid positions, and opportunities to contribute to community gardening as part of existing positions, are gradually becoming more common, however when the initial interviews for this thesis took place in 2004, there were only a handful of paid community garden workers in Australia, and a significant proportion of them were interviewed for this thesis. Generally, people in paid positions had committed many hours of unpaid work, and most continued to do significant amounts of unpaid community gardening work in addition to their employment. Paid positions, while enabling of their ongoing activism, were part-time and often short term and insecure.

Paid employment was more about being involved with community gardening than with providing career prospects. As LaRocca found in her survey of Australian activists, paid work was not a motivation for activism, but assisted activists in maintaining their involvement. Being employed as a community garden worker was not seen as a secure or well-paying career path, and had limitations
compared to other employment possibilities. Most of the people I spoke with had university level qualifications, and several had post-graduate degrees. All of them had incomes much lower than average for graduates, reflecting a conscious commitment to live simply, and to give their time freely.

I don’t think in terms of career, but as things that you do that make meaning in your life and meaning for others around you. Distinctions between voluntary and paid work haven’t been so strong in my life… So it’s not having that clear divide between work and volunteering, it’s more just this is what life is, this is what I value.  

(Yvonne, ACFCGN, in interview)

For some, employment was central to their ability to be involved with community gardening. While they were committed to community action, employment opportunities helped to define the kind of community work they were involved with.

I had been working in theatre for about eight years as a freelance artist, and I’ve got a family, and it was very insecure—the money. So as a freelance I worked on a project-to-project basis. I’d get a job, I’d work for three months, then I’d have another three months without work, so whatever money I made I would spend when I didn’t have a job. I had made a decision to move away from theatre and I was searching for something new, and this came along. Seemed to be the right thing at the right time.  

(Vicente, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

The Buddhist idea of ‘right livelihood’ was important for some—it was one of their activist aims to create ethical, creative employment opportunities for themselves and others. Vicky had been volunteering at Northey Street for a year when a part-time paid role became available.

Then a job came up for eight hours a week doing administration … it sounded great, it was flexible and it was for an organisation that I thought was really worthy. Those were the two things I was looking for getting back into employment again. So I applied for the job and was successful.  

(Vicky, NSCF, in interview)

People’s paid positions were not always identical to their primary roles within their organisation. Some, for example, were paid as ‘Work for the Dole’ supervisors, but saw themselves primarily as community organisers or gardeners. There was some difference here between members of Northey Street City Farm and of Cultivating Community. At Cultivating Community, people’s paid roles often meant they didn’t have time for additional activist work, were doing more hours, and had more secure tenure in their roles. Some mentioned other things they’d like their organisation to be doing that weren’t possible because of the demands of the Public Housing contract.

CONCLUSION

Community gardening can be many things—a leisure activity, a form of exercise, a way to access fresh food, a form of neighbourhood beautification, a method of cultivating ecological literacy, a social opportunity. For the community gardening organisers I interviewed, community gardening was also a way to enact social change. Community gardening was chosen consciously and strategically as a way to enact environmental and social justice values and to influence the actions of others. During my fieldwork, I frequently heard people refer community gardening as ‘activism’, and in this chapter I have argued that many of the community garden organisers I interviewed can be seen as having an
activist identity because they view their current community gardening activity as continuous with previous activism—often using more familiar protest tactics—in other social movements. In focusing on people with a commitment to community gardening that extends beyond the tending of garden beds and maintenance of intra-garden relationships, my research addresses a particular cohort of community gardeners who are perhaps more likely than others to see their involvement as activism. By positioning their work as activism, these community garden organisers not only asserted their role as political actors, but also contributed to understandings of what can be seen as constituting activism—and of what practices can be recognised as part of a repertoire of social movement action. Establishing that community gardening is seen by some community garden organisers as a form of activism addresses an important aspect of my enquiry into community gardening as a mode of social action. By arguing that community gardening can be seen as ‘activism’—a conscious and strategic means to enact social change—I provide a basis for considering whether the specific tactics used by community gardeners can be considered part of social movement practice, and what their relationship is to ‘protest’ as a way of making political claims. In the following chapters, I focus on the choices community gardening activists make in adopting particular tactical repertoires and seeking to enact social change through community gardening.
GARDENING

For many, raised beds, butterfly gardens and organic vegetables expressed a tactical, grounded resistance to global capital and its negative environmental impact.

DeSilvey 2003 pp. 458 – 9

the seemingly frivolous and private pleasures of gardening… play an important role in setting the conditions for new political and ethical thinking.

Donati, Cleary and Pike 2009 p. 219

Rolling the compost barrels is a morning activity—before it becomes too hot to work in the full sun. Waste from nearby restaurants, lawn-mowing contractors and the farm is piled into human size tumblers with green comfrey and manure from the garden’s chickens to speed its transformation. It takes about six people to push each barrel along the wooden tracks to aerate and mix the decaying contents. Over the coffeepot an invitation goes out for those willing to help. Work for the Dole participants in shorts and steel-capped boots fit in another cigarette before they make their way over to the barrels. Volunteers, workers, office staff, passers-by, and resident caretakers (otherwise described as homeless, Indigenous) gather. Some push, some pull. The barrels turn slowly as people heave and laugh. Administration workers return to the office with grass clippings on their shoes.

Community gardening—like other forms of environmentalism—is a hugely embodied politics (Lichterman 1996; Horton 2006). Community gardeners incorporate their environmental and social justice commitments into their everyday practice and gardening is central to this. Community gardeners’ daily embodied praxis is of planning, planting, observing, mulching, weeding, harvesting, seed saving, and composting. An understanding of community gardening—and of the ways in which community gardeners seek to effect social change—requires proper attention to the role of gardening. However vegetable gardening and social action are concepts that sit uneasily alongside each other. Until recently, to cultivate one’s garden was ‘synonymous with a withdrawal from the hurly-burly of
life’ (Hoyle 1991 p. 9) and activist-produced literature joked of people retiring from political engagement to tend their permaculture plots. Gardening requires access to land, and in this sense at least it has always been political. There is also a long history of gardeners growing mutual aid and solidarity along with their cabbages. With anxiety about climate change, peaking oil supplies, crises in global agrifood systems, and increasing concern about food security, vegetable gardening has taken on new significance. On May Day 2000, a 6000 strong group of anti-capitalist protesters installed a ‘guerrilla’ vegetable garden at Parliament Square in London (Do or Die 2001; Franks 2006). In 2009, there were successful campaigns for organic vegetable gardens to be dug at the White House and Buckingham Palace. Then Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, resisted calls from food and community gardening activists to follow suit. Far from being a retreat from the political, growing vegetables in public spaces has become a widely adopted political statement.

In this chapter, I explore in depth the ways community gardeners garden and the ways they use gardening as a form of collective social and political action. Drawing on academic and activist-produced literature and ethnographic research, I begin by describing the specific forms of gardening practiced in Australia’s community gardens, in which people work together using permaculture-informed organic practices to produce fresh vegetables, herbs and fruit, and how these acts represent the social and ecological commitments of community gardeners. This is informed by a discussion of community gardening within a long tradition of concern with ‘commons’—land that is neither public nor private but collectively cared for. Community gardeners’ emphasis on growing food has led to an increasing association with the notions of ‘food security’ and ‘food sovereignty’, and I examine the ways that community gardeners’ engagement with these issues reveal something of their approach to social change. Community gardening is a form of social action tied to the production of space, and in the following section I examine the ways community gardeners draw on the traditions of other urban social movements in appropriating and ‘re-programming’ space, and how community gardens themselves are used as a means of political communication. Finally, I explore tensions between ‘community’ and ‘gardening’—the ways individual community gardeners negotiate a balance between them and how emphases on one or the other imply understandings of the ways community gardens create change.

**A PARTICULAR KIND OF GARDENING**

I begin this chapter by examining exactly what kind of gardening it is that community gardeners practice and advocate. There are many different people involved in community gardens in Australia and the landscapes they create reflect their diversity. Nevertheless, a particular kind of gardening

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70 The Australian campaign ‘C’mon Kev, plant some veg!’ urged Rudd to plant a vegetable garden at the Lodge, the Prime Ministers’ residence in Canberra, www.kevspatch.wordpress.com. The US campaign, ‘Eat the View’ was initiated by Kitchen Gardens International, www.eattheview.ning.com. The Buckingham Palace garden has been framed as part of a ‘Grow Your Own Movement’, and linked to Wartime Victory Gardens and an increasing demand for allotments (Hunt 2009).
predominates. The ways people garden and the gardens they design and co-create reveal much about their values, hopes, and priorities. Community gardeners garden together. They garden organically to produce food, and many are influenced by permaculture. In this section, I draw on my research visits to community gardens around Australia, interviews with garden organisers, and movement and academic literature to discuss each of these elements of Australian community gardening praxis.

**Growing in common**

Community gardeners garden in community. Gardening, whether of vegetables for the table or of fashionable foliage for display, is often seen as an individualistic pursuit. There is, however, a long history of gardeners joining together for mutual support. In Australia in the late 1800s for example, a host of gardeners’ ‘mutual improvement societies’ and horticultural societies ‘strove with earnest endeavour to educate and advance the welfare of their members’ (Aitken 2004 p. 56), encouraging self-help, information sharing, and community among gardeners (Timms 2006 p. 135). In this tradition, community gardening is collective gardening. People come out from private dwellings to create and tend gardens in common. Their interests are often social as well as horticultural, with community gardens designed to grow community as well as fresh produce. The collaborative management of a community garden necessitates working with others and the process of establishing and maintaining a community garden often requires commitment beyond the shared maintenance of a garden or the tending of a leased plot. Community garden groups must engage with their local council, promote and defend their garden sites, apply for funding and find resources. They have to develop collective decision-making processes and garden management systems. Unlike the backyard vegie patch, hidden away in the private sphere, community gardening is gardening-in-community. In this sense, community gardeners link their work with an agrarian tradition of tending land in common.

Community gardens are centrally engaged with providing people with land on which to garden and grow food. They draw on the commons as a particular tradition of collective land management. This stems in part from the origins of community gardens in the British allotment tradition and in particular, an understanding of allotments as the result of resistance to the enclosure of the British commons (for example Crouch and Ward 1988, see Chapter 2). In discussing local systems of collective land management in the United States in the early 19th Century, Judd (1997) links the common management of land to agrarian traditions of conservationism. The collective management of these American commons was an expression of a conservation ethic rooted in cultivation of the land and in farming traditions. In Judd’s analysis, commons are neither private property nor a free-

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71 Judd’s analysis of US agrarian traditions as concerned with notions of the commons can be contrasted with Guthman’s (2004 p. 12) argument that ‘new agrarianism’ is ‘fundamentally’ tied to the defence of private property. Judd’s historical account provides an opening to reconsider Guthman’s critique of the limits of organics as an ‘agrarian answer’ to industrial agriculture.
for-all wilderness, but a form of corporate ownership (Judd 1997 p. 41)^72. Commons belong to the community and are managed collectively for mutual benefit. In this way common land is distinct from public land, which is managed by the state putatively for the benefit of an unidentified public. In the histories of Britain, North America and Australia, commons can be seen as preceding both private and public property—a pre-capitalist, pre-state form of land stewardship.

Historically, the creation of ‘public’ spaces came at the expense of ‘commonly’ owned property… Everywhere, public spaces that had been known as the commons, were converted into sites of either private/capitalist or public/state power.

(Chan and Sharma 2007 p. 180)

This process of turning commons into public land is visible in the colonisation of Australia. ‘Public’ parks and botanic gardens were early institutions in the colony^73. These gardens were part of a process of claiming the land, ‘a sign of imperial power, a mark of possession and ownership’ (Holmes, Martin et al. 2008p. 8). Like other symbols of power, they were resisted. Endersby (2000) examines the contestation over land in one of these early garden institutions, the Domain in Sydney. He suggests that the land claimed by the government as the Domain and Botanic Gardens was also claimed by other early British inhabitants as common land—both before its enclosure as a leisure garden and after. There is evidence of cows, sheep, pigs and horses being grazed and of wood, soil, and other resources being harvested. Gathering firewood, hunting and harvesting food, and pasturing animals were activities that had been major uses of the commons in Britain prior to the Enclosure Acts of the 18th Century (Warner 1987 p. 8). This free utilisation of the land caused much displeasure to the Governor—who had the area fenced in 1816—and to those who would have reserved the gardens for the ‘innocent’ use of ‘respectable persons’. In response to one wave of ‘intrusion’, Governor Macquarie wrote,

the Government Domain ... has been much injured, not only by Persons breaking down the Wall that incloses it, but by their cutting down or burning the Shrubbery, destroying the young Plantation of Trees, quarrying of Stones, removing loam, and stealing the Paling.

(Governor Macquarie in the Sydney Gazette, 6th July 1816 quoted in Endersby 2000 p. 315)

Endersby argues that, because of their similarity to demonstrations against the enclosure of the commons in Britain in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the intrusions on the Domain reported by Governor Macquarie ‘sound more like protests than attempts to gather resources’ (Endersby 2000 p. 315). In seeking to lay claim to land to create community commons, community gardeners situate themselves within a long tradition of resistance to both private and public occupation of space. And when community gardeners come together to garden and to manage land in common, they garden to produce food for people to eat.

^72 Judd’s analysis (and that of others such as Ward 1997; Linebaugh 2008; Caffentzis 2010) is in stark contrast with accounts like Hardin’s (1968) ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ in which commons are framed as free-for-all resources, inevitably destroyed by atomised individuals acting in narrow self-interest according to the taken for granted assumptions of neo-classical economics.

^73 Sydney’s Domain and Botanic Gardens were established on Cadigal land in 1818, Melbourne’s Botanic Gardens on the meeting grounds of the Kulin people in 1846, Adelaide’s Botanic Gardens on Kaurna land in 1854.
Growing food

I'm with Emma Goldman: Our revolution will have dancing—and excellent food.

(Kingsolver 2008 p. 251)

The emphasis on food production in Australian community gardens marks them as differing from community gardens in the US, where the focus is on collective gardening that does not necessarily produce food\(^74\). The variety of foods grown in Australian community gardens is staggering. While occasionally plots lie fallow or show signs of neglect, most gardens are intensively cultivated with food grown in raised beds and level plots, in exacting grids and productive tangles. Garden beds crammed with bok choy and edible chrysanthemums flourish alongside plots of epazote and tomatillos, pioneering new garden guilds and culinary experiments in the process.

Many community gardeners have a strong interest in both agricultural biodiversity (Lockie and Carpenter 2010) and cultural diversity. Many community gardeners practice seed saving (Carolan 2007; Fanton and Fanton 1992) and cultivate rare and heritage seeds from around the world and locally adapted seeds from their own neighbourhoods. Community gardens around Australia are key Local Seed Networks, hubs for the preservation and exchange of non-hybrid seeds (Fanton, Fanton and Glastonbury 2004). People I interviewed from Cultivating Community in particular often spoke about being inspired by the efforts of community gardeners to maintain their traditional food plants and cultivation methods. Woodward and Vardy's (2005) book, *Community Gardens: A Celebration of the People, Recipes and Plants*, focuses on the cultural diversity of gardeners in the public housing estate gardens managed by Cultivating Community. In it the authors detail some of the many plants and methods of cultivation that can be seen in the gardens, and relate the stories of some of the gardeners. When I interviewed Cultivating Community worker, Allison, she spoke about a group of women who were refugees from Afghanistan.

For Allison, the seeds represented not only the tenacity of the woman who had held on to her precious bundle through a long and uncertain journey, but also the complex process of putting down roots in a new country—committing to place through nurturing a garden and continuing to grow the food plants of homeland. Community gardens enable people to access culturally preferred foods that

\(^74\) While most North American community gardens do involve food production, collectively managed ornamental gardens associated with neighbourhood reclamation and cultural expression are also classed as community gardens (see for example Schmelzkopf 1995; Salvidar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004).
are not available at the local market, enabling the maintenance of traditional cuisines, and providing opportunities to pass on stories and methods of cooking and growing.

If you’re growing your own food, even giving away food that you grow (which is the case with practically every vegetable gardener I know worth his or her spade), you’re evading the economic system, especially if you’re using basic, non-designer tools, and you’re using saved seeds. (interviewee in Carlsson 2008 p. 98)

By encouraging people to produce some of their own food, and providing land on which to do it, community garden activists can be seen within a discourse of gardening as a means to self-sufficiency and independence (see Gaynor 2006). The self-provisioning activities of community gardeners are often a public statement against conspicuous consumption, about the ability of people to become producers of something valuable with their own labour, and about achieving a measure of independence from the economic system. However growing food means having something to share as well as something to eat, and is valued as a part of enabling social relationships of reciprocity. It is not a form of gardening that aims towards liberal individualism, but towards collective self-reliance. A focus on food production has increasingly linked community gardening with other alternative agrifood initiatives and the concept of food security. These are discussed below. First, I turn to discussing the particular ways that food produced in community gardens is cultivated.

**Growing ecologically**

The specific gardening practices that can be seen in Australia’s community gardens reflect the social and ecological values of those involved. Growing food for people, rather than the native plants or wildlife habitats that have often been seen as epitomising environmentally sensitive gardens (see Plumwood 2005), represents a particular ecological ethic—one which is rooted in the urban as well as the agrarian and is concerned with the wellbeing of people as well as non-human nature. Ideas from permaculture and organic agricultural movements are significant in informing community gardeners’ views and practices about gardening. In this section, I discuss the ways community gardeners in general, and garden organisers in particular, draw upon organics and permaculture to create productive urban gardens that express their ecological commitments, cultivate ‘ecological literacy’, and express care for people and communities. Together, these inform an understanding of community gardening as a ‘healing’ practice for people, communities, and the land.

**Permaculture**

The influence of permaculture is apparent in the design of many community gardens, which attempt to mimic the ‘diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems’ (Mollison 1990 p. ix). While stock techniques such as herb spirals and mandala gardens are ubiquitous, for many in the community gardening movement, permaculture provides not only a set of techniques for the design of productive landscapes, but also an overarching ethical and practical framework for their community gardening activism. Of the 60 gardens I visited during my research, Northey Street City
Farm had perhaps the strongest focus on permaculture and many of those I interviewed spoke of the influence of permaculture principles and ethics\(^\text{75}\) on their community gardening work.

I really relate to the permaculture idea of caring for the earth and caring for the people. And also the idea of putting back surplus to the people and the earth again. Most importantly I think of permaculture as a way of thinking and viewing the world and the way we relate to people. That’s something that you actually see here everyday, the whole idea of co-operation.

(Vicente, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

I found Bill Mollison’s stuff so inspiring because he had the angle that we have to find a new way of involving ourselves in the natural environment and being productive without destroying it.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Permaculture was also important to people involved with community garden organising at a national level:

My father had the social justice side, but not so much the environmental, so when I came across permaculture it was more of a holistic, integrated thing that put a lot of pieces together for me.

(Yvonne, ACFCGN, in interview)

Even where permaculture was not talked about as central to gardeners’ practice, it often remained an influence. At Cultivating Community many members also had done training in permaculture and had connections with permaculture networks. However, they were less inclined to describe their practice in terms of permaculture.

One of the things that I’ve noticed is very different here in Melbourne to being in Brisbane [at Northey Street City Farm] is that they talk a lot more about permaculture. I would put money on the first Cultivating Community meeting I went to well over half, maybe two thirds, of the group would have done permaculture design courses, would have been very knowledgeable about permaculture, but we didn’t talk about it.

(Henry, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Cultivating Community worker, Rachel made similar observations and described the way she saw permaculture as informing, but not defining, her community gardening work.

I went to the international permaculture conference in ’96… I thought it was amazing and loved it and it was one of those experiences where everything started to make sense. It was a world vision that combined all the elements of what I thought and tried to do, coined in a phrase… I think for me, there was a time in my life when permaculture was a really central thing and I felt very directed by permaculture as an overriding life principle. For me now, it feels like it’s integrated into my life in a way that I don’t really think about it anymore. It’s not something that I read about or think about all the time anymore.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

As well as drawing upon permaculture, some community gardeners have been active in reshaping permaculture to fit their shared visions and values. Northey Street City Farm has developed its own version of the three ‘ethics’ which underlie permaculture (Holmgren 2002b; Mollison 1988, see also de la Bellasca 2010). These ethics are often phrased as ‘earth care, people care, and fair shares’. At

\(^{75}\) In permaculture, ‘principles’ refers to a set of integrated design tools that inform permaculture practice. There is not, however, a single agreed upon set of permaculture design principles, with Mollison (1988), Holmgren (2002b) and others building on their work articulating them in quite different ways. However, in each version, permaculture principles seek to apply understandings of natural systems to the design of agricultural and other human environments. Permaculture ethics are discussed below.
Northey Street, they are reworded as ‘care of people’, ‘care for the earth’, ‘care of spiritual self’ and ‘sharing the surplus and setting limits to consumption and re/production’ (NSCF 2008 p. 6). This reframing of permaculture’s core ethics reflects Northey Street’s emphasis on people, and I believe it is unique in including self care as a permaculture ethic. The reference to spirituality also marks a distinct position within the permaculture movement, as permaculture also involves people who eschew spirituality in favour of a ‘scientific’ orientation. In Northey Street’s Policies and Procedures Manual (NSCF 2008), David Holmgren’s 12 permaculture principles (Holmgren 2002b), including ‘use and value diversity’, ‘use small and slow solutions’, ‘apply self-regulation and accept feedback’, and ‘produce no waste’ inform every area of the Farm’s practices. Permaculture has brought a philosophy of ‘working with rather than against nature’ (Mollison 1990 p. 3) to many community gardens. However this is a concept that has an even longer history within the organic movement.

Gardening organically

To garden organically is more than a good form of husbandry and a good source of nutrients; it is above all a way to place oneself directly in the food web by personally cultivating the very substances one consumes to live and by returning to one’s environment what one elicits from it. Food thus becomes more than a form of material nutrient. The soil one tills, the living things one cultivates and consumes, the compost one prepares all unite in an ecological continuum to feed the spirit as well as the body, sharpening one’s sensitivity to the nonhuman and human world around us. (Bookchin 1993 p. 42)

Australian community gardeners, with very few exceptions, garden organically76. The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network actively promotes organic practices in its conferences, submissions, website and publications and for most community gardeners, an organic approach is central to their gardening practice. I have not witnessed any dissent or debate about the importance of organic practices during my research, and government and agency initiated community garden projects have been as committed as gardens started by grassroots groups in championing an organic approach. While community gardens—and individual plots within them—vary greatly, organic practices such as composting, companion planting, mulching, crop rotation, inter-planting, the use of green manures and innovative pest-management strategies are inevitably visible. With a range of organic practices on display, community gardens are also prime locations for the dissemination of organic principles and practices. Many community gardens offer courses and workshops on organic gardening. Community gardens are also repositories of local and traditional knowledges about organic gardening practices, and informal learning and knowledge sharing is widespread. In the organic approach of community gardens, solutions to problems do not come from the shelves of the hardware store, but from a community of gardeners sharing experiences and techniques and from

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76 While I am aware of gardens that allow the use of artificial fertilisers in individually leased plots, I have not heard of any community gardens in Australia that allow the use of non-organic biocides. That is not to say that every plot holder always adheres to the rules.
careful observation of the gardens themselves. Organics is deeply embedded in the culture of community gardening in Australia. There is a practical utility in adopting organic gardening methods: it eliminates the need to monitor the use and storage of potentially dangerous chemicals in spaces inhabited by volunteers, children and the general public. Nevertheless, organic gardening is defined not only by the avoidance of chemical fertilisers and biocides, but also by an ecological ethic of gardening with nature, of nurturing a living soil ecology, and of fostering human health (Balfour 1943; Simons 2004). It is concerned with human ethics and values as well as economic and environmental ones (Alroe, Byrne and Glover 2004; Paull 2009). A commitment to gardening organically is an extension of the ecological values that animate community gardening projects. Organic gardening and environmentalism have long been intricately intertwined and mutually informing. Kaufman (1986) has argued that in its call for an agriculture that worked in harmony with nature, the organic farming movement of the 1940s was ‘an ethical precursor’ of the later environment movement (1986 p. 76). Egri (1997 p. 25) found that organic farmers viewed the world through an ‘environmental paradigm’. Where other environmental movements have focused on campaigns to protect remote wild places, community gardeners’ ecological visions are enacted closer to home, with people—even in cities—placed firmly within a peopled landscape (Kropotkin ([1901] 1974) as a species which takes its nourishment from the soil and returns nutrients to it. In common with environmental justice movements (Bullard 1994; Cole and Foster 2001), it is an environmentalism that sees the wellbeing of people as fundamental.

Community gardeners create spaces in which people are revealed as existing within a food web, and where food is revealed as coming from a very particular place. Gardening is seen and spoken of by garden organisers as a way of cultivating ‘ecological literacy’ (Orr 1992), a practical understanding of natural systems and human impacts and a commitment to live accordingly. Community garden activists view themselves as ‘people who understand and have a stake in the land’ (Crouch and Ward 1988 p. 14). Through gardening, the seasons, the soil and the unique microclimate of a particular garden, become richly and intimately known. Community gardens, and the programs that are run there, are practical demonstration sites, showing the ways soils function, food is produced, water cycles, and humans participate with nature in providing for our needs.

Interestingly, while organic practices and outlooks are firmly entrenched in Australian community gardens, biodynamics has not been prominent in the Australian community gardening movement. Biodynamics is an approach to organic farming and gardening based on the teachings of spiritual philosopher, Rudolf Steiner. It focuses on the life of the soil and the subtle forces working within plants, soil, the surrounding environment, and the cosmos. It includes specific practices such as the use of preparations like BD500, which encourages the growth of roots and root hairs and the proliferation of worms and other soil life; specialised composting techniques; and attention to astrological cycles of energy (see Steiner 1972; Koepf, Pettersson and Schaumann 1976; Podolinsky 1985; Podolinsky 1989; Proctor and Cole 1997). A few community gardens have recently offered workshops on biodynamic techniques (for example Mullumbimby Community Garden ran an ‘Introduction to Biodynamics’ course in conjunction with Byron Region Community College in June 2010).
I passionately believe in restoring the earth and in stopping using pesticides and killing things off, killing the natural world, and I get the chance here to talk to all sorts of people in all sorts of ways about everything from having little frog ponds to bringing back the birds and the butterflies, to keeping chooks to having organic gardens.

(Judith, NSCF, in interview)

The agrarian ethics of organic gardening (Kaufman 1986; Wirzba 2002; Pollan 2001) have implications that are not only ecological but also inherently anti-capitalistic. The connection to and knowledge of country required for successful organic production exist in contradiction with a view of land as a mere commodity.

Sustainable agriculture is necessarily knowledge-intensive, depending upon all the faculties of the farmer ... farmers must understand the many subtle interrelations of their chosen mix in order to enrich the soil and minimise pest damage. Thus sustainable agriculture depends upon a specific type of relationship between the farmer and the land. It must be enduring, for only over time can the necessary information be acquired. And the farmer must feel a personal stake in the welfare of the land.

(Caldicott and Lappe 1986 p. 27)

This ethic of connection to place links community gardeners’ gardening practices with their practices of land management, their focus on the re-creation of community commons and their understandings of gardening as a practice of healing people and land.

**Gardening as healing**

Contact with gardens and green spaces has been shown to have health-giving effects (Sugiyama, Giles-Corti and Owen 2008; Richardson, Pearce, Mitchell, Day and Kingham 2010. On community gardens as providing access to health-giving green space, see Milligan, Catrell and Bingley 2004; Henderson-Wilson 2005). Horticultural therapy has further popularised idea that ‘getting your hands in the soil’ is both healing and empowering (Guthman 2008a p. 435). A number of community gardeners I spoke with in my research saw gardening—and particularly collective gardening and vegetable gardening—as a way to promote health and healing. The health benefits of gardening have long been recognised by horticultural therapists (Lewis 1990, 1996; Marcus and Barnes 1999; Sempik, Aldridge and Becker 2003). Some community gardeners in Australia have had strong associations with horticultural therapy. Community garden and horticultural therapy organisations have organised conferences together, developed shared training programs, and contributed to each other’s projects. Community gardens have been used as venues for horticultural therapy programs. However, the community gardening movement’s approach to gardening as a health promotion strategy is broader than that generally practiced by horticultural therapists. Where horticultural therapists tend to focus on individuals, believing that ‘caring for plants and admiring their beauty can have considerable therapeutic value’ (Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria 1997), community gardeners tend to take a social and ecological view. They see gardening as healing and healthful not just because of the aesthetic value of plants (as in the ‘biophilia hypothesis’ underlying much horticultural therapy, see Kellert and Wilson 1993), but because gardening-in-community addresses social isolation, encourages
social action, and cultivates right relationships with the earth. In addition, growing herbs, vegetables and fruit means access to fresh produce and essential micronutrients and leads to increased food literacy (Blair, Giesecke and Sherman 1991; Twiss, Dickinson, Duma, Kleinman, Paulsen and Rilveria 2003; Somerset, Ball, Flett and Geissman 2005; Somerset and Markwell 2008; Alaimo, Packnett, Miles and Kruger 2008).

Public health is closely related to environmental health, I reckon. If we live on the earth in such a way as to sustain it and care for it, we’ll automatically sustain and care for ourselves—I don’t see the two as separate… If we try and get the way we live on the earth right, then sure, there’ll always been a need for doctors and hospitals, but less of need. People will be healthy because they’ve been doing exercise, eating the right food, and so on.

(Robert, NSCF, in interview)

Several of the community garden organisers I interviewed talked about gardening-in-community as a healing practice, for individuals, communities, and the earth. These aspects of healing were seen as interconnected, and people sometimes saw them as existing within a spiritual framework.

It’s not just a garden where people come, it’s embracing of who we truly are—which is integrated beings—physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. And the earth isn’t separate from us. We are the earth, we are part of it. When these elements are acknowledged and they come together then healing takes place, and not just of the land, but for people as well. Everyone needs healing. I think a lot of people take healing from Northey Street, whether they’re conscious of it or not. That’s why we’re here. To heal ourselves and heal the planet and facilitate the healing of others.

(Judith, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

These health outcomes are not just the outcome of gardening, but of the particular kind of gardening practiced in Australian community gardens: collective, organic, and food producing.

**GARDENING FOR FOOD SECURITY**

We have to address food security if we want to have sustainable communities and connected people.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Food and its politics and the injustice in the world—it’s justice issues associated with food that really get my blood boiling.

(James, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Because of their focus on food production, Australian community gardens have increasingly been framed as food security initiatives by government agencies, food security organisations and community gardeners themselves78. Community garden activists’ engagement with food security can be viewed an example of the ways they approach social issues beyond their primary objectives of creating and sustaining community gardens. Because food security is a much contested concept, a discussion of how the community gardening movement may be situated within it is a window on how

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78 A number of programs using and recommending community gardens as a strategy to address food insecurity have received government funding in recent years. See for example, Tyrrell, Grundy, Lynch and Wakeman (2003); Fengie (2005); Rowe (2007); Amy (2008); Dillon (2008); Davis (2010); Moffett (2010); VicHealth (2010); Wollongong City Council (2010).
community gardeners’ practices of vegetable gardening can be seen in terms of collective social action.

The association between community gardening and food security is a recent one in Australia. While Australian community gardens have always played a role in providing access to vegetables, herbs and fruits, community gardens have been more likely to be associated with concepts like ‘sustainability’, ‘community development’ and ‘multiculturalism’ than food security (see for example Sullivan 1997; Crabtree 1999; Woodward and Vardy 2005; Kingsley and Townsend 2006). When I began researching the Australian community gardening movement in 2003, I found that gardeners often described their work as urban agriculture or permaculture, but I rarely heard food security mentioned. However, by 2007 food security had become a major frame. The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network’s 2007 national conference, ‘Cities Feeding People,’ dedicated a day to discussing the role of community gardens in ensuring food security. Many individual community gardens added food security to the litany of benefits their projects promised and community garden advocates were increasingly invited to speak about community gardens as grassroots responses to food insecurity. Even more recently, community garden organisations have joined with groups advocating for food security at a policy level, participating in coalitions like the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance and sponsoring conferences such as Hungry for Change (Sydney, October 2009) and From Plains to Plate: The Future of Food in South Australia (Adelaide, February 2010). In August 2010 the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network and several other community garden organisations became founding members of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, formed to lobby the Federal government about a proposed national food policy.

Food security is an evolving, contested, and complex concept, understood differently at different scales and from different political and theoretical orientations. When food security emerged as a concept in international development literature in the 1960s and 70s, the focus was on the ability of nations and regions to produce a sufficient amount of food for their current or projected population. By the 1980s, the focus had shifted from the national level to the household and individual level in recognition that adequate production did not necessarily lead to adequate access to food for all (Anderson and Cook 1999 p. 142). Emphases in discussions on food security have shifted along a continuum from emergency food provisioning to creating long-term food security through local economic development (Maxwell 1996) and have intersected with numerous other social, environmental and economic issues in development and agrifood systems. Despite competing voices, definitions of food security adopted by major organisations such as the World Bank and the United

79 There is, of course, a long association between urban food production and food security. See for example (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010).

80 ‘Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life’ (World Bank 1986)
Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have achieved dominance. Some NGOs have lobbied intensively to have additional criteria, such as sustainability and the food security of future generations added to these definitions (Bellows and Hamm 2002 p. 34). Some, such as the Community Food Security Coalition in the United States, have advanced competing definitions, emphasising additional criteria including democracy, social justice, environmental sustainability, and local autonomy (Winne 2009). Others have rejected the idea of food security, which they argue fails to address ‘where food comes from, who produced it, or the conditions under which it was grown’ (Pimbert 2009 p. 10). Advocates of food sovereignty (Rosset, Patel and Courville 2006 p. 36), including the world’s largest civil society organisation, La Via Campesina (Desmarais 2007), have criticised practices of food aid carried out in the name of food security, which they argue ‘disguises dumping, introduces GMOs into local environments and food systems and creates new colonialism patterns’ (Declaration of Nyéléni 2007), thereby damaging the livelihoods of local farmers, and ultimately compromising food production and access. Unlike advocates of community food security, whose emphasis is on the local, advocates of food sovereignty have focused at a global scale, drawing attention to the impact of international trade agreements and the treatment of food as a commodity.

Within this diversity of perspectives, the community gardening movement has a distinct set of approaches to food security. When recognized by government and health agencies as contributing to food security, community gardens have most commonly been seen as strategies to increase food production (see for example Rychetnik, Webb, Story and Katz 2003). However, community gardens’ contribution to food security goes beyond providing access to land to grow food by building on the skills and expertise within communities to improve food knowledge and networks as well as food access. It combines an association with (other) alternative agrifood networks, strong commitments to community process, an ecological perspective, and a nascent interest in policy development.

Food security is a frame that strongly links community gardens with alternative agrifood networks in what Australian community garden activists call a ‘community food’ movement. For many community gardeners, an awareness of food security has developed through the frame of ‘community food’, a concept linking a range of alternative agrifood initiatives with ideas of seasonality, relocalisation, and connection between producers and consumers. Australian Community Foods inc. was an early articulator of this perspective in Australia. Established in 2002, it aimed to connect direct food distribution systems such as farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), food consumers’ co-operatives, and farmgate sales with community initiatives like community gardening and seed saving under the shared frame of local, ‘community’ food (on the idea of ‘local’ in

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81 ‘Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life’ (FAO 1996)

82 It is important to note that not all community gardens have taken up food security as a focus, and many prioritise other objectives.
alternative food movements see Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003 p. 64). The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network has maintained a connection with Australian Community Foods since 2003, including managing a directory of community gardens on the Australian Community Foods website. A community foods perspective has broadened many community gardeners’ understanding of their work, situating community gardens as part of wider moves to create a sustainable, socially just food system. It has also brought issues of food production, sustainability and food justice to the fore. As a movement concerned with food, community gardening differs in several important ways from other community food initiatives, most pertinently because unlike farmers’ markets, CSAs, and food co-operatives, they are not enterprise-based and they are not concerned with distributing farm-grown produce (on the enterprise orientation of alternative agrifood movements, see Guthman 2008a).

For many of the community garden activists I met, the greatest contribution community gardens were making to food security was through enabling immigrants, and recently arrived refugees in particular, to access culturally preferred foods. The garden organisers believed that enabling people to grow and share traditional food plants was valuable not only as way to ensure adequate nutrition83, but as a means of cultural maintenance and transmission, and a way to alleviate the trauma of resettlement.

> Getting your hands dirty and growing food is so important to us—our wellbeing, our happiness, our sense of who we are. The gardens are a really fantastic way for people to maintain that connection when they come here from other countries, especially when they come through very difficult circumstances. There’s a place where they feel comfortable, they feel connected, and they can relate to, when everything else might be kind of foreign and scary, you can continue to grow the food that you’ve grown your whole life and talk in your own language, and you’re celebrated, your culture is celebrated and valued. That’s what I really love about the community gardens.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Some community gardening organisations have taken seriously their role in providing food access to people in disadvantaged groups. Cultivating Community, for example, has increasingly prioritised food security aims emphasizing access rather than production. While working to support public housing residents to manage community gardens on high-rise estates, Cultivating Community workers recognised that only a small proportion of tenants could actually have a community garden plot but that many faced food insecurity and food related health problems. With an awareness that not everyone with limited access to fresh produce wants to grow their own, they expanded their work to include other food security initiatives, including setting up not-for-profit fresh food markets to bring affordable fresh produce to the doorstep of public housing residents.

In addition to addressing issues of inequity of access, community gardening organisations have emphasized the threats to overall food supply in the face of climate change, peaking oil supplies and

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83 Food insecurity is prevalent among refugees settled in developed countries (Potocky-Tripodi 2002; Sellen, Tedstone and Frize 2002; Sellen and Hadzibegovic 2003; Hadley and Sellen 2006; Gallegos, Ellichs and Wright 2008; Piwowarczyk, Keane and Lincoln 2008).
increased fossil fuel costs, uncertain water supplies, and the environmental and social impacts of industrial agribusiness. Vulnerability to food insecurity is seen as an issue for all, not just those who are currently most at risk, and is associated with risks to food production. The solutions they propose include increased local—and particularly urban and peri-urban—food production, organic and agroecological farming practices, and closer links between producers and consumers in a locally-based food system. Their response reflects not only an analysis of the threats to the agrifood system, but an overall ecological perspective. In common with proponents of food sovereignty, the way food is produced, and the social, economic, and ecological impacts of its production is seen as central to food security. For Australian community gardeners, urban dwellers’ widespread lack of connection and understanding of the food system is seen as a fundamental part of the problem of food insecurity. Community garden activists have encouraged consumers to recognize their role within the food system, as sharing responsibility for the environmental, social and economic problems of food production, and particularly, for the massive amounts of waste produced. And, to take a role in developing a new food system. In this sense, the community garden activists I interviewed have a perspective closely allied with civic agriculture, in which the food system is framed in social, rather than purely economic terms, and the role agriculture plays in the lives of both urban and rural-dwelling people is emphasised (DeLind 2002). The physical spaces community gardeners create are expressions of their visions for the food system and for cities, and it is this use of community gardens as didactic displays that I turn to next.

GARDENING TO RECLAIM AND REPROGRAM URBAN SPACE

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

(Lewis 1979 p. 12)

To plant… is to give body and life to one’s dreams of a better world.

(Page 1962 p. 67)

We are accustomed to seeing environmentalists express their visions and their critiques in a number of ways: through media stunts, protests, petitions, submissions, flyers, articles, books, reports, websites, and so on. In addition to using these familiar modes of communication, community gardeners communicate through the gardens they create. There is a long tradition of using the creation of gardens as a way to both present a vision and—at least partially—realise it (Hoyles 1991 p. 263). All gardens communicate something about those who design and tend them (Lewis 1979; Francis 1987; Francis and Hester 1990). However, the signifiers of community gardens are consciously and strategically deployed. Through the gardens they create, community gardeners present tangible, physical manifestations of their visions for local food production, community

84 There have been a number of critical responses to the reification of the local in alternative food movements. Commentators note that issues of social inequity and environmental sustainability are embedded in structures and social relations other than geographical scale, and that local alternatives do not necessarily confront issues operating at extra-local levels. See for example Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Born and Purcell 2006; Allen 2010; Kneafsey 2010.
commons, and ecologically sensitive cities. Community gardens themselves are (amongst other things) pedagogic displays, forms of propaganda. They are designed to influence those who see them, as well as those who actively participate in them—challenging perceptions, developing understandings, and constructing knowledge. The garden is both the medium and the message.

Before discussing the specific messages that community garden activists seek to convey through the gardens they create, I will briefly outline the ways the reappropriation of public space has been used as a means of political communication by social movements since the 1960s.

Community gardening is a way of laying claim to land for purposes at odds with dominant modes of urban land use. Much of the social movement action in North America during 1960s was carried out in and over public spaces (Carr 1992). People’s Park in Berkeley California, which Carlsson (2008) describes as the first contemporary community garden in the United States, was established to claim political space as much as to claim garden space. From the outset to the present, communal vegetable gardening has been a central element of the park (Compost 2009), and Belasco (1993 pp. 19 – 22) argues that People’s Park introduced food and environmental issues to the wider counter-culture. However the focus of attention at the park’s creation in 1969, and in the riots that followed it, was on space for free speech.

If there is no place to freely assemble, there is no free assembly. If there is no place to freely express there is no free expression

(Reclaim the Streets NYC flyer, quoted by Duncombe 2002a p. 221)

The appropriation of public space for protest and sociability at People’s Park and elsewhere, sought to redefine the way public spaces were used and managed. Community gardens can be seen as the ‘fulfilment’ of this idea that citizens can and should take control of public land (Carr 1992 p. 68).

In seeking to create meaningful public (or rather common) spaces, community garden activists are linked with other movements concerned with ‘insurgent public space’ (Hou 2010), such as The Land is Ours, Reclaim the Streets and Critical Mass (Shepard 2009; Carlsson 2008), and indeed there have been a number of collaborations between community gardeners and these movements (Duncombe 2002; 2007; Wood and Moore 2002; Shepard 2004; 2009). For a number of urban social movements, the occupation and production of ‘space’ by the market and the state is seen as central to the reproduction of social relations—and therefore the survival of capitalism (Uitermark 2004 p. 707; Lefebvre 1976; 1991). The ‘programming’ of urban space—the ways in which it is designed through commodification and state authority to fulfil specific functions and in which the processes that structure and shape spaces are hidden (Gregory 1994 p. 403)—is seen as a mechanism of alienation and of the colonisation of everyday life (Debord 2004 [1967]). Through Marxist, and particularly Situationist analyses of programmed space (Debord 2004 [1967]; Vaneigem 2001 [1967]), a number of social movements have adopted strategies to ‘de-program’ space by exposing the power relations embedded in urban environments and suggesting other ways to appropriate space (Uitermark 2004 p.
Reclaim the Streets parties and Critical Mass bike rides are clear examples of these strategies of ‘hacking’ and subverting the functioning of public spaces and suggesting ways that they could function differently. Here, I argue that community gardens can also be read as attempts to ‘de-program’ public space, to repurpose it to new and subversive ends, and to use reappropriated urban space as a form of political communication.

The presence of community gardens in the urban landscape—and in the agrifood system—is a highly visible contradiction to the naturalness and seeming inevitability of the industrial food system. In ways that can be seen, touched, smelled and eaten, community gardens communicate that other ways of producing food are possible, that the industrial food system has not achieved complete saturation. Specific elements of garden design re-enforce the distinctions between the possible food landscape of community gardens and the dominant industrial agrifood landscape. Community gardens are a distinctly human-scale form of food production, with little evidence of the use of machinery, and the eschewing of agricultural chemicals. The diversity of species cultivated in community gardens is counter to the narrow range of transportable, storable varieties produced in the mass monocultures of industrial farms and available on supermarket shelves. The fruits, herbs and vegetables grown in community gardens are often unknown to supermarket aisles, with heritage varieties valued and the traditional cuisines of gardeners reflected in plant choices. Diversity is valued for its ecological services (mitigating against crop failures, providing habitat for predating insects), for its cultural value, for its beauty, and for its utility—as ripe yellow tomatoes and purple and white striped aubergines are less tempting to unauthorised harvesters than their more familiar cousins. They are also perhaps valued as markers of a conscious and reflexive stance in relation to ‘ethical eating’ (Bell and Valentine 1997) in which ‘Slow’, organic, and heritage foods are positioned in binary opposition to fast food and industrial agribusiness (Guthman 2003). The inclusion of locally native plants and bush food species are intended to communicate an informed relationship with the local environment, an interest in pre-European landscapes, and a desire to engage with (or be seen to engage with) Indigenous people. The allocation of space for play and socialising and the cultivation of flowers convey an interest in land that is not purely economic, that is concerned with beauty, connection to place, and human connectedness as well as food production.

It is perhaps relevant to note here that the valorisation of agricultural labour within alternative agrifood movements has not always been accompanied by an adequate commitment to addressing the actual conditions under which agricultural labour takes place (Allen 1999; Allen, FitzSimmons, et al. 2003; Guthman 2004; Allen 2010). Indeed, there have been cases where the desire for artisan foods within some segments of the wider alternative food movement has led to the reintroduction of labour-intensive practices that would otherwise have been discarded for their inefficiency and strain on workers’ bodies (Guthman 2003).

This raises the frequently cited spectre of eating organic (or substitute local, Slow, heritage, exotic) food as ‘performative of an elite sensibility’ (Guthman 2004 p. 52) in which distinctions of taste have a defining role in inscribing social identity and status (Bourdieu 1984; Probyn 2000. See also Miele 2006 for a summary of recent debates within analyses of agrifood movements).
The gardens communicate not only about food production, but also about the production of urban spaces. In contrast with most public open space, community gardens are idiosyncratic and unique. They are collectively managed, often without the input of professional landscape architects, designers and gardeners. They are not simply to be observed or to provide space for passive leisure, but are open to active input and change from their users. They speak to the possibility of people working together at a neighbourhood level to directly create the kinds of urban spaces they would like to see.

In public parks, the social relations that enable their creation are largely hidden. In community gardens, the process of making the gardens is central to their pedagogic content. By emphasising the process of creating community gardens, garden activists show other public space as the historic outcome of social action. In a study comparing public parks to community gardens, Francis (1987) found that one of the main differences was that public parks were used mostly for relatively passive activities—reading, resting, eating, while in community gardens, people were actively involved—weeding, watering, harvesting. The two models represent fundamentally different ways of managing, designing, and maintaining urban open spaces. The community garden experience of collectively imagining and creating a desired community open space has potential to speak to the possibility of organising other things differently too.

Community garden organisers actively try to make their garden displays legible to people visiting or passing by, with varying degrees of success. There is a recognition that productive gardens are unfamiliar sights in an urban environment and that it takes particular, and not sufficiently common, knowledge to make sense of the abundant tangle of a self-seeded permaculture garden, with its delight in disorder and ease with useful weeds. Gardens such as these are not always immediately understood or appreciated—in fact they are sometimes actively opposed by neighbouring residents with differing aesthetic sensibilities. Community gardeners seek to build bridges of understanding to encourage people to relate comfortably and favourably with their gardens. Most community gardens have signage welcoming people to the garden, explaining what it is about, what is invited of passers-by, what is not permitted, and how to become involved. There is often also detailed information on aspects of the garden, such as green waste recycling systems, composting toilets, and particular plants. Gardens are designed to make multiple invitations to connect with a possibly unfamiliar and therefore hard to interpret landscape. Community gardeners sweep paths, contain overgrown abundance, and decorate the garden landscape to address perceptions about neatness and to provide visible signs of a place that is actively cared for. However, unlike heavily curated garden displays, like the vegetable garden at the White House, in which each variety of fruit, herb, and vegetable included can be understood as representing a ‘canonical object worthy of display’ (Batra-Wells 2010 p. 58),

87 In staking a claim on public land, community gardens also alienate land from other uses. In some instances this has led to conflicts between those seeking land for low-cost housing and those seeking land for community gardening (this framing of disputes over land is discussed in detail in Appendix 5). In the United States, there have been disputes between those claiming land for community gardening—in which only a limited number of people can obtain a garden plot, and those who would prefer the same land to be made into sporting fields—which putatively benefit the ‘entire community’ (see Irzabál and Punja 2009; Barraclough 2009).
Community gardens are open to—indeed designed to encourage—the input of multiple gardeners. Community gardens are the result of the choices and practices of many people, each of whom chooses what to plant, how to arrange parts of the garden, and whether to present an image of cultivated control or flourishing wildness. They therefore vary somewhat in how successful they are at presenting a legible and appealing pedagogic display.

While primarily designed to communicate in a tangible, embodied way to people physically present within them, the didactic landscapes that community gardeners create are also used to communicate to people further afield. Community garden activists frequently use images of their gardens and stories about the plants and people within them to provide an opening to discuss wider issues of food production and distribution, environmental management, and community agency. They are distinctly local sites in which global processes can be identified and challenged. However, images of smiling children clutching bunches of fresh picked carrots and jaunty senior citizens leaning on spades in tiny but incredibly productive plots can present an overly sentimentalised view of food and community gardening activism. Worse, they can create the impression that ‘everything is good in the garden’, belying the need for further action. Miles Bremner from the UK’s Garden Organic (formerly known as the Henry Doubleday Research Trust) has described these images as ‘the most dangerous threat’ to community gardens because they lack a ‘compelling narrative’ that includes an account of the problems within food systems as well as the feel-good responses (Bremner 2010).

**GARDENING AND COMMUNITY**

It’s a cool Melbourne morning and Rachel is taking me to one of the public housing estate gardens that Cultivating Community assists. The next-door neighbour is in the garden with her small son. An older couple are squatting down by their plot pulling out weeds. Rachel greets them enthusiastically—‘Hola, Mary!’ They give her lush lettuces for the barbeque this afternoon. I ask Rachel how many languages she speaks. ‘Just a little Spanish. But I can say hello in a few languages. The African women get such a kick out of it when I try to speak Arabic. They giggle and laugh.’

I find a garden fork and set to digging out couch grass along the fence line, enjoying the warming sun on my back, smelling the fresh mulch on the garden beds. Rachel sweeps the paths and chats with the gardeners, asking after children and about where people want to go for their next garden bus trip. Someone has brought in their phone bill and Rachel helps them decode the English and the accounting. She discusses aphids with another gardener and suggests that he could make a garlic spray to repel them from his plants.

As lunchtime nears, more of the plot holders come into the garden and Rachel fires up the barbeque for halal sausages and tofu. Workers from the community centre across the road come over to join us for lunch. Rachel has also arranged for translators to be present, so gardeners speaking five different languages can more fully participate in a discussion about what should happen in their garden in the coming months.

(Journal, November 2004)

Cultivating Community’s garden support workers spend a lot of time gardening. They sweep paths, turn compost, clear weeds in any plots that are not currently leased, help to maintain common areas
and plant flowers in communal beds. However much time and energy they devote to gardening—and despite the endless tasks needed to keep the gardens flourishing—they rarely seem to be just gardening. Information about organic gardening practices is shared. Conflicts among gardeners are mediated. The public face of the gardens is maintained and enhanced. Information is shared about services and resources available. Even while knee deep in compost, every opportunity to cultivate social connections is grasped.

Everyday when you’re in the garden just being available to talk to people is important, to workshop ideas about the space and just to chat about families and lives. Lots of people are very lonely, they’re very socially isolated, so to come and have a chat with you is quite a big thing for them, they really look forward to seeing and talking to you. We just try to recognise every opportunity to link people and present people with a lot of possibilities.

(Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

Though so many non-gardening things occur while Cultivating Community workers are in the garden, when interviewed, the ways they talked about their work tended to focus on the value of gardening—and of urban agriculture in particular—in and of itself. One of Cultivating Community’s founders, James, described the organisation’s initial and ongoing focus as being ‘that obvious need that gardens are socially and spiritually nourishing and there’s not enough of them in the city’. The other impacts of their work were often described as being the consequences of gardening, rather than of Cultivating Community’s community development efforts or their other practices.

This may sound really simplistic, but there’s a special magic in being able to plant a seed in the ground and water it and watch it grow into a plant—and then being able to eat it. It’s magical. I guess if you look at lots of areas of people’s lives, there’s disempowerment, sadness. It’s a real joy to be able grow and harvest food. For Cultivating Community, there’s the sense of achievement at being able to create that experience for anybody, regardless of what else is going on in their lives.

(Julia, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Community gardeners at Northey Street City Farm also spend a lot of time with their hands in the soil, and many of them spoke with me about the particular ‘magic’ of gardens. However for some Northey Street members, gardening was not the most significant element of their work.

I like gardening. But I like building and I like cooking and making and doing and lots of things. It’s not central. I like writing a good submission, where the words are tight and it says exactly what I think they want to hear. There isn’t anything special about the process of gardening, other than it being a place where I forget about everything. If I garden at home and I’ve got enough time and no interruptions, then I actually lose myself in it. But I also lose myself in dancing, getting drunk, fifty other ways that I can think of. City Farm is about permaculture and gardening, but it isn’t the end. I’d hate to see it as a religion or everyone must garden or do permaculture. Gardening is just a tool.

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

For a number of the Northey Street gardeners I interviewed, ‘community’ was of more importance than gardening, and took a more central place in their descriptions of their work. Gardening, though seen as valuable in many ways, was often described as a ‘tool’ rather than an end of itself. As Ellis put it, ‘you come for the gardening and stay for the community’. Jake explained,
You may call it a farm and it may look like a farm and we do produce some food, but that’s not its primary function. Its primary function is community building. There are no fences here. Anybody can come.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

While much of the visible work of community gardens is about researching and developing ways of producing food in cities, a focus on people and community means that this is done in a different way to, for example, a scientific research institution:

we are trying to find systems that work locally, with regard to food production, but the overall ethic is not to put that ahead of how important people are in that landscape. What a waste it is if you’re creating people who are oppressed by whatever systems you put in place.

(Tom, NSCF, in interview)

This interplay between gardening and community is significant to understanding the ways community garden activists understand community gardens as sites of collective social action. Some have seen community gardens as connected to environmental action by the ecological sensibility developed through the practice of gardening. In a recent study of community gardens in Melbourne, Donati, Cleary and Pike found that ‘at least some community gardens were hotbeds of environmental, cultural and social activism’ (2009 p. 218). This was seen as a direct result of the increased awareness of the natural environment that was cultivated through gardening.

The act of growing food brought about a greater sense of interconnectedness with the earth’s ‘natural’ and sometimes ‘unnatural’ rhythms in an urban environment where these patterns are often stifled by the everyday trappings and conveniences of city life.

(Donati, Cleary and Pike 2009 p. 218)

In this analysis, community gardens inspire activism through the intrinsic effects of organic gardening on cultivating ecological understanding and commitment, rather than as the result of involvement with a collective project, nor of conscious design on the part of garden organisers. This contrasts with other studies, in which the significance of community gardens as sites of social action is strongly associated with experiences of community engagement and collective efficacy.

Often getting the permission to build community gardens involves lobbying municipal governments to grant access to the land; once acquired, urban farmers must frequently fight to keep possession. This type of involvement in the political arena can help to empower people who might otherwise be intimidated by the city’s administrative machine. Meeting with success at a local level can cause them to realize that they can make their voices heard by those in power, and they may become more willing to take on larger projects with broader mandates and global consequences.

(Woodsworth 2000)

In the United States, community gardening is often seen as a form of ‘gateway activism’, in which experience gained through community gardening equips people with skills, networks and confidence to take on more ambitious projects (Sommers 1984 p. 98; Severson 1987; Ferguson 1999 p. 85; Woodsworth 2000; Buckingham 2003, Shepard 2009).

Some have argued that there are ideological implications in an emphasis on gardening-as-transformative or on community engagement-as-transformative. Jamison (1985) contrasts the language used to describe the impacts of community gardens by ‘collectivist’ community garden
movement organisations with that used by government agencies that provide funding to community garden projects. Jamison found that community garden movement organisations defined community gardening as ‘a collectivist activity, viewed gardening projects as alternative institutions, and considered urban gardeners as… participants in the movement’ (1985 p. 475). In contrast, government agencies understood community gardens as a self-help activity. They viewed community gardens as recreational facilities, and treated participants as ‘facility users or project clients’ (p. 476). These diverging understandings lead to different analyses of the impacts of community gardens.

Government agencies attributed the benefits of community gardens to individual participation in the ‘creative and therapeutic act of gardening’ (p. 476). While identifying a similar range of benefits (increased confidence and ‘self-worth’, neighbourhood improvement, community development, cooperation and democratic participation) community gardening movement organisations attributed these outcomes to involvement in collective action, including not only gardening, but also the wider range of tasks involved in establishing and sustaining a community garden (pp. 476 – 480). This interpretation was applied equally to gardens composed of individual plots, in which people were seen as working together to realise common goals. Access to a plot in a community garden was gained through involvement in the larger collective process of garden making. In Jameson’s analysis, attributing the benefits of community gardening to the ‘joys of gardening’ can be associated with an individualist perspective and a bureaucratic culture of governance, while attributing the benefits to involvement in collective action can be associated with collectivism and social movement forms of organisation. Taking this kind of analysis further than Jamison, Pudup (2008) argues that many government-initiated organised gardening projects are specifically designed as instruments of neoliberal governmentality. She asserts that such gardening projects provide spaces in which gardening puts individuals in charge of their own adjustment(s) to economic restructuring and social dislocation through self-help technologies centred on personal contact with nature.

(Pudup 2008 p. 1228)

Pudup, like Jamison, contrasts community garden projects associated with new urban social movements with government-sponsored programs which utilise organised gardening programs to produce neoliberal subjectivities and to transfer economic responsibility from the state to individuals and the voluntary sector. In Pudup’s view, projects drawing upon the ‘supposedly transformative power of gardening’ (2008 p. 1228) are increasingly being co-opted to further neoliberal ends by promising the liberation of ‘poor and socially and culturally marginalised’ (p. 1230) people through direct contact with nature. Thus she suggests that such projects deflect attention away from engaging with issues of poverty and social justice.

To some extent, different emphases on gardening and ‘community’ in Australia’s community gardens and in the wider academic debate reflect theoretical debates within broader environmental movements such as those between deep ecology and social ecology. Deep ecologists (Devall and Sessions 1985; Naess 1989) locate the origins of the ecological crisis in the ‘anthropocentric’ way
humans relate to the other-than-human world, in which humans are seen as separate from and ranked above other species. From a deep ecology perspective a shift in identity is required, with wider ecological systems integrated into an expanded sense of ‘self’ (Matthews 1991; Macy 2007). Strong affective connections with ‘nature’ and ‘place’ are seen as motivating and enabling environmental action (Seed, Macy, Flemming and Naess 1988). It is an approach to social change that foregrounds the cultivation of ecological literacy, as do many community garden activists. An appreciation of deep ecology can inform an understanding of the ways community gardeners describe gardening as environmentally significant because of its potential to strengthen connection to local place and ecological systems through embodied experience of working with soil, seasons, insects and plants. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 5, deep ecology advocates such as Joanna Macy (1983; 1998; 2007) have had a direct influence on a number of community gardening activists.

In contrast to deep ecology, a social ecology perspective (Biehl 1991; Light 1998; Bookchin 2005) locates the roots of environmental problems not within human-nature relations, but within social relations in human societies. In this perspective, ‘all ecological problems are social problems’ (Bookchin 1989 p. 24) with deep-seated relations of domination in human societies seen as the source of the ecological crisis. What is needed in order to address environmental issues is the elimination of hierarchy and oppression and the creation of just and participatory societies. Therefore the primary praxis of social ecology involves the creation of grassroots, participatory counter-institutions, from neighbourhood councils and community development initiatives to co-operatives, local exchange systems and community land trusts (Biehl 1991; Bookchin 1989, see also Callenbach 1981). A social ecology perspective sheds light on community garden activists’ efforts to create community commons, local food systems and other opportunities for direct, participatory involvement in civil society.

Two decades after a round of heated debates between deep and social ecologists (see Bookchin, Foreman and Chase 1991), it is clear that despite their differences, these two perspectives have considerable points of convergence, including shared focuses on bioregionalism, grassroots democracy, and soft technologies. Many in environmental movements integrate insights from both perspectives, and from others such as ecofeminism and critiques of growth economics and consumerism. Likewise, community garden activists can be seen as drawing on both of these traditions in its practice of gardening-in-community. While some of the garden organisers I interviewed drew more on discourses about the ‘magic of gardening’ and others more about gardening as a means of growing community, all were engaged in both community-building and gardening activity, and their commitment to both is evident in their choice to commit their energies to community gardening, rather than other forms of urban organic gardening—such as backyard sharing, edible sidewalks, or social enterprises in urban agriculture—or other forms of community building activity. By way of illustration we can compare Jamison’s (1985) descriptions of typical
garden designs resulting from collectivist and bureaucratic orientations. Gardens designed by government agencies emphasised clearly defined individual plots and contained little common area or social space, thereby shaping the experiences gardeners might have there. In contrast, movement initiated gardens contained individual plots in various forms and had well developed shared facilities with picnic tables, bulletin boards, tool sheds and compost bays. From Jamison’s description, the movement-designed gardens had much more in common with Australian community garden landscapes. Here, even the most ‘bureaucratically’ managed gardens, such as those managed by Cultivating Community on state-owned public housing land, devote substantial space to communal facilities and space for socialising, even when the demand for land for plots is high. Their purpose is clearly both ‘community’ and gardening, and community garden activists’ description of gardening as a transformative practice cannot be equated with those who view gardening as a means of social control. The analyses of Jamison and Pudup demonstrate the importance of being able to define community gardening clearly, so distinctions can be made between organised gardening programs run by government agencies, and community gardens.

CONCLUSION

Individuals become involved with community gardening for numerous reasons—to access space to garden, to obtain fresh organic produce, to make connections with other local people, for the simple pleasure of planting seeds and watching them grow. Community garden organisers frequently reiterate that any reason that a person wants to grow vegetables in a community garden bed is a legitimate one. For some, growing vegetables in a community garden plot is a form of collective social action. In this chapter, I have discussed some of the ways in which these community gardeners use gardening as a form of collective social action, and the ways in which community gardening intersects with other social movements, such as those concerned with food security and those concerned with the programming of urban space. Through the particular gardening practices used and advocated by community gardeners, links are made with organic and environmental ideologies. Engagement with issues such as food security enables community garden activists to use their gardening practices to address wider issues of sustainability and social justice. By staking a claim on urban space, community garden activists seek to transform understandings of what is possible in cities and in agrifood systems.

Gardening, and the production of organic vegetables in particular, always has a political element. Access to land—and therefore the ability to produce food and meet basic needs from one’s own labour—are fundamental political struggles, as massive movements like La Via Campesina (Desmarais 2007; Pimbert 2009) and the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers’ Movement (Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra or MST, see Branford and Rocha 2002; Wolford 2003) have demonstrated. But clearly, growing vegetables is not always a form of collective social action. As I have shown, the collective cultivation of fruit, herbs and vegetables in a community garden can be
seen as a way of engaging with the political, a practical and symbolic engagement with issues of climate change, waste, peak oil, citizen engagement, food security, and community space at a local level. But community gardening is not political action in the sense we are used to seeing. There is little emphasis on petitioning powerholders, little sign of conventional protest repertoires—at least not until gardens are under threat. Taking a piece of land and collectively transforming it to better reflect people's hopes and values is a political discourse and practice that isn’t reliant on traditional avenues of political process or access. It is a politics of example and creation. Just as Reclaim the Streets demands collaboratively produced public space by ‘going out and actually creating a collaboratively produced public space’ (Duncombe 2002a), community garden activists create what they want to see: cities full of food and the collaborative processes that create them, opening possibilities for participating in local, everyday forms of creation and participation, of politics. The question then becomes, how can we determine when a cultural performance such as vegetable gardening can be understood not only as political but as a form of collective social action—part of a social movement repertoire—and when it is better analysed as a form of leisure or food provisioning or a performance of individual environmental and social commitments.

In the conceptual definition of social movement tactics proposed by Rupp and Taylor (2003, see Chapter 3) cultural performances can be understood as part of a repertoire of collective action if they involve contestation, intentionality and collective identity. The political gardening praxis of some community gardeners falls well within these criteria. In terms of contestation, community garden activists are active in framing issues, negotiating meaning, and making claims in a number of areas. Operating primarily at a local level, community garden activists use their gardens to demonstrate the ways in which global issues—climate change, food security, the commodification of urban space—intersect with everyday life. The gardening performances that community gardeners deploy are used consciously and strategically to communicate and make claims, whether through adopting and displaying gardening practices that are counter to industrial agribusiness practices or by modelling practical strategies that can be replicated by both communities and government agencies to address food insecurity. A key element that makes community gardening distinct from other forms of urban organic food production is its collective nature. It is not only the case that community garden activists must work together to establish and sustain their garden projects, but also that they have shared values and aims, such as clear commitments to organics and community participation, which form the basis of a strengthening collective identity within the community gardening movement. Social movement repertoires can be seen as having internal, movement-building functions (such as the creation and maintenance of an oppositional identity and solidary ties) as well as engaging with external targets (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Roscigno and Dahaher 2001; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). The gardening practices used by community gardeners are concerned with this ‘internal’ function of collective identity formation as well as with addressing external aims. The following chapter considers
the ways community gardeners use gardening—and other strategies—to grow community both within the movement and beyond.
CHAPTER 7.
GROWING COMMUNITY

There are many facets to ‘community’ at Northey Street. Number one is that we’ve created a community here. The Farm is a bit like a community centre in that people drop in, there’s usually someone to talk to, you can get a good meal, a cup of tea. It’s not a conscious community development. It’s laidback and inclusive and it almost happens unconsciously. I think that’s the most basic level ... But the main community development that’s happening is within our organisation. I feel that I’m always developing as an individual here. We’re always pushing each other and challenging each other. We’re a fairly diverse group so there’s always someone coming up with a new idea, a new way of doing things. I really like that.

(Robert, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

‘Community’ is the core praxis of community gardeners—as important as gardening and often more so. While Australia’s community gardens have sometimes been described as a form of urban agriculture (see for example Elliott 1983; Gelsi 1999; Milne 2002), in practice community gardeners’ focus is often much more on the social aspects of collective gardening than on maximising horticultural production. A focus on community is common to all community gardens. However, the word community carries multiple meanings and is practiced in myriad ways by different people in different gardens. In the interview quoted from above, Robert described multiple aspects of Northey Street City Farm’s engagement with ideas and practices of ‘community’. Northey Street as an organisation is itself a community, and its members deeply value the open, supportive, non-hierarchical, challenging and productive relationships it is woven from. It is also an organisation with ‘community’ as a central external aim, whose members—despite Robert’s claim that community development happens ‘unconsciously’—I found to be actively engaged in theorising, practicing and reflecting on a distinct model of community development. The model is one that values inclusivity, nurtures grassroots leadership, and facilitates the acquisition and circulation of the practical skills necessary to participate effectively in a community organisation.
Although it is possible to observe community in action in locations like Northey Street, ‘community’ remains a slippery term, combining moral and social values, spatial relationships and collective identities and solidarities. It is a normative and aspirational terminology as well as (or perhaps more than) a descriptive one. Community is also a potent and resilient political symbol, one deployed across the political spectrum. However, many scholars are dismissive of the concept of community, finding it at best hackneyed and imprecise, at worst a means to disguise a reassertion of values and relationships that emphasize social conformity and homogeneity. On these grounds, Pudup (2008) advocates jettisoning the term ‘community’ from analysis of collective gardening projects. Excising the messy and multifarious language of community may be cleaner and more precise in an analytical sense but there is also a cost attached to this desire for precision. Disallowing usage of the term also erases from analysis the complex and messy ways in which community is actually used and understood. It also negates the possibility that marshalling the term ‘community’ may be a real resource for mobilisation and social change, not just a homogenising force or ‘a denial of the difference and fragmentation that exists within communities’ (Staeheli 2008 p. 7). Moreover, the language of community is one that permeates community garden activists’ descriptions of their work and their approaches to collective social action. While not dismissing the many critiques and cautions levelled at appeals to community, in a thesis beginning with the voices of grassroots community garden organisers, attending to—rather than dismissing—they ways they talked about, practiced and imagined community is at the centre of my approach.

Practices of community have not been strongly represented in analyses of environmental movement repertoires. Indeed, environment movements have been criticised for their limited or superficial engagement with notions of community. Kenny (1996), for example, argues that ‘greens’ appeal to romantic notions of small-scale, directly democratic communities in which co-operation between individuals and right relationships between people and non-human nature obviate political questions (Kenny 1996 p. 21 cites Naess 1989 as an example of this tendency). Environmental movements are thus seen as evading the need to engage with debates around ‘community’ and with issues of power and difference by focusing on relationships between people and ‘nature’ couched in vague appeals to liberal communitarianism or idealised traditional societies. Worse, greens are sometimes portrayed as prioritising the preservation of natural systems over democracy and social justice. It is feared that environmentalists value democracy and community only to the extent they are useful in achieving environmental goals, and that if shown to be more effective, misanthropic or authoritarian means would be embraced (Kenny 1996; Cannan 2000). While these critiques clearly apply more strongly to some parts of the environmentalist spectrum than others, the community gardening movement’s particular focus on ideas and practices of community as both means of achieving social change and

88 On the importance of reinstating community in response to the accounts of those ‘actively involved in social processes’ see Day and Murdoch (1993 p. 108); Staeheli (2008).
an inherently valuable goal is a significant departure from environmental movements’ traditional focus on the preservation of wild nature.

In the previous chapter, my focus was on relationships between people and land and the ways these are shaped through the practices of collective organic gardening to become repertoires of collective action. This chapter focuses on relationships among people, in the context not only of gardening but also the language and practices of community, and argues that community garden activists’ repertoire is shaped by their understandings and practices of ‘community’. I begin the chapter with a brief survey of academic literature about ‘community’ in community gardens, placing it in the context of wider debates about community and democracy. I respond to the absence of community gardeners’ voices in this literature by discussing some of the ways I have witnessed people in the Australian community gardening movement using the language of community and developing practices that embody their understandings. I begin by discussing community gardens as place-based communities, which not only exist within specific geographic localities, but are also animated by ideas of place and the local as sites of social action. Community garden activists’ accounts of ‘community’ are infused with the language of ‘inclusivity’, and it is an examination of ideas and practices of inclusion that I turn to next. From here, attention shifts to the ways that ‘community’ is mobilised towards goals of collective social action. I focus on three elements of community praxis as social action. Firstly, I look at community as a site in which relationships of care and mutual aid can be formed and nurtured, directly counter-acting the impacts of isolation and alienation and enabling new forms of co-operative social relations to emerge. Secondly, I explore intersections between community and ‘citizenship’, focusing on the ways in which community gardens cultivate both ‘good citizens’—primed to be productive members of society pursuing their goals through established democratic channels—and ‘oppositional citizens’—joining together with others in social movement forms of political praxis. Finally, I focus on the internal, movement-building aspects of community, which enable social change through processes of micromobilization, bringing people together in ‘free spaces’ in which shared analyses and solidary ties can be developed. Throughout the chapter, I attempt to balance the idea of community as a resource, a discourse that gardeners mobilize, and community as a practice, something that garden activists seek to enact in specific ways.

‘COMMUNITY’ IN LITERATURE ON COMMUNITY GARDENING

Ideas of community are analysed in numerous literatures and the vocabularies of ‘trust’ and ‘care’ are frequently evoked in response to a perceived ‘crisis’ of community in the face of the atomistic individualism of the neoliberal order. Community gardening is strongly associated with the creation of and maintenance of ‘community’ (see for example Armstrong 2000; Schukoske 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Shinew, Glover et al. 2004; Kingsley and Townsand 2006). However, in a body of literature focused on substantiating the benefits of community gardens, studies focus not on debates about ‘community’ but on assessing community gardens’ community building capacity in
terms compatible with the discourses of policy and governance. In these articles, ‘community’ is frequently associated with ‘social capital’, in which the presence of reciprocal supportive connections and personal attributes such as trust can be used as indicators of ‘community’ (see for example Hanna and Oh 2000; Schukoske 2000; Maxwell 2002; Glover 2004; Glover, Parry et al. 2005; Kingsley and Townsand 2006). By assessing community gardens in terms of social capital, scholars provide community gardeners with evidence that can be ‘measured and quantified’ in terms compatible with the dominant economic rationalist worldview (Cox 1995). Absent from these accounts is an engagement with debates over the complex and contested meanings of ‘community’ or of ‘social capital’ as an evaluative tool to measure community. They also fail to engage with the ways community gardeners themselves understand, mobilize and embody ideas of community in ways that overflow the bounds of policy discourse. Caffentiz (2010 p. 31) aptly describes social capital as ‘the commonism in capitalism’, a limited sense of community whose individualism makes it distinct from mutual solidarity, affinity and collectivity. Much of the emphasis in literature on social capital is on advocating for the development of social virtues like care and trust which are important particularly insofar as they produce good citizens with the skills and attributes to participate in democratic processes and therefore enable effective government (Putnam 1993; 1995; 2000; Fukuyama 2005).

Like writings on social capital, feminist literature on care focuses on the moral or ethical qualities (or deficits) of individuals. However the focus tends to be less on enabling effective governance and more on the need for humane, respectful social relations (Beasley and Bacchi 2007). As such, the care literature perhaps has more in common with community garden activists’ own perspectives than social capital analyses. Early care writings (Gilligan 1982; Held 1993) tended to have a limited focus on dyadic relationships between carer and cared for, with a particular focus on mothering. However, later theorising about care (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993; 1995) situated debates more firmly in community and considered the ethics of interdependence and ‘shared mutual reliance’ (Beasley and Bacchi 2007 p. 280) in ways beyond asymmetrical carer/cared-for relationships, attending to the relationships between care and power (Bacchi and Beasley 2004; Beasley and Bacchi 2007; Plumwood 2008). Care theorists also began to engage with environmental maintenance (Tronto 1993; Fisher and Tronto 1990) and more recently, have considered the role of care in agrifood systems (Wells and Gradwell 2001; Clarke, Barnett and Malpas 2008; Plumwood 2008; Cox 2010; Kneafsey, Holloway, Venn, Dowler, Cox and Tuomainen 2008; Dowler, Kneafsy, Cox and Holloway 2010). While other alternative food and agriculture practices have been analysed in terms of care ethics, as yet community gardens have rarely been viewed through this lens (Perkins and Lynn 2000; Schmelzkopf 2002; Plumwood 2008; Staheli 2008 touch on ethics of care in relation to community gardens).

Ethnographic publications have also lacked an account of community gardeners’ views of ‘community’. For example, although the idea of ‘creating community in the city’ is the focus of Landman’s (1993) ethnography of community gardens in Washington, D.C., the author does not
discuss community gardeners’ understandings of community, nor does she take a clear stance on her own use of the term. While she acknowledges the multivalency of community, implicit in Landman’s study is an understanding of community as primarily implying unmediated relationships in which people can become known to each other outside of major organising social roles regarding family and work (cf. Tönnies 2002 [1887]). Landman suggests that the combination of economic and social aspects in community gardens contributes to the development of ‘denser web[s] of relationships than urban roles usually do’ (p. 2), enabling participants to become known to each other in multiple dimensions. This study takes conflict—a sign of engaged relationships—as evidence of the presence of ‘community’, which is an interesting departure from the social capital-based studies, which tend to emphasise ‘harmony’, instead moving towards the less common agonistic emphasis typical of ‘radical democracy’ approaches to social interconnection (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Lummis 1996; Trend 1996). It is perhaps ironic to find rather more socially conformist understandings of community-as-homogeneity dominating within community garden scholarship, given garden activists’ own engagement with ideas of diversity and conflict, which are discussed below. Indeed, I would suggest that the rather uncritical acceptance of a social capital orientation within this literature is itself evidence of a lack of engagement with community gardeners’ self-assessments regarding collectivity.

Kurtz (1996; 2001) is one of few scholars to consider the meanings ‘community’ may have to those in the (United States) community gardening movement89. She sees community gardens as spaces where the meaning of ‘community’ is negotiated. Her empirical research suggests that individual garden projects embody varying understandings of ‘community’, and she makes particular distinction between locked gardens accessible primarily to an exclusive community of member-gardeners who hold keys, and unfenced gardens open all. Kurtz’s (2001) article draws attention to the ways understandings of community are manifest in the physical design of community gardens, and in turn the ways in which garden design shapes people’s experience of ‘community’.

**EMBODYING COMMUNITY**

As I argued in the previous chapter, community gardening is a highly embodied political praxis in which social and environmental commitments are translated into everyday practice. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate ideas and actions. As in other contexts, the word ‘community’ is used and enacted in multiple ways in Australian community gardens. In a descriptive register, community gardeners use ‘community’ as a short hand for the general ‘public’—for anything that is not business, government or family based. It is also used to refer to more bounded groups—the migrant

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89 In a discussion of the problematic nature of the idea of ‘community’ in discussing organised gardening programs, Pudup (2008) also infers that individual community gardeners may have their own version of ‘community’ that they seek to enact. She looks at the way community ‘can be invoked and even enforced as part of a strategy of moral reform’ (p. 1231) in prison and school gardens, but does not engage with the meanings of community in community gardens as such, as the term is used in this thesis.
community, the deaf community, the public housing community. Finally, community is used in encompassing spatial terms, to refer to residents of neighbourhoods and other geographical localities. Community garden activists harness these descriptive uses of ‘community’ as an ideological resource, using them to frame their projects in ways that claim legitimacy on the grounds of embodying ‘the community’ (Williams 1995 p. 140). Community garden organisers frame their gardens as manifestations of ‘community’, projects that emerge from ‘communities’ working together to meet collective needs and improve their neighbourhoods. As projects representing ‘community’ and existing to further ‘the public good’ community gardens are able to claim a moral high ground in disputes over land use and resources and can promote their gardens as assets of value to the ‘whole community’, regardless of the number of participants actually involved. Those opposing community gardens are effectively positioned as opposing the altruistic public good and acting out of narrow self-interest (Williams 1995; Martinez 2010). Community is also used in a more restricted sense, with reference to those with a shared collective identity or commitment to common goals, for example in relation to the community gardening community or the permaculture community. Thus community gardeners’ efforts to generate community have both external and internal targets, sometimes bringing together a broad range of people within a local neighbourhood, sometimes strengthening relationships among people with existing ties to a particular garden or the wider community gardening movement.

In a more normative register, ‘community’ is used by community garden activists in ways that speak to aspiration or yearning—as involving friendship, commitment, togetherness, responsibility, care, and mutual aid. Community in this sense also implies a set of practices, ways of doing things that are local, participatory, ‘grassroots’ and collective. In the following, I aim to tease out some of the meanings and practices of community in Australia’s community gardens. My particular focus is on community in its normative and aspirational sense—as part of a vision for ‘the good life’ rather than upon more straightforwardly descriptive usages, as this is of particular importance for the overall argument within the thesis regarding community gardens and social action. This focus on normative/aspirational meanings of community inevitably intersects with more directly strategic appeals to community as the local body politic, and to usages of community as a legitimating discourse. I begin by looking at the ways that community garden activists’ moral aspirations of community are embedded within communities of place.

**Communities of place**

Definitions of community frequently include reference to locality: ‘a group of people living together in one place’ (Oxford English Dictionary). Place is also central to discussions of community within

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90 There are community gardens in Australia in which participation is limited to people who meet particular criteria—residents of a local government area, participants in a particular health program, residents of a public housing estate. Therefore a more specific ‘community’ is often implied or addressed through these projects.
environmental movements, which often blur the boundaries between human and non-human communities, positioning both as co-inhabitants bound by the particularities of their biotic environment (Kenny 1996 p. 18). Particularly from deep ecology perspectives (Naess 1989), notions of self and community are deeply bound up with place. In keeping with both traditional and green focuses on spatial co-location in understandings of community, community gardens are communities of place. They inhabit specific geographic locations. They grow in particular neighbourhoods, surrounded by particular people and within particular (mostly urban) ecologies. While community garden activists may have networks that cross regional and national borders, unlike many environmental movements—whose headquarters may move around without significant disruption—community gardens exist firmly in place and have a specific focus on the local and the neighbourhood. For many community garden activists, inhabiting—and committing to—place is not only a necessary condition for growing a garden but an ethical imperative. As in wider agrifood movements, ‘local’ has become a powerful symbol of opposition to ‘globalised’ (and therefore alienated and unsustainable) systems of food production and distribution (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003 p. 64; Kneafsey 2010). In recent years, ‘place’-infused local food has increasingly been adopted as both a sign of protest and a practical alternative to alienated consumption. Community garden activists’ emphasis on the value of the local is in keeping with that of other contemporary ‘community food’ movements, in which it has at times carried with it the dangers of a reduced sphere of concern and the neglect of issues operating at an extra-local scale (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Born and Purcell 2006; Allen 2010; Kneafsey 2010).

Re-localisation and commitment to place also have a longer history within the community gardening movement and the wider environmental movement in connection with ideas like bioregionalism (Sale 1985; McGinnis 1999; Carr 2005) and deep ecology (Devall and Sessions 1985; Seed, Macy et al. 1988; Naess 1989, see previous chapter), in which the cultivation of proper relationships with particular cultural and ecological locations is seen as central to an ecological ethic and to understandings of community. Bioregionalism refers to both ‘a geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness—to a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place’ (Berg and Dasmann 1977). It therefore involves a combination of cultural and ecological knowledges of place, a vision for a community that lives within the physical limits of a bioregion, and a set of practices for integrating human settlements within local environments, which include agrifood strategies such as community gardens. Within the community gardening movement, the deep understanding of a particular place, cultivated through gardening, is seen as a basis for both environmental action (Donati, Cleary and Pike 2009, see previous chapter) and community commitment. Engagement with the local has both social and ecological significance.

Community garden activists focus their environmental activism on specific local communities, developing local systems of food production and environmental management, including projects like
redirecting waste from local restaurants and lawn mowing contractors into community composting facilities. Reflecting about Ellen Swallow Richards (Clarke 1973; Hynes 1985) who popularised the terms ‘ecology’ and ‘home economics’ Heller writes

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\begin{align*}
\text{[t]he ecology movement today should also be a ‘home ecology’ that expresses this love of nature through active care for social and ecological eco-communities. Swallow’s term ‘ecology’ comes from the Greek words ‘oikos’ and ‘logos’ or ‘the way of the house’. A true ‘oiko-logy’ dissolves the hierarchical separations between the privatised domestic realm of the home and the alienated public realm. As true ‘oiko-logists,’ we do not just care about our own private backyards and bodies. We also care for ‘the world home,’ in all of its social and ecological diversity.} \\
\text{Heller 1993 p. 234}
\end{align*}
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Thus ‘community’ is positioned as existing at the intersection of the public and the private as a necessary site for collective social action and care. Heller suggests that community gardens are a good example of the ways urban dwellers might effectively practice their love of nature through cooperation in community. The idea of environmentalism as entailing caring for ‘home’ (Somerville 2000)—a particular inhabited place—encompasses care for people as well as their non-human environments. It also raises questions of how the labour associated with such caring is distributed. In social terms, commitment to place enables the development of relationships among people. In neighbourhoods with a high turnover of residents it is difficult to establish strong bonds. Making a commitment to a particular geographical community motivates people to form relationships that embody qualities of care and social interconnection, and to focus their energies on local projects. As David puts it, ‘I’ll be here for a long time, so I might as well make it as good as I can’ (in interview).

Relationships to communities of place are strongly affected by gender, class and colonial status. Those with the least power are most at risk of losing control over their ability to remain in a home place or place of attachment (Plumwood 2000 p. 97). Despite these obstacles, community gardens facilitate connection to place and local community. In Melbourne’s public housing community gardens, tenants who have a community garden plot are less likely to relocate. The gardens have a stable core of gardeners with little turnover. ‘The act of planting things suggests that you’ll be around for a while’ (David, in interview). High-rise apartment dwellers that have a community garden plot get to know their neighbours, and develop a system of social support.

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91 See Pickerill (2008) for a discussion of inhabited country versus ‘wilderness’ in Australian environmentalist practice; see Plumwood (2008) for a critical perspective on community in place and country, and the politics of environmentalism as home-keeping.
There are many examples of people who through the community gardens have got to know their neighbours and people on their floor and that now talk to each other in the lift and look out for each other. There were two women who lived next-door to each other for six years, both of them living alone, terrified of being on the estate, wouldn’t go out at night. Then they got garden plots, not alongside each other but in the same area. They’d never spoken to each other—they’d seen each other but never initiated any conversation—but in the garden they struck up this conversation and now they’re really good mates, and the support they provide to each other is huge. Just to have someone there that’s right next-door provides them with a great amount of security that they didn’t have before. That has a huge effect on feeling good about where you’re living, your sense of place.

(Allison, CC, in interview)

For these community gardeners, a practice of community based in a specific geographical location is not just a consequence of the physical practice of gardening on a particular piece of land, but also represents a conscious and strategic choice to work at a neighbourhood level because of a commitment to the idea of caring for home-place. Cultivating connections among people within a place-based community is one of the key ways that community gardeners seek to enact ‘community’. This goal is furthered directly—by using community gardening as a means to increase knowledge of, respect for, and connection to cultural and biophysical life-places, and to identify, create, elaborate, and strengthen mutually supportive relationships among people in a geographic locality.

While place is important to community garden activists’ practice of community, the concept of ‘community’ gardeners evoke does not refer simply to people who are geographically co-located, but also to specific qualities of relationship that may be aspired to and encouraged within local neighbourhoods. I found that the frame many community gardeners used for describing the qualities of care, identification and commitment implied by this conception of community was ‘inclusivity’.

The language and practice of inclusion

There is a sense of including, welcoming people, which is what I think is what we’re about as much as the gardens.

(Judith, in interview, on Northey Street City Farm)

In the Australian community gardening movement, one of the words I have most often heard in relation to community is ‘inclusivity’. The language of inclusivity functions in a number of ways—to express appreciation for what is valued in experiences within community gardens, to frame goals about internal organisational cultures, and to position community gardens as central, rather than marginal, in their neighbourhoods by emphasising the involvement of diverse cross-sections of the community. Issues of inclusion and exclusion, homogeneity and difference have long been at the centre of debates about community. After all, the words ‘community’ and ‘garden’ both carry connotations of exclusivity. Indeed Young (1990) has argued that ‘those motivated by [community] will tend to suppress difference among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their… groups persons with whom they do not identify’ (p. 300). Kurtz (2001 p. 660) notes the origin of the word garden in the Indo-European root *gher* to enclose. Hoyles (1991 p. 1) writes that ‘enclosure is
essential to gardening, and this raises fundamental questions, such as who is doing the enclosing, who owns the land, and who is being kept out'. These questions are perhaps even more fundamental for community gardening, in which the cultivation of (a) community is as central as the cultivation of a garden.

The people I interviewed for this thesis actively reflected on and theorised about the politics of inclusion and difference. Having adopted a language celebrating inclusivity, they were confronted daily with the challenge of embodying this discourse. Jake at Northey Street City Farm talked about his organisation’s conscious efforts to welcome and include a diversity of people and to address barriers to participation. One of the potential barriers that Jake identified was the tyranny of ‘environmentally correct’ forms of behaviour, which he saw as being sometimes present in environmental movements. One of the ways ‘environmental correctness’ manifests is in food choices, with moral discourses about ‘good food’ and ‘ethical eating’ implying supposedly superior dietary practices that are often promoted with an evangelical zeal (see Guthman 2008a; 2008b). In Jake’s account, Northey Street was committed to creating a space divorced from these prescriptions, where adhering to a diet of local, organic, ‘Slow’ food is not a prerequisite for participation.

If you want to bring your McDonald’s to eat here, nobody’s going to tell you that you can’t. Because as soon as we do that the people who eat McDonald’s will never come here ... In a kind of twisted way, my smoking or swearing is comforting to some people, a first open gate when they walk in with their McDonald’s pack. We strive to be open with no fence or barrier. Same for others who might be vegan, non-smoking, yoga freaks or something—they also feel comfortable to come here. A diversity. We can’t be about bottling ourselves off.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

In this way, Jake and other community garden organisers recognised that the shared values, ideology and daily praxis that brought some people together as part of a community gardening movement were also potential barriers to the involvement of others. There is some disjunction here between, on one hand, community garden sites as community commons and neighbourhood resources, in which anyone might participate in a number of different ways—attending a playgroup or a poetry reading, growing plants of her own choosing in a leased plot—and, on the other hand, community gardens as the physical manifestation of a community gardening movement, with significantly shared culture, aims and identity. A similar dilemma has been noted in the ‘direct action movement’, in which community building also plays an important role. Epstein (1991) has argued that the ‘alternative’ language and cultural practices of the direct action movement—including adherence to lengthy consensus processes and use of ‘pagan’ rituals—are ‘so foreign to mainstream... culture that it can only alienate people from the Left’. (1991 p. 343). The approach of community garden activists like Jake to the apparent paradox of building internal movement community and building relationships with the wider community was a self-conscious and reflexive stance in relation to movement identity, and a purposeful de-emphasis on the differentiations between internal movement culture and other norms. Community, then, works to destabilise movement identity, bringing gardeners face to face
with multiplicity and differences. Community functions not as a place of refuge in sameness, but as a place where identity is challenged and reconstructed (Phelan 1996 p. 241).

Like the women’s health centres created by the feminist movement, community gardens seek to create practices and institutions that address the needs of broad local communities, rather than seeking only to meet the needs of those who are members of the movement. As ‘sustenance institutions’ (Hunter 2006 p. 24), community gardens can be seen as an externally-focused political strategy—to demonstrate communities working together to effectively meet their own collective needs—rather than as merely part of a movement-building strategy. As such, community initiatives were seen by some community garden activists as requiring practical and skilled participants in order to effectively meet their goals and offer practical support to their members and the wider community.

I think that it’s really important to have skilled people in communities. It’s the way that they actually get to work. This is a reaction to many years of the notion that communities are soft places… People shouldn’t go into communities thinking that this is going to be rosy. It’s not a lovey dovey thing. It’s an action of people with good intent who have the skills to make it happen. Good intent isn’t enough.

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Community in this sense suggests a self-reliant social group, people who work together to address mutual needs and visions without the intervention or sponsorship of the state or the market. In order to create functioning communities that can successfully contribute to meeting the needs of their constituents and the wider community, sharing the skills of working effectively in community was central to these community gardeners’ work, and to their approach to social change. However, as in other movement-produced spaces, there can be a tension between creating an inclusive ‘public point of interaction between worlds’—in which McDonald’s packs might be welcome—and reaffirming ‘sub/counter cultural choices/identities’ (Pusey 2010 p. 187) in which personal food choices such as commitments to local and organic have considerable political significance.

In addition to subcultural and ideological barriers, Northey Street gardeners’ thinking about inclusivity also involved identifying and addressing practical and cultural barriers to participation. For example the Farm aims to make its educational activities accessible to all members of the community. This is achieved by offering concession pricing as well as extra support for students with language, literacy or numeracy issues, for example, or disabilities that could affect their participation.

(NSCF 2008 p. 13)

It has also entailed identifying particular groups of people whose needs could be better attended to, such as newly arrived migrants (who were invited to participate in a ‘Food, Family, Culture’ program which is discussed in Chapter 8) and people with disabilities. Some of the early discussions in the development of Northey Street City Farm focused on the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive space, and the particular importance of welcoming and enabling the participation of people with physical and intellectual disabilities.
When we were writing our objectives, we all agreed that inclusivity was important. Supporting people with disabilities is in our objectives in our constitution…. At times it’s been hard, we’ve had a few people who have caused a bit of problems, and at times we’ve probably been fairly tokenistic in our commitment to it—it waxes and wains a bit. I think it has been a positive feature. We've never had great long policy debates about how we do it, it’s just sort of happened. Probably the peak of it was when a group up the road called HANDS—they’re people with Down syndrome and moderate intellectual handicaps and some physical disabilities—used to come down twice a week and do workshops and just hang out. They just felt comfortable here.

(Robert, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

In the United States community gardening movement, I have observed considerable discussion about ways to prevent rough sleepers staying in gardens, amid concerns that gardens would be damaged and an inhospitable or threatening social environment created. At Northey Street City Farm, a culture of welcome and inclusiveness has also extended to people experiencing homelessness. During my time at Northey Street, a number of people were sleeping at the Farm and were welcomed as part of the Farm community. They had become an after-hours site crew, protecting the grounds from vandalism and dangerous activities. One of the men was registered as an official volunteer for his night-time contributions. In return for helping to care for the Farm, the night-shift received a pleasant place to sleep out, with toilets, a partially accessible kitchen, a rocket stove for cooking on, and places for comfort fires. As with anyone else who was on site when the lunch bell rang, there was a free meal available in the middle of the day. Some people stored sleeping bags and other belongings in lockers originally designed for staff and volunteers. Upon arriving at the Farm early in the morning, the smoke from the evening comfort fires still hovered over the kitchen gardens, and the night and day shifts greeted each other over cups of tea and coffee before heading into their various daytime activities.

While Northey Street is perhaps unique in the extent of its engagement with ideas and practices of inclusivity, a desire to offer a welcome to all was common to most of the community gardens I visited during my research. This intention, however, was tempered by the practicalities of maintaining a community facility in which gardens and physical infrastructure are to be taken care of and where people can gather without being subjected to undue levels of ‘antisocial behaviour’. In keeping with this, Northey Street City Farm reserves the right to request people to leave and to revoke membership if a person’s ‘behaviour is deemed to be of risk to property or the wellbeing of others’ (NSCF 2008 p. 11). In her research on community gardens in New York, Staeheli (2008) found that some gardeners explicitly argued that they ‘needed to exclude some people in order to build a safe place in which members of marginalized communities could develop as citizens’ (p. 12). This included not only disbaring those who vandalised the gardens or otherwise violated norms and rules, but also extended to ambivalence about the involvement of middle-class white people from other parts of town in gardens in low-income neighbourhoods. The aim of building radically democratic community gardens was seen as necessitating transitional practices of exclusion in order to create spaces in which marginalised people could come together to develop their own political and social
agendas. Staeheli argues that the ‘soft, comforting’ language of care and community can ‘shroud the hard realities of inclusion and exclusion’ (p. 13). Nevertheless, I have not witnessed any community gardeners advocating for situations in which explicit ‘exclusion’ is a preferred option, even if less formal or even inadvertent modes of exclusion may be present. It is common to hear community gardeners recommending that the best strategy to deal with potential vandals, for example, is to find ways to ‘engage’ them in the garden through projects like graffiti murals, rather than by building higher fences to keep them out. However, on a small number of occasions, I have observed community gardeners resorting to banning a person from their garden. This has taken place following ongoing attempts at mediation and in response to serious breeches, such as threatened or actual violence against other gardeners. Rather than seeing this as a necessity, the gardeners I spoke with saw this as a failure on their part, a lack of the skills necessary to reach a conclusion that could preserve their aims of inclusivity. The implication was that with enough training in conflict resolution and mediation, sufficient time, and adequate funding for translators, it would be possible to include any interested people in the garden community.

One mechanism used commonly in Australian community gardens in order to reach a balance between an open armed welcome to all and the preservation of shared norms of acceptable ‘community-oriented’ behaviour is the ‘Gardeners’ Agreement’. In many community gardens, a person becoming a member or leasing a garden plot is required to sign such an agreement. These can include both practical considerations—not planting trees that overshadow neighbouring plots, refraining from the use of non-organic biocides, helping to maintain shared areas—and normative ones, such as ‘plot holders are to conduct themselves in a manner… which promotes a spirit of harmony, fair-mindedness and goodwill amongst garden members’ (Canberra Organic Growers Society 2010). These agreements provide a mechanism for the self-selection of participants who are willing to agree to shared guidelines, and thus both temper and enable the gardeners’ aims of boundless inclusivity.

An important aspect of community garden activists’ praxis of inclusivity was the avoidance of practices that were seen as isolationist. This was most clearly articulated in relation to ‘intentional communities’. In interviews and other conversations, a number of community garden activists compared their approach to building community as a strategy for achieving social change with that of intentional communities. Often associated with the ‘alternatives movement’ of the 1970s, intentional communities include urban and rural residential land sharing communities such as communes, ecovillages, cohousing projects, kibbutzim, and co-operatives in which members practice varying degrees of communality (Munro-Clark 1986; Metcalf 1995; Brown 2002). I was interested to discover that many of the people I interviewed during my research, and a number of other community gardeners I spoke with had connections with intentional communities. Nine of the 20 people with whom I conducted formal interviews mentioned having lived in or formed strong ties with an
intentional community, commune or ecovillage. They tended to see their involvement with community gardening as a continuation of the values that attracted them to intentional communities, but also as having important differences. On a personal level, some found that community gardens fulfilled the same needs met by intentional communities, such as access to green and cultivatable land and social connectedness. Several community gardeners described intentional communities as places that had contributed to their personal growth and skills development, and which had supported their other forms of activism. However, those who had moved from involvement with intentional communities to involvement with community gardening also felt that there were important differences between the two. Some felt that community gardens were more inclusive as they could involve more people and enable interaction across greater differences than intentional communities, in which people often have shared ideological and demographic characteristics. The community gardeners who discussed intentional communities had a desire to develop community not only among ‘like minded’ others, but also with a broader cross-section of people. In this way, these garden activists suggested a model of community in which homogeneity and conformity are explicitly rejected and difference—including ongoing conflict—is embraced. There was also a concern that intentional communities had limited impact beyond their own members, and that—particularly in their rural form—they were motivated by a desire to withdraw from the problems associated with urban environments rather than to seek collective responses to them. Community gardening was seen as a way of developing strong and supportive community ties within the city and within mainstream society.

I think it’s good to stay in the city and be part of the solution rather than going that other way, which is to try to divorce yourself from the problem—and I don’t think that it is possible to do that. I don’t think you can escape it. And then there’s working with people. If your philosophy is to separate yourself and isolate yourself to the nth degree, you end up in a little hilltop fort with enemies all around you. It’s not a good philosophy. It’s good to try and work with people.

(Tom, NSCF, in interview)

Community then, implies here not only meeting one’s own needs for sociality and support, but a high degree of commitment to others, including those with substantively different beliefs and values. People who had lived in rural intentional communities expressed concerns about their environmental impacts, with some communards describing making frequent car trips to the city and living on precious bush blocks without adequate knowledge of environmental management. Community gardens were seen as a way to avoid both types of concern about intentional community, while furthering people’s commitment to developing skilful, mutually supportive community networks and contributing to urban food production and sustainability. It is important to note however, that not all intentional communities exist in rural areas, and not all have an escapist approach (Metcalf 1995). Community garden activists also shared experiences of urban and activist intentional communities.

92 People at many community gardens I visited commented that the gardens felt like idealised rural communities with ‘country hospitality’ and close ties. This romantic ideal of community was something that some community gardeners wished to cultivate and build upon, with varying degrees of reflection about the less ideal aspects of traditional rural communities.
that supported and enabled social movement action. However even these saw community gardens as a more ‘inclusive’ way of growing community than intentional communities. We can perhaps understand community gardens not only as inclusive, but as building a different democratic polity, one which is based on an understanding of our ‘interconnected mutually reliant flesh’ (Beasley and Bacchi 2007 p. 293) and of the need to find ways to work within the heterogeneity of contemporary society (see also Mouffe 2004).

The language of inclusion used so commonly by the community gardeners I met during my research is not unproblematic. Practices of inclusion do not necessarily challenge structures of domination and can be colonising in their desire to ‘include’ the margins without destabilising or questioning the centre (Dhaliwal 1996 p. 43 – 44). The inclusionary impulse implies a desire to envelop all into itself, without necessarily considering or transforming to meet the desires of the other. One of the most widely employed models for considering issues of difference in democratic communities is radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Lummis 1996; Trend 1996), an expanded version of participatory democracy that seeks to make visible and challenge structural inequities, and counter oppressive power relations through an embrace of difference, dissent and conflict. Radical democracy is often positioned as at odds with liberal models of deliberative democracy (Rawls 1971; Habermas 1989; 2002; Fischer 2006) in which citizens work towards a common view through procedures of rational debate and deliberation. In the latter approach it is argued that by creating spaces and processes in which people can engage in free and equal collective deliberation shared interests will be identified and accepted by those effected by issues under consideration (Benhabib 1996). In contrast, radical democracy does not imagine a public sphere in which power relations have been erased and people can participate in ‘free and equal’ deliberation, but rather acknowledges the constitutive impact of power on social relations and the irreducible differences—and attendant antagonisms—within a pluralist society (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Advocates of radical democracy critique the rationalist bias of deliberative democracy and argue that it can legitimise neoliberal rationalities and licence hierarchical power structures (see for example Pickard 2006). Radical democracy proponents advocate ‘discarding the dangerous dream of a perfect consensus, of a harmonious collective will, and accepting the permanence of conflicts and antagonisms’ (Mouffe 1996 p. 20). This approach resonates to some extent with the practices of community advocated by some of the community garden activists I met during my research. A number of people from both Northey Street and Cultivating Community expressed a strong desire to learn how to ‘do’ conflict better and to resist avoiding differences. I was struck by the openness with which these community garden organisers discussed and reflected upon conflicts within their organisations and their commitment to exploring and working through differences rather than avoiding or suppressing conflict. However those involved repeatedly expressed a desire to improve their practices of working with conflict, and several felt that their organisations didn’t deal with conflict as well as they ‘should’.
There’s been conflict between various people. That’s just normal. We should figure out how to enjoy our conflicts as well ... One of the things we need to do as a culture, as a society, is learn how to deal with conflict really well, so it becomes normal, a positive, instead of shrinking and being scared of it.

(Iain, in interview)

However, rather than eschewing the ‘dream of consensus’, many community garden groups—including Northey Street City Farm and, to a lesser extent, the Australian City Farms Community Gardens Network—embrace and advocate for consensus decision-making processes (Lakey 1973; Butler and Rothstein 1987; Graeber 2009) as a means to work with a diversity of interests and perspectives. While formal consensus processes require a substantial degree of pre-existing agreement on the appropriate procedures for coming to decisions, they enable people who, it is assumed, have substantially different perspectives, to decide on ways to act together in spite of—or enhanced by—their differences. Consensus, proponents argue, is ‘not just a way of making decisions ... it’s a way for people to deal with each other that puts the emphasis on mutual respect and creativity, and which tries to make sure no one is able to impose their will on others and that all voices can be heard’ (activist quoted in Graeber 2009 p. 303). As such, it is concerned with the maintenance of relationships and with non-hierarchical ways of organising as much as, if not more than, coming to good decisions. With its procedures for enabling multiple voices to be heard, and for registering degrees of dissent, formal consensus processes provide a mechanism for combining radical democracy’s commitment to allowing conflict and difference with a means to come to decisions on collective actions that everyone involved can live with. Formal consensus processes have been critiqued as silencing ‘dissensus’, leading to ‘lowest common denominator’ mediocrity (Bookchin 1995) and creating informal elites (Freeman 1972). They have at times become fetishised beyond their actual utility in achieving intended aims (Cornell 2009). While these failures of consensus are often attributed by activists to a lack of understanding of a process ‘that is neither intuitive nor in tune with much of Western socialisation’ (Pickard 2006 p. 32), they can be serious flaws in actually practiced (rather than ideal) consensus processes. Interestingly, formal consensus decision-making processes, in which dissent can be registered without derailing the process, have been seen by some as examples of radical democracy in action (Pickard 2006).

Inclusive and participatory community is by no means a straightforward exercise. Nevertheless, a crucial aspect of such conceptions of community amongst community garden activists is associated with a culture of welcome, in which great importance is attributed to social interaction.

It’s time, the time that people take with each conversation. People stop and engage, see that conversation out and move on. There are days where there’s busy stuff happening and people have to move on, in which case there’s an incredible heart-felt apology that you do have to cut that lunch or conversation short. That happens. But as a general rule, people give you the time of day. That’s a very tangible impression.

(Ellis, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)
In the Australian community gardens I visited, ‘community’, as type of sociality, was not seen as flowing inevitably from the opportunity for unmediated social interactions\(^93\), nor from the creation of spaces and forms of organisation that aim to be inclusive, but from the conscious—and difficult—work of facilitating, nurturing and encouraging relationships of friendship and care.

One thing I know for sure is that these efforts to create community and live in community are not easy. It’s not the easy way to go. Like finding the courage to listen, to grow, to speak your truth, for us to admit that the easy path is not always the best path. But if you want to do good things in the world and have a great life then sometimes when it’s a little bit harder it’s actually a bit juicier, there’s substance, rather than it being thin or shallow and easy flowing.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

The specific practices that turn opportunities for face-to-face interaction into opportunities for growing community range from microstrategies like the offer of a cup of tea or a garden tour extended to passers-by, to planned community development interventions.

The simple gestures, even sometimes ones that seem insignificant, are often the ones that mean the most in creating affective community. Not that they are glorious tasks by any means—asking how someone is doing, taking an extra five minutes to work out what’s bothering someone or why they’re pre-occupied—but because of this it is easy to overlook how important they really are ... all too often we fail to appreciate the on-going work of social reproduction and maintaining community that these acts entail.

(Shukaitis 2009 p. 142)

For Cultivating Community’s community garden support workers, regular community development initiatives included organising bus trips to other gardens and places of interest to plot holders, and frequent barbeques with culturally appropriate food and translator-assisted opportunities to discuss activities at the gardens. Practical projects arising from the gardens often have a community building component. A proposal to introduce chickens to one of Cultivating Community’s gardens necessitated the formation of a chicken collective, with translators called in to aid initial planning and visits to a well-established chicken collective at another garden. The group of gardeners was successful in creating space for chickens in the garden and designing a system to manage their care, and also deepened relationships within the garden and connections with other community projects.

For those I interviewed, community also implied a high degree of responsibility and practical care. I discovered that many community garden organisers were aware that for some gardeners, they were their only social contacts, so people looked out for gardeners who were elderly, for example, and checked up on them if they didn’t see them for a few days. When the house of one of Northey Street’s regular volunteers was destroyed by fire, another household of Northey Street gardeners invited him, his partner and three children to live at their home. Many volunteers and workers at the Farm contributed to organising a benefit dinner for the family, as well as helping to gather donations of furniture, kitchen equipment, and in particular, things to help the family ‘make a house into a

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\(^93\) The hope that people having opportunities for unmediated social relations, getting to know each other, will create ‘community’ has been critiqued by some. Young (1990) argued that this idea ‘fails to see that alienation and violence are not only a function of the mediation of social relations but also can and do exist in face-to-face relations’.
home’. The wider Northey Street community was mobilised, including inactive members, stall holders at the farmers’ market, and nearby businesses and artists. In this sense, the ‘community’ aspired to and embodied by community gardeners may be understood as ‘a web of relationships defined by a significant level of mutual care and commitment’ (Wong 1998).

**RELATING DIFFERENTLY TO ONE ANOTHER**

The state is a relationship between human beings, a way by which people relate to one another; and one destroys it by entering into other relationships, by behaving differently to one another.

(Staeheli 2003 p. 816)

Relating as equals serves as a gentle form of direct action—engaging directly with others to address oppressions rather than through representation, elected or imagined.

(Heckert 2010a p. 404)

For many of the community garden activists I met during my research, the flourishing of ‘community’ represented both a means and an end. Interpersonal relationships of care, commitment, equality, mutuality and joy were seen as directly counter-acting the impacts of isolation and alienation, and as enabling new forms of co-operative social relations to emerge. These were aims that did not require legislative change, nor the patronage of power holders, but could be enacted directly and immediately, with tangible impacts on the lives of those involved. Community garden activists seek to effect change by making community gardening an everyday practice—the practice of gardening in community is not a campaign with a projected end, but an ongoing intervention into daily life. ‘Community’, for these community gardeners is therefore an aim of itself, not simply a legitimating discourse, a means of movement building, or a site of political action.

Many late 20th century movements—from queers to Sandinistas—were characterised by ‘the continuing appeal of community as a vision of human relations that resists the advance of the modern state’ (Phelan 1996 p. 235). However the idea that ‘community’ can be a place of refuge from the market and the state is frequently dismissed as naïve or romantic. Even within community development literature, community building is frequently seen as a tactic—a way of bringing people together in order to engage in political action—rather than an inherently valuable aim. However, within the anarchist tradition, the idea of community building—as political praxis has been theorised in considerable depth, and this analysis is useful in understanding community garden activists’ approach to ‘community’ as both practice and aim of social change. If, as Landauer, the German anarchist theorist argues, the state (and we might add other forms of systemic relations of power) is not simply an institution but a pattern of relationships, ‘present and premised in the

94 This perspective on the significance of community building has been applied to the role of community gardeners’ efforts, and is discussed below.

95 This understanding of ‘community’ also intersects with feminist work on ethics of care, in which some have argued that social justice can be achieved through the practices of care in community (Staeheli 2003 p. 816).
minutiae of our everyday lives’ (Osterweil and Chesters 2007 pp. 261) then the question of how to transform it is bound up with the ways we relate to each other. Within the anarchist tradition, co-creating ‘different’ interpersonal relationships—consciously and strategically uncovering, creating, and elaborating instances of mutual aid, solidarity, and care—can be seen as a form of direct political action (Heckert 2010a, 2010b forthcoming). While I have found it rare to meet Australian community garden activists who describe their involvement in terms of anarchism, or of opposition to the state per se, the idea that change can be achieved through ‘entering into other relationships, by behaving differently to one another’ (Landauer 1910) is prevalent. The increasing number of anarchists and other radicals who advocate community gardening recognize in it the ‘anarchist method’ (Ward 1973 p. 231) of developing relationships of voluntary co-operation and mutual aid through freely organised direct action in the here-and-now (Goodway 2006 p. 317). In this way, community gardening shares a political logic with co-operatives, local currencies, de-schooling, squatters’ movements, self-build initiatives, and other community organisations that exist alongside the state, within, against and beyond the present condition (Ward 1973 p. 231; Hardt and Negri 2009). These counter-organisations provide direct benefits in the present, whilst prefiguring a different kind of social order (Gordon 2006; 2008, see Chapter 9). They are examples of Landauer’s argument that anarchism is not the ‘founding of something new, but the actualization and reconstitution of something that has always been present—of Community, which exists alongside the State, albeit buried and laid waste’ (quoted in Buber 1996 p. 46).

Affinity groups, community groups, nonviolent direct action… [and] the development of alternatives—squats, food coops, alternative housing, etc—are places where we can contract other relationships and behave differently, not with the aim of becoming part of the state, but to dissolve this form of organising human relationships with is based on (structural) violence, and which creates violence—within society and globally.

(Speck 2006 p. 8, italics in original)

In addition to being of value in itself, community is also seen by community gardeners as a means to wider political engagement.

COMMUNITY AND CITIZENSHIP

Without a space for difference of opinions, thoughts, or dreams, democratic culture only recedes. Without some sort of local community space where citizens can act together, there is little room for critical consideration of community issues. Without a space where people can share common interests, pleasures, and concerns, it is difficult to imagine citizens engaging in political participation… Access to space for dialogue is fundamental for democracy to thrive.

(Shepard 2009 p. 273)

Community gardens provide neutral soil for people to meet and interact. While Shepard (above) sees community gardens as enabling a radically democratic counter-public, they are also spaces where more conformist forms of citizenship are cultivated. They are spaces where people are nurtured to develop commitment, trust and responsibility—‘habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness, as well as the practical skills necessary to partake in public life’ (Putnam 2000 p. 338). These are the civic
virtues extolled by the social capital theorists discussed at the beginning of this chapter. These virtues in turn can lead to becoming part of an active and engaged citizenry (Staeheli 2003 p. 818), in which citizenship is an ‘activity or a practice, and not simply a status’ (Oldfield 1998 p. 79). Along these lines, Glover, Shinew and Parry (2005) investigated links between community gardening and democracy via ‘civic culture’. They argue that community gardens provide ‘social infrastructure’ for relationships to be forged, debates to be conducted, ideas to be developed and skills to be acquired, thus enabling people to participate in democratic processes. Through experiences in community gardens, Glover and his colleagues contend, people gain a sense of efficacy, build trust, and develop their abilities to respond to conflict, as well as becoming informed about local issues. By means of ‘being brought into community’ (Staeheli 2008; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1968) via community gardens, people are groomed to become ‘good citizens’: informed, capable, and oriented to pursue their interests through accepted channels. In this way, ‘community’ in general, and community gardens in particular, can be seen as a point of mediation between the state and individuals. This raises the idea of ‘community’ as a technology of governmentality, reconstructing citizens as ‘moral subjects’ that serve the interests of the capital and the state (Pudup 2008; Rose 2001). There are however a number of other ways of conceptualising the relationship between ‘community’ and ‘citizenship’. In the following, I examine four approaches for their relevance to understanding the practice of community gardening in Australia: firstly the North American community organising tradition, secondly social action-based community development approaches, thirdly, the idea of ‘third spaces’, and finally, analyses of ‘community’ as a mechanism of governmentality.

One way of conceptualising community building in relation to citizenship comes through the North American community organising tradition (see for example Alinsky 1946; 1971; Bobo, Kendall and Max 1991; Frost 2005). In the United States, it has been argued that the community garden movement builds on and is influenced by traditions of community organising (Shepard 2002). The gardens bring people together into a collective that can act on shared interests. They offer a neighbourhood-based politics that touches people directly, as distinct from the more distant politics of state and national government. Like other community organising initiatives, community gardens are created as long-term organisations with capacity to have direct effect on people’s lives, not just organisations formed to protest/lobby for particular changes on an ad hoc basis. A number of US commentators note the role that community gardens play in bringing people together to take collective action on issues beyond the creation of a garden, such as access to affordable housing, education and recreation programs for young people, and enrolling people to vote in elections.

Interestingly, in another study which considered community gardens as both ‘third places’ and sites for the generation of social capital, Glover (2004), found that the distribution of social capital within a community garden was not equally distributed, and rather than being commensurate with effort, the distribution social capital benefits reflected and reinforced a wider context of inequality and oppression. This is a rare example of a study that finds a community garden lacking in its ability to generate and circulate social capital for social benefit.
(Sommers 1984; Severson 1987; Woodsworth 2000; Buckingham 2003, Shepard 2009). While Australian community gardens also provide a forum for people to come together to develop skills, form supportive ties and collaborate on addressing shared issues, I have found that most of the collective efforts of community gardeners are focused on the creation, maintenance, and growth of the gardens themselves, rather than addressing other matters. While people seek to address a number of issues through their community gardening activism—social isolation, poverty, racism, food access, mental health, recovery from abuse, urban green space preservation, the creation of community commons, and so on—these agendas are carried out through community gardening, rather than by using community gardening as a means of mobilizing people to take other action, such as protests and petitions. An exception to this is in issues related to food access and sustainable food production, in which community gardens have provided a springboard for people to organise a number of initiatives beyond the garden gate, including farmers’ markets, produce exchanges, and not-for-profit food markets, as well as engaging in policy-focused initiatives.

There are numerous models of ‘community development’ (in the Australian sense97, see for example Kenny 1994; 1996; Ife 2002) beyond the US community organising tradition, and much theorisation about the role of community building as a social change strategy (see for example Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1968; Community Development Project 1977; Corkey and Craig 1978; Withorn 1984; Thorpe and Petruchinia 1985; Epstein 1991; Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Shepard 2002; 2009). Many of the community garden activists who I interviewed for this thesis were familiar with writing about community development, community work and social change, and several reflected on their own practice in relationship to it. Some of the community garden organisers that I spoke with saw their community building practice as quite distinct from professional practices of ‘community development’, which were seen as being a form of social work98. An uneasiness with social work practice was expressed by several organisers I interviewed, with the non-hierarchical, mutually supportive relationships they aspired to contrasted with the client/professional relationships they felt were engendered in social work-based community development practice. Distancing their own practice from professionalised community development also reflected a Do-it-Yourself orientation, with an attendant valuing of participation and action learning over professionalism, and local knowledge over state and corporate expertise. Gardeners involved with some of the health or community worker supported community gardens I visited in other states commented on the difficulties of negotiating collaborative management of gardens in a group involving paid community

97 In the United States, ‘community development’ has become strongly associated with community economic development models, and with initiatives such as Community Development Corporations with primarily service provision roles, particularly in social housing. While such approaches have occasionally been advocated for in Australia (see for example National Advisory Group on Local Employment Initiatives 1987), community development in this country is more strongly associated with a social action model, which emphasises bringing people together to work collectively to improve their situation.

98 See for example Mendes (2009). In Australia, many people employed as community development workers have a degree in social work, or are employed in social work oriented organisations.
workers and unpaid community members. Cultivating Community workers, whose position assisting public housing community gardens situated them in a similar position to professional community development practitioners, were more likely to express an affinity with professional community development practices than were gardeners at Northey Street.

Some Australian community gardeners (following Grayson 2007a; 2007b; 2008b) have promoted community gardens as examples of what Oldenberg (1989; 2001) has termed ‘third places’: public spaces conducive to convivial social interaction and informal gatherings outside the realms of home and work (see Glover 2004 on US community gardens as social capital-generating third spaces; Caggiano 2010 p. 1217 on Parisian community gardens as third spaces). Third places, Oldenberg—like Shepard, above—argues, are essential not only to community building, but also to democracy. Following a similar process to that set out by Staeheli (2008) and Putnam (2000) above, third places enable the cultivation of ‘civic virtues’, and enable people to develop the networks and competencies necessary to acting as ‘good citizens’. The spaces community gardeners create amply fulfil the criteria seen to be necessary for effective third spaces—they are open and participatory, there is conscious effort to be welcoming and inclusive of all comers, and the physical space adapts to the needs and desires of those present. United States community gardens have been analysed as places that create ‘democratic communities’ (Oldenberg 1989). By creating venues for community engagement and participation, community gardens bring people together in ways that enable learning—about the workings of power, about local issues, about ways to effect change (see for example Carlsson 2008; Shepard 2009). Through practices of dialogue, mutual recognition and respect, ‘third places’ bring people whose perspectives and experiences would otherwise go unheard into active citizenship enabling them to find political voice (Kemmis 1990; Kaplan 1997; Oldenberg 1989; White 2000; Staeheli 2008).

A number of commentators have seen the role that community gardens are asked to play in cultivating citizenship as implicating them in the processes of neoliberal governmentality. Debates over the role of ‘community’ inevitably intersect with heated arguments about the ways social responsibility is shared between states and public agencies on one hand, and ‘communities’ and individuals on the other (Staeheli 2003; Silk 1999). In a newspaper article written during the Howard government, Morton (2000 p. 10 quoted in Gibson and Cameron 2001) wrote that the ‘C-word is the camouflage behind which government has conducted a massive withdrawal from society’ in terms of its social and economic responsibilities. At the same time, the Howard government promoted conservative, moralistic ‘community values’ directed at people’s private lives. As Clarke (1996) writes, ‘what from one angle can be viewed as the diminution of the state’s role can be seen from another as the extension of state power, but through new and unfamiliar means’. As discussed in the previous chapter, community gardens have been implicated by some in the transfer of social and economic responsibility from the state to the household and ‘community’ through fostering individual
responsibility and community self-help, and promoting personal transformation as a means for adjusting to economic change (Pudup 2008, Guthman 2008c; Hobson and Hill 2010 forthcoming). It is important to note that these writers have focused their critique on ‘organised gardening programs’ that would not generally be understood as ‘community gardens’ in the Australian usage\(^9\). However, perhaps because of the paucity of critical literature on community gardening, analyses such as those of Pudup (2008) have become widely cited in subsequent publications about community gardens (for example Dixon, Donati, Pike and Hattersley 2009; Goodman 2009; Donati, Cleary and Pike 2009; Cameron, Manhood and Pomfrett 2010). While usefully drawing attention to the ways community gardening is becoming reshaped and appropriated in a neoliberal context—particularly as community gardens are increasingly adopted by government agencies—these analyses are overly pessimistic about the potential of community gardens to create change, and neglect the role that community gardeners play in challenging neoliberal conceptions of space and trade (see for example Hayden 1995; Staeheli, Mitchell and Gibson 2002; Schmelzkopf 2002; Shepard 2007b; 2009; Carlsson 2008).

The cultivation of an active and engaged citizenry—whether conceptualised as organised neighbourhoods or neoliberal subjects—is one aspect of the way community garden activists’ practices of ‘community’ intersect with models of political engagement. It is far from the totality of their social action or of their mobilization of ideas of community, as we have already seen through the lens of community as cultivating ‘different relationships’ beyond the state form (Deleuze and Guttari 1987). As a venue in which ‘good citizenship’ is fostered, ‘community can be a space in which some of the work of capital and the state can be accomplished, without being directly responsible for either the work or the outcome of that work’ (Staeheli 2003 p. 819). While the notion of good citizenship infers enacting change on an individual basis through accepted political channels, or possibly via processes of community organising, ‘community’ is also a space where oppositional forms of ‘citizenship’ can develop, and social movements coalesce and emerge.

**COMMUNITY AND MOVEMENT BUILDING**

‘Community’ is a frame that ‘ties together the internal and external dimensions of movement activity’, linking internal processes of movement building with symbolism that can be used to organise public rhetoric (Williams 1995 p. 139). In this section, my focus is on the internal, movement building, aspects of community practiced in Australia’s community gardens. Community is a level of micromobilization (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988) that links macrolevel issues with the microlevel processes that generate collective action. Through creating ‘community’, community garden activists attract people to become part of their movement (compare Staggenborg 1998). Through participation in their movement community, political identities are developed, and people

\(^9\) A prison garden and a school garden are the focus of Pudup’s analysis. The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation—an Australian organisation promoting vegetable gardening in primary schools—is the focus of Hobson and Hill’s chapter.
acquire the mutual trust, solidary ties, and shared analyses necessary for collective action (Taylor and Whittier 1999). By becoming situated within a collective, participants are no longer the ‘abstract, atomistic citizens of liberal theory’ (Staeheli 2003 p. 818) but members of a movement. The aim of internal community building is to produce activists—people with long-term bonds and commitments—not just to further short-term aims. However, although ‘community’ is mobilized to movement and organisation building ends, it is useful to be reminded that communities are ‘not coldly calculated contracts, but embodied, sensual and emotionally charged affiliations’ (Amit 2002 p. 17).

While community gardeners engage in many community building activities—hosting cultural events, running workshops, sharing food, organising skills shares—the shared practical work of planning, planting, and caring for a garden is at the heart of their community building efforts. As Carlsson (2008 p. 84) writes, ‘gardening provides a common language and context in an urban environment that usually promotes private property and individualism’. Gardens provide plentiful pleasant, absorbing tasks and people band together to get things done. There is emphasis at many community gardens on noticing and celebrating the small daily achievements of the garden. Collective activities—eating, working, decision-making, singing, praying, maintaining a space—have been recognised as centrally important to the development of collective identity and esprit de corps, and to the persistence of social movement groups (Kanter 1972; Glass 2010). The everyday routines of maintaining a garden have a ‘restorative’ (Szerszynski 2002) effect on group bonds, build commitment, helping to maintain activist commitments.

Gardens provide the additional benefit of producing food that can be shared and enjoyed. Shared food is a traditional focus and lubricant for social connections (Baum 1999). At Northey Street City Farm many people identified shared lunches as being essential to building community and commitment at the Farm. The daily lunches are prepared mainly from produce grown in the kitchen gardens and served without charge to whoever is there—workers, volunteers, visiting dignitaries, homeless people, students. They are an opportunity for people to take time out from whatever tasks they are involved with and to gather together to share food and convivial conversation.

One of the factors that sets The Farm apart from other community organisations is its tradition of all members eating together at lunch time. This tradition is a significant part of our culture. Most importantly, it enables members to be part of the physical celebration of Farm members reaping what they sow. The kitchen is a central part of The Farm community.

(NSCF 2008 p. 54)

I think sharing food at lunchtime everyday is a big part of the inclusiveness of the garden… If you’re willing to be part of it, and part of the discussions, you’d be turned to and asked your ideas about things, your advice would be sought, your help would be sought. Your opinions would be valued in any aspect of the Farm, including some of the more significant management issues.

(Ellis, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)
While most community gardens do not prepare shared meals everyday, and not all have cooking facilities, all have some access to the community building resource of fresh food to share.

With names like ‘Garden of Poor People in Action’, ‘Harmony Garden’, ‘Chico Mendez’, gardens are designed and organised to act as ‘free spaces’. They are strongly participatory and democratic, emphasising bottom-up voice, consensual decision-making, and collective control of the space.

(Martinez 2009 p. 327)

‘Free spaces’ (Poletta 1999), are ‘local places where social movement culture is developed, practiced, and passed on between generations of participants’ (Glass 2010 p. 199). They enable experimentation with ‘new cultural models, forms of relationships and alternative perceptions and meanings of the world’ (Maddison and Scalmer 2006 p. 81). Free spaces include institutions like the black church in pre-civil rights United States, social clubs, self-help groups and other community associations, as well as those deliberately created within movements to institutionalise alternative ways of interacting (Evans and Boyte 1992; Polletta 1999). Movement-created free spaces may take the form of social centres (Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill 2007), co-ops, book shops, and media and squatted temporary autonomous zones (Bey 2003) or of community gardens (Doherty 2002 pp. 50 – 51). These spaces are important to the development and maintenance of a movement culture that nourishes, resources, and maintains a community of resistance between major campaign events so that its ‘submerged networks’ can be remobilised when called upon (Melucci 1989). ‘Free spaces’, however, do not necessarily lead to mobilization and also have the potential to become spaces of retreat and safety which enable people to adapt to oppression rather than working for change (Polletta 1999; Fantasia and Hirsch 1995). Some community gardens contribute to fostering and sustaining an ‘alternative milieu’ (Melucci 1989) or ‘social movement community’ (Buechler 1990 p. 43) and a culture that does support other activism, for example, as venues where other community groups can meet or hold events. Some of the larger community gardens—and some of the more radical ones—are venues where people interested and involved in social action meet and interact. Community gardens enable activists to meet some of their own needs for food provision, socialising, and recreation, helping to sustain their activism. Notice boards at larger community gardens, such as CERES, City Farm Perth, and Northey Street City Farm display flyers and posters for numerous social and political groups and events. In the process, community gardens play a role in disseminating information, and in creating a sense of the scope of social movement activity happening in their region. Community gardens build movement community not only within their own gardens and the wider community gardening movement, but within wider social movements as well.
CONCLUSION

Community garden activists are intensely concerned with issues of community. Their focus on community as not only instrumentally useful but as inherently valuable and of central importance marks a significant departure from the approaches of other environmental movements. Despite the centrality of notions of ‘community’ in the language and practice of community gardeners, it is a concept that has been given remarkably little attention in academic studies. Those studies that do seek to demonstrate community gardeners’ effectiveness as agents of ‘community’ have most commonly done so within a framework of social capital. While social capital provides a way to quantify community gardeners’ impacts in policy-friendly terms, it does little to illuminate the ways community gardeners understand, embody and deploy notions of community. In this chapter I have attempted to address this absence of community gardeners’ perspectives by exploring the ways that community is lived, discussed and mobilized within the Australian community gardening movement.

Community gardeners’ understandings of ‘community’ are strongly influenced by ecological values, and as such are concerned with notions of ‘place’. The choice to work at a local level entails commitment to a notion of ‘home place’ that encompasses both land and people. It also means that community gardeners are uniquely placed to inform practices of community development, which until recently have tended to focus on issues of poverty and social justice to the exclusion of ecological issues and contexts.

The language and practice of inclusion are also crucial to community gardeners’ understandings of community. Through numerous micro-practices, from accepting McDonald’s meals to considering the needs of rough sleepers, these community gardeners sought to create a culture of welcome that actively avoided isolationism and withdrawal into subculture and was able to embrace people with a diversity of experiences and perspectives. They have created spaces in which a radical democracy can be imagined, where dreams of homogeneity are discarded and difference and conflict are embraced.

Practices of community are employed as a means to create change beyond the gardens themselves. Community gardens provide places where democratic cultures and competencies are developed, where people come together to discuss and share ideas; develop analyses and plans of action. Community gardens cultivate ‘good citizens’, informed, skilled, public-spirited and ready to pursue change through conventional channels. Drawing on traditions of community organising and community development, they also cultivate oppositional citizens—social movement actors. One mechanism for this is the creation of ‘free spaces’ that facilitate movement building. The gardens are not only a space where people come together to engage with established political processes, but are a site for direct participation, places where people can have concrete impacts on urban space and
neighbourhood facilities. By acting on ‘community’ issues community garden activists address local manifestations of issues that also operate at larger scales.

Attempts to create change through practices of ‘community’ have frequently been analysed within social movement scholarship as forms of ‘cultural’ action. It is to community gardens’ role in producing culture that I turn next.
CHAPTER 8.
PRODUCING CULTURE

Địa lý Nhân hòa
The fertile land and the kind people live in harmony

Plantation installation

The garden is garlanded with flowers. All along the central path, the gardeners have installed bamboo arches every few feet, each lined with palm fronds twisted into spirals and covered in handmade paper flowers. Strings of pink and orange origami flowers weave through the fences. There are thousands of rustling blooms. In the garden plots, conical Vietnamese gardening hats hover on thin stakes. Each bears a verse or quotation, in one of several languages, about the joys of gardening and gardeners’ connection to season and place. Artists from the gardens collaborated with community arts workers, Cultivating Community members and residents of the neighbouring housing estate to produce this temporary art installation, ‘Plantation’. It is a meditation about putting down roots and the role of gardening in inhabiting a new country. Traditional cultural symbols from China, Vietnam, and Timor Leste are used to reflect on the practice of home and the love of country, new and old. A well-known garden writer guides groups of visitors around the garden, pointing out motherwort and stem lettuce, black nightshade and red perilla. Visitors crane their necks to hear their guide speak about the medicinal and culinary uses of just a few of the plants flourishing in every available space. She describes the plot holders as expert gardeners and as caretakers of rich traditions.

Community gardeners are producers. Not only of food, but also of culture. Community gardens are places of festivals and community celebrations; galleries for sculpture, murals and mosaic works; venues for recitals, concerts, performances, and readings. Community gardens are also repositories of traditional cultural knowledges from around the world, centres of expertise about increasingly rare plant varieties, methods of cultivation, and the preparation of myriad foods. They are places where people attempt to develop and disseminate new cultural practices and values, where people seek to
create and embed cultures of food and ecological literacy, connection to place, celebration of diversity, and commitment to community and collaboration. Community gardeners produce culture not only through the arts, but through the creation of shared knowledges and ways of living and working: their organisational practices, decision-making processes, the ways they tell stories about what they do, the information they share and the ways that they share it, the spaces they create, and the ways they tend their gardens. Cultural creation and elaboration are key components of community gardeners’ practices of collective social action. The Plantation exhibition at Belgium Avenue Community Garden illustrates some of the elements of cultural production that community gardeners catalyse. There is a strong commitment to the practice and celebration of traditional cultures. There is also the creation and broadening of new or reclaimed cultural values relating to community and ecology. The process and the event were designed to be inclusive and to invite the active involvement of many people, imagined as a catalyst to genuine dialogue and connection. It was a cultural intervention about the meanings of community space, invoking an idea of a community garden as neither public park nor a private garden but common land, cared for collectively and deeply.

In the previous two chapters, I have described practices of gardening and community that would be understood by many social movement scholars as ‘cultural’—strategies that are largely aimed at the symbolic dimension of structures, institutions and practices, primarily concerned with cultural elaboration and values change rather than specific policy objectives or the gaining of political power. For example, although community gardeners’ practices of growing vegetables produce material sustenance, I have argued that the performance of growing vegetables in public may be of greater political significance. Similarly, Duncombe has argued that the direct action of the Diggers—the landless commoners who planted vegetables on a hill outside London in 1649 in protest against successive waves of encroachments on common land—was ‘a cultural one through and through’ (2002b p. 17). According to Duncombe, ‘the symbolism of taking back as common land that which had been enclosed ... overshadowed the negligible material value of planting corn in barren soil’ (Duncombe 2002b p. 17). While my argument so far may be taken as emphasising cultural outcomes, in this chapter, my focus is on a narrower conception of what may be deemed more strictly cultural repertoires, one concerned with ritual, art, performance and tradition. While the other chapters have touched on economic (for example food security), and policy implications of community garden activists’ strategies of collective social action, my focus here is on cultural change and elaboration as a specific aim and as a form of social action. Cultural production can be a valuable resource for social movements. For groups with limited access to financial resources, media coverage, and great numbers of people, cultural practices provide opportunities to use creativity to garner attention and highlight issues. In this chapter I look at the forms community gardeners’ cultural interventions take, what their content and political messages are, and how they go about producing culture. The chapter begins with a discussion of festivals and rituals created and hosted by community gardens. I focus on the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at CERES in Melbourne to consider the ways that
community gardeners use festivals to celebrate and publicise their successes, circulate their ideas, and invite the participation of the wider community. I argue that festivals such as Kingfisher have both internal movement building aims and external outreach aims. In the second half of the chapter, I return to the Belgium Avenue Community Garden open day to address the role of ‘multiculturalism’ in community gardeners’ cultural production, and to consider community gardens as sites of anti-racist cultural interventions. I preface these discussions with a brief review of approaches to culture within social movement theory.

CULTURE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Cultural practices and outcomes were long sidelined within social movement scholarship (Earl 2004 p. 509). One of the first attempts to diverge from social movement theory’s focus on structure and organisational resources was the concept of ‘framing’ (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow 2004). Through this lens, scholars considered the ways in which activists generate meaning in order further movement aims. The study of ‘collective identity’ (Melucci 1996) sought to bring attention to the agency and affective experience of movement participants, providing further tools to consider ‘cultural’ aspects of social movement praxis. Drawing on cultural and social psychology, other scholars attempted to integrate emotions, cognition and creative practice into the study of social movements, also emphasising the agency of movement participants (Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Jasper 1999; 2004; Eyreman and Jamison 1991).

With the cultural practices of social movements still frequently dismissed as irrelevant, or even detrimental, within much social movement writing, some scholars sought to go beyond ‘culture versus politics’ (Staggenborg 2001) to explore the relationships between cultural practices and political actions. Focused primarily on women’s, lesbian and queer movements, these scholars found that cultural practices did not compete with or distract from oppositional mobilization, but rather had a movement-building function that supported ‘political’ action (Taylor 1989; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Taylor and Whittier 1995; 1999; Staggenborg 2001; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009). This was seen as particularly important during periods of ‘abeyance’ (Taylor 1989), in which ‘political opportunities’ were lacking. These studies made important contributions to understandings of the ways that cultural practices impact on social movements and how both internal, movement-building tasks and externally-focused activities must be balanced within movements. However, these studies tended to leave distinctions between culture and politics intact—if not reinforced. Cultural and political activities were recognised as interlinked, but culture still played a supporting role with external ‘political’ action, most often directed at the state, remaining at the centre.

Increased theoretical attention on groups like ACT UP, Reclaim the Streets, Critical Mass, and Reverend Billy’s Church of Stop Shopping have brought sharper focus to the use of cultural performance as a way to communicate political messages and enact social change (Duncombe 2002a;
Most recently, new directions in the study of ‘cultural’ aspects of social movement practice have begun to coalesce around what Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) describe as a ‘multi-institutional politics’ approach. Whereas political process theorists and many who followed them saw culture and structure as distinct, and believed that culture was of secondary importance (see Chapter 3), these scholars draw on feminist and poststructuralist analyses to argue that politics and culture are not only deeply intertwined, but mutually constituting. Their analysis includes a strong critique of the narrow focus of resource mobilisation and political process scholars on interactions with the state as defining of political action. In their place, they assert the need to recognise multiple sources of power ‘each of which is simultaneously material and symbolic’ (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008 p. 75). Cultural distinctions at each of these sites of power are seen as having material consequences: ‘they determine how people are treated, the allocation of resources, and forms of regulation’ (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008 p. 83; Young 1997). Culture is considered a formidably powerful productive force and interventions that address culture are therefore not seen as merely an adjunct to ‘instrumental’ forms of contention, and certainly not as a distraction from them, but as having the potential to significantly impact on cultural categories that have material effects on the distribution of resources. These analyses are compatible with the arguments I have made in the preceding chapters, and form the basis for those that follow.

RITUAL AND FESTIVAL

A significant amount of time at many of the community gardens I visited during my research was spent organising festivals, fairs, exhibitions, rituals and other community cultural events. People met in the gardens to work together in preparation: painting banners, making lanterns, organising logistics. These events were not seen as peripheral, but as a central part of the practice of community gardening. Festivals, fairs and celebrations are an important form of outreach, a way that community gardens publicise their activities and invite the involvement of the wider community. For some, they are an important fundraising activity. Events like Northey Street’s annual Winter Solstice Festival enable community gardens to ‘share the surplus’ by making financial contributions to ‘sister’ projects overseas as well as raising funds for their own needs. Festivals are also a means of communication about community gardeners’ visions and achievements, highlighting and publicising their successes, transmitting frames and analyses, creating cultural practices relating to season and place, modelling environmental technologies and practices, and creating the community meeting spaces, rituals and shared experiences that help to build a movement.

The events that community gardeners mark with festivals and celebrations reflect their beliefs about what is worthy of celebration, often assigning new meaning to traditional rituals. The cultural events organised by community gardeners often have a seasonal element, marking solstices or harvests. They also mark ecological events specific to their local place. For some community gardeners, rituals such
as these are seen in contrast with ‘consumer’ rituals, such as Christmas, and as providing glimpses of the possibilities of an ecological culture.

The Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival is celebrated annually at CERES, a community garden and environmental education centre on a former tip site on the banks of Melbourne’s Merri Creek. It has been an inspiration to other community gardens in imagining and producing their own cultural events (Hibers 2006 p. 163). The genesis of the Kingfisher festival occurred in Spring 1993. Students and teachers at CERES heard a thud on their classroom window. Going outside to investigate, they found a small blue bird, a sacred kingfisher. It was more than 20 years after the previous sighting of this endangered species in the area, and its arrival was taken as clear indication of the effectiveness of CERES’ work rehabilitating the Merri Creek. The bird recovered from its collision and flew off. The CERES community decided this event was worthy of celebration, and the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival began. It has been celebrated every year since. The Festival is an acknowledgement of the work done by CERES volunteers to rehabilitate the garden site, and working with the wider community to clean up and revigate the wider creek system. It is also an event in which local environmental history is made tangible and ideas about care and custodianship of country are introduced to a wider audience. I have been fortunate to attend three Kingfisher Festivals at CERES, each one different. Some years there has been funding available to support professional community arts workers to engage with people in the lead up to the Festival—working with several local schools and many community groups. In other years, funding has been scarce, and the Festivals have gone ahead with much energy and enthusiasm on a shoestring budget.

The general design of the Kingfisher Festivals has been the same. In the late afternoon, people gather at CERES. Children have their faces painted in brilliant blues. The café serves organic meals, and people queue for plates of food from smoking barbeques. Bands play in the central green. People wander around the gardens, visiting animals, chatting to friends. As evening falls, the informal mingling begins to coalesce, and people gather in the village green. After a series of brief performances, people leave the grounds of CERES, stepping through the gate into the grassed banks of the Merri Creek. The gathering begins to take the form of ritual and the revellers are repositioned as initiates. As we make our way along the candle lit path, we stop at points to ‘boo’ at pantomime polluters picnicking across the way, to add a candle to a riverbed sculpted from sand, to listen to a string quartet and a choir of people with intellectual disabilities. The path opens out into a grassy open area and hundreds of people arrange themselves around a performance space marked out with ribbon. The ceremony is opened by a Wurundjeri elder. Everyone is given a eucalyptus leaf in a sign of welcome. The re-enactment of the mythic journey of the sacred kingfisher from its original

While CERES was not one of my case study organisations, the Kingfisher Festival was selected as a focus for this chapter because of its important role in the wider community gardening milieu in Melbourne, and because it was an event that many Cultivating Community members were engaged with organising and participating in during the time of my fieldwork.
migratory inhabitation, through habitat loss, to return begins with the time of creation, weaving in stories and rituals from Wurundjeri custodians.

Once upon a time, in a southerly land between mountains and bay, was the land of the Kulin, where the Wurundjeri lived. Their ancestors, Bunjil the Wedge Tailed Eagle and Branbeal the rainbow had created this land, and the people sang the songs to sustain the land, to thank the ancestors for creating this bountiful world. And when the people died, the Sacred Kingfisher in her clothes of sky and cloud flew away at the end of summer with the people’s spirit into the sky, while their body and soul returned to the earth. And in spring the Sacred Kingfisher returned, to nest and rest, to feed and breed on the banks of the Merri Merri, while the Wurundjeri harvested eels and blackfish, cumbungi and water ribbons.

But then one day strangers came to the land of the Kulin, who did not know lore or right behavior. The strangers stole the land from the Wurundjeri, and banished them to beyond the mountains. But the Wurundjeri walked back over the mountains, and so when the strangers had been in the land for many generations, and were starting to open their eyes and unblock their ears, to see and hear of the wrongs they had caused, the Wurundjeri were there with the stories of how this land came to be.

And so, after many, many years unspoken, together the Wurundjeri and the strangers retold the story of Bunjil and Branbeal, and of how Waa the crow created a whirlwind to take them into the sky, so that they could view their creation. The people who were no longer strangers sang the song calling Branbeal to bring colour to the world. But she only comes after rain, so when the drenched singers had dried themselves, Branbeal the rainbow arced over the Village Green.

(Ward 2006)

On the green, school children dressed as Waas and eels, eagles and cockatoos dance in costumes they have created from found and recycled materials. Their peaceful reverie is interrupted by giant puppets, dressed in suits and wielding mobile phones, and by the deafening sound of chainsaws. The animals begin to sicken and retreat. There is a time of mourning and sadness. Then groups of people begin slowly cleaning up the strewn rubbish. Trees begin to grow. The group of musicians to the side of the performance space begin to play a hopeful tune. A tiny shadow puppet bird flutters behind a screen. There is a collective intake of breath before a giant kingfisher of brightly painted papier-mâché takes flight, supported on long poles by six puppeteers. A flock of small children dressed in beaked masks and blue wings flies after her.

Festivals as political performance

The aim of performative protest is to represent the idea that another world is possible, and to do it with style.

(Shepard 2005 p. 56)

As a form of political performance, the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at CERES and other festivals and cultural events that community gardens produce, represent a distinct mode of collective action. Performances like the Kingfisher Festival are mechanisms for the presentation of issues and ideas to broader audiences of potential allies. Through the lens of framing practices (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow 2004), festivals can be seen as sites of strategic ‘packaging’ of claims in ways that resonate with existing and emerging cultural themes and values, and inspire people to take action (Rochon 1998; Wall 1999; Earls 2004). Through the performances they design, community garden
activists not only utilise established discourses of environmental stewardship, but also elaborate upon them, making new connections and bridging participants’ frames and their own. While the theme of the Kingfisher festival is celebration of the possibilities of community action for environmental rehabilitation, its hopefulness is accompanied by a call to further action, a reminder of the need for ongoing work, both on the banks of the Merri and elsewhere. One of the ways CERES Festival organisers disseminate their environmental message is through the use of a narrative that despite a very local focus, has a number of wider cultural resonances. Freya Matthews (2005 p. 202) has described the Kingfisher narrative presented at the Festival as a local version of the ‘sacred daughter’s return’ myth, echoing the story of Demeter (known in Rome as Ceres), which in Ancient Greece was marked each spring in the Mysteries of Eleusis. The kingfishers’ story is told in a way that references the experience of the Wurundjeri people and their banishment and return to country. It has also become a metaphor for people who, through migration, have sought refuge on the banks of the Merri Creek. The Kingfisher Festival, like other cultural celebrations produced by community gardeners, constructs and circulates a new story about the possibilities of living with the land, and living in community. Matthews describes the ceremonial aspect of the Kingfisher Festival as inviting people to enter into sacred relationships with the land, a shared custodianship in which country is not merely tended and revegetated, but sung to and celebrated.

Its dramatic re-enactment of the retreat of the kingfisher in the face of ecological holocaust and its return in response to the efforts of local people to regenerate their ‘country’ through revegetation and restoration, symbolizes the beginning of a new ‘season’ of peaceful coexistence between the people and the land in this locality. Mythic elements from Aboriginal culture are woven into the proceedings, and the Aboriginal custodians who lead the entire performance ‘initiate’ non-Aboriginal Australians into ancient local rituals of place, thereby inducing a more custodial consciousness in the new peoples, and inviting us all, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, to become ‘reconciled’ as one people through our common commitment to homeplace. (Matthews 2000 p. 7)

Similar uses of Indigenous symbolism have been criticised for both their essentialism and their cultural appropriation. In the Kingfisher story, as related by Ward (2006) and Matthews (2000), non-Aboriginal participants become not only environmental stewards, but also co-stewards of Wurundjeri cultural knowledge—no longer strangers to the land but people who can also sing the songs of maintenance and creation. The possibilities of non-Aboriginal Australians cultivating deep relationships to country in the context of colonisation and dispossession are complex and fraught with anxiety (see for example Read 2000 and responses such as Plumwood 2000; 2003. For a perspective starting with Indigenous knowledges of place, see Rose 1996; 2004). The use of Wurundjeri symbolism, and the commitment of organisers to work with Wurundjeri people in the design and performance of the festival are clearly the result of a genuine desire to join with Indigenous custodians in a respectful and justice-seeking manner. However, appeals to Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal notions of custodianship to legitimate calls for engagement with local environmental initiatives have historically invoked an association of Aboriginality with the sacred, fixing Indigenous peoples as ‘at one with nature’, as unchanging. This valorisation of Aboriginal
peoples as ‘noble environmentalists’ (St John 2001 p. 124) can haunt the efforts of non-Indigenous environmentalists to join with Indigenous peoples in creating cultural practices of custodianship, invoking a sense of ‘imperialist nostalgia’—a mourning for what one has destroyed (Rosaldo 1989). The equation of ‘authentic’ Aboriginality with an image of the ‘noble environmentalist’ also fails to attend to the complexities of acting in solidarity with Aboriginal communities in situations where their decisions and priorities conflict with those of environmentalists (for a discussion of how this tension in Australian environmental movements see Pickerill 2008).

As a way of disseminating community gardeners’ framing of issues of ecological custodianship, connection to place, and responsibility to community, festivals like the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher operate at an affective level, using humour, play and creativity to engage people in making change, rather than simply exhorting them to do so. Unlike strategies that appeal exclusively to the intellect, cultural products and performances—‘poems, songs, paintings, murals, chants, sermons, quilts, stories, rhythms, weavings, pots, and dances’—are seen as making ‘emotional and visceral breakthroughs’ possible (Kahn 1995 p. 575).

Performance with humour can disarm fear. When we laugh, we can listen, we can learn. Our audiences are not passive; we engage them. When people participate… opportunities for new perspectives and transformation emerge. (Paul Bartlett, quoted in Shepard 2005 p. 55)

Global justice movement performances have been analysed as similarly emphasising notions of play and performance, joy and creativity, of ‘exorcising the legacy of the hairshirt left while simultaneously critiquing the empty satisfactions of consumer culture’ (Yuen 2004 p. xii). Where playful and celebratory performances have been used as part of social movements’ repertoire, they have often been seen as falling within carnivalesque traditions of social change (Vaneigem 2001 [1967]; Bakhtin 1984 [1965]; Bey 2003). Bakhtin’s analysis of the carnivalesque in the Middle Ages and Renaissance is seen as directly inspiring groups like Reclaim the Streets (Jordan 2002). Bakhtin viewed carnivals as breaking down power hierarchies and enabling people to dream and act out ways things could be in ways not possible through conventional forms of political participation (Bakhtin 1984 p. 7). Unlike protest marches, which are argued to be a ‘passive political activity’ (Duncombe 2002a p. 221), those who are inspired by the carnival-as-political-praxis see festivals and other cultural events as not simply observed by attendees, but as collaboratively constructed by active participants. Contemporary social movement uses of the carnival are certainly different to the carnivals of the period Bakhtin describes. They are more focused and specific in their political content and social critique, and—despite claims otherwise—do have an ‘inherent performer/audience divide’ because they are deployed strategically by social movement actors, rather than embracing the ‘whole village’ (Bogad 2006 p. 57). The ‘tactical carnival’ (Bogad 2006) that has become an established part of the social movement repertoire situates joy and desire as central to cultural performances as radically political events, setting its advocates apart from the traditional, ‘hairshirt’ left.
The festivals and other cultural performances produced by Australian community gardens have counterparts in the United States community gardening movement. The Rites of Spring is a seasonal ritual that has been held annually in the community gardens of New York’s Lower East Side since 1991. Started by a community arts organisation, Earth Celebrations, the Rites of Spring is a twelve hour long procession that winds its way between community gardens—and sites where gardens have been destroyed—delivering fertility blessings. Costumed revellers, people dressed as vegetables and nature spirits, and elaborately decorated floats are welcomed at each garden they visit. Along the way, there is a dramatic enactment of the abduction of Gaia the ‘Earth Mother’ by black suited developers. After a number of ‘battles’, she is ultimately rescued by the community of garden activists, with help from the earth and nature spirits. The developers flee. (Martinez 2009 p. 330; von Hassell 2002 p. 101).

Like the Kingfisher Festival, and Northey Street City Farm’s Winter Solstice Festival, which is described below, the Rites of Spring Pageant draws on spiritual, and particularly seasonal, themes and myths, including those of Indigenous peoples. It involves collaboration with numerous volunteers, school children and community groups (Von Hassell 2002 pp. 98; 101). It is a focal point for building solidarity amongst community gardeners, and an important mechanism for transmitting community gardeners’ cultural values to the wider community. In distinction from the cultural performances of Australian community gardeners, the Rites of Spring has also been deployed to more overtly ‘political’ purposes, to make specific claims on power holders. When New York’s community gardens were systematically threatened in 1996, themes and symbols that had been developed through the annual Rites of Spring ritual were central to gardeners’ repertoires of action in defence of their gardens (Martinez 2009 p. 330. A detailed review of protests in defence of community gardens in New York is provided in Appendix 5). The use of puppetry, costume, ritual and seasonal symbolism was a key part of the playful and festive forms that community gardeners’ protest actions took (Shepard 2009). Shepard argues that the gardeners’ innovative forms of protest were based in their everyday praxis within the gardens. Martinez (2009) describes in detail how the shared language and symbolism developed through the Rites of Spring Pageant were redeployed to frame the gardeners’ case once the gardens came under threat. This experience suggests that even when cultural events have not been used in directly confrontational ways, they can be seen as part the community gardening movement’s repertoire of frames and tactics, which are available to redeploy should the need or opportunity arise.

In addition to the events themselves, the processes of organising festivals can be important to achieving community garden activists’ aims. Many gardens invite the participation of gardeners and other community members in the planning stages, providing opportunities to experience event management, community arts practices, promotion and publicity, the use of the media and other skills, building capacity within the community. The shared experience of producing a successful
event—whether on a large or small scale—often with little or no funding or professional support, is an example of the experiences of efficacy that help people to sustain their involvement with community organisations (see Chapter 5) and take further steps towards political activism (see Chapter 7). It provides the lived experience of creating and doing, instead of the current norm of buying and following (Duncombe 2007 p. 498). For some community gardens, the organisation of festivals and cultural events has been the focus of sufficient reflection and refinement that it can be articulated as a set of guiding principles or policies. In 2008, Northey Street City Farm drafted an ‘Events’ policy (NSCF 2008), which set out the way that festivals and cultural events at the Farm should take place. At the time this policy was written, it was largely descriptive of current practice, rather than setting out new ideals to aspire to. The policy balances a wide range of objectives, from compliance with relevant legislation, to a commitment to environmental best practice, and embeds the Farm’s wider values of inclusivity, community safety, and collective organisation. Policies such as requiring that all events are open to all, with no admission fees, mark these festivals out from other cultural events. While most community gardens do not have formalised policy about cultural events, the values and practices described in Northey Street’s festivals policy would be shared by many community garden organisations.

**Festivals as movement building**

In contrast with resource mobilization theorists, who emphasise the role of political opportunities and established networks, Staggenborg (1998) argues that it is movement culture and community that attract people to participate in social movements. For community gardeners, cultural events like the Kingfisher Festival are way of attracting new people into their gardens and their organisations. Festivals and celebrations provide focal points to build community around. These kinds of performances ‘can help bring people together, in a common space, to creatively, nonverbally, and dialogically express and develop their perceptions of the world, power structures, and oppressions’ (Bogad 2006 p. 49). They provide a space where people can come into contact with new ideas and visions, experience models of social change, and build networks with others. For people becoming involved with community gardening, participation in organising a festival or other cultural event can be an opportunity to deepen ties, learn skills, and develop confidence. As a pathway into activism, participation in cultural production—generally perceived as a low risk and relatively undemanding form of activism—can provide a bridge to other forms of social action, both within the community gardening movement and in wider movements (see Duncombe 2002b p. 6).

One of the ways that community gardeners attempt to create community engagement in cultural events is through the use of ritual. An element of ritual is present in festivals and cultural events around the country, though by no means at all such events. Rituals such as the Kingfisher Festival at CERES and Solsticio Festivals at Northey Street City Farm are seen by organisers as both a way to (re)create an ecologically based culture, often with a strong element of eco-spirituality, and also as a
way to involve festival attendees as active affective participants, rather than as detached spectators. They attempt to arouse and animate ecological passions, and to create shared experiences and understandings. Rituals sometimes draw spiritual traditions, including neo-paganism (see Letcher 2001; Taylor 1994 for a discussion of neo-pagan beliefs and practices in ecological movements), and have strong elements of performance. Northey Street City Farm’s annual Winter Solstice Festival has a strong pagan element, drawing on reconstructed Celtic seasonal rituals.

The dancers crouch down low to the ground and hold their torches at the base of the pyre—a wickerman of branches and palm fronds, stuffed with paper and surrounded by dry logs. The fire creeps slowly then erupts into an engulfing blaze. Strips of burning paper flutter toward the moon then break up and rain gently on the regrowth along the creek. Pan’s horns glow in the flickering light. People have filled a papier-mâché egg with wishes and intentions, things left behind, resolutions, and secret desires. The egg is brought into the ritual space and set alight. Flames fill the inside, casting an animate glow on the egg’s giant mouth, then slowly engulf it. In the centre, there is something that won’t burn. A metal phoenix emerges hot and black from the flames. Around the blazing bonfire more people begin to dance. Drummers coalesce and beat out complex, layered rhythms that change and merge and double back on each other, just as the throng of people around the fire do. Those watching feel the hot blast of the fire from behind bamboo barriers—there is no option of not being enmeshed in its blazing heat. (Journal, 27th June 2004)

Rituals such as these can be more or less effective as a way of engaging people, depending on how successfully they are carried out, and how well the frames of organisers fit with those of attendees. Ritual performances can operate to alienate and exclude as well as to engage. While ecospirituality and rituals with a symbolic element are part of the cultural production of Northey Street City Farm and CERES, most of the community garden events I have been aware of during the past eight years have not incorporated an overt spirituality. A range of other strategies are used to entice people to visit community gardens for festivals, fairs and celebrations, in the hope they will like what they see and come back for more. More often than not, food is central. The acts of sharing produce, a meal, or a cup of tea are seen as key to creating community. Organisers also consciously develop strategies to attract people who might not usually come to a community garden, such as engaging popular bands to perform.

The Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at CERES is one of the few events in an Australian community garden for which research data is available on the responses of participants to garden organisers’ attempts to create inclusive, participatory, enjoyable and educative cultural events. Attendees of the 2005 Kingfisher Festival were surveyed by a research group from the Globalism Institute at RMIT (Mulligan, Humphrey, James, Scanlon, Smith and Welch 2006). They found that perceptions of the inclusivity of the event varied markedly among participants. One respondent was quoted as saying ‘we only just arrived and are already excited about being here—the music, the colour, the sense of community, happy people being themselves and enjoying life!’. Another noted the ‘lack of inclusiveness’ and the feeling that it was ‘closed and clicky, not embracive’ (p. 80). The researchers speculated that many of the attendees were part of an ‘established community’ (p. 78),
rather than people brought together by the participatory nature of the event. They also suggested that the entry cost of $12 (plus food and drink) may have been prohibitive to potential attendees (p. 79).

In social movement accounts of cultural performances like festivals and rituals, there is often tension between impacts on outsider and insider audiences (Jasper 2006 p. 10). Frequently, cultural events are judged to be successful only when they reach new members of the public. The internal, movement-building impacts of cultural practices tend to be accorded less significance. The findings of Mulligan and colleagues (2006) suggest that the organisers of the 2005 Kingfisher Festival were reasonably—but not completely—successful in creating an event in which reached a broad audience of local people who felt engaged and welcomed. Moreover, comments that the Festival was ‘closed and clicky’ (p. 80) or the analysis that attendees were ‘part of an established community’ (p. 78) need not be taken as evidence of failure. As Staggenborg (1995) argues, movement outcomes can be seen as having three aspects: political and policy impacts, mobilization impacts and cultural impacts. In this model, internal movement-building outcomes, in which the target audience is an insider one, can be regarded as equally legitimate as outreach impacts (see also Giugni 1998; 2004; Einwohner 2001; Bernstein 2003). From my observation of the Kingfisher Festival over a number of years, I would argue that it has played a significant role in the crystallisation and maintenance of the community gardening movement in Melbourne, and of a broader green milieu. It is one of few events that bring people from numerous individual community gardening projects together. People from a number of community garden organisations, including Cultivating Community and Collingwood Children’s Farm as well as CERES, are centrally involved in the Festival as organisers, performers and participants. Kingfisher presents an opportunity for community garden organisers to step out of their daily roles and to enact their commitment to community gardening in novel ways, whether by dressing up as a crow and cawing raucously from the roof of a building, by helping groups of children make pobblebonk costumes, or by flipping hundreds of corn cobs on the barbeque. These opportunities to ‘play’ and celebrate together can help activists to sustain long-term involvement and form stronger affective ties, as well as providing opportunities to use colour and humour to communicate with outside audiences (Shepard 2010). Participating in events with symbolic impact can create activists and activist networks with a readiness to participate in subsequent actions (Soule 1997).

Festivals, whether on a large scale such as Kingfisher, or the more modest gatherings that take place around cob ovens and picnic blankets at many community gardens on summer evenings, are important ways in which community garden activists attempt to effect change at a community level.

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101 The RMIT researchers also surveyed participants about their reasons for attending Kingfisher. 45% of respondents said they attended ‘to meet up with friends and neighbours’, 41.9% ‘to have some fun’, 20.9% ‘to experience or maintain cultural traditions’, and 43.8% ‘to support my community’ (Mulligan, Humphrey et al. 2006 pp. 48 – 49, n = 85). They also elicited responses about the benefits people gained from their participation. They found that 55.8% of respondents had ‘caught up with neighbours and friends’, 37.2% ‘felt like [they] belonged to this community’, 44.2% had fun (p. 51). 2.3% of respondents reported feeling ‘a bit on my own’, and 1.2% reported that they ‘did not feel that involved’.

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They do this through the collaborative ways they are organised, the practical examples they provide of the changes they would like to see, and by involving more people in their activities. Festivals display a logic of modelling effective change in ways that can be replicated, and of making change fun, accessible and appealing. Festivals and similar events give community gardeners opportunities not only to showcase their gardens, but to demonstrate ways of organising events in collaborative, sustainable ways, for example it is common for community garden events to use washable crockery rather than disposable plates, even when serving food to hundreds of participants. Festivals, like carnivals, are seen as a collaboratively constructed experience, not simply observed by attendees, but co-created by active participants. They attempt to provide an experience of taking action about issues of concern that is not based in guilt or stories of impending ecological peril, but in the pleasure of joining with others in place-sensitive community celebration. As movement-building practices, festivals and other cultural performances have several functions, publicising community gardeners’ work and successes, recruiting new members, providing a ‘free space’ for the development of analyses and networks, and strengthening ties and developing an internal movement culture that sustains long-term commitment.

‘MULTICULTURALISM’

Arts and cultural events in Australian community gardens—particularly in Melbourne’s public housing estates—are often framed as ‘multicultural’ celebrations, examples of the successful integration of recent immigrants. This is multiculturalism as state policy for ‘managing’ diversity, rather than a multiculturalism that might fuel a radical imaginary (Day 2000 p. 4). With their unusual plants, colourful ‘ethnic’ costumes and opportunities to sample exotic home cooked foods, events like the Harvest Festivals held by community gardeners in Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane might be easily conflated with the kind of multiculturalism that ‘represented a wholesome spectacle of nutritious ethnic bread and finger-snapping ethnic circuses’ (Gunew 1990 p. 104) in which ‘bourgeois Anglo culture has remained the core around which “difference” is clustered’ (Willis 1993 p. 36). There is a ‘tendency to associate [“ethnic”] gardening with a simple multiculturalism in which Australia provides a haven for displaced people and is, in turn, “enriched” by their exotic otherness, especially in relation to food’ (Holmes, Martin et al. 2008 p. 218). Community gardens in particular, have been portrayed as embodiments of the success of multiculturalism (Holmes, Martin et al. 2008 p. 217)102. This gloss, however, belies the complexity and ambiguity of the intercultural interactions that take place within community gardens, and in their relations with the wider community. Community gardens are contested sites, in which organisers’ strongly held commitments to diversity and social justice must engage daily with intercultural tensions and conflict. In this

102 As a point of contrast, Klein’s (1993) study of allotment gardens in Sweden as sites of intercultural interaction found that despite appreciation that the gardens provide rare opportunities for ‘feel good’ stories about immigration, in contrast to most Australian and US accounts (for example Shinew, Glover, et al. 2004) she discovered that there was little intercultural interaction in the gardens, and they were sites where broader debates about the ‘detrimental’ impacts of ‘foreigners’ were reinforced.
section, I look at the impact of the involvement of people from diverse migrant and refugee experiences on the cultural practices of community gardens. I consider the ways that community garden activists have developed practices aimed at enabling the participation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and have seen community gardens as sites for increasing intercultural interaction. I also look at the limits of community gardening as a means of encouraging the celebration of cultural diversity and challenging racism.

Community gardens are places where the experiences and knowledges of immigrants and refugees are put into practice and shared—benefiting both the people who have the opportunity to share their gifts and the community which receives them (see Airriess and Clawson 1991, 1994; Corlett, Dean and Grivetti 2003 for evidence of the benefits of community gardens in the lives of people from migrant backgrounds). Community gardens facilitate the ‘public showing and practicing of cultures of origin—as opposed to their being hidden or forgotten’ (Müller 2001 p. 190). As discussed in Chapter 6, community gardens play a role in enhancing the food security of non-Anglo migrants by enabling the cultivation of otherwise inaccessible culturally preferred food plants. The gardens are also places where immigrants practice a degree of self-determination and control over their own lives—experiences that Müller argues are often denied to refugees and migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. As explored in the ‘Plantation’ installation described at the beginning of this chapter, gardens can be significant sites for the creation and remembering of home in a new country.

Although immigrant and refugee experiences may have an impact upon how people engage with community gardens, it is important to emphasise that these experiences are not the totality of immigrants’ influences and aspirations. Holmes, Martin and Mirmohamadi (2008) note that the gardens of non-Anglo Australians are ‘almost invariably read as displaying ethnicity and cultural difference,’ while ‘gardens worked by Anglo-Australians are rarely scrutinised for signs of the “whiteness” of their makers’ (p. 216). The performance of and consideration of ‘ethnic’ identities is not the only motivation for people from migrant backgrounds to become involved with community gardens. There is no evidence that the benefits people report from being involved in a community garden—the opportunities for social connection, the pleasure of eating freshly picked produce, the contribution of a garden to the household economy (see Appendix 2)—are any less motivating for people from migrant backgrounds. The cultural identities performed by immigrant gardeners are complex ones—hybrid, transplanted, reconstructed, contingent. There is as much interaction, learning, and adoption among non-Anglo cultures as there is between migrant and dominant cultures, as seeds are swapped, recipes shared, and new methods of cultivation are learnt and adapted. The decoration of Belgium Avenue Community Garden, described at the beginning of this chapter, was inspired by the Vietnamese tradition of decorating a village for the Tết festival at lunar New Year.

In their research on community gardens in the USA, Shinew, Glover, et al. (2004) found that the reasons for involvement in a community garden were similar for interviewees of different ethnic backgrounds.
Decorating the garden was an opportunity to carry out a traditional practice in a new place. Yet far from merely reproducing or approximating a traditional practice, the ‘reconstructed landscape’ (Helzer 1994) of the garden contained new layers of meaning. It was an intervention in public space, which honoured the garden as a manifestation of village and community and reinscribed it as an owned and cared for community hub.

For some community garden organisers and activists, the diversity of people involved with community gardens, and the opportunity to interact with people from a range of cultural backgrounds is a significant attraction to the work. Several of the community garden organisers I interviewed spoke about how meeting people from around the world had enriched their experience of community gardening.

The people are incredible. It’s like travelling. Being around people from all over the world is such an amazing opportunity. And the majority of the people are old people so there’s a great amount of knowledge. Some people have got 50, 60, 70 years gardening experience behind them and that’s amazing just to be around. I had found that if you don’t have a way into another culture, another community, it’s very hard just go out and think ‘oh I’m gonna meet Vietnamese people’, or ‘I’m gonna learn all about Somalian culture’. You’ve got to have some kind of relevance, so being involved in the gardens was an opportunity for that.

(Allison, CC, in interview)

While such desires for intercultural interaction tend to relegate non-Anglo gardeners to the realm of exotic other, many community gardeners I spoke with in my research saw confronting racism and creating culturally diverse communities as central to their work. Many community garden organisers and participants expressed a belief that racism is generally founded in ignorance, and that attitudes could be effectively challenged through positive direct experiences, which would reveal prejudices as unfounded.

The reality is that of a lot of our little cultural enclaves condition us to all sorts of prejudices… Quite often prejudices are founded in the fact that you’ve never met someone in the culture that you’re talking about. Here you have this opportunity for that to happen… People get an opportunity to meaningfully work alongside somebody else who might be from a completely different background, like an affluent background or from a different country, different culture. Somebody arrives here with a racist view of a particular group, and then when they leave six months later they actually have a friend or a close connection to somebody of that group. Just that in itself is success in terms of community building.

(Jake, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

While intercultural interaction is seen as an important way of overcoming prejudice, considerable thought goes into creating the kinds of environments and organisational cultures in which values of co-operation and collaboration are supported to ‘arise’ (Jake) in face-to-face contact.

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104 This idea is known as ‘contact theory’ (Allport 1954, Williams 1964). Shinew, Glover, et al. (2004) explored the effectiveness of a contact theory approach to interracial interaction in US community gardens, and concluded that positive interracial interaction does take place in community gardens, and that they are perceived as unbiased community spaces. However, there was not strong evidence that interracial relationships formed within the gardens changed gardeners’ interracial relationships in the wider community.
I think for the public housing gardens that we work in particular, cultural diversity is one of the major riches. And that they are places that do celebrate that diversity is one of the things that makes them a good strategy for social change. The gardens give people something to feel very proud about, where people want to share their stories, they want to share their traditions, they want to share their culture. Racism is rife everywhere, and certainly the gardens are no exception. Those kind of tactics for people getting to know people they might not ordinarily interact with—they might be frightened of or have very preconceived negative ideas about—are important. I think that celebration of and value of different cultures—and respect as well—that people know that people in the gardens will be friendly, and that you'll be friendly to them and that they'll get respect. Probably in lots of other parts of their lives they don’t experience that very much, if they do struggle with English, they are living in public housing, they don’t have a lot of money, maybe they go and get food parcels or whatever it is, but then when you’re in the garden there is something to be proud of, there’s a skill as well that you can kind of show off and feel very proud about, or you just know that there’s a place you can go that’s peaceful, and it’s a beautiful place. (Rachel, CC/ACFCGN, in interview)

I have quoted Rachel at length because her description of the role of community gardens in fostering cultural diversity speaks to several facets of the community garden activists’ approach. There is a strong commitment to celebrating diversity, inviting and welcoming people to garden in the ways they choose, to use the gardens to express traditional, innovative, and sometimes subversive ideas. Individual ‘pride’ and self-worth are seen as important, and viewed as being fostered by people’s sense of achievement in the gardens they grow and the produce they harvest. While the ‘contact’ approach is largely individualistic, the community gardeners I spoke with generally saw the gardens as existing within a wider context of racism. Those I interviewed recognised that people experience structural and institutional racism in many parts of their lives as well as prejudice from individuals. Community gardens are conceived of as a refuge from racism, ‘a beautiful place’ that fosters general wellbeing, where people can feel entitled to be treated with respect, and where they can have a high degree of autonomy and self-determination. This belief was strong among many community gardeners I spoke with during my research, not just those interviewed. Racism was sometimes, but not always, recognised as existing within the gardens as well as outside them.

The organisational and movement cultures of friendliness and generosity described in Chapter 7 underlie these community gardeners’ approach to working with cultural difference. Community garden organisers consciously modelled friendliness and welcome, hoping their attitude would become contagious. The open day at Belgium Avenue Community Garden was imagined in these terms. When organisers talked about wanting to create a ‘cultural experience’ for visitors, they meant they wanted to invite people to enter into the experiences of the gardeners, to learn something new, to interact rather than only observe, to collaborate rather than only consume. The first time Belgium Avenue Community Garden participated in the Open Garden Scheme, many of those who visited asked if they could buy seed for some of the rare and unusual plants the plot-holders were growing. Plants and seeds were not made available for sale at this first opening, nor at subsequent events. Instead, people were invited to join the gardeners for their next seed swap day. Cultivating Community worker Henry said that he believed that money and financial transactions could devalue the culture and work of the gardeners, and reinforce a power relationship between gardeners and
observers, public housing residents and visitors. People were invited to be part of an equal exchange with the gardeners, to participate rather than consume, and to consider the possibility of developing interpersonal relationships.

Some community garden organisers expressed disappointment, and occasionally surprise, that they were not able to eliminate racism from the gardens. Their hope that a combination of positive intercultural interactions, access to a beautiful and inclusive space, and mediation in cases of conflict would contradict racist practices and beliefs was not always realised. Henry related an experience of being called into a garden to address a dispute between two gardeners, which was understood as being exacerbated by inter-ethnic tensions.

I've been warned that we have to say something to this guy, and he's a bit feisty. Then he starts pushing and shoving this Vietnamese bloke, but I've got a Turkish interpreter there and I've got a Vietnamese interpreter there and we spent two and a half hours and we resolved the current conflict and I got them to shake hands after that. I thought I've done it. I don't know what's going to happen afterwards, but that's a really great thing that with interpreters they could say 'yeah ok I won't do that' and 'ok I won't do that' and then shake hands in front of me and the other gardeners. That was really quite symbolic, cause everyone knows when conflict is happening.

(Henry, CC/ACFCGNN, in interview)

Cultivating Community members working in public housing community gardens saw it as positive that conflicts between residents took place in the gardens, rather than elsewhere on the estates. In the gardens, there was access to support workers who could help mediate, and translators who could facilitate understanding across language barriers. In the case Henry describes, the two parties entered into another dispute soon after. Henry expressed his disappointment, but suggested that he and other Cultivating Community members would benefit from further training in working with conflict—that if they were more skilled all the conflicts in the gardens could be resolved. This contrasts with the agonistic perspective I identified in the previous chapter, in which conflict was accepted as an ongoing and positive reality. In this case, conflict was seen as positive in that it was an opportunity to bring underlying tensions into the open where they could be addressed. However the hope remained that with sufficient rational dialogue conflicts could be resolved or eliminated.

In the community gardens I visited during my research, there was generally a recognition that community garden organisations must learn and adapt in order to be accessible and welcoming places to as many people as possible and that merely avoiding active exclusion is not sufficient.

Nevertheless, this awareness was not universal. I went with a group of community gardeners involved with Cultivating Community when they visited a community garden in a culturally diverse Melbourne neighbourhood. The garden’s members were predominantly white and they were looking for ways to encourage more active participation in the garden, including of non-white people in the local community. Following the visit, the Cultivating Community organisers expressed dismay that the garden had not considered translating their promotional material into other community languages, or
providing translators at community meetings. They saw this as a base-line necessity for enabling the participation of people for whom English was not a fluent language. Cultivating Community was originally formed in response to the organising of people from non-English backgrounds who wanted to start community gardens (see Appendix 4). The public housing community gardens that Cultivating Community assists are populated mostly by people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Of the seven Cultivating Community workers I interviewed, three identified as non-white. Northey Street City Farm, in contrast, was initiated by predominantly white activists, all of whom had English as their first language. While a number of Indigenous people are part of the Farm community, few people from other non-Anglo cultures were involved. Northey Street was grappling less with working with a diverse community of gardeners and more with exploring ways to identify and overcome barriers to inviting people from non-English speaking backgrounds to make the Farm their own. This has been a cause for ongoing reflection at Northey Street. One response was the initiation of a ‘Food Family and Culture’ program in 2004. The project’s co-ordinator Vicente described it as

an attempt to bring people of non-English speaking background into the Farm. A lot of the food that we eat here comes from the countries that these people are from and is native food for them, so it’s a great chance for us to learn from them and for them to learn about more sustainable practices and permaculture.

(Vicente, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Although he felt that a targeted program to encourage the involvement of people from non-English speaking backgrounds and to invite them to stake a claim at the Farm was valuable and brought clear benefits to newly engaged immigrant gardeners and to the wider Farm community, Vicente felt he was somewhat ‘typecast’ in his role as worker in a program to involve people from migrant backgrounds in Northey Street.

Here I was, a non-English speaking background person working with non-English speaking background people. Which was fine, but after you’ve been doing that for so many years you wish you would take a job that is not specific to the fact that you’re a migrant, you know, working with migrants.

(Vicente, in interview)

At the time of our interview, Vicente had moved into in a paid position at the Farm that was not specifically focused on involving migrants. He reflected on the successes and shortcomings of the Food, Family and Culture project in fostering a more diverse community at Northey Street.

The Food Family and Culture people were on the other side, apart from the rest of the Farm. I think that was one of the errors of how we ran that project. And even though we had activities where they’d cook for everybody and all that, ‘they’ remained as such. And part of that is that we were given a piece of land that was their land to work on, rather than work anywhere around the Farm, so at one time I had lots of people coming, but the same as everybody else who comes to the Farm, they come and go, you know. From that group of people who were part of that project, a few are still coming, and a few have made themselves become part of the Farm and now they’re recognised by other people here and they’re welcome, they just feel like everybody else here. I think that was a mistake in the way we conducted, ran the project, in terms of involving them more into the Farm than happened. I guess we’re learning as we go… But in terms of making them part of the community, I think we failed in doing that. But ... you just learn about it. It’s really exciting work.

(Vicente, in interview)
As with Cultivating Community’s experiences of working with conflict in the gardens, disappointment in the not altogether successful results of the Food, Family and Culture project led to reflection and learning, and this has influenced the design of subsequent programs.

Environmental movements have often been criticised as involving primarily white and middle class people. While this characterisation is an overstatement, particularly when urban and environmental justice movements are included (Wall 1999 p. 95), many environmental organisations have recognised the problematic nature of a lack of ethnic diversity within their organisations, and have attempted to build cross-cultural alliances. In keeping with patterns in wider environmental movements Northey Street is not alone among Australian community gardens in seeking ways to increase the cultural diversity of its members. While it is tempting to suggest that racism may be operating in these gardens—and undoubtedly issues of white privilege are a factor—Lichterman’s (1995) study of environmental movements in the United States suggests that while environmental movements are often unsuccessful at building multicultural organisations, this should not be ascribed ‘simply to race bias in organisational ideologies or personal beliefs’ (Lichterman 1995 p. 527). Rather, he argues, practices of community building within organisations ‘could perpetuate unintended race or class barriers’ (1995 p. 527). Rather than anti-racism training for white environmentalists, he suggests that what is needed is consideration of the internal culture of organisations and practices of intra-movement community building, arguing that different ethnic groups are likely to respond differently to discourses of individualism and communality within movements.

In stronger terms, alternative agrifood movements have been criticised not only for their disproportionate whiteness, but for the racist implications of some of their discourse and practice (Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman and Warner 2003; Slocum 2007; Guthman 2008a; 2008b). In projects aimed at assisting poor communities of colour to improve their diets through access to fresh produce, the missionary drive ‘to do good on behalf of those deemed other’ is seen as having the ‘markings of colonial projects, in that it seeks to improve the other while eliding the historical developments that produced these material and cultural distinctions in the first place’ (Guthman 2008 p. 436). In addition, it is argued that the agrarian romanticisation of agricultural labour and the putative benefits of ‘getting your hands in the soil’ are promoted in a way blind to the racialisation of the labour of food production. In communities of colour in the US for example, agricultural work can have connotations of enforced labour rather than therapeutic benefit (Guthman 2008a p. 440). Much contemporary food production takes place through the labour of non-white people on land owned by white people. These critiques generally focus on projects such as farmers’ markets and CSAs, and interestingly, some writers exempt community gardens from their analysis (see for example Guthman 2008a p. 432). However, their critiques of the politics of conversion in food movements—the desire to impose a supposedly ‘better’ way of eating upon others—and the attention they draw to the racist
implications of some agrarian discourses do have resonance with some community gardening practices. In the Australian community gardening movement, there may be a need to explore strategies for addressing racism that go beyond multicultural fairs, cultural celebrations and translators to address more deeply entrenched issues of discourse and practice.

CONCLUSION

Having a carnival is a way of saying yes. In a funny way, it's not unlike creating a community garden. It's a way of saying, we not only oppose what's happening now but we have a vision of a different moral order, in which people are free to express their creative energies to the greatest extent, a world where public space is dedicated to community-building and fostering public expression, instead of given over to commercial expression.

(L.A. Kauffman, interviewed in Shepard 2004 p. 381)

Community gardeners are producers of culture as well as producers of food. Art making, festivals, rituals and the dissemination of ecological values are part of community gardeners’ daily praxis. They represent the development of new cultural forms and practices as well as the preservation of traditional cultures. Recurring themes in community garden activists’ language and practice are inclusivity, participation, community, ecological awareness, urban food production, cultural diversity, and celebration. Community gardeners’ cultural production seeks to bring these values into focus, to make them tangible and to increase their prevalence. The festivals, rituals, and other cultural events produced by community gardeners provide a context for reflection, and impetus to integrate gardening, community building, and environmental change into everyday life. The cultural events they organise attempt to provide an experience of taking action about issues of concern that is not based in guilt or stories of impending ecological peril, but in the pleasure of joining with others in celebration. Cultural production is a way of researching new possibilities. This aspect of community gardeners’ work has been recognised within broader social movements, which have seen community gardens as venues for creating cultures of peace (Kelly 2004), cultures that can mitigate the effects of energy descent (Holmgren 2002b), and cultures that support the emergence of transition towns (Hopkins 2008), and conserver societies (Trainer 1995).

While critics of cultural tactics argue they detract from instrumental actions (Cohen 1985), cultural and instrumental aims do not have to be mutually exclusive (Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke and Anderson 2009 p. 868) and many actions do both simultaneously. As Gramsci (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell Smith 1971; Gramsci, Forgacs and Hobsbawm 2000) argued, ‘power does not just reside in institutions, but also in the ways people make sense of their world; hegemony is a political and cultural process’ (Duncombe 2007 p. 493). In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate both the external, strategic dimension of cultural tactics, and the internal motivating and movement building dimensions. Both of these are necessary to advance the goals of social movements.
CHAPTER 9.
CREATION: THE POLITICS OF DIRECT ACTION
AND PREFIGURATION

Instead of the exhausted march, chant, and civil disobedience protest model that we (and the police, media, and public) were used to, we had created our own liberatory culture and—at least for a little while—had demonstrated it to the world. In place of the sour Lefty cry of ‘No! We’re against it,’ we yelled out triumphantly: ‘Yes! This is what we’re for.’

Duncombe 2002b p. 3

One of the aims of activist research is to give attention to those experimenting with political repertoires and creating forms of co-operation and solidarity in order to consider their underlying logic and what they reveal about possibilities for change—and to share what is learnt in a way that can inform and be built upon by others (Graeber 2004 pp. 11 – 12; Shukaitis 2004). In the previous chapters, I have focused on key aspects of community gardeners’ practices of collective social action: positioning community gardening as activism, growing food in common, mobilising notions of community, and engaging in cultural production. In this chapter, my focus shifts away from specific strategies to argue that a common political logic underlies each of them. I explore the ways community garden activists theorise their work and the ways their practices reflect and are illuminated by other analyses of collective social action.

Community garden activists embrace a politics of creation and collective imagination. Through practices that garden activists described as ‘constructive’ or as offering ‘alternatives’, they seek to enact what Iain described as ‘positive and practical’ local responses to social and environmental issues (see Chapter 3). In seeking to ‘be the change we wish to see in the world’\textsuperscript{105}, their approach is not

\textsuperscript{105} This phrase is usually attributed to Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi, though it does not appear in any of his writings. The attribution of this quote to Gandhi has been traced to Arun Gandhi in interviews about his grandfather recorded the 1990s (see B’Hahn 2001; Potts 2002).
focused on asking governments or corporations to change, but on implementing aspects of that change directly. Community garden activists have sought to create alternative systems, institutions and cultural practices within or alongside the state and the market which are not reliant on them, or at least challenge their centrality. Through degrees of ‘delinking’ (Baker 2004, Starr 2005) and recreation, their aim is to research and implement aspects of the society they wish to bring into being. The tangible micro-experiments they create can be understood as both a critique of systems that are identified as oppressive or unsustainable and as the seeds of other possibilities.

This chapter begins with an account of the ways that some of the community garden activists whom I met during my research presented analyses of the political logic and significance of their work, frequently using terms like ‘constructive’ and ‘positive’ to describe the kinds of ‘alternative creating’ practices they were pursuing through community gardening, and contrasting these with protest-oriented ‘oppositional’ repertoires. Building on the analysis of practices of collective social action described in the preceding chapters, I argue that community garden activists’ shared practices represent an ‘implicit strategy’ which is consistent with the political analysis articulated by a number of community garden organisers—that community gardening is an example of a distinct mode of political engagement that seeks to create change by collectively imagining and creating tangible micro-examples of what they are ‘for’, rather than petitioning others to act against what they oppose. I consider the degree to which community gardeners embody this approach in practice and also some of its limits as a form of collective social action.

Many political activities carried out by social movements fall outside of social movement scholars’ focus on state-directed protest and have been largely omitted from consideration. Because the kinds of strategies that community gardeners advocate have received little theoretical analysis within social movement studies (see Chapter 3), I turn to activist and scholarly literature on the political logic of direct action and prefiguration to situate and understand community gardeners’ practices and analyses. Direct action refers to activities that attempt to alter situations directly, rather than appealing to others to make change. My use of the term prefiguration refers to a specific political logic, which is characteristic of the ‘direct action’ that I will argue is practiced by community gardeners. Prefigurative actions in this sense are those intended to have immediate and intrinsic value and to simultaneously lay a foundation for ongoing change. Prefiguration is not equivalent to ‘cultural’ forms of social action, nor to the ‘transitional’ structures advocated by traditional Marxists. In rejecting the justification of means in terms of envisioned goals, prefiguration presents a break from the consequentialism of much political strategising. These terms are discussed in more detail below.

This focus enables me to further explore the political logic of community gardening as a form of collective social action, and to identify links with other movements. I argue that community garden activists are not alone among social movements in engaging with ‘constructive’ repertoires of
contention, and that these practices are being employed consciously and strategically in order to enact change—not merely as forms of apolitical cultural elaboration or personal lifestyle change. I do this by drawing attention to evidence of the increasing prevalence and continued significance of ‘constructive’ social movement practices, by providing some notes towards an analysis of the political logic of constructive repertoires of contention, and by identifying ways in which ‘constructive’ social movement practices can be seen as distinct from similar activities like ‘hands-on’ environmental projects.

COMMUNITY GARDENERS’ ANALYSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE REPERTOIRES

Implicit strategy and introspective praxis

Within the Australian community gardening movement I have encountered people with numerous political affiliations and analyses, and many who reject the language of politics altogether. I have met Marxist academics and anarchist squatters; anti-capitalists and people who champion social enterprise; people who feel closely aligned to permaculture or transition movements and people who identify with Latin American liberation theology; those interested in building a lifeboat for their nearest and dearest and those looking to transform the social order; people who see community gardening as intersecting with and capable of informing debate on numerous issues from water conservation and agrifood systems to democratic participation and social equity and many who seek only a peaceful place to tend a patch of soil and harvest some vegetables. Community gardening is not a social movement with a clearly articulated, conscious and shared political philosophy or model of change. Like many (new) social movements, community gardeners’ collectivity is plural, ambivalent, and often contradictory (Melucci 1996). However, although explicit political analyses within the Australian community gardening movement vary enormously, there has been a considerable and increasing coherence in the use of a small constellation of strategies—such as those described in this thesis so far—and nascent intra-movement theorising of the political logic that underpins them. The political logic of prefigurative direct action, which I will detail in this chapter, can be identified as a significant tendency in the Australian community gardening movement and, I will argue, underlies much of the community gardening praxis discussed in this thesis so far. In my research, I have observed numerous articulations and elaborations of this perspective—over garden beds, during shared meals, and at national conferences, as well as during formal research interviews. The prevalence of this ongoing reflective dialogue suggests that the community gardening movement can be seen as an ‘introspective’ environmental movement (Doyle 2000), in which there is conscious political decision-making about ideas, organisational structures, and repertoires of contention. People do not necessarily come to community gardening activism with a shared analysis of effective and appropriate means of creating collective social change. However, through participation in the community gardening movement—
involvement with ongoing discussion and interactions, the embodied experience of using ‘alternative creation’ as a way of effecting change—people develop shared practices and analyses (compare Seel and Plows 2000 on similar processes in Earth First!). A focus on ‘constructive’ repertoires is not, however, the only strategic orientation that exists within the Australian community gardening movement, and at time of writing (December 2010) an emerging move towards more policy-oriented action could be observed within several community gardening organisations, including the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network. I retain my focus on community gardeners’ ‘constructive’ repertoire because it represents a significant discourse within the Australian community gardening movement, one distinctive to it, and because policy-directed forms of social action have been comparatively well documented within the literature on alternative agrifood movements (see for example Allen 2004; Maye, Holloway and Kneafsey 2007).

The empirical basis for the argument presented in this chapter is twofold: firstly, an account and analysis of community gardeners’ explicit articulation of social change analyses in both formal interviews and during observational ethnographic research, and secondly, analysis of the kinds of collective social action I observed community garden activists actually practicing. This reflects an overarching position that in movements in which a conscious and collective philosophy or model of change is not clearly articulated, an ‘implicit strategy’ can be discerned from movement members’ collective practices (Trainer 2000). Such a position is in contrast to those who have argued that peace and environmental activists lack a strategic analysis that understands specific interventions as part of a broader political program (see for example Epstein 1991). In this thesis I have deliberately sidestepped debates over the boundaries between the strategic and the tactical, and have not limited the use of ‘strategy’ to its militaristic sense. Community garden activists’ reasons for working in the ways they do—though demonstrating analytical self-reflection—are not necessarily nested within a wider theoretical framework such as Marxism or social ecology. To some this would not warrant being seen as ‘strategic’. However, the term’s meaning is by no means self-evident. ‘Strategy’ within some Marxian traditions has been associated with conceptions of a central—class—struggle and centralised location of power. In these traditions strategy can be understood ‘scientifically’ from an objective position. Political struggle thereby also becomes linked with implicit assumptions regarding the self-evident status of what is designated ‘rational’. Doubts about both the narrowed meaning of strategy as exclusively or primarily concerned with class and centralised accounts of power, let alone as a mode of rational objectivity, has indeed led some social movements explicitly to reject a so-called ‘strategic’ approach. Some anarchists, for example, have argued against a ‘strategic’ orientation with its implication of ‘a singular, central problematic whose successful outcome resolves all problems’ (May 1994 p. 11) and in favour of tactics that can be assessed by ‘how far they embody their objectives’ (Franks 2003 p. 32)—that is, by their prefigurative logic. In declining to differentiate between ‘strategy’ and ‘tactic’, I have attempted to be inclusive of multiple orientations within the analysis of social movement repertoires, and to avoid privileging either the Marxian or anarchist
positions. Community garden activists make conscious choices about the ways they work, their techniques and tactics, their forms of engagement, their critiques. They analyse situations and design approaches to improve them. Activists’ selection of community gardening repertoires of collective action is sometimes circumstantial and biographical—arguably accidental and unselfconscious rather than presenting the supposedly ‘rational’ and cognitive features of repertoires deemed to be primarily strategic. Yet, apart from my uncertainties about such distinctions or their merits, I would also argue that by analysing what community gardeners do and say it is possible to discern a shared political logic, and to make links between the ‘implicit strategy’ embodied by community gardeners and other analyses of strategies of collective action.

**Community garden activists’ analyses**

Protest has a place, but needs to be supplemented by building alternatives. Buckminster Fuller said if you want to change things, you create something new which is so compelling that it makes the old obsolete. Sometimes you’ve got to oppose that old because it’s just doing so much damage, but simultaneously you’ve got to create the new to replace it, to make the old obsolete. (George, ACFCGN, in interview)

In my ethnographic research, people frequently articulated an understanding that what they were attempting to do through community gardening was to develop new visions, practices and institutions that could have a role in ‘making the old obsolete’. By growing food in urban spaces, community garden activists’ saw themselves as presenting an alternative to industrial agrifood systems. By developing systems of collective land management, they saw themselves as presenting an alternative to dominant models of public space management. By producing festivals and cultural events that celebrate place and community, they saw themselves as presenting an alternative to consumerism and alienation. I witnessed community gardeners describing the creation of tangible, actually working examples of how things might otherwise be as both an exercise in collective imagination—the cultivation of new visions, narratives and possibilities—and an embodied critique of the existing order. While there are questions about the effectiveness of this approach for articulating a coherent critique and for achieving change, I will argue that it represents a widely held implicit—and sometimes explicit—theory of change for those community gardeners who see their work as collective social action.

The community garden organisers I spoke with did not generally believe that community gardens provided a complete or sufficient response to all of the issues they sought to address (and there were many), but talked of being ‘part of the solution’ (Jody, Tom and Iain, in interviews). This meant they saw their community gardening work as having a number of impacts:

- **Innovation**: Researching, developing and refining practical responses to issues—from urban water management and municipal composting to urban food production networks.
- **Encouraging and enabling others to make personal changes**: Providing formal and informal education in ways to implement more sustainable and just practices in everyday life—from
composting kitchen waste to working through interpersonal conflict. This involved providing practical resources and support for people to enact change in personal and household practices—from supplying seeds and seedlings to hosting regular workshops and social events.

- Enabling a degree of ‘delinking’ and autonomy from the market and other institutions seen as oppressive or unsustainable—providing an alternative to the Australian supermarket duopoly and the shopping mall-as-social space.

- Creating an alternative political imaginary: Subverting dominant narratives about food, sociality and space and providing a venue to explore and enact other possibilities.

- Informing policy debates: Modelling actually existing and workable micro-examples that could be more widely replicated and presenting them in a tangible way to policy makers.

Being ‘part of the solution’ meant that the community gardeners I interviewed were conscious of the limitations of their work. They saw community gardening not as sufficient of itself, but as nested within a context of other movements simultaneously working towards similar aims. Being part of the solution was associated with an analysis that the complement or cacophony of different approaches to collective social action towards similar aims could be seen as falling into two categories: the constructive and the oppositional. The term ‘constructive’—also referred to as ‘positive’ or, particularly by those connected with permaculture, as ‘positivism’ (see Holmgren 2002b; Mollison 2003)—embraced a range of alternative creating and delinking practices, including community gardening. Actions classed as ‘oppositional’, included protest and lobbying repertoires aimed at halting destruction or ‘opposing the old’, as George put it. For some people within the community gardening movement, framing particular approaches to creating change as ‘positive’ implied a critique of protest and other ‘oppositional’ strategies as ineffective and overly ‘negative’ or as unsustainable for those involved. However for most, alternative creating strategies were seen as existing in tandem with oppositional protest. Many had used and continued to use strategies from both categories, and saw both as integral to bringing about the change they wished to see. In this chapter, I have tended to adopt the language of ‘constructive’ or ‘alternative building’ rather than ‘positive action’ or ‘positivism’ in order to avoid the connotation that these strategies are more useful or ‘positive’ than oppositional repertoires and to avoid confusion with other uses of the word positivism.

As outlined in Chapter 5, a number of the organisers with whom I recorded more formal interviews reflected in depth about personal trajectories from involvement with often highly contentious ‘oppositional’ activism, to committing their energies to ‘constructive’ forms of change. While their change of tactic often reflected a degree of fatigue and changes in personal circumstances that affected their availability for higher-risk forms of collective action, it also involved considerable analysis about the validity and effectiveness of different repertoires, and an increasing conviction that alternative creating strategies were ethically and instrumentally preferable.
How community garden activists’ perspectives resonate with other activists’ approaches and analyses

Rather than expending energy by defying the forms of authority that maintain the current form of social organisation characterised by social divisions, it is more consistent to develop and support ideas and institutions that promote alternative values and forms of organisation. Of course in situations of violent repression by the State or others, transgression and opposition may well be necessary effects of political action. However, they should never become emphasised over more constructive strategies.

(Heckert 2004 p. 108)

A number of writers within social movements have advanced analyses of repertoires of contention that are similar to those presented by the community garden activists in this thesis. The ideas of Buddhist ecologist and activist educator, Joanna Macy (Macy 1983, 1998; Seed, Macy, Flemming and Naess 1988) have been popular in some sections of the Australian environment movement and her work was mentioned as an inspiration by several of the community gardeners I interviewed. Macy identifies three dimensions to social change. The first she calls ‘holding actions’. These are tactics aimed at slowing environmental destruction, including protests, blockades, civil disobedience and lobbying for legislative change. The second is ‘creating structural alternatives’. Macy describes this as a response to analyses of the interlocking causes of injustice and ecological destruction. Her many examples of this kind of action include the development of local currencies, community supported agriculture systems, community gardens, nonviolent, citizen-based defence, ecovillages, new measures of wealth and prosperity, and alternative schooling and education systems (Macy 1998 p. 20). The creation of ‘structural alternatives’ is seen as a way community members can join together to create preferred futures, without ‘waiting for any national or state politicos to catch up with us’ (Macy 1998 p. 19). The third form of action Macy identifies is a cultural and spiritual shift away from the values and worldview of ‘the Industrial Growth Society’ (1998 p. 21) to ‘ecological’ values. Macy notes that many activists are involved with all three modes, and holds that each is necessary and interrelated with the others.

A second influential author within the community gardening movement is permaculture progenitor, David Holmgren (Mollison and Holmgren 1979; Holmgren 2002a, 2002b, 2003). Holmgren argues that innovations such as passive solar building design, alternative and intermediate technology, and organic agricultural practices have been at the centre of environmental movements, particularly since the oil crises of the 1970s (Holmgren 2003). In an analysis that parallels Macy’s, Holmgren categorises these strategies as ‘developmental’, and contrasts them with ‘oppositional’ strategies that aim ‘to stop, ameliorate or mitigate adverse environmental impacts, especially those caused by the actions of corporations and governments’ (Holmgren 2003 p. 7). Holmgren suggests that an increase in interest in developmental strategies such as ecological housing, local economic systems, permaculture, and alternative agrifood initiatives heralds a new ‘wave’ of environmentalism (Holmgren 2002a). Clearly, community gardening might be numbered among Holmgren’s developmental strategies.
Macy and Holmgren’s analyses of the dimensions of social change action coincide significantly with the analyses community garden activists presented to me, and are therefore useful in understanding community gardeners’ work. While community garden activists clearly position themselves within the ‘creation of structural alternatives’ or ‘developmental’ categories, as I have discussed in the preceding chapters, cultural values and practices—and sometimes spiritual ones—have also been a focus for the Australian community gardening movement. By contrast, the repertoires that Macy describes as ‘holding actions’ and Holmgren as ‘oppositional strategies’—the protests and blockades, petitions and lobbying—have been least used by community garden activists. However within social movement scholarship, ‘oppositional’ actions have been a primary focus. While new social movement theorists and scholars focused cultural repertoires have attended more closely to what Macy describes as cultural and spiritual shifts, the ‘creation of structural alternatives’ has had very little analytical attention from social movement scholars. It is this point to which I will now attend by looking at the political logic which underlies community garden activists’ repertoire of collective action.

**THE POLITICAL LOGIC OF COMMUNITY GARDENING**

*Local and accessible forms of contention*

I really think we have to work out how to enjoy changing the world… In the midst of living a simple life, which others would describe as poverty, we are happy. We’re not going to convince anyone else unless we’re enjoying it. To stop people consuming is impossible, they’ve got to want to have different things. Enjoying it’s a major part of it.

(Iain, NSCF/ACFCGN, in interview)

Gardening is one thread of a new fabric of social opposition and reinvention, abandoning the grip of guilt and sacrifice in favour of beauty and pleasure.

(Carlsson 2008 p. 106)

The people I have met in the Australian community gardening movement are resoundingly clear that social change does not take place only through dramatic media stunts, mass protests and parliamentary reforms. In seeking to create attractive and accessible ways to engage in collective social action, many community garden activists emphasise the joy of working with a group of people to create a better world. Community gardening aims to be a form of social action based on ‘shared entusiasms’ (Crouch and Ward 1988 p. 26) in which people’s deeply held passions can be amplified and enacted in ways that are attractive and low-risk, and which through connection with new collaborators are enabling of next steps. An embrace of the joy of change is central to community garden activists’ desire to avoid creating an ‘activist ghetto’ and to create inclusive, relevant, enticing models of change that appeal not only or necessarily to those with established activist identities, but to as many people as possible. The long-term focus of community gardeners—aiming to impact on everyday practices rather than short-term campaigning goals—means that community garden activists
see the creation of mutually supportive relationships as central to their work. This is seen as diminishing the burnout rate associated with more heroic forms of collective action (it is unclear as to whether this is actually the case, a question taken up below). In addition to providing an accessible entry point to civic engagement, a focus on the everyday disrupts narratives about what is normal and what is possible, ‘changing the daily actions of the multitude while simultaneously attempting to reframe the broader debate in order to change the “common sense” ’ (Pickerill and Chatterton 2005 p. 4).

In addition to using shared joy and passion to make activism accessible and attractive, community garden activists’ focus on the local enables links to be made between personal experience and wider social processes, providing an additional entry point to collective action. As I argued in Chapter 7, local ‘community’ is seen as a site where change can be implemented on issues that are not necessarily locally based. In this context, Chatterton and Pickerill (2006 p. 735) argue that ‘locally-grounded autonomous projects allow an unpacking of the power working at different levels through governments, corporations and local elites, and the building of extra-local solidarity and resistance’. The focus is therefore not necessarily on privileging the local in opposition to the ‘global’, but in addressing wider issues through local practice, making links between the local and the micro-political and wider political processes.

**Direct action and DIY (Do-it-Yourself)**

Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.

(Voltaire de Cleyre, 2005 [1912] p. 167)

In a strategic sense, the DIY elements found in the current movements against capitalism are among the most successful. They are highly participatory, practical, positive, constructive, non-ideologically based, and often go beyond simplistic oppositional politics and critique… discussion of strategy within the movements against capitalism should address DIY.

(Holtzman, Hughes and Van Meter 2007 p. 54)

Most analysis of social movement repertoires assumes a political logic of demand and representation—that the aim of collective action is to petition power holders to make changes on behalf of those they represent or impact upon. In my research on the Australian community gardening movement I saw few examples of this kind of political praxis. An understanding of the ‘alternative creating’ or ‘constructive’ forms of social action practiced within the Australian community gardening movement requires the recognition of a different political logic, one in which people seek to create change directly and immediately, rather than appealing to vanguard or elite groupings to make change on their behalf, and where power is understood to be vested not only in structural authority but in everyday praxis.
The term ‘direct action’ tends to be applied to actions that are illegal and involve a high risk to participants (McAdam 1986; Seel, Paterson et al. 2000). It brings to mind people locking themselves to bulldozers in logging coups, uprooting genetically engineered crops, sabotaging nuclear weapons or blockading trade summits. However, the ‘alternative creating’ efforts of community gardeners also partake of the political logic of direct action. In this setting, as Gordon (2006 p. 105) asserts, ‘it is also possible to talk about direct action in a constructive way’, as directly creating aspects of the change one wishes to see. Unlike civil disobedience, with which direct action is often confused, direct action does not necessarily involve breaking the law (Franks 2003 p. 18). Doherty, Paterson and Seel describe direct action as ‘forms of action designed not only or necessarily to change government policy or to shift the climate of public opinion through the media, but to change environmental conditions… directly’ (Doherty, Paterson et al. 2000 p. 1). Direct action is not only symbolic or awareness raising—though it can have effect on the symbolic order and present a larger vision for societal change—but is a practical and ‘direct’ response to a given situation (Franks 2003 p. 20). Direct action implies a ‘Do-it-Yourself’ or DIY ethic. In some analyses, this requires that direct action must be primarily for the benefit of those carrying it out, therefore excluding actions on behalf of other people or in defence of the interests of nature or animals (Franks 2003). A DIY perspective asserts that it is possible to do for yourself the activities usually reserved for the realm of capitalist production (wherein products are created for consumption in a system that encourages alienation and nonparticipation). Thus, anything from music and magazines to education and protest can be created in a nonalienating, self-organised, and purposely anticapitalist manner. (Holtzman, Hughes and Van Meter 2007 p. 44)

As a form of direct action, DIY seeks to withdraw support from capitalism and the state while constructing and experimenting with other forms of social organising (Hardt and Negri 2000). Holtzman and colleagues list community gardens as an exemplar of DIY strategy (2007 p. 61).

Direct action and prefigurative ‘alternative creating’ strategies pose some of the same challenges to the state-centrism of much social movement scholarship. As a reasonably well established political praxis, direct action provides a bridge between existing social movement scholarship and the forms of collective action practiced by community gardeners. It provides a means of conceptualising non-protest, non-petitioning strategies as political and as part of social movement practice, and therefore for the consideration of community gardening as part of a social movement repertoire. In direct action, lines between means and ends blur. People want community gardens and they get them by community gardening. The political logic of direct action is therefore a departure from the consequentialism of much political strategising—in which acts are justified in terms of intended goals, and people can become instruments of a vanguard’s predetermined emancipatory objectives. Direct action rejects revolutionary teleology and an exclusive focus on either means or ends, and looks to a prefigurative model of uniting means and ends.
**Prefiguration**

In prefigurative direct action, the focus is on ‘creating an alternative social world’ through actions that have immediate and intrinsic value, and also lay a foundation for ongoing change (Kaufman 2003 p. 278). Prefigurative praxis is thus a continuous process, which does not follow a blueprint but causes wider ripples that are complex and not necessarily predictable. Change is seen as occurring through millions of ripples or ‘cracks’ created by micro-resistances which displace the concept of ‘one clearly defined huge push’ (Chatterton 2010 p. 902; Holloway 2010). Prefigurative political praxis rejects the idea that seizing state power can be a ‘prelude to social transformation’ (Gibson-Graham 2006 p. xx)—that cultural and social change will follow a political revolution—and looks to ways present-tense changes to culture, knowledge and community can bring about wider changes (Solnit 2005). Prefigurative forms of social movement practice and are based on a dispersed or rhizomic understanding of the operations of power (Deluze and Guttari 1987), in which ‘change is possible through an accumulation of small changes’ (Chatterton and Pickerill 2006 p. 737) and ‘the revolution exists in little bits everywhere’ (Solnit 2009) because a ‘multiplicity of forms of oppression requires diverse forms of resistance’ (Franks 2003 p. 34). For example, ‘counter institutions’—whether community gardens or squats or women’s health centres—that foreshadow a desired social order can address needs that are unmet by the current system and can also dramatize both the failures of the system and the ability of people to organise effectively to meet their own collective needs (Ward 1983 p. 10; Echols 1989 p. 16). Seel and Plows (2000) describe a number of attempts ‘to prefigure the kind of future that activists want to see’ while simultaneously protesting against things they oppose. They give as an example interventions by The Land is Ours, whose ‘occupations usually establish demonstrative permaculture plots, self-composting toilets, and environmentally friendly temporary shelters’, and Reclaim the Streets, in whose occupation of the M41 (a major highway in the UK) ‘part of the motorway was dug up and trees were planted’ and who in another event ‘covered [a section of a street] with turf and children were then encouraged to play on it’ (Seel and Plows 2000 p. 120). These actions are described as part of a ‘direct action spectrum’.

Prefigurative practices are strongly associated with the North American New Left of the 1960s and 70s (see for example Brienes 1980; 1989; Stoecker 1994; Polletta 2003; Juris 2008a), and to read many accounts (Echols 1989; Stoecker 1994; Gamson 1991; Arnold 1995; Kaufman 2003; Polletta 2003), prefiguration was defined—if not invented—by Wini Breines (1980; 1989), who wrote about prefigurative praxis in the New Left. In Breines’ accounts, prefigurative practice denotes the ‘cultural’ and internal aspects of movement action and is contrasted with ‘strategic’ action. Her use of prefigurative and strategic is essentially equivalent to the distinction between cultural/affective and instrumental that pervades much social movement literature (see for example Staggenborg 2001). However as a long established part of anarchist strategic thought, prefigurative politics has a history that precedes the New Left. The Industrial Workers of the Word (IWW) adopted their statement
advocating ‘forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old’ in 1906 (see Dubofsky and McCartin 2000), and anarchist activists/theorists such as Mikhail Bakunin (1873 [1990]), Emma Goldman (1924 [2007 p. 174, 177]), Voltairine de Cleyre (1912 [2005]), and Gustav Landauer (1910; 1911 [1978]; see also Link-Salinger Hyman 1977) emphasising the importance of prefigurative action. Prefigurative practices have also been developed within feminist (Rowbotham 2010), peace (Cornell 2009), and autonomist (Holloway 2002; Katsiaficas 2006) movements. Within these movements, prefigurative praxis has a theoretical basis that makes clear its distinction from other forms of ‘cultural’ action. Within anarchism and those influenced by it, prefiguration signifies the unity of means and ends—that strategies must be consistent with purposes by laying the groundwork for the future in the present—and not postponing change. Prefigurative practice draws attention to the disjunction between what is, and the way activists would prefer things to be.

Goldman states,

There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another ... All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical.

(Goldman [1924] 2007 p. 174)

One of the most detailed articulations of contemporary prefigurative praxis has been produced by Uri Gordon (2006; 2008). His accounts of prefigurative politics emphasise ‘present-tense politics’, which seek to manifest political aims in the present, but without prescriptiveness or utopianism. Gordon argues that prefigurative politics is defining of contemporary anarchism (2006 p 103) and its core strategy (2006p. 105): the means to create social relations that are characterised by egalitarianism, voluntarism, co-operation, solidarity and playfulness.

Although community gardeners can be seen as using a prefigurative repertoire that has strong roots in the anarchist tradition, the majority of community garden activists I interacted with during my research were not anarchists, either in identification or political analysis. While their day-to-day practice was focused primarily on the autonomous creation of ‘constructive’, ‘alternative creating’ community garden projects, without particularly addressing or interacting with the state, many of those I interviewed spoke positively about the potential of working with government—and local governments in particular—to achieve desired change. This reflected both an analysis that ‘it’s the responsibility of government legislation to protect the environment, protect people’ (Jake, in interview) and a pragmatic approach to what could actually be achieved within ‘the structures around

106 While often rejected by Marxists, a prefigurative strand can also be identified in some Marxian traditions. See Pratt (1978) for a discussion of prefigurative and instrumentalist tendencies in the writings of Marx and Lenin. Pratt acknowledges the influence of the anarchist tradition and writers such as Kropotkin (1901[1974]) on prefigurative praxis within Marxism and argues for a ‘prefigurative socialism’. See Boggs (1978) for an argument linking Gramsci to the prefigurative tradition. Other Marxian writers draw firmer distinctions between the ‘prefigurative’ practices advocated by anarchists and the ‘transitional’ structures advocated by Marxists (see for example Blackledge 2010), in contrast with Pratt’s argument that both are based on prefigurative logic.
people in local government that make it difficult for them to move’ (Tom, in interview). Vicky outlined an approach that was both hopeful of the possibility of achieving change by working with and within governments, and conscious of the limits of what can be achieved by community groups petitioning the state.

In the last few months, [Northey Street] have been having meetings with Brisbane City Council… And I can see that movement is happening in some local councils more and more—the environment’s becoming more important, community participation is becoming more important, and helping communities having a sense of ownership. I still don’t think it’s at the point where it’s an easy partnership for community organisations or people in communities to work with local government, but I think it could be, and I think what it needs is more people who are interested in working in that way to infiltrate those positions and help change come about.

(Vicky, NSCF, in interview)

It is necessary, therefore, to recognise that prefigurative practices can be used in concert with policy-oriented approaches, and while prefigurative politics is not primarily directed at influencing elites, its adoption does not necessarily imply a rejection of strategies that do seek to petition the state and other power-holders in order to enact change. It should be noted that this is likely a particularly salient point in Australia, which has a long history of activist interactions with the state (Sawer 1990; Doyle and Kellow 1995; Eisenstein 1996; Hutton and Connors 1999; Doyle 2000; Doyle and McEachern 2008). As noted above, the tangible examples of other possibilities that are explored and enacted through ‘constructive’ collective action can be deployed to influence the development of policy, in addition to their primary aim of effecting change directly.

In both activist writings and social movement scholarship, prefiguration is closely associated with internal organisational process. In fact, where prefigurative politics has been discussed in literature about social movements, the focus is almost exclusively on the internal practices of movement organisations—the use of consensus, spokescouncils, affinity groups and other organisational structures and processes—rather than externally focused activities (see for example Epstein 1991; Graeber 2001; 2007; Kaufman 2003; Gordon 2006; 2008; Polletta 2002; 2003). The following quote from Graeber is typical:

Over the past 10 years in particular, activists in North America have been putting enormous creative energy into reinventing their groups’ own internal processes to create a viable model of what functioning direct democracy could look like, …The result is a rich and growing panoply of organisational forms and instruments—affinity groups, spokescouncils, facilitation tools…

(Graeber 2007b [2001] p. 171)

Likewise Gordon focuses on processes within social movements: non-hierarchical organisation, consensus decision-making, an emphasis on ‘interpersonal dynamics and the way in which they might reflect social patterns of exclusion’ (2006 p. 107). Where prefigurative praxis is seen to concern the internal organisation of a movement, the creation of projects and systems beyond the internal workings of activist groups is rarely addressed. Prefigurative practices are therefore often equated with ‘horribly inefficient’ and impractical rituals of direct democracy (Polletta 2003), which are associated with ‘expressive’ aims—personal and cultural change and ‘lifestyle’—and therefore of little
relevance to strategic and external goals (Meyer 2000; Juris 2008a). Polletta argues that participatory democracy in movements ‘can advance efforts to secure institutional political change’ and ‘can be strategic’ by generating innovative tactics, developing skills, supporting long-term thinking, and strengthening solidary ties within movements (Polletta 2007 p. 7, see also Staggenborg 1989; 1995). However, like most analysts of prefigurative politics, Polletta limits her analysis of prefigurative praxis to internal movement processes, and does not consider the impact—strategic or otherwise—of externally focused prefigurative practices.

One exception to this disregard of prefigurative repertoires that are conceived of as ‘externally’ focused collective action can be found in accounts of the second wave women’s movement107. Sheila Rowbotham (1973; 1992; and particularly 2010) provides an excellent overview of uses of ‘alternative creating’ strategies within women’s liberation movements, including descriptions of the development of women’s health initiatives, rape crisis centres, childcare co-operatives and credit unions. These instances represent an important addition to the more common observation of the prevalence of decentralised and non-hierarchical forms of organisation that were embraced (if not always fully achieved) by second wave feminists. While the innovations of minority world feminists of the 1970s and 80s contributed to the development of new social movement theory, as well as to the repertoire of contention available to other movements, new social movement theorists have been criticised for failing to attend adequately to the emergence and development of feminist social movements (Roseneil 1995; Young 1997; Charles 2000). Social movement scholars have rarely analysed the alternative creating repertoires of the women’s movement. Conversely, feminist scholars such as Rowbotham, who have produced considerable literature mapping these strategies, have not engaged with social movement theory. Thus the alternative creating strategies of second wave feminism have not led to wider recognition of alternative creating strategies within social movement scholarship nor to a widely recognised expansion of conventionally recognised social movement repertoires.

In this setting it can be asserted that for community gardeners, and in other cases from Reclaim the Streets parties to women’s health centres, prefiguration implies a ‘politics of possibilities’ (Gibson-Graham 2006), in which ‘alternative creating’ practices are part of a vision for the transformation of society beyond the bounds of intra-movement decision-making and identity formation.

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107 Prefigurative and alternative creating practices within other movements are discussed below.
It is a common observation among radicals that the order of the world easily becomes naturalized, normalized, and reified ... Clearly if one wants to seriously put forward the idea of revolutionary social change one has to move conceptions of how such an alternative arrangement might work out of the realm of inconceivable thought and into the realm of possibility ... The task at hand for those of us who advocate radical social change is making that sort of flexibility and utopian social vision seems like an achievable possibility to the vast majority of the population—and that will happen not through saying or proclaiming that is so, but through a concrete demonstrations that such forms have existed and present a realistic alternative to the current social order.

(Shukaitis 2004 p. 6)

Prefigurative social action involves both discursive imaginings and practical enactments (Gibson-Graham 2006 p. xxii), interventions in naturalised narratives of ‘the realm of possibility’. In her ethnographic study of the global justice movement in Australia, Canada, Mexico, India and the United States, Couch (2004) found that while activists valued prefigurative practice within movement cultures and organisations, activists also emphasised ‘the deliberate creation of alternative social, economic or communication institutions… as a critical strategy for change’ (Couch 2004 p. 97 – 98). She found that the constructive, anti-vanguardist, non-petitioning strategies advocated within global justice movements marked a fundamental difference from the established left (p. 99). Numerous studies of global justice movements have come to similar conclusions (Graeber 2009; Day 2005; Klein 2002; Starr 2000; Naples and Desai 2002). As this thesis has demonstrated, prefigurative interventions are not limited to demonstrating the possibility of forms of direct democracy and non-hierarchical organising, but extend to providing alternative visions for food production, social space, health promotion, and housing, contradicting the narrative that neoliberalism is inevitable and inescapable (Gibson-Graham 2006). Through producing local embodiments of collective imagination, community garden activists and others practicing prefigurative direct action open up space for others to experiment and propose, rather than setting out a singular utopian vision (Franks 2003 p. 34).

**Distinctions between prefigurative direct action and ‘hands-on’ projects**

There are similarities between the prefigurative direct action repertoires I have been describing and a range of other hands-on environmental projects such as tree planting, clearing invasive vegetation, and developing and installing renewable energy systems. In order to understand the distinct political logic of prefigurative direct action repertoires within social movements, it is useful to make some differentiations between prefigurative and other practical projects in terms of their wider political intent. Writing about dynamics in the early environmental movement in the United States, Faich and Gale (1971) explored the relationship between conservation groups focused on ‘nature recreation’ and groups focused on instrumental conservation goals. They argued that these are two distinct forms of environmental organisation, with the membership of the nature recreation groups seeking opportunities for leisure activities in ‘nature’ and fellowship with like minded others, and members of goal-driven groups seeking information on environmental issues and to have their voice represented in campaigns. Faich and Gale also note that organisations that start out with a focus on nature
recreation often become increasingly involved in political action. They suggest (after Hendee, Catton, Marlow and Brockman 1968) that there may be a ‘stepping stone’ process between becoming involved with a nature recreation-focused environmental group and becoming involved in a more politically oriented environmental group. In the contemporary Australian environment movement, there are a number of organisations that fall between these two categories. While Faich and Gale’s nature recreation organisations are focused on bush walking, bird watching and the like, organisations such as Trees for Life, Greening Australia and Landcare provide opportunities for meaningful ‘nature recreation’ through ‘hands-on’ environmental projects, such as tree planting and weed removal. Community gardens provide similar opportunities. These hands-on projects enable people to put their environmental beliefs into action in a practical way and to connect with other people. While they have clear goals, they are not ‘politically oriented’ in the same way as groups which have a campaigning focus and a broader analysis of issues, such as Friends of the Earth or the Wilderness Society.

The fundamental difference between these hands-on environmental activities and the prefigurative direct action repertoire I have been describing is that the latter are collective practices used consciously and strategically as a means to enact social and political change. Prefigurative direct action aims not only to achieve immediate goals—to rid a riverbank of blackberries, to plant a herb garden, to power a community centre with solar energy, to create a neighbourhood barter system—but to ‘challenge dominant forms of power and culture’ (Doherty 2002). As Holloway (2002) insists, prefigurative and alternative-creating strategies contain refusal as well as embrace: ‘However much we focus on the “other world” which we hope is possible, it is important to remember that the cutting edge of the drive to another world is negativity, our refusal of the world that exists’ (Holloway 2002 p. 259). Alternative and community structure building is seen as an ‘absolutely necessary’ element of attempts to ‘dismantle capitalism and the state’ (Shukaitis 2003). In contrast, organisations whose focus is exclusively on hands-on projects are often at pains to describe their work as ‘apolitical’. In examples like Landcare Australia, hands-on conservation groups work closely with governments. They describe their work as ‘volunteering’ rather than activism. They do not engage in policy debates or become involved with protest. For example, Trees for Life, a South Australian hands-on environment organisation describes itself as ‘community driven, non-political and not for profit… the largest volunteer organisation of its type in Australia’ (Trees for Life 2008).

Although it is analytically useful to make distinctions between prefigurative direct action and hands-on environmental projects, there are nevertheless significant continuities between them. Community gardens themselves are host to both types of action. Community gardens are—in all cases—hands-on environmental projects, in which people with shared interests in gardening and community come together to achieve practical goals—planting, weeding, harvesting—activities that are both recreational and a way of enacting environmental and social values. For many, this represents the
extent of community gardens’ contribution to environmental and social aims. For some—those who have been the focus of this thesis—community gardens are also a form of prefigurative direct action, in which the collaborative creation of new gardens, culture, values, and community structures is a conscious strategy to achieve broader political aims. As both analysts of nature recreation (such as Faich and Gale 1971 above) and analysts of community gardens (Severson 1987; Ferguson 1999; Woodworth 2000; Buckingham 2003, Shepard 2009) have argued, involvement in hands-on projects can lead to increasing politicisation, including both the adoption of protest repertoires (as in the case of community gardens whose tenure is threatened, see Appendix 5) and expanded understandings of the radical potential of alternative-creating projects. Community gardeners whose work would fall within the definition of hands-on practical projects rather than prefigurative direct action are still connected, to varying degrees, with community garden organisations which have clearly political and social movement characteristics and modes of operation. This drift can occur in the opposite direction also. Australian and North American agrifood movements, for example, have been seen as shifting from an original orientation that combined the ‘search for alternatives’ with a critical stance towards existing agricultural practices to a more ‘subdued’ orientation that sees grassroots initiatives as alternative—or even complementary—rather than oppositional (Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman and Warner 2003 p. 65; Pearson 2010).

**PREFIGURATIVE DIRECT ACTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT LITERATURE**

As I have argued, social movement scholarship has been largely focused on the dramatic, the confrontational, and the large scale. The prefigurative direct action strategies employed by community gardeners and others have not been a significant focus in social movement literature. However, it is surprisingly easy to catch fleeting glances of all kinds of prefigurative and alternative creating activities taking place just outside the spotlight of social movement writers’ focus. While protest maintains centre stage, the margins of much empirical social movement literature are scattered with passing references to social movement activists who are engaged in petitioning protest and other forms of contentious action also dedicating time and resources to ‘constructive’ and ‘alternative building’ activities (see for example Bergmann 1993; della Porta and Diani 1999; Wall 1999; Purkis 2000; Seel, Paterson *et al.*, 2000; Seel and Plows 2000; Critical Resistance 2001; Plows 2002; Whelan 2002; Bergmann 2003; LaRocca 2004). Despite frequent brief appearances in social movement literature, there has been little focus on the significance of prefigurative direct action, and it tends to remain on the sidelines, with writers’ focus directed on bigger, flashier instances of protest and oppositional action. Wall, for example, notes that as well as conducting oppositional direct actions, building networks, and garnering public support, the UK Earth First! activists who are the focus of his (1999) study also established food co-operatives, created squatted social spaces and set up housing co-operatives (Wall 1999 p. 162). None of these is a small task, and considering they were carried out
during a period which also included intensive protest and which was characterised by a great sense of urgency, the fact that these projects were even attempted suggests their significance. However, only a paragraph is dedicated to them in Wall's book. LaRocca’s (2004) research on environment movement activism in Australia found that a very high proportion of people who identified as environmental activists and who participated in more widely recognised activist strategies such as lobbying politicians and going to rallies, also committed time and expertise to what she described as ‘proactive’ activities—including community gardens and city farms. Around 15% of LaRocca’s 185 activist respondents said they were currently involved with ‘demonstration projects, city farms, food co-operatives’ (up from around 7% at time of activists’ initial movement involvement) (LaRocca 2004 p. 41). Significantly, this is exactly the same proportion of activists who were currently participating in nonviolent direct action (down from approximately 19% at time of initial movement involvement). As a point of comparison, the most common activist activity identified by LaRocca’s respondents was going to meetings—which only 26% of respondents currently did. If we accept McAdam’s (1996 p. 341) contention that it is essential for theorists to attend to what activists do, rather than just what they say, LaRocca’s findings indicate that Australian environmental activists find ‘city farms and food co-operatives’ important indeed. However, LaRocca does not accord these activities status as strategies, or mention them in her listing of tactics used in the environment movement.

Yet many social movements have used ‘constructive’ initiatives in tandem with more familiar ‘oppositional’ repertoires in campaigns ranging from nuclear disarmament to black liberation, women’s health to global justice. As examples we can look to analysis of Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey 2003) and other autonomous geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton 2005; Chatterton and Pickerill 2006, 2007), in which the aim is to create spaces that have some disconnection or sense of space from capital and the state; to analysis of co-operative childcare and (de)schooling initiatives (Illich 1971; Holt 2004); street medics (Weinstein 2010) and radical health care projects (Brown, Zavestoski, McCormick, Mayer, Morello-Frosch and Altman 2004); the creation of independent media (Atton 2003; Pickerill 2003). Other examples include groups like ACT UP (Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Shepard 2009), the battered women’s movement (Arnold 1995; Reinelt 1995) and the Black Panthers (Lazerow and Williams 2006; Foner 1995), which have combined confrontational protest with direct service provision. Organisations with a strong focus on prefigurative politics such as Movement for a New Society (Lakey 1973; Coover, Deacon, Esser and Moore 1977), which operated in the United States from 1971 to 1988 have received strikingly little scholarly attention considering their impact on wider movements (Cornell 2009). This handful of examples indicate that the comparative absence of theoretical attention to constructive strategies in the social movement literature is not a result of their absence in social movements. Rather, it is a limitation in social movement theory that it has not developed a framework for identifying and analysing the full range of repertoires utilised by social movements, leaving prefigurative strategies mostly unnoticed and, when they are identified, largely unexplored and untheorised, sometimes by equating them with
personal and lifestyle change or by consigning them to the background role of creating a social movement milieux that facilitates the ‘real’ action of protest.

**Comparative case study: Friends of the Earth**

There remains some aspects of all our lives that have not yet been captured by the capitalist market... whenever we engage in household production..., whenever we barter or participate in cooperatives or contribute to campaigns for change, we act outside the realm of the growth economy. We need to inch further towards... the alternatives and to disentangling ourselves from the global capitalist system.

(Lang and Vlais 2006 p. 35)

Some social movement scholars explicitly exclude what Kriesi (1996) calls ‘supportive organisations’—rape crisis centres, intentional communities, community and independent media, workers’ co-operatives—from the definition of social movement. According to Kriesi, these organizations should be understood as ‘self-help organizations, voluntary associations or clubs created by the movement itself in order to cater to some daily needs of members’ but not as social movement organisations. He argues that they ‘contribute to the process of consensus mobilization or the creation of commitment, but do not directly contribute to the “actual mobilization” or the “activation of commitment” for a political goal’ (Kriesi 1996 p. 153; see Stall and Stoecker 1998 for a gender analysis of this argument). The exclusion of these groups from consideration within social movements rests on defining social movements in relation to the state as the actor that can process movement claims: ‘self-help groups, proselytizing religious sects, and cultural campaigns may share stylistic similarities with social movements, but engagement with the state creates a critical distinction’ (Meyer 2000; see also Tilly 2004 p. 3; della Porta and Tarrow 2004). Other social movement analysts disagree with this boundary drawing, and have argued that ‘movement associations’ should be analysed as a type of social movement organisation (della Porta and Diani 1999 p. 146).

One of my aims in this thesis has been to determine the extent to which community garden activists’ ‘constructive’ and ‘alternative creating’ practices can be considered part of a repertoire of social movement contention, as part of what may be discussed and analysed in terms of social action within social movements. A limitation of focusing on a movement that sits on the edge of formal definitions of social movement is that its strategies may be seen as outside the realms of social movement practice—as constituting a non-social movement form of social action. In order to more convincingly suggest that the kinds of prefigurative direct action strategies practiced by community gardeners can be regarded as part of a repertoire of social movement possibilities, I want to demonstrate that similar practices are employed by organisations that clearly and recognisably fit within dominant analytical constructs of social movement. As one example of an organisation whose status as a social movement organisation is well established, and which sees prefigurative direct action as an important part of its repertoire of contention, I offer this brief case study of Friends of the Earth Australia.
Friends of the Earth clearly falls within even the most restrictive definitions of social movement and has been analysed as a social movement organisation by many scholars (see for example Doyle 2000; Rootes, Steel and Adams 2000; Rootes and Miller 2000; Bergman 2003; Doyle 2005; Doherty 2006; Smith, Pagnucco, and Romeril 2006; Doyle and McEachern 2008; Doherty and Doyle 2011 forthcoming). Friends of the Earth is one of the largest and most radical transnational environment movement organisations. In contrast with many environmental organisations, Friends of the Earth (FoE) ‘has sought to address environmental issues through a critique of social and political inequality, an explicit attack on neoliberalism and a commitment to environmental justice as a central principle’ (Doherty 2006 p. 862). As well as engaging in protest, oppositional direct action and lobbying, FoE, in Australia and elsewhere, has long included prefigurative strategies in its repertoire of contention.

Friends of the Earth Australia was founded in 1973, and joined FoE International in 1974 (Doherty 2006 p. 878). Friends of the Earth Australia has historically been one of the more radical groups within the international FoE network in comparison to its European counterparts, which adopt a more liberal stance, and the neo-marxist orientation of FoE groups in Latin America and parts of the Pacific (Doherty and Doyle 2011 forthcoming). From the outset, FoE Australia has adopted prefigurative practices in its internal organisation—using and advocating consensus, direct participation, and subsidiarity. In its engagement with the wider community FoE has also sought to promote ‘positive solutions’ to ‘create the type of world we want’ (Walker 2008). It has started a number of workers’ co-operatives, and recent campaigns include the establishment of an ‘eco supermarket’ in Melbourne, at which it is hoped that people will be able to access environmentally and socially sustainable alternatives to at least 70% of the goods available at conventional supermarkets. The promotion of this project includes explicit critiques of corporate monopolisation and environmentally damaging practices within the food system, and a commitment to education and advocacy in addition to the establishment of its own alternative supermarket (see for example FoE 2009). Friends of the Earth’s journal, Chain Reaction, is an important site of discussion and debate within the wider Australian environmental movement. Through numerous editions of Chain Reaction, from its ‘food primers’ in the early 1980s to its coverage of community building in the face of ‘the G-20s neoliberal agenda’ (see especially Lang and Vlais 2006; Wheeler 2006) Friends of the Earth has articulated, analysed, and legitimated prefigurative repertoires to address issues of social and environmental justice.

Friends of the Earth Australia is a self-conscious and reflective organisation, which has produced internal discussion papers theorising and advocating the use of what it describes as ‘constructive’ repertoires, alongside oppositional contentious action. In an internal discussion paper circulated in 2000 (Scrinis, Hepburn and Walker 2000, an extract of which appeared in Chain Reaction (Scrinis, Walker and Hepburn 1999)), FoE activists wrote that in the ‘global North’ a different form of politics is needed, one which has already emerged and grown in strength in recent decades, but which still isn’t adequately recognised and supported within the environmental and social justice movements: a politics of directly creating alternatives to the
mainstream economy. This involves effectively building parallel social, economic, cultural and political structures and paradigms, based around a vision of a sustainable and just society. (Scrinis, Hepburn and Walker 2000 p. 3)

Radical reconstructive strategies, they argue, aim to weaken the market and the state by withdrawing support for and engagement with them, rather than perpetuating the hope that they can be reformed. Adding to Macy and Holmgren’s analyses discussed above, FoE’s analysis of oppositional and constructive repertoires takes into account differences in experience and strategy between environmental movements in majority and minority worlds, noting that for environmental activists in the ‘global South’, the task may not be creating new alternatives, but defending and sustaining intact local and autonomous economies, cultures, and knowledges ‘that have so far escaped being techno-industrialised, commodified, developed and integrated in the mainstream system’ (Scrinis, Hepburn et al. 2000 p. 3). The paper calls for more recognition of—‘and a significant shift towards’ (2000 p. 5)—‘constructive’ forms of social action. It also argues that existing ‘alternative’ initiatives need to become more consciously politicised. The authors argue that ‘alternatives at the local level’ are inadequate if designed to be underpinned by the economy and the state: ‘nothing short of a radical transformation/revolution’ is required (2000 p. 3). ‘Alternative’ movements, they write ‘need to be subjected to rigorous scrutiny and analysis—we need to be sure that we are building a new society on solid foundations and not merely re-inscribing dominant paradigms of oppression and inequity with a green tinge’ (2000 p. 4).

Friends of the Earth’s ‘constructive’ practices have been rarely analysed in academic studies of the organisation. On the occasions that they have been reported, have been criticised or dismissed as having little relevance. Bergmann (2003) notes Friends of the Earth Australia’s work in establishing alternative systems. She suggests that FoE Melbourne’s wholefood co-operative is ‘indicative of FoE’s alternative lifestyle culture’ (2003 p. 194) and sees maintaining the co-operative as being at odds with FoE’s position as one of the most radical established environment organisations. Similarly, Whelan (2002) describes a range of Friends of the Earth Australia’s initiatives which aim to create local food systems and livelihoods. These include FoE Brisbane’s ‘Reverse Garbage’ co-operative and ‘Bicycle Revolution’ workshop and FoE Melbourne’s long running organic food co-operative. However, rather than interrogating their significance, Whelan situates them within his typology of social movement practice as a minor tactic for the strategy of environmental education: as a form of ‘consumer education’ (2002 p. 73). Whelan writes that ‘educational efforts [such as Reverse Garbage and Bicycle Revolution] appear a secondary focus and are commonly associated with fundraising and membership activities rather than being considered integral to the achievement of the organisations’ central objectives’ (2002 p. 73). This is in decided contrast to the ways these initiatives have been supported and accorded significance by FoE activists (for example Hepburn 2005).
LIMITS TO COMMUNITY GARDEN ACTIVISTS’ USE OF
PREFIGURATIVE DIRECT ACTION AS SOCIAL CHANGE
REPERTOIRE

Prefigurative repertoires—like any ‘culturally’ focused repertoires—are frequently dismissed as apolitical or naïvely utopian. At times, these critiques are based on an understanding that proponents see prefigurative repertoires as sufficient to ‘undermine’ the ‘foundations of power and capital and the state’ which will eventually ‘collapse’ (Žižek 2008 p. 21). This analysis is refuted by advocates of prefigurative politics. Carlsson and Manning (2010), for example, state that prefigurative repertoires ‘certainly will not cause the state or global capitalism to collapse’ (p. 950). Their role, rather, is to ‘develop a form of life that is directly antagonistic to the internal logic of the capitalist mode of production’ and to ‘combat the isolation and atomism that has reduced so many social struggles to individualized resistance and consumer politics’. As such they are ‘germane’ to the struggle to ‘destroy capital’, but not sufficient (p. 926). Prefigurative and alternative-building strategies are vulnerable to co-option and reintegration into the market, diffusing their ability to create change and potentially perpetuating capitalist relations. Naomi Klein’s book, No Logo (2000) provides many examples of the recuperation and commercialisation of once-radical counter-cultures through the efforts of advertising executives. To the extent to which it is possible for prefigurative strategies to maintain their radical edge, there are also limits to community garden activists’ actual embodiment of this approach.

The idea that community gardens offer an ‘alternative’ to that which they oppose—whether supermarket duopolies or industrial agriculture—is sometimes overstated. For most of us in Australia, our food is produced by industrial agribusiness and purchased from Coles and Woolworths. Community gardens do not produce fruit and vegetables on anywhere near the scale necessary to substantially supplement, let alone replace, the dominant food system. Nor do farmers’ markets and CSAs, despite their growth in popularity. Some community gardeners look to the British and North American Victory Gardens of the 1940s (see Chapter 2) and the Cuban huertos populares and organopónicos of the 1990s (Altieri, Companioni, Cañizares, Murphy, Rosset, Bourque and Nicholls 1999) as historical precedents indicating the possibility of rapid transition to urban food production, given the right circumstances and political will. A more modest, and perhaps more supportable claim for the impact of community gardens situates them not as providing, or having the potential to provide, a workable alternative to the dominant food system (or planning system, education system, et cetera) but as offering a political imaginary that opens up a space of possibility, one that does not offer a fully formed alternative, but rather enables glimpses of other possibilities.

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108 Permaculture and Transition networks have brought renewed attention to urban agriculture in Cuba, particularly through screenings of the film The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil (Dir. Morgan 2006), which emphasises the role of permaculture in the development of urban agriculture in Havana. The film has been screened in several community gardens.
glimpses that add credibility to the suggestion that other ways are possible (Wright 1993; Bonefeld 2009).

The ‘politics of the example’ (Epstein 1993; Agamben 1993; Day 2005) can sometimes imply a degree of arrogance, a claim that community gardeners have developed practices that are morally superior to those of others and whose obvious goodness will attract the emulation of others. Exemplary politics can sometimes veer uncomfortably close to the politics of conversion. Alternative food movements, as I noted in Chapter 7, have frequently been evangelical in their promotion of the putative moral and nutritional superiority of their preferred dietary choices, leading at times to a missionary impulse to ‘help’ and convert others. This proselytising does not always take into account the desires and material circumstances of those receiving ‘assistance’. For example, some researchers have found that residents of the so-called ‘food deserts’ of the United States do not want the farmers’ markets and community co-operatives offered by alternative food organisations, but rather the convenience, anonymity and ‘normality’ of a local supermarket, a choice taken for granted in more affluent areas (Guthman 2008a). The local and organic food championed by alternative food movements is often simply unaffordable for those with low incomes and alternative food initiatives may better serve ‘the status needs of the privileged rather than the material needs of the poor’ (Allen 1999 p. 125). For community garden activists, a desire to promote the joys and practical benefits of producing one’s own food can occasionally eclipse analysis of the complex reasons people experience food insecurity and of the reasons that supermarkets and ‘convenience foods’ have achieved such dominance in the food system, including their actual convenience in an era in which women have increasingly sought to balance participation in the paid workforce with responsibility for domestic duties that still falls disproportionately to women. That growing food in a community garden, or accessing it through a CSA, requires significantly more labour than buying from a supermarket has clearly gendered implications.

The question of whether alternative-building praxis is carried out in a ‘purposely anticapitalist manner’ (Holtzman, Hughes and Van Meter 2007p. 44) is a central one for analyses of prefigurative social movement repertoires. Scrinis and his Friends of the Earth colleagues (2000) call on those creating alternative initiatives to develop their political critique in order to ensure they meaningfully contribute to challenging the market and the state, rather than merely adding a ‘green tinge’ to the status quo. I have argued that the ‘constructive’ repertoire of the Australian community gardening movement is a conscious and strategic attempt to effect social and political change; that it represents a critique of what is opposed as well as an embrace of preferred visions. However, the balance between critique and embrace is not always an even one. For some within the Australian community gardening movement, drawing attention to problems and—particularly—making demands is seen as unhelpful, if not uncouth. In a rare foray into policy-focused action, the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network recently became involved with the Australian Food Sovereignty
Alliance (AFSA, see Chapter 6). The early activities of this Alliance illustrate this tendency to avoid the language of critique, whilst simultaneously advocating for alternatives that are understood to embody a challenge to the current order. The AFSA’s press releases and submissions have been characterised by a strikingly deferential tone in which they have ‘respectfully request[ed]’ a seat at the table in government discussions of a national food policy. From my observation of internal discussions of AFSA in its initial stages, any references to ‘demands’ have been quickly struck out from draft documents, replaced by language such as ‘we are working towards’, emphasising the already existing examples of alternative agrifood initiatives and stopping sort of calling for specific government action. While opposition to the supermarket duopoly, the detrimental social and ecological impacts of industrial agribusiness, and technological fixes such as genetic engineering and nanotechnology appears to be widely shared, the inclusion of explicit critiques of these in public materials has been described as ‘undiplomatic’, ‘accusatory’ and ‘unhelpful’. One member commented that focusing any attention on supermarkets is a wasteful use of energy that could be better directed at strengthening alternative food distribution systems. For most, avoidance of the language of critique represents not the avoidance of critical analysis but a conscious and strategic framing of the issues based on a belief that ‘focusing on the positives’ is more effective than reiterating an account of ‘the problem’. A danger of this exclusive focus on currently existing and emerging alternatives is that it can create an impression that an adequate solution is already in hand, that there is no need for further government action, and that supporting community gardens, farmers’ markets, and CSAs is a sufficient response to the ‘wicked problems’ (Batie 2008) of the food system. A lack of explicitly political language and analysis may also mean that community gardens tend to attract those looking to implement personal lifestyle preferences. The resolutely ‘positive’ framing may deter the involvement of those seeking involvement in collective social action and limit opportunities to join with other, more oppositionally oriented, groups addressing similar issues.

The benefits of community gardens are not evenly distributed. Not every neighbourhood has access to a community garden site. A social justice perspective demands that the needs of those who cannot—or do not wish to—participate in community gardens and other alternative institutions are taken seriously and addressed by other means. Patricia Allen’s (1999; 2004; 2010) supportive critiques of alternative agrifood movements have unfailingly insisted on the necessity of policy-oriented political action in addition to the creation of alternative systems. In particular, she has argued that food movements should advocate for the provision of a government-provided safety net: ‘if food is a basic human right and if that right cannot be guaranteed by the market economy, it is the duty of the state to fulfil that right’ (1999 p. 126). For community garden activists, a focus on demonstrating ‘positive and practical’ alternatives can mean that other levers of power are underutilised and opportunities to participate in protest and policy development are neglected, despite their potential to create wider ranging impacts.
In a parallel debate, some have suggested that the women’s movement, in adopting ‘cultural’ repertoires and eschewing mass protests, has lost its political edge (Staggenborg 2001; Androbus 2004). ‘There is passion in this movement,’ says Antrobus (2004 p. 121) ‘but is there rage?’ She concludes that an absence of violence and ‘masculinist’ models of political action does not lessen the ‘revolutionary’ nature of feminist social action. However, in the Australian community gardening movement, a preference for ‘cultural’ and ‘alternative-building’ strategies does occasionally imply an absence of ‘rage’ and political ‘edge’, not because their actions do not fit within dominant understandings of the political, but because they can imply a rejection of any attention to critique and confrontation. For most community garden activists, their set of ‘alternative-building’ practices is seen as nested within a complementary ‘diversity of tactics’ in which it is understood that change requires ‘people in the streets, at the negotiating table, and providing services’ (Shepard 2007a p. 191). Nevertheless, for a few, the embrace of ‘constructive’ forms of social action implies not only a strategic focus on the ‘positives’ but an explicit rejection of oppositional forms of social action, which are seen as a diversion from the more urgent work of creating workable alternatives, and as being unacceptably unsustainable for those involved. While community gardening may represent a ‘different kind of activism’ that is attractive and accessible to a wider range of people (Chapter 5), claims that it does not lead to activist burnout are not without dispute. As I noted in Chapter 5, Harnik (2010) argues that the United States community gardening movement is characterised by ‘a brusingly high level of burnout and turnover’ (p. 84). This does not accord with the experience of my small sample, in which 18 out of 20 of the community garden organisers I interviewed remain involved in community gardening. Most of these people have now been committed to community gardening activism for more than a decade, suggesting an unusually high retention, rather than turnover rate. However, in my observation, there is sometimes significant disillusionment and fatigue among groups attempting to start new community gardens, particularly when confronted with opposition from local governments and neighbouring landholders. The movement’s emphasis on the benefits of community gardens contributes to an unrealistic expectation that garden initiatives will be willingly embraced and established with relative ease, and does little to prepare people for the long processes of advocacy and negotiation that are often required to get new gardens started.

These cautions about the limits to current community gardening practice do not negate the real impacts that community gardens have in creating spaces of hope and imagination, nor the difficulties inherent in carving out spaces of autonomy and solidarity within, against and beyond the present condition (Hardt and Negri 2009).

Our alternative doings always exist on the brink of impossibility. Logically, they should not exist—at least according to the logic of capitalism. But they do exist: always fragile, often ephemeral, often with lots of difficulties and contradictions, always in danger of disappearing or, worse, being reintegrated into the dominant logic, being transformed into a new element of the political or social system. They should not exist, and yet they do, and are multiplying and expanding.

(Holloway 2010 p. 910)
CONCLUSION

Where once it seemed that the only alternatives to marching along with signs were either Gandhian non-violent civil disobedience or outright insurrection, groups like the Direct Action Network, Reclaim the Streets, Black Blocs or Ya Bast! have all, in their own ways, been trying to map out a completely new territory in between. They’re attempting to invent what many call a ‘new language’ of protest… These tactics are… less about seizing state power than about exposing, delegitimizing and dismantling the mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy from it.

(Graeber 2007 [2001] p. 170)

Like the movements Graeber describes, community garden organisers are attempting to create a new ‘language of protest’ and set of repertoires that embody and advance their aims through what community gardeners describe as ‘constructive’ or ‘positive’ activism, and which I have analysed as prefigurative direct action. Prefigurative repertoires are based on a broad social critique, and an analysis of power as diffuse and rhizomic, necessitating multiple and complex forms of resistance and re-creation. They have a logic of direct action, rather than demand and representation, and are designed to directly create or prefigure aspects of the change movements seek, on a long or short-term basis, opening space for new possibilities and narratives, and delegitimising the hegemony of the status-quo.

‘Constructive’ repertoires of collective action, despite their sustained and possibly increasing prevalence, have been given inadequate attention by social movement scholars. Where this constellation of practices has been recognised, social movement writers have tended to underestimate their significance, focusing instead on large scale, state- and corporation-directed, highly visible forms of protest. Social movement researchers must be able to recognise new ways of conceptualising and doing politics which emerge from the movements they seek to understand. If the conceptual frameworks brought to the study of movements can recognise only a limited range of action, researchers are going to fail to adequately understand the movements they study. The changing role of the nation-state under globalisation as a focus for action is something that social movement theories must be able to account for. As the global justice movement continues to shift its emphasis away from confronting what they oppose towards the creation of many alternatives (Kingsnorth 2003), it has become imperative that social movement scholars adequately recognise and analyse prefigurative direct action. Giving theoretical attention to these practices not only provides a clearer picture of the practices and analyses of movement activists, but also reveals and challenges some of the underlying assumptions that characterise social movement theory. This is not to suggest that all forms of prefigurative direct action are equally successful in terms of social movement practice, but rather to note that a failure to include them adequately into social movement analysis amounts to a significant theoretical and practical aporia.
In noting the existence of prefigurative direct action strategies across a number of movements and offering a brief description of Friends of the Earth Australia, I hope to demonstrate that the political logic of the ‘constructive’ or prefigurative strategies advocated within the Australian community gardening movement are not exclusive to it, but rather, represent part of a distinct language of protest that is part of the current repertoire of social movement action and which demands wider recognition and analysis.
CHAPTER 10.
CONCLUSION

[There is] a need for much more work to be done on theorizing the possibilities and pitfalls of constructing alternatives to the neoliberal order. This can only be a practical theory and a theoretical practice, one that avoids both the quiescence brought on by excessive abstraction and the frustrations inherent in setting out to ‘do something’ without paying adequate attention to what others are doing and have done before. It requires the participation of activists who are aware of past and current debates within and across radical social movements, and theorists who are willing to say more than ‘the people will work out what is to be done’. This is perhaps not as tall an order as it might seem, since activists are always already doing theory and theorists are always already political subjects; the challenge lies in increasing our awareness and acceptance of this mutual implication, in finding more ways to explore fully the tension it creates and the possibilities it opens up.

Day 2005 pp. 205 – 206

My research for this thesis was motivated by a desire to gain a deeper understanding of the Australian community gardening movement through engagement with the people who have become leaders in its development. I was interested in the ways community gardeners made sense of their work and wanted to explore the contributions community gardeners’ experiences could make to practices and understandings of activism, democracy, community, gardening and culture. I believed that community garden activists had developed practices that others might ‘adapt and creatively redeploy’, and that their work could be seen as a way of developing understandings, a form of ‘research into action’ (Shukaitis and Graeber 2007 p. 37).

To explore these possibilities, I conducted extensive ethnographic research with three key organisations within the wider Australian community gardening movement, including participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews. I also spent time at more than 60 other community gardens around the country, enabling me to observe the ways that people involved in a wider range of community gardens expressed similar commitments and drew on similar repertoires to those at the forefront of the movement. My approach was ‘empathic and interactive rather than extractive and objective’ (Chatterton and Pickerill 2006). However, I was not only interested in
extending the project of mapping the many benefits community gardens bring to their participants. I also wanted to adopt a more critical and reflexive stance, placing the Australian community gardening movement in the broader context of international research on community gardening and considering community gardening through the specific lens of social action. This led to sustained engagement with social movement theory, which assisted me in developing a more nuanced analysis of community gardening as a form of collective action. Subsequently, my findings enabled me to develop a critique of some of the limitations of dominant perspectives in the study of social movements.

My ethnographic approach, informed by activist research practices, enabled me to witness community gardeners in action, and to join with people who were passionately involved with and committed to community gardening in reflecting about the meaning and significance of their work. This has been a joy and a privilege. When I began my research in mid-2003, there had been little research conducted on community gardening in Australia, North America and Britain. There has been a comparative burgeoning of academic publications since 2008, allowing me to position my research within a broader field. However there remains little peer-reviewed research on community gardening that focuses on Australia in particular. This thesis has begun the task of mapping the Australian community gardening movement by providing ethnographic detail on the everyday practices of community gardeners. The benefits analyses that have dominated community garden scholarship have produced vital resources that have been useful to community gardeners as well as academics. However the focus on enumerating and substantiating the benefits of community gardens has inadvertently led to the neglect of critical and theoretical analysis and to an avoidance of the political and contentious aspects of community gardeners’ work. While my research may be of limited utility to community gardeners in terms of securing funding or gaining support from local authorities, I hope it contributes to a richer and more complete picture of the scope of community gardeners’ impacts and ambitions. My focus on activism is not intended to suggest that collective social and political action is a focus for all community garden projects, or that it should be. Nor is it to suggest that all community gardening activity should be seen as activism. This is, however, an aspect of community garden praxis that has a significant impact on the direction of the community gardening movement, and one that has previously been neglected.

In order to develop a more precise understanding of how community gardening is practiced and perceived in Australia, I found it useful to engage with accounts of the history of community gardens. These enabled me to consider the discursive construction of community gardening, and the ways in which dominant narratives influence the way community gardens can be seen and understood. I found that community garden histories tended to replicate one of four narratives, each illuminating some aspects of community gardening practice and obscuring others. Community gardens were portrayed as a continuation of 19th and 20th century urban gardening programs including ‘Dig for
Victory’ campaigns; as poverty alleviation measures emerging in response to cycles of economic downturn; as heirs to ongoing struggles to defend and reclaim community commons; or finally, as the initiatives of new social movements of the 1960s and 70s. While it is unclear how accurately these accounts—most of which were produced in and about North America—reflect the actual experience of the emergence of a community gardening movement in a distinctly Australian context, their role as myths of foundation influences the way community gardening is seen and understood in this country.

Drawing on these historical accounts and my ethnographic research, including an overview of community garden landscapes and organisational forms, I offer a bounded definition of ‘community garden’ that I argue reflects the way the term is used and understood within the Australian community gardening movement. Identifying the key characteristics of self-identity, food production, primarily voluntary participation, and collective or participatory management structure allowed me to illustrate the ways in which the Australian community gardening movement is similar to its counterparts in other parts of the world, but also distinct, particularly in its emphasis on food production. This definition enabled me not only to develop analytical precision about the movement I was studying, but also to critically assess literature on more broadly defined ‘organised gardening projects’ (Pudup 2008) and ‘urban garden programs’ (Lawson 2005), whose transferability to Australian community gardens should not be assumed.

My primary task in this thesis was to provide an ethnographic account of Australian community garden activists’ practices of collective social action, and to consider the extent to which these might be seen as informing or constituting a repertoire of contention. I did this through considering four main frames: activism, gardening, community and culture. I found that community garden organisers—particularly those with whom I conducted formal interviews—had experiences and analyses that suggested a reconsideration of the bounds of ‘activism’. By identifying points of continuity between the narrowly defined protest repertoires that have conventionally been seen as defining of ‘activism’ and the more local, sustained and everyday practices of community gardeners, they challenge us to reconsider the overemphasis in social movement scholarship on ‘dramatic moments’ (Payne 1995), ‘flashy demonstrations’ (Stall and Stoecker) and ‘moments of madness’ (Zolberg 1972) and to attend to a wider range of collective practices of resistance and creation.

Gardening is a central part of the community gardening movement’s approach to social change. Community gardeners draw on traditions of organic gardening, permaculture, and collective management of community commons, and also reinterpret them in innovative ways. Through the gardens they create, community garden activists develop understandings, construct knowledge, frame issues, communicate with wider audiences, challenge perceptions and make political claims. As pedagogic displays, community garden sites demonstrate the ways that global issues such as food security, climate change and the commodification of urban space intersect with everyday life. They
present tangible examples of the possibility of things being otherwise. Their gardening practices also offer practical contributions to addressing issues of food security and food sovereignty at a local level.

Previous analyses of the ‘community’ in community gardens have been dominated by the application of a social capital framework. While social capital provides a way to quantify community gardeners’ impacts in policy-friendly terms, it does little to illuminate the ways community gardeners understand, embody and deploy notions of community, particularly when considering practices of ‘community’ as part of a repertoire of collective action. I argue that there is a need to engage more with community gardeners’ own self-assessments with regard to practices of community, and have suggested that theories of care and radical democracy may provide somewhat more useful tools than social capital. I describe a number of the ways in which community garden activists have sought to embody and invoke community: cultivating connection with and commitment to place; creating welcoming and inclusive spaces; embracing difference and conflict; and avoiding isolationism. Interpersonal relationships of care, commitment, equality, mutuality and joy were seen by some community gardeners as directly counter-acting the impacts of isolation and alienation, and as enabling new forms of co-operative social relations to emerge. I argue that community garden activists’ practices of community intersect with notions of citizenship and democracy through providing ‘third spaces’ in which relationships can be forged, debates conducted, ideas developed, and democratic virtues and competencies acquired. I also propose that in addition to fostering ‘good citizens’, ready to pursue their interests through accepted channels, community gardens provide space for the mobilization of oppositional citizens and support a wider social movement milieu. I suggest that community garden activists can be seen as building a different democratic polity, one based on an understanding of our ‘interconnected mutually reliant flesh’ (Beasley and Bacchi 2007 p. 293) and of the need to find ways to work within the heterogeneity of contemporary society.

In the community garden organisations I studied, arts and cultural events such as festivals, rituals and exhibitions were important means of transmitting information and values. Operating at an affective level, these events used celebration, joy and playfulness to invite wider audiences to recognise and join in community gardeners’ work. Participation in these events provided an accessible point of entry to engagement in community activism and a means of performing and promoting preferred cultural values. The involvement of people from diverse migrant and refugee experiences has impacted upon the cultural repertoires of community gardeners. The community garden organisations I researched were active in experimenting with ways to enable the participation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and sought ways to use community gardening to celebrate cultural diversity and challenge racism. Like many environmental and agrifood movements, community garden organisations have also struggled to find appropriate ways to confront racism and question the whiteness of their organisations.
Throughout this thesis, I argue that the numerous everyday practices, tactics and micro-strategies that I have discussed within the categories of activism, gardening, community and cultural production may in some cases be regarded as forms of collective social and political action. They are characterised by conscious and strategic choices to engage in contestation through framing and deploying discourses, symbols, practices and identities in order to effect change. Community garden activists’ practices can also be seen as having ‘internal’ movement building functions—creating solidarity, network ties and oppositional consciousness—in addition to addressing opponents and garnering public support (Rupp and Taylor 2003). However, the innovative ‘repertoire of contention’ developed by community garden activists differs significantly from that generally recognised by social movement scholars. In order to bridge this gulf, it is necessary to account for the political logic of prefigurative direct action, which I assert underlies community garden activists’ conception of their work as political and as collective social action.

Community garden activists do not begin with a theory that they seek to enact but with practice in response to local needs and visions. Despite the absence of a shared political analysis, there is considerable coherence around the use and advocacy of the distinct constellation of strategies that I have described. The political logic underlying these strategies has been articulated, discussed and embodied within the Australian community gardening movement to the extent that I suggest that it is possible to discern an ‘implicit strategy’ (Trainer 2000) or shared political logic that animates community garden activists’ collective practices of social change. The community garden organisers I interviewed, and others I encountered within the community gardening movement, described their approach as a ‘constructive’, ‘alternative building’ and ‘positive’ one. Their focus was less on petitioning governments, corporations and other elite groupings to change but rather on directly implementing aspects of the change they sought. Their collective social action was not envisioned as a campaign with a projected end, but an as ongoing and embodied intervention into daily life. Theirs was a politics of creation and collective imagination, in which the formation of alternative systems, institutions and cultural practices was associated with degrees of ‘delinking’ from the logic of the market and the state. Their aim was to develop tangible and enticing micro-examples of aspects of the society they wished to bring into being. These can be understood as both a critique of systems that are identified as oppressive or unsustainable and as the seeds of other possibilities. Prefigurative repertoires should therefore not be understood simply as ‘cultural’ or intra-movement forms of social action, nor as equivalent to the ‘transitional’ structures advocated by traditional Marxists. Rather, they are characterised by a distinct political logic in which actions are intended to have immediate and intrinsic value and at the same time provide a foundation for ongoing change. In seeking strategies that are consistent with their purposes, community garden activists’ prefigurative practices reject the justification of means in terms of envisioned goals, presenting a divergence from the consequentialism of much political strategising. Change is seen as occurring through millions of
ripples or ‘cracks’ created by micro-resistances, displacing the concept of ‘one clearly defined huge push’ (Chatterton 2010 p. 902; Holloway 2010).

By adopting an inclusionary approach to political theory, drawing on Marxian, feminist, queer, and anarchist traditions, I aimed to avoid a singular stance that might limit my understanding of community gardeners’ own diverse perspectives. While prefigurative politics has strong roots in the anarchist tradition, I found that community garden activists did not necessarily embrace anarchist analyses. Indeed, many spoke positively about the possibility of targeting and working within all levels of government. This suggests that prefigurative practices can be used in concert with policy-oriented approaches, and that while prefigurative politics is not primarily directed at influencing elites, its adoption does not necessarily imply a rejection of strategies that do seek to petition the state and other power-holders in order to enact change. The ‘incidental’ impacts of prefigurative practice on the symbolic order and its capacity to present tangible visions for change may even enhance policy-oriented and petitioning actions.

Having addressed the questions I set out to answer about the extent to which community gardening can be understood as a form of political praxis, the particular methods they use to effect change, and the political logic that underpins them, a further horizon of questions emerges. This thesis points to a number of areas for further research. As I outlined in Chapter 1, baseline data such as the number of community gardens that currently exist in Australia has not been established. While Chapter 2 of this thesis has provided a general picture of the range and activities of community gardens in Australia, given the gaps in knowledge there is a pressing need for further research, and in particular, for a comprehensive survey to determine the scope of community gardening activity in this country, including the number of gardens that exist, where they are, their core activities, and how many people they involve.

I have found that the history of community gardening in Australia is almost undocumented, and that important historical records have not been well archived. While a number of Australian studies include a brief account of the history of community gardening, these narratives tend to be transplanted from North American sources without evaluating their applicability to the Australian experience. There is a need to document individual community garden projects—including what can be learnt from their successes and struggles—and to analyse the role of historical events, wider social movements, and international community garden initiatives in the emergence and development of the Australian community gardening movement.

With its focus on community garden organisers and on the aspects of community gardening praxis related to collective social action, this thesis has left many aspects of community gardening relatively untouched. For example, I have given little consideration to agency and local government-initiated
community gardens. There are numerous questions as to the role that these projects play within the wider community gardening movement. In keeping with the themes explored in this thesis, the role that activist traditions associated with public health and community development play in agency-initiated and co-ordinated community garden projects is an area that might fruitfully be explored. There are also questions about the ways in which agency-initiated gardens resemble and differ from grassroots projects, and how Australian agency-run gardens compare with their overseas counterparts.

I chose to focus my attention on community gardeners’ ‘constructive’ repertoires. Nevertheless, community garden organisations are increasingly beginning to engage with policy development, particularly with the development of food policy councils and coalitions addressing issues of food security and food sovereignty. Future research might usefully consider the ways that community gardeners seek to influence government and other policy, and whether their constructive and prefigurative ways of working inform their policy-focused interventions. With community garden activists increasingly locating their work within agrifood movements, there is a need for analysis and evaluation of the contributions community gardens are making and could be making to food security and nutritional health.

The case studies presented in this thesis focus on urban forms of community gardening. While the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network has active connections with many gardens in regional centres and I did visit several community gardens growing in rural and regional areas I have not attended to their particular experiences in this thesis. There have been, to my knowledge, no studies that compare community gardens in urban and non-urban settings. It may be the case that community gardens in rural and regional communities have unique experiences of working with land and community—particularly given that lack of space to garden is likely to be less of a factor in people’s involvement—and that urban and non-urban community gardens face different obstacles and limitations.

Throughout my research, I found that community gardeners themselves voiced pressing needs for research that might assist them in making practical decisions about their projects—what is the optimal size for a community garden plot? What are the most effective ways of inviting involvement? What factors have led community garden projects to fold? What tools can be used to evaluate community garden projects? Despite the growing literature documenting the ‘benefits’ of community gardening, this is mostly comprised of small qualitative studies. With funding bodies and policy makers demanding quantitative ‘science facts’, there is continuing demand for rigorous and well-designed studies that provide substantive evidence of the impacts community gardens have on their participants and neighbourhoods, including their potential contributions to key areas including nutrition, food security, social inclusion, urban ecologies, and climate change.
While there is more work to do, I believe that this thesis makes important contributions to the development of a systematic research account of community gardening in Australia, particularly through its distinctive focus on grassroots organisers within the community gardening movement and its attention to the ways in which this subset of community gardeners conceptualise and enact collective social action through their community gardening work. This is a significant point of difference from previous studies, which have focused on plot-holders and casual participants in order to document a relatively narrow range of the ‘benefits’ they experience. This thesis also opens up new possibilities for analysis by applying social movement theory to the study of community gardens.

Although my primary aim in drawing upon social movement theory was to assist my analysis of community garden activists’ practices of collective action, my findings also intersect with recent developments in social movement scholarship, and suggest some gaps in existing theory. By claiming community gardening as activism, community gardeners present a challenge to prevailing conceptions of the activities that can be considered part of a social movement repertoire. This suggests that accounts premised on an understanding of social movement action as involving only highly confrontational, public, and dramatic forms of contention may be significantly underestimating the scope of collective social action taking place within social movements. Expanding notions of activism may not only allow for a more complete understanding of what social movements do and how they operate, but may also serve to redress the currently existing gender-bias in what social movement activities are and are not recognised as politically significant. Rather than suggesting that all kinds of ‘good works’—from personal dietary commitments and selective consumerism to community service—may be considered social movement activism, and thus impoverishing our understanding of social movement action, I argue that Rupp and Taylor’s (2003) model of social movement action may be extrapolated to define social movement activism as participation in collective practices that are employed consciously and strategically in order to make political claims, effect social change, create solidarity and build movements.

By mapping the ‘constructive’ and prefigurative social movement repertoire that has been developed and refined by the Australian community gardening movement, I hope to have made a contribution to the analysis of social movements that do not adopt state-focused protest as their primary strategy. Through my account of the community gardening movement, and the comparative case study of Friends of the Earth, I assert that the virtual absence of theoretical attention to constructive strategies in the social movement literature is not a result of their absence in social movements. Rather, it is a limitation in social movement theory that it has not developed a framework for identifying and analysing the full range of repertoires utilised by social movements, leaving prefigurative strategies mostly unnoticed and, when they are identified, largely unexplored and untheorised. In seeking to address this lacuna, I have been encouraged and assisted by developments in the analysis of what has
been described as ‘cultural’ social movement practices. While critical of analyses that maintain or reinforce a distinction between the ‘cultural’ and the ‘political’, I have found that these accounts provide useful openings to assist in the consideration of non-state focused collective action. In a series of accounts that Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) describe as having a ‘multi-institutional politics’ approach, some of the most encouraging developments draw upon feminist and poststructuralist analyses to argue that politics and culture are not only deeply intertwined, but mutually constitutive. In these accounts, cultural interventions are recognised as being capable of having material effects on the distribution of resources and the allocation of rewards and disincentives. With their recognition of multiple sites of power and resistance, these analyses are particularly useful for considering the kinds of prefigurative repertoires that have been my focus in this thesis. Interestingly, the theoretical accounts I have drawn on have been focused on women’s, lesbian, and queer movements. There has been little application of cultural social movement theories to environmental movements. This thesis suggests that there is potential for developing our understanding of green movements through further consideration of their cultural and prefigurative practices, informed by and informing social movement theory.

Looking at community gardens with a focus on social action, and using the tools of social movement theory enabled me to identify links with other social movements, and with an emerging literature that considers social action that is not concerned with seizing—or even necessarily influencing—state power, but with challenging its legitimacy and carving out spaces with a degree of autonomy from the logic of the market and the state (for example Day 2005; Chatterton and Pickerill 2006; Franks 2006; Carlsson 2008; Graeber 2009). Community gardens do not exist in isolation, despite the impression that may be created by a singular focus on them. Rather, they are embedded within their local communities, within social movement networks, and in some instances, within a web of local institutions—alternative food production and distribution initiatives, bicycle repair collectives, unschooling networks, housing co-operatives—with multiple layers of overlap that enable people to co-create a degree of autonomy and collective self-management, despite the pervasiveness and persistence of forces of co-option and recuperation. This may go some way to accounting for the interest that anti-capitalist and global justice movements have shown in community gardens in recent years. Community gardens can be green havens of autonomy and mutual aid. They are not only producers of food, community and culture but also generators of hope, possibility and collective imagination.


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APPENDIX 1.
AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITY GARDENING

This bibliography includes books, book chapters, guidebooks and manuals, honours, masters and doctoral theses, articles in academic and professional journals, and a number of other research-based documents, such as project evaluations and submissions.

My emphasis is this bibliography is on material that contributes to an understanding of community gardening in Australia. Hence I have attempted to be exhaustive in my inclusion of Australian sources. I also include publications about community gardening from other parts of the English-speaking world and on European allotments where articles raise issues relevant to community gardening in Australia.

Publications are listed chronologically within each category. Sources from or about Australia are marked with 

GUIDEBOOKS AND MANUALS109


109 This section does not include the numerous gardening manuals aimed at allotment holders in the UK and Europe.
gardening, from the practicalities of finding land and other resources, soils, compost, and water, to land ownership alternatives and local food systems.

A step-by-step guide to starting community gardens, focusing on forming partnerships with ‘sponsoring organisations’ such as churches, horticultural groups, community agencies and local councils. Covers budgeting and resource acquisition, getting and keeping land, site design, and soils. Also suggests solutions to perennial problems such as vandalism, pests, effective volunteer management, and dealing with surpluses. Examples from community gardens around the US.

A hefty spiral bound volume detailing the ACGA’s Growing Communities curriculum, including background information, workshop handouts, and facilitation tips. Workshop outlines cover creating and strengthening community gardening organisations, leadership development, planning, and forming partnerships. Focus is on using community gardens within an assets-based community development framework.

Outlines a range of strategies for using community gardens for community organising and development, including nurturing leadership, including families, and ‘economic empowerment’. Examples from around the US.

A handbook with a focus on saving allotments under threat. Includes an overview of allotment history and legislation, ways to revitalise allotments with additional projects, such as community gardens, events, horticultural therapy programs and orchards, and the basics of non-violent direct action if all else fails. Forward by George Monbiot.

Includes sections on the benefits of allotments, and how local authorities can promote and support them, as well as strategies for designing and managing existing and new allotments.

A basic step-by-step guide to starting a community garden, from gathering people to form a ‘garden club’ to finding and securing land, and troubleshooting as the garden develops.


Australia’s first general community gardening manual. Includes practical advice on starting and developing a working group, finding a site, securing resources and funding, garden management, and working with people. Frames community gardens as a form of urban agriculture.


Practical information for starting community gardens, including site assessment, fundraising, and promotion. Includes sample letters to property owners, meeting agendas, budgets, examples of policy documents, and volunteer job descriptions.


Resources for starting new community gardens and developing and maintaining established ones. Outlines benefits of community gardening. Ideas for getting started, involving people and growing community, garden design, finding resources, garden management, and running workshops and training programs. Includes basic gardening fact sheets.


More an alternative phone book than a garden manual, this is an extensive A-Z directory of resources and contacts for community gardeners, on everything from soil remediation services to seed retailers, with practical information on cultivation, fundraising, and starting a new garden.


A comprehensive start-up guide, based on the *Community Gardening in S.A Resource Kit*, and ACFCGN start-up guide, covering all the essentials for groups starting out, ongoing management, and social and organisational systems.


An operations manual, detailing Carss Park’s model for garden management and administration. Covers governance, site management, organic gardening basics and safety.

Presents the case for more community gardens and tools for creating them. Includes case studies of a number of different types of urban food garden programs as well as chapters on youth garden programs, therapeutic horticulture, and refugees’ gardens. Sections on soil health and safety, bringing community into the garden, and making community gardens more sustainable.


A Melbourne-focused guide to starting a community garden on publicly owned land. Covers finding land, garden design for temporary and long-term community gardens, forming partnerships, and funding, with local suggestions for identifying potential stakeholders and supporters.


On the heals of Michelle Obama’s White House kitchen garden, a group of government-sponsored volunteer programs published this online ‘toolkit’ for using community gardens to produce food in hard economic times. Strong focus on health and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption for low-income households. Frames community gardens primarily as sites of food production. Practical direction on the social and organizational aspects of starting or linking with a community garden program.


A substantially revised and updated version of Fulton 2004 (above), with additional material on gardening with children and agency supported community gardens.

**BOOKS**

Books are divided into research and analysis, histories of community gardening, and stories about community gardens. Book chapters are included in the following section.

**Research and analysis**


One of the first Australian publications on community gardens. Describes community gardens as a form of urban agriculture, also emphasising community and job training benefits. Profiles the thirteen community gardens and two city farms identified in Melbourne,
including management structures, land tenure, funding, activities, participants, and employment opportunities, with sample documents from profiled gardens, such as newsletters and constitutions. Provides recommendations for local governments to support community gardens.

Description and analysis of the community open space movement in the US and Europe, which includes community designed and managed spaces such as community gardens. Detailed case studies from New York City including recommendations.

An ethnographic study of several co-operative enterprises, a housing co-op and eleven community gardens. Includes physical descriptions of the gardens, interviews with gardeners, historical background, and an analysis of ‘community’ in community gardens. Also discusses policy issues for community gardens and co-ops.

The first national study of community gardens in Australia, this booklet gives details of the 38 community gardens, city farms, and ‘enterprize centres’ Phillips identified around Australia in 1994. Widely distributed, this publication was the impetus behind the establishment of the Australian Community Gardens and City Farms Network.

A study of 27 Californian community gardens focusing on productivity, employment, training and entrepreneurialism. Describes conditions that enable gardens to flourish. Includes in-depth case studies of 5 gardens and lists of contacts and resources.

A collection of short articles focusing on gardening as a radical act of resistance and creation. Includes accounts of creating and struggling to save community gardens, issues in food production and urban greening, as well as articles on the meaning and philosophy of gardening.

Proceedings from an international conference on community gardening held by Nottingham University in 2000. Articles, predominantly from the US and UK, are grouped in five themes:
gardening in the community, gardening and health, children and gardening, food security, and reclaiming the land. Many colour photographs.


A scholarly analysis of the history and present of community gardens in the Lower East Side of New York, which emphasises the gardens’ organisational forms, activism in support of threatened gardens, the roles children play, and the limitations and possibilities of urban food production.


Billed as ‘the first significant study of community gardens in Australia’, this publication details an interdisciplinary research project on the role of community gardens in a Sydney public housing estate, focusing on community development and neighbourhood improvement. Based on in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation, the study finds that community gardens enhance community and social life on the estate, fulfilling multiple roles including community building, health promotion, reclamation of public space, environmental education, and providing opportunities for cultural expression. Also covers policy and design issues and makes a number of recommendations for public housing authorities, community workers, designers and gardeners.


Explores the culture of allotments though art produced in and about them. Written by the preeminent scholar of British allotments. Reflects on allotments and friendship, landscape, and politics. Includes many colour and black and white illustrations.


*Community Greening Review* is the ACGA’s annual publication, directed at academics and the general public as well as community gardeners. This 160 page 25th Anniversary edition includes articles from 1984 – 2002, grouped in themes of ‘what good are gardens?’, history, transformation, managing, and ‘the world in the garden’. Includes several oft-cited articles, such as David Malakoff’s (1995) ‘What good is community greening?’ and reports of the ACGA’s major surveys.


Looks at community gardens from a planning perspective, exploring ways that planners can support the development of community gardens, including approaches to design, community
participation, and policy development. Uses case studies of six community gardens in Seattle to demonstrate the benefits of community gardens.


**History of community gardening**

Coe, Mary Lee (1978) *Growing with Community Gardening*. Countryman Press. One of the early community gardening books from the US, with a focus on the history of community gardening. Also provides step-by-step instructions on starting community garden projects.

Warner, Sam Bass Jr. (1987) *To Dwell is to Garden: A History of Boston’s Community Gardens*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. Maps the development of community gardening in the US, from its roots in 18th Century Britain to the first US urban gardens in the late 1890s, American community gardening in WWI and WWII, and the role of the Civil Rights movement in community garden development in the 1960s. Warner then uses garden plots in contemporary Boston community gardens to tell stories of migration from Italy, Africa, China, Latin America and the UK. Also includes beautiful portraits by photographer Hansi Durlach, with quotes from the gardeners. A key source on the history of US community gardens.

Crouch, David and Colin Ward (1988) *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture*. Faber and Faber (reprinted by Five Leaves in 2003). The definitive history of allotments and community gardens in Britain and Europe. Explores the culture and landscape of allotments from the struggle for their creation to their revitalization by environmentalists, focusing on allotments’ culture of community and reciprocity.


Draws on Bassett’s (1979) analysis to describe the history of community gardening in the US as a series of ‘movements’ responding to political and social contexts and economic cycles. Covers urban gardening programs emerging in the 1890s, gardens during and between the World Wars, new movements for ‘community greening’ from the 1970s, and developments from the 1990s to present.

**Stories about community gardens**


Details a plan to redesign an entire gentrifying former industrial area of Adelaide along permaculture principles. A city farm was at the centre of the design (and was established in 1986). One of the first permaculture books and an example of the relationships between community gardening and permaculture.


Success stories of many urban community gardens in Harlem, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco, their development and impact on their local communities, with analysis of why so many of the gardens are run by women.


A collection of stories from inner-city community gardeners in the US.


An inspiring collection of articles about community garden projects in the US (and Cuba and Slovenia), and campaigns to keep them growing. Includes a section on practical permaculture strategies for guerrilla gardening, urban water, and neighbourhood food production.

Community gardens are portrayed as part of a grassroots movement for sustainable cities and a ‘free and just’ world.


Stories and pictures gathered from community and school gardens that were part of a community storytelling project. Includes an introduction outlining the gardens’ significance to their communities, particularly though increasing community safety.
Profiles plot holders in Melbourne’s inner-city public housing community gardens, and the plants they grow. Focuses on ethnic diversity, with stories arranged by gardeners’ countries of origin. Many colour photographs. Forwards by Peter Cundall and Stephanie Alexander.

With parallel English and Italian text, this book celebrates the gardens of the Manhattan, New York in the context of neighbourhood history and culture. Many colour photos.

Stories and photographs of community gardens around the United States.

**BOOK CHAPTERS**

An argument for producing food in cities, citing environmental and social benefits. Advocates a permaculture approach and suggests principles for effective urban food growing projects, including promoting local wealth and using and building upon existing networks. Describes allotments and community gardens as strategies to provide city-dwellers with ‘clean, fresh and affordable food’. Includes considerations for urban planners and urban eco-village designers.

Describes allotments as ‘the epitome’ of Local Agenda 21 at its best. Argues that allotments and community gardens are becoming ‘re-radicalised’, with people increasingly seeing them as a means to ‘empower disadvantaged social groups’, avoid the marketplace, and produce ecologically sustainable food. Outlines international research discussing the social (including health, community development, and education), economic, and environmental benefits of community gardens and allotments. Strengths are said to stem from co-operation ‘synergies’ among local people, community groups, and local authorities (though acknowledges gardens often thrive despite local government). Suggests that local authorities learn from and support grassroots community gardens, rather than running community gardens themselves.

In the concluding chapter of her book, Matthews describes the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at Melbourne’s CERES as an example of an environmentalist practice that invites people to enter into deep connection with place by drawing on mythic,
Indigenous, and spiritual poetics, as well as celebrating the practical land regenerating work of the community (see also Matthews 2000).


Shepard, Benjamin (2009) “Community Gardens, Convivial Spaces, and the Seeds of a Radical Democratic Counterpublic” in Heather D. Gautney, Omar Dahbour and Neil Smith (Eds.) Democracy, States, and the Struggle for Global Justice. New York: Routledge. pp. 273 - 296. Shows community gardens as community spaces that are vital for democracy, enabling people to meet, dialogue, share pleasures and concerns, and act together. Argues that community gardeners used creative, festive forms of protest in campaigns to protect gardens in New York, and frames the conflict as being about the meaning and significance of public space. Community gardening is shown as a movement to create inclusive, convivial public spaces, with much in common with other public space movements, such as Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets.

an embodied practice that opens up spaces of ethical and political possibility and community gardeners as people actively engaged with issues of living sustainably in the city.

Looks at community gardens in the context of a city’s system of public parks. Addressing both stand-alone community gardens, and those created within existing parks, Harnik argues that community gardens should be recognised as ‘an integral part of a city’s park system’ (87). Community gardens are also recommended as a strategy to help rejuvenate parks, particularly those that have fallen into disuse because of safety or crime concerns.

Argues for the use of nature-based community capacity building interventions – such as community gardens – to address military service related stress, pre- and post-deployment, in a way that sees soldiers as embedded in families and communities. Drawing on research in horticultural therapy and conservation psychology, the chapter argues that community gardens increase the resilience of both soldiers and their families, including those dealing with post-traumatic stress disorders. Includes examples of where community gardens have been used as an intervention with returned soldiers.

THESES
Argues that community gardens should be a planning priority, recognised as valuable recreational facilities as well as sites of food production, and zoned to protect tenure. Community gardens are portrayed as an ‘incremental step to more sustainable communities’ by easing the stress of alienating urban environments, and preserving green and community spaces in the midst of increases in urban density. The thesis applies lessons from the analysis of benefits generated and obstacles faced by an existing community garden to the development of a new garden.

A reflective case study of the FINCA community garden in Fremantle, by one of its initiators and organisers. Explores the development process, the garden’s aims and visions, relationships with local council and with wider concerns of place-making and community. See also Stocker and Barnett (1998) under journal articles/environment.

A review of Melbourne’s community gardens before the Department of Human Services – Housing created a position supporting community gardens and funded Cultivating Community to manage the housing estate gardens. Identifies and provides details of 42 gardens, and assesses their potential contributions to urban and household sustainability.


Case studies of eight Sydney community gardens and the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network outline management structures, what the gardens mean to participants and ‘issues’ identified by gardeners. Analyses the gardens’ sustainability and accessibility, drawing on Actor Network Theory and permaculture principles and emphasising information flows and networks among gardens, NGOs and local councils.


Based on interviews and participant observation at Northey Street City Farm (Brisbane) in its early years of development. Focuses on ‘consumption’ as an economic and cultural practice. Frames community gardens as a form of urban agriculture and suggests that ‘the emergence of community gardens in Australia seems to be both unnecessary and undesirable, given that presently most… consumer goods can be easily obtained from commercial outlets.’ As food produced at the farm did not significantly add to gardeners’ income, participation is explained as resulting from ‘environmentalist ideology’ and group identity, rather than personal benefit. Emphasises potential differences in motivation between community garden organisers and gardeners/plot holders.


Evaluates the social benefits of four urban greening sites in Chicago using empowerment theory to analyse empirical data and contextualise greening advocates’ practices. Concludes that community greening projects (including, but not limited to community gardens) have the potential to provide social outcomes, but that empowerment is not an automatic outcome, and depends on organisers’ practices.


Based on a survey of organisers of 14 community gardens in suburban Canada. Unlike the gardens in much US research, most of these projects were initiated by organisations such as churches and food banks, rather than by neighbourhood groups, and most had good security of tenure. Concludes that gardens started by agencies can be as successful in meeting
community development aims as grassroots projects, provided gardeners ‘share in the
garden’s responsibilities and accomplishments’. Identifies conflict between gaining support
from local authorities, and remaining independent from bureaucratic assumptions as an issue
for community gardens.

Outlines and compares six US community gardens’ adult education programmes, based on
telephone interviews with co-ordinators. Reviews and compares horticultural therapy and
adult education literature.

Drawing on social capital theory, Maxwell surveys 27 community gardens in urban blight
neighbourhoods. The gardens were found to contribute to increased physical order, such as
reduction of graffiti and vandalism, and to social outcomes such as increased
intergenerational interaction and access to fresh food. Includes narrative case studies of five
of the gardens.

Qualitative study involving students, teachers and parents of the Kitchen Garden at
Collingwood College, run by Stephanie Alexander and Cultivating Community. Shows the
innovative curriculum has potential positive impacts on children’s food preferences, learning,
and social development. Recommends further evaluation of the program.

Outlines history of community gardens in US, following Bassett’s (1979) argument. Drawing
on ecofeminism and deep ecology, argues that community gardens redress dualism and
disconnection by addressing multiple interlinked issues, and enabling people to reconnect
with ‘nature’, ‘community’ and food systems. Proposes deep ecology as a guiding philosophy
for community gardening. Also reviews issues for planners and policy makers, recommending
holistic and collaborative food systems planning within a strong philosophical framework.

A review of the public health benefits of community gardens for recently arrived migrants
living in public housing in inner-city Melbourne.

Inspired by Christopher Alexander’s *A Pattern Language* (1977), this thesis identifies common themes in case studies of seven community gardens in South East USA, and from these proposes elements to include in the design of community gardens to maximise productivity and community building. Suggested design elements include ‘a mixture of personal and communal beds’, ‘a shaded seating area with a view of the garden’, ‘a participatory and changing aesthetic’ and ‘an attractive public face’.


Focuses on gardening as a practice of connection with nature, and concludes that participation in community gardens can produce greater social and environmental connections than gardening individually. Based on case studies of four gardens and interviews with community gardeners, organisers, and professor of landscape architecture, Mark Francis. Includes transcripts of interviews.


A multiple stakeholder analysis of non-commercial urban food production in Melbourne backyards and community gardens. Found that main reasons for participating in food production were the enjoyment and production of fresh tasty food. Health, environment, community involvement were secondary motivations, while economic benefits and food security were less important. Barriers included availability of space as well as land tenure, funding for insurance and start-up costs, and water restrictions.


Finding that there is little planning policy on community gardens in South Australia, this thesis makes a number of recommendations for state and local government bodies to enable the development of community gardens, including integrating community gardens into strategic plans and developing zoning regulations that support community gardening. Reviews literature on the benefits of community gardens and community garden planning strategies from the United States and New Zealand.


Interviews community gardeners and local government officials in Vancouver Canada.

Recommends the establishment of an umbrella organisation for community gardens.

Couët, Marie-Laure Zolcinski (2009) *Strengthening Providence with Community Gardens*. Unpublished Masters thesis, Environmental Studies, Brown University. A study of the net economic benefits of community gardens to participants and communities. Found that plots produced from $90 to $130 of food per season, with the potential to produce up to $200 worth. Concludes that community gardens provide direct fiscal benefits to participants and to the City through vegetable production, health promotion, and low-cost management of green space. Provides a costing argument for local authorities to fund community garden support organisations.

Green, Rachel (2009) *From Little Things, Big Things Grow: Investigating Remote Aboriginal Community Gardens*. Unpublished Honours thesis, School of Geosciences, University of Sydney. A qualitative study of seven community gardens in remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The gardens are shown to bring significant benefits, including building trust and relationships and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. Found that the role of garden co-ordinator or trainer was crucial, but constrained by short CDEP funding cycles that removed funding for co-ordinators before garden participants were ready to self-manage projects.

**JOURNAL ARTICLES AND CONFERENCE PAPERS**

Journal articles and conference papers are listed in sections focused on social impacts and community development; health; food security, policy and systems; urban agriculture; education; politics and social action; environment; planning, urban design and place making; and economics.

**Social impacts and community development**

Klein, Barbro (1993) “Fences, Fertilizers, and Foreigners: Moral Dilemmas in the Swedish Cultural Landscape” *Journal of Folklore Research* 30(1): pp. 45 – 59. Looks at a Swedish allotment garden as a site of negotiation between ethnic groups. In contrast with North American accounts, Klein finds that while the gardens enable feel-good stories about ‘good interethnic relations’, there was in practice little interaction among different cultural and ethnic groups in the garden. Debates about fences and chemical use are
shown to reflect wider discourses about the supposedly detrimental impact of ‘foreigners’ on Swedish culture.

Written in response to struggles over community gardens in New York in the late 1990s.
Shows the success of community gardeners in the United States in turning urban ‘blight sites’ into safe, productive, and beautiful spaces, which build social capital through collaborative action. Outlines legislative obstacles, including forms of tenure, and proposes legislation at local and state level in the US that would support community gardens.

Summary of two undergraduate theses on community gardens in Philadelphia. Focuses on the benefits of community gardens to de-industrialised inner-city communities dominated by poverty. Analysis of poverty as having multiple interconnected causes that cannot be redressed by solely economic means. Primary benefit of community gardens is identified as food production as a means of alleviating poverty, particularly in areas where there is limited availability of fresh produce, with the additional benefits of social capital creation, access to ‘nature’, neighbourhood improvement and community building, and the potential for small enterprises.

Frames community gardens as places where people develop understandings of ‘garden’ and ‘community’, and where different interpretations of these ideas become embodied. Case studies of three gardens in urban Minneapolis (one a collection of allotments remaining from the 1940s, one an open, mostly ornamental garden focusing on involving children, and the third a fenced garden with individual plots and an emphasis on community building) focus on their differences, particularly in regards to their enclosure and their subsequent ability to involve people and foster community. Argues for need to make distinctions among different types of urban gardens.

Describes community gardens in Seattle, Vancouver and Sydney. Attributes the Seattle gardens’ success to city council support, and partnerships between grassroots organisations and local government. Suggests that Sydney gardens would be assisted by statutory authorities integrating community gardening into planning processes and employing community garden co-ordinators/liaison officers.
Report of a narrative inquiry on the establishment of an urban community garden in a US neighbourhood affected by poverty, violence and drug use. Demonstrates how the development of the garden enabled residents of a neighbourhood that had developed a negative reputation to tell a different story, one which emphasised effective community collaboration and resistance. Includes a brief review of community gardening literature, with sources on psychological and community building benefits of community gardening.

Uses the social networks of the community gardeners in the above study as a context to theorise about the nature of social capital. Frames community gardens as ‘third places’ (Oldenberg 1999) where people generate and draw on forms of ‘social capital’ such as reciprocity, trust and civic participation. Shows that social capital was a prerequisite to the development of the garden, but that some participants had less access than others to the social resources the garden generated. Access to social capital was not commensurate with effort, but reflected and reinforced a wider context of inequality and oppression. Glover argues that social capital needs to be regarded as a potential mechanism of inequality as well as a social benefit.

Shows community gardens as places where positive interracial interaction and relationship building occurs. Found that community gardens were less racially segregated than other leisure settings, and that many gardeners believed community gardening brought people of different ethnic backgrounds together. Also found that the reasons for, and satisfaction with, involvement in a community garden were similar for black and white interviewees. Includes statistics about gardeners’ motivations and sense of community.

Describes the multiple roles of 20 Latino gardens, their organisational structures, gardener demographics, gardening practices, institutional support, cultural and educational activities, and the issues they face. Finds that gardeners and support organisations viewed the gardens more in terms of community building than agricultural production. Gardens also lead to further community organising, and contributed to community food security and agricultural literacy.

Looks at community gardens as sites where gender roles and relations are both reproduced and resisted. Considers division of garden labour, leadership, and impacts beyond the garden.


Ways ‘grassroots organisations’ such as community gardens mobilize social resources to meet their projects’ needs. Based on interviews with gardeners in the US, the paper identifies relationships within and beyond the garden as mechanisms for resource acquisition.

Sociability – being friendly and welcoming – and engaging in ‘leisure’ as well as ‘work’ are recognised as essential to form the social ties necessary to produce and access social capital.


British allotments have traditionally been seen as the province of low income, older men. Since the late 1990s, numbers of women, middle-class, and tertiary-educated plot holders have been increasing. This article, based on surveys and interviews in London allotments, explores the significance of these changes. Finds that women, across classes, were more focused on environmental sustainability and organic food production than men, and were more likely to involve children in their allotments – hence that allotments were becoming more focused on these issues. Reviews literature about women as food gardeners. Also touches on women’s roles in establishing community gardens.


Qualitative study of a Melbourne community garden considering the kinds of connections that have been formed among gardeners in terms of social capital theory. Finds that members experienced the community garden as socially beneficial, but that connections formed within the garden did not appear to extend outside the garden setting. Factors that enhanced social connectedness were the layout, location, and effective voluntary management of the garden.


An ‘autoethnography’ about the experience of a white academic working with an African American community to grow a community garden in a school, reflecting on her realisation of the role of racism and white privilege in her interactions with gardeners and students.
Health


An early example of community gardens as part of a public health program. Outlines a social and ecological view of health promotion, as adopted by the City of Toronto. Describes a community garden that was central to the community development aspect of the City’s health promotion strategy.


Survey of 144 community gardeners and 67 non-gardeners from the same neighbourhoods. Found that gardeners ate significantly more vegetables than control interviewees, particularly brassicas, squashes and eggplants, and less sweets, soft drinks and dairy products. The output of garden plots was measured and estimated the market value of the produce calculated at between $2 to $1134, with an average of $160 of produce from each plot (values calculated as conventional, not organic produce). Gardeners’ reasons for involvement included recreation, mental health, exercise, produce and contact with nature. There was also a correlation found between involvement in a community garden and life satisfaction.


Looks at the perceptions of US community gardeners on the benefits of community gardening, framed in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. Detailed results of a survey of 361 gardeners from 36 community garden sites are provided, and analysis focuses on findings that gender, ethnicity and city size effect gardeners’ assessments of the impacts of community gardening on meeting life needs, with women valuing money saving and beauty, and gardeners in larger cities finding community gardens particularly important.


Assuming that ‘health is wealth’, article looks at how community gardens create ‘community capital’ by generating natural, social, human and economic resources.


Based on a survey of co-ordinators of 63 urban and rural community gardens. Describes physical characteristics of gardens, people’s reasons for participation, and demographics of gardeners. Finds that gardens improved social networks and community capacity by creating a social gathering space and a focus for community organising. Concludes that community
gardens are useful for health promotion, addressing multiple determinants of health. Includes literature review demonstrating benefits of gardening for a range of health outcomes.


A comprehensive review of literature about the links between human health and access to parks and nature. Includes references to community gardening. See also Volume 2, an annotated bibliography of literature about health and parks.


Evaluation of a program that initiated six community gardens, showing that participants increased their physical activity and their fruit and vegetable consumption. Identifies ‘key elements’ for community garden programs to succeed in improving public health and increasing community capacity: local leadership, community participation and partnerships, and skill-building opportunities for participants. Argues for the need to develop tools to effectively quantify the benefits of community gardens.


A study of 20 people aged over 65 who were recruited to participate in a gardening activity – collectively cultivating an allotment – tracking their experience over a 9-month period. Reviews the health benefits of gardening, noting that most research focuses on the benefits of physical activity. Argues that allotments and community gardens are ‘therapeutic landscapes’, which can contribute to maintenance of health and wellbeing amongst older people by combining the benefits of gardening with social connectedness and support.


Report of a research project involving 13 school gardens in South East Queensland. Despite nutrition not being a primary focus for most of the gardens, increased familiarity, enjoyment and consumption of vegetables resulted from children’s involvement. Provides an overview of evidence for the benefits of school gardens for health promotion, along with evidence on the benefits of gardening, increased fruit and vegetable consumption, and community gardens. Recommends school-based community gardens as a way to ‘embed nutrition, physical activity and environmental sustainability’ into school curricula.

Based on surveys and interviews with inner-city highrise residents in Melbourne and Sydney, including public housing tenants. Survey respondents with good access to ‘natural environments’, including community gardens, reported higher levels of ‘quality of life’ than those with poor access. (See also Henderson-Wilson 2007).


A study of youth involved with community gardens in Minneapolis, US. Finds that garden participants were more willing to eat nutritious foods and to try unfamiliar foods than those not involved. Also finds that garden participants had a better understanding of the food system and were more likely to cook and garden independently.


Based on focus groups, interviews, and participant observation in ethnically diverse community gardens in Toronto, this article focuses on gardeners’ perceptions of the health benefits of community gardening. In line with other investigations, this study finds that access to fresh, culturally appropriate food, increased veg consumption, physical activity, and social support were they key health benefits. Gardeners also reported that insecurity of tenure produced uncertainty and anxiety, and expressed concerns about soil contamination.


Quantitative data substantiating a link between participation in a community garden and increased fruit and vegetable consumption. The survey of 776 adults in a US city found that adults with a household member who participated in a community garden consumed fruits and vegetables 1.4 more times per day than those who did not participate, and they were 3.5 times more likely to consume fruits and vegetables at least 5 times daily. The authors suggest that community gardens may encourage fruit and vegetable consumption by increasing access to fresh produce, providing low-cost produce that is perceived as of high-quality, and increasing people’s preference for fruit and vegetables.

A qualitative study using a community-based participatory research methodology involving academics community organisations. Case studies of two Michigan community gardens, both running programs for youth focus on community gardens’ capacity to generate ‘developmental assets’ (such as commitment to learning and positive identity) and healthy eating in youth participants. Suggests that the gardens brought a number of benefits to their young participants, including increased vegetable consumption, increased self-esteem through contributing to meaningful voluntary work (growing vegetables for homeless shelters), skills development, and reducing fear of crime.


A study of a program in North Carolina designed to reduce obesity through classes on nutrition and gardening. While the administrators’ goals were centred on obesity reduction, participants identified holistic wellness benefits, community development and nutrition outcomes.


A qualitative study based on interviews with 10 plot holders at Dig In Community Garden in the parklands of Port Melbourne. Interviewees identified the health benefits they gained from participation in the garden, and their responses are correlated with previous research. Benefits included relaxation, social connection and support, connection with nature, experiences of efficacy and achievement, organic vegetable consumption, and an improved sense of wellbeing and health. Walking or bicycle riding to the garden was seen by the researchers as adding to the physical exercise benefits of gardening.


Looks at the health benefits of community gardens primarily in terms of social support and collective efficacy, a combination of mutual trust and action for common good. Based on interviews with 67 people from 29 gardens, the article finds that community gardens promoted health through social connections characterised by trust and reciprocity leading to increased social support and within a community that looked out for each other and were willing to help and the establishment of social norms of mutual reciprocity and care for neighbourhood. These were seen as buffering against violence and crime and embedding healthy food choices and vegetable consumption. Specific mechanisms facilitating social
health benefits included engagement in voluntary activity, leadership development, organised activities such as working bees, shared meals and festivals, and acting as a catalyst for neighbourhood activity.

**Food security, food policy, community food systems**


A clear, though somewhat dated, introduction to a community food security perspective. Identifies bridges between the environmental justice and community food security movements based on their shared systemic analyses and commitment to social justice and community empowerment. Community gardens and urban farms are offered as examples of projects integrating food security, environmental and social justice issues.


A study of the plants in a community garden created by Hmong immigrants in California, focusing on agricultural biodiversity and ethnobotanical usage, reflecting also on the significance of the gardens in maintaining cultural identity. Lists names and culinary and medicinal uses of the 72 different plants identified in the plots of Hmong gardeners. Compares the community garden plots with traditional Hmong agriculture in Laos and Thailand, finding additional usages not recorded in Asian studies. Hmong gardeners cultivated traditional species, enabling the continued practice of traditional medicine and food preparation, and also adopted plants from other cultures and neighbouring non-Hmong plot holders.


Situates community gardens within the community food security movement, as alternative food networks enabling people to begin ‘delinking’ from global corporate food systems and as means for food education and participation. The three case studies of community gardens in Toronto, Canada show plots being cultivated intensively and creatively to produce substantial amounts of food, and growing diverse crops not otherwise available. In stories that closely parallel those from Melbourne’s public housing community gardens, Baker emphasises the importance of translators and culturally sensitive NGOs to enable participation of non-English speaking gardeners and meet the needs of immigrants and refugees.

This article evaluates two strategies for dealing with food system issues expected to emerge with climate change. It outlines the environmental costs of food production and distribution systems, and contrasts functional foods, which they describe as a corporate and profit driven solution, with community gardening, a solution emerging from grassroots environmental and food movements. The authors argue that urban agriculture is limited as a response to food insecurity and climate change because of the contested nature of the land it occupies and a lack of institutional support, and that the multiple benefits of urban agriculture should be more widely recognised.

**Urban agriculture**


A study of the allotments, city farms and community gardens in Leeds and Bradford and their contributions to sustainability. Looks at community gardens as a form of urban agriculture, but acknowledges that community development and education may be more of a focus than food production at some sites. Outlines the arguments for growing food in the cities of developed nations, including environmental, social, economic, educational, and health benefits. Finds that community gardens and city farms contribute in a range of ways to environmental and social sustainability, as well as education and health, with allotments having a narrower range of benefits. Argues that urban food growing should be supported as part of local government policy.


Overview of urban agriculture in London, focusing on allotments, community gardens and city farms, mapping who is involved, what’s produced, and current and potential contributions of urban agriculture to health, environmental, economic, educational, community goals.


An analysis of urban agriculture (particularly community gardens but also guerrilla gardens and other urban food production) in the Global North from a Marxian geography perspective. Sees urban agriculture as increasing in the developed world in the context of the current financial crisis, but as more than a response to economic need. Drawing on Marx and Polanyi, urban agriculture is framed as a way to reclaim ‘community commons’, and to overcome alienation from nature and production.
Education

Describes a project to engage high school students in science through a hands-on project to transform a vacant block into a community garden. Shows students’ learning outcomes and the benefits of an approach to science education that engages participants’ concerns, interests and experiences outside science, enables ideas to be enacted, and is situated within the wider community.

Describes the process of engaging students in research in community gardens using Participatory Rural Appraisal – a form of action research – as a methodology. Young people in a community environmental education program documented the gardening practices of recent immigrants in urban community gardens, collecting oral histories and mapping garden processes. (See also Krasny and Doyle (2002)).

This article revisits a study of community gardens in one of Sydney’s public housing estates (see Bartolomei, et al 2003 above) to assess their contributions to non-formal education for sustainability. Draws on the NSW Environmental Education Plan. Finds that the gardens contribute to multiple dimensions of sustainability, through the gardeners’ learning about sustainable gardening practices and self-management, the physical benefits of the gardens to the quality of life in the estate, and the involvement of multiple agencies in a project with sustainability education outcomes.

Examines the Garden Mosaics program, an out of school learning program that takes place in community gardens across the US. Garden Mosaics focuses on science content and inquiry skills for people aged 9 – 18 years, working with elder community gardeners. The authors consider the program in the context of social and interactive models of learning, and argue that community gardens are communities of practice that present multiple opportunities for learning, which are not available in classrooms.
Politics and social action


Compared the ways community garden movement activists and government agencies supporting and running community gardens viewed and practiced urban gardening. Despite claiming the same benefits for community gardening (community development, increasing self-worth and confidence, food production, promoting equality and co-operation), Jamison found that agencies attributed these to individual gardening activities, while movement organisations attributed benefits to the community effort of starting and growing the gardens. Agencies saw gardeners as ‘clients’ or facility users, movement organisations saw them as participants and movement members, with gardeners expected to be involved in the management of the garden. Shows the community gardening movement having to change its structures and ways of working to accommodate bureaucratic assumptions in order to gain government support and funding.


Discussion of conflicts over land use between developers, low-cost housing advocates and community gardeners. Based on an area of New York with over 75 community gardens. Describes their diversity – some squatted, some well-established community parks with gazebos and lawns and fruit trees, some inspired by Puerto Rican casitas, some growing only flowers where the soil is too contaminated for food – the reasons people are involved, and the impacts the gardens have had in creating community and safety. Analyses the involvement of non-government organisations such as Green Guerillas (they spell it with one ‘r’), and government programs in both supporting the community gardeners and engaging in conflict over land use.


Outlines arguments by current allotment activists and advocates based on environmental and community-building benefits. Brief history of allotments in the UK, from their origins in the 17th Century.


Describes a women’s community garden in Townsville, which was started as a response to the ‘culture of violence’ against women and the earth, and a way of developing ‘resourcefulness’ and community self-reliance. The article describes the ecofeminist and Heart Politics (Peavey, Levy et al. 1985) ideas which influenced the project, and offers critical reflections on the process of initiating the garden, including integrating the garden with the
wider work of the women’s community health centre, on whose grounds it grew, and the collective’s difficulty encouraging the involvement of more women.

Based on interviews with community garden activists, this article reviews the campaigns to save New York’s community gardens, and argues that they reflect the City’s and gardeners’ different conceptualisations of ‘the public’. The City, they argue, saw the public as ‘aggregation of abstract political subjects’ (p. 202), while the garden activists campaigned from a perspective of communal community rights. Argues that successes in saving gardens were due more to campaigning by community activists than the lawsuits that accompanied it.

An exploration of the ways allotments’ complexity – resisting categories of urban/rural, public/private, leisure/production, and having multiple benefits relevant to several portfolios – affects advocates’ efforts to frame their value. Draws on de Certeau’s conceptualisation of tactics and strategies to examine gardeners’ political practices, focusing on submissions to the Scottish Parliamentary Inquiry into allotments in 2001. Includes historical examples of ways allotment’s benefits have been described, and how advocates have tentatively drawn on contemporary discourses such as ‘sustainability’ and ‘social inclusion’.

An analysis of the campaign to save New York’s community gardens in the late 1990s.
Details the history of campaigns to save NY’s gardens, in which housing advocates joined with community gardeners in refusing Mayor Giuliani’s framing of the issue as ‘gardens vs. affordable housing’. Affirms that conflict was not about need for housing, but about values. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre (1991, 1996), shows how market values and metaphors are incompatible with people’s right to ‘inhabit’ cities and public spaces, that they are and incapable of assessing the use value of community gardens.

Further analysis of the 1990s conflict over NY’s community gardens. Shows how community gardeners mobilised support at various ‘scales’ to resist the destruction of their gardens and the ‘neoliberalization’ of urban space through neighbourhood, local area, city-wide and national organising. Gardeners’ strategies included staging public protests to raise awareness of the issue, linking their cause to wider political struggles, and using the internet to gain support outside New York. Also shows how framing was used on both sides of the
controversy, suggesting the ‘housing-versus-gardens’ conflict was fabricated by Mayor Giuliani’s office.

Explores the background to the 2003 settlement between community gardeners and the State and City of New York. Details the quite distinct arguments made by two different community coalitions and the Attorney General in court cases in defence of the gardens. Compares the local government’s approach to community gardens in New York with other US cities, and makes recommendations about how it could develop better policy and practice in regards to urban and community green space.

Examines the links between participation in a community garden and democratic values and skills. A survey of 190 randomly selected community gardeners finds that community gardens were venues for the development of civic virtues such as public spiritedness, participation and trust, of feelings of efficacy, and of skills necessary to partake in public life. Self-identified leaders were found to have stronger democratic values than other garden participants.

Examines the changing discourses about ‘the supposedly transformative power’ of gardening and analyses recent developments in community gardening in the context of neoliberalism. Argues that since the early 1990s, a new discourse has emerged which is distinct from the previous era’s emphasis on community organising and development, environmental improvement, food security, and social space. The new wave of programs draw on this tradition, but seek not to facilitate collective resistance or action, but individual transformation and the cultivation of neoliberal citizen/subjects. These projects are initiated not by local neighbourhood members, but ‘quazi-state’ actors. Benefits are seen as coming from relationship with ‘nature’ and ‘gardening’ rather than community engagement.

Drawing on the frame alignment strand within social movement theory, Martinez argues that New York community garden activists were ultimately successful in their late 1990s campaign because of their symbolic work in framing the conflict in ways that garnered allies and resources. Garden activists framed the list of auctionable gardens as a ‘hit list’, associating their destruction with killing and portraying the gardens are loved and grieved for spaces. Bulldozers were depicted as symbols of the destructive power of development. Gardeners
also linked their campaign to wider issues of democracy under neoliberalism and to growing disquiet about the Giuliani administration.


An analysis of the destruction of the 14 acre South Central Farm in Los Angeles, which was the subject of the film *The Garden* (dir. Scott Hamilton Kennedy). Analyses the struggle to defend the garden as resistance to discriminatory legal and planning practices and develops an argument for the preservation of threatened community gardens based on environmental justice principles.


Another analysis of the loss of South Central Farm, this time focusing on the ways racism is reproduced through land use policy, and the ways racism impacted on the gardeners’ ability to mobilise the discourses of property rights and heritage.

**Environment**


Frames community gardens as part of a permaculture approach to redesigning cities and as a form of urban food production that is compatible with increased urban density and community space. Describes five Western Australian community gardens.

*Stocker, Laura and Kate Barnett (1998) “The Significance and Praxis of Community-based Sustainability Projects: Community Gardens in Western Australia” *Local Environment* 3(2) pp. 179 – 189

Based on Barnett’s honours thesis (see above), this article explores grassroots community gardens’ contributions to local sustainability, with a case study of FINCA community garden in Western Australia.


Looks at the re-emergence of urban food production initiatives in the context of Local Agenda 21. Focuses on attitudes and knowledge of local government and makes recommendations to assist local authorities in enabling increased community gardening and urban food production.

Reports on research carried out in the US, aimed at relevance to policy development in the UK, with a focus on Local Agenda 21 and social aspects of sustainable development. Avoids defining community gardens, but offers a typology of kinds of garden, including demonstration gardens, child and school gardens, and healing and therapy gardens. Argues that all types contribute to environmental justice and sustainability.


Survey of community gardens in the UK, focusing on their relevance to Local Agenda 21. Reports results of a range of questions asked of 96 community gardens and city farms including reasons for gardening, organisational structure, demographics of participants, and how successful gardens have been in moving towards their aims. Although the gardens were not developed in response to LA 21, Holland suggests that the community garden model could inform the implementation of integrated social, economic and environmental policies at the local level.


Frames organic agriculture as a social movement with a broad social as well as environmental agenda. Outlines community gardens’ contributions to the organic movement as incubators of organic enterprises (including farmers’ markets), developers of innovative urban agricultural practices, and through education and awareness raising about organic food production.


Looks at community gardens, along with CSAs and farmers’ markets, organics and permaculture, as examples of community-lead agri-ecological systems, and argues that they can be understood using concepts from ecological systems thinking, such as resilience and holism. (See also King 2008).

A survey of bee populations in NY community gardens, finding that despite their small size, the gardens provide habitat for a diversity of bee species, and that they have the potential to contribute to plant pollination in urban areas.


Maps the roles, resources, contributions, and networks of local environmental NGOs the in management of urban spaces in northeast USA. Includes community gardens as examples of ‘urban ecology stewardship’ and community-based resource management.


A report of a study-in-progress investigating the urban ecology of community gardens in Baltimore, focusing on vegetation diversity and ecosystem services provided by the gardens, as well as the effects of changing demographics on landscape management.

**Planning, Urban Design, Place Making**


A comparison between a public park and community garden, focusing on the perceptions of users, non-users, and government officials. Community gardens in this article are framed primarily as user-developed and managed open space. Finds that the development and maintenance of the community garden cost a fraction of that of the park ($2 750 cf $61 000). Both spaces were well utilised, with the park mostly used for passive activities, such as eating and resting, and the community garden for active uses – watering, weeding, harvesting and so on. When describing the gardens, community garden users referred to sociability and production. The park users referred mostly to visual attractiveness and space for children. Safety and homeless users were major concerns for park users and barriers to non-users, but not for people in the fenced community garden. Residents, both park and garden users and non-users, were favourable to the community gardens, seeing them as visually pleasing, inclusive and deserving of permanency, where as city officials saw them as a temporary use of vacant land, and as being perceived as restrictive because of fences.


One of many articles by David Crouch on the culture and landscapes of British allotments. This one looks at the allotment as one of the few landscapes in contemporary culture that is created by its users, within political and economic contexts, and explores connections
between local culture and relations and the landscapes they produce. Compares allotments in four parts of Britain.


Develops a number of practical design tools for including community gardens as part of new urban design projects (rather than as infill in existing developments). Covers gardens’ requirements for solar access, proximity to users, and balancing community gardening goals with other site functions, such as buildings and parking. Frames community gardens as a form of urban agriculture necessary for sustainable cities.


While focused on the process of implementing design for safety principles in a Melbourne community garden, this article also looks at planning for community gardens at local government level more generally, including the use of community development principles to gain community support.


Case study of the establishment of a community garden in Toronto, Canada, which combines food production with ecological restoration. Planning process used Local Agenda 21 guidelines to address socio-economic, community participation and ecological considerations, and were based on a desire to create a landscape that could ‘heal connect and empower, that make[s] intelligible our relations with each other and with the natural world’. A literature review with an international perspective frames community gardening in ‘First’ and ‘Third’ world cities as a response to environmental and social consequences of globalisation and looks at them in the context of urban agriculture and sustainable development.


Reviews literature about the use and experience of parks and the ‘countryside’ by immigrants and ethnic minorities. Explores allotments and community gardens as landscapes designed with a ‘facility provision’ approach to including people of ethnic minorities, which meet needs enabling the cultivation of preferred food plants, and space for socialising and sharing food.

Recounts the process of involving children from immigrant backgrounds in redesigning the landscape of the high-density housing estate where they lived. The children designed and implemented a community kitchen garden, as well as other play spaces.


Review of Sydney’s ‘Community Greening’ program, established by Sydney Botanic Gardens and the NSW Department of Housing to support community gardening. Compares it with New York’s ‘Green Thumb’ program. Suggests that planners and government organisations should support, rather than drive, garden initiatives and that representatives of all community groups should be included in planning processes to increase acceptance and reduce vandalism of gardens.


Concludes that community gardens may be useful models for addressing issues in the maintenance of small pockets of urban land.


Outlines the history of community gardening in the US from the 1890s, showing community gardens being used to address multiple agendas in different periods. Argues that despite ongoing interest in the idea of community gardening, and intermittent support from planners and public agencies, community gardens are seen as interim activities, rather than as permanent places or public resources. Lawson identifies three reasons that planners have neglected community gardens: the persistent idea of community gardens as a temporary use of land that will be given over to a planned park or other development; the association of gardening with private land and the household and therefore belonging in the design of the suburbs, not the city; and that gardens initiated by ‘planners’ – including social workers and urban designers – are not necessarily successful in involving neighbouring residents in running the garden. Suggests need for ‘collaborative partnerships’ between grassroots gardeners and planners that balance participatory and evolving processes with long-term planning to create more strength and permanence for community gardens.


Provides a detailed review of the evidence for the importance of gardens in urban environments, including on quality of life, particularly for the urban poor, on air pollution, water management, aesthetics, safety, job creation, and food security. Recommends ways to
remove legal and policy barriers to the development of ‘green infrastructure’ including community gardens.

**Economics**


The study upon which most other histories of community gardening in the US are based (eg. Lawson 2005). Based on his (1979) masters thesis, Bassett argues that communal food growing endeavours rise and fall in association with economic cycles. He identifies seven periods of urban gardening activity linked with campaigns during the 1890s and 1930s depressions and World Wars I and II.


Based on interviews with 178 community gardeners in New Jersey, US. Finds that economic benefits were significant to many gardeners. Estimates that in 1989 the area’s 905 community gardens produced over $450 000 worth of vegetables, $500 per plot. Social contact and urban greening were also valued.


Based in New York City, provides quantitative evidence to support gardeners’ claims that community gardens are a valuable use of open space. Community gardens were found to have significant positive effects on the value of surrounding properties (and therefore on tax revenue available to the community). Gardens were found to have the most impact in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and ‘higher quality’ gardens had the greatest positive impact. (See Pruijt (2003) for an analysis of the role of squatters and community gardeners in gentrifying neighbourhoods, and various articles on community gardens in NY for some of the consequences of garden-led increases in property values).

**EVALUATIONS, SUBMISSIONS, REPORTS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS**


A substantial report that identified ways the Council could best support the development of community gardens, emphasising community gardens’ potential role in urban waste management and local food production. Includes case studies of several NSW gardens, models of garden management, and information on nutrition promotion and soil fertility in
community gardens. This report led to the employment of a Community Gardens Officer by South Sydney Council.

Further background and a state-level perspective on the struggle over land for community gardens in NY. Advocates the support of community gardening in context of NY state policy. Reports findings of a survey of 229 gardens in NY City, including gardens’ age, physical description, activities, gardener demographics. Finds that community gardens are an important resource, able to uniquely meet needs of diverse communities in ways that other open spaces – such as playgrounds – do not, and benefiting the wider community as well as garden members. Many gardens provided open space where no alternative spaces were available. Many gardeners were found to be involved in campaigns to save gardens, whether or not their garden was directly under threat.

Case Study of City Farm Perth, including its history, programs, and contribution to sustainability.

A detailed review of Sydney’s Community Greening Program (see Hatherly 2003 above). Includes case studies of 5 gardens, new and established, urban and rural (including the Waterloo gardens in Bartolomei et al 2003 above). Found the gardens were effective in reducing crime, such as vandalism, and in increasing feelings of ownership and safety for both gardeners and neighbouring residents. They also decreased social isolation and benefited the health of gardeners. Provision of individual plots appeared to increase sense of ownership of the garden and encourage ongoing involvement. There was much learning, including of work skills, but there was been no significant change to employment status of gardeners. The program was also found to have had ‘a considerable impact’ on linking government and non-government agencies. Recommends sustained funding, start-up support for new gardens, increased knowledge-sharing among gardens, providing a range of activities in the gardens, efforts to involve young people and Indigenous people, and ongoing community consultation and involvement.

Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and RMIT University Circle.

A profile and evaluation of Kurruru Pingyarendi Community Garden in the northeast suburbs of Adelaide, with a focus on its effectiveness in building community capacity and capital. Explores the garden’s development, aims, management, what it means to participants, and the impact of government policy and strategy. Includes an overview of community gardening literature and history and many photographs.


Outline of Cultivating Community worker, Peta Christensen’s 2004 research tour as a Churchill Fellow. Includes vivid descriptions and photographs of numerous community gardens and community food systems in South America, the US and Denmark.


Includes a brief history of community gardening in Australia, analysis of benefits, and a range of management models, with examples from around Australia. Relates community gardening to global trends, such as interest in local food production, global warming, and peak oil. Examples of community garden policies from local governments other countries. Includes guide for community groups making submissions to councils.


Includes overviews of the history and practice of community gardening in Australia, with examples from Sydney, Melbourne, Western Australia and Tasmania, and outlines social and environmental benefits. Reviews global trends that have stimulated the growth of community gardening in Australia. Outlines roles local government bodies play in supporting community gardens, and ways gardens benefit local government. Describes various models of garden governance and organisation, with recommendations for the development of proposed and future gardens in the Council area.

Additional bibliographical information is available in:


A comprehensive listing of publications on community gardening in North America from 1975 to 1979. Including newspaper and magazine articles, government publications and books, with a brief introduction by the authors.
APPENDIX 2.

THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENING

The benefits of community gardens have been a major focus in publications about community gardening. Studies have argued that community gardens promote health – through exercise (Twiss, Dickinson, Duma, Kleinman, Paulsen and Rilveria 2003), relaxation, and increased vegetable consumption (Blair, Giesecke et al. 1991; Twiss, Dickinson et al. 2003; Alaimo, Packnett et al. 2008). It is claimed community gardens enable sociability (Glover 2004; Glover, Parry et al. 2005; Kingsley and Townsand 2006); community development and organising (Armstrong 2000; Hancock 2000; Twiss, Dickinson et al. 2003; Saldívar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004). They provide education about food and environmental issues (Corkery 2004b; Doyle and Krasny 2003). They preserve and improve open space in cities; and offsetting some of the effects of urban density and decay (Hall 1989; Schukoske 2000; Henderson-Wilson 2005). The address poverty and social isolation (2003; Hanna and Oh 2000). They contribute to household economies (Blair, Giesecke and Sherman 1991; 1991).

With an emphasis on enumerating and substantiating the ‘benefits’ of community gardens, there has been little enquiry into any detrimental impacts, and questions of the distribution of benefits have rarely been raised (Glover’s 2004 analysis of the unequal distribution of social capital in a US community garden is a rare exception).
Despite the consensus about the many benefits community gardens bring, there is little primary research to substantiate them. The following table summarises research that provides evidence of particular benefits.
### TABLE 1: Benefits identified by community gardening researchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of study</th>
<th>Benefits found</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Comparative case studies</td>
<td>Low cost open space, sociability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patel</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>New Jersey, USA</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Food production – contribution to household economy. Social contact, urban greening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armstrong</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Survey of garden coordinators</td>
<td>Improved social networks and community capacity, social space, health promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barlolomei, Corkery et al</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Sydney, Australia</td>
<td>Focus groups, interviews</td>
<td>Community building, friendship, health-promotion, reclaiming public space, environmental education, cultural expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glover</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Midwestern USA</td>
<td>Narrative inquiry</td>
<td>Give meaning, enable telling of success stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twiss, Dickinson, et al</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>Increased physical activity, increased fruit and vegetable consumption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Interviews, observation</td>
<td>Community development, space for social interaction, community organising and leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbis Keys Young Pty Ltd</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Sydney, Australia</td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>Reduced crime, ‘ownership’ of public space, decreased social isolation, learning, linking government and non-government agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Developing urban agricultural practices and incubating organic enterprises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaimo, Packnett, et al</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Michigan, USA</td>
<td>Survey of gardeners and non-gardeners</td>
<td>Increased fruit and vegetable consumption, access to fresh produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicu and Been</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Economic modelling</td>
<td>Increase value of neighbouring properties (this can represent a threat as well as a benefit).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


APPENDIX 3.

THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH
OF COMMUNITY GARDENING IN AUSTRALIA

History Wall
At the national community gardening conference in Queensland in 2005, long-time community garden activists converge in a huddle to map the emergence of community gardening in Australia. With blue-tac, textas and little bits of paper, the group piece together a story of individual gardens starting up, networks developing, and institutional support structures gradually forming.

A clear pattern emerges in the collage. The left side of the wall, representing the late 1970s to mid-80s, holds a scatter of individual projects: Nunawading Community Garden, CERES, Glovers Garden, Hindmarsh City Farm. These were projects with strong roots in their local communities, but little connection with each other.

In the mid-1990s another cluster of activity is marked by ink and post-it notes. Handfuls of gardens sprout around the country, but more significantly, the roots of the established gardens begin to meet. Suddenly, people’s gaze begins to lift from the compost heap, the next grant application, the troublesome volunteer to seek something beyond. A wider context perhaps? A sense of how this fits? People begin to wonder if they are alone and what they might learn from the others. They realise they have something to share.

From the middle to the right side of the wall—the mid-1990s to the present—people struggle to find room to add the scraps of paper which represent important developments: new gardens, visits between projects, meetings, publications, events, overseas connections. I’m surprised to see a tiny label with ‘claire visits Northey St’ written on it.
And whenever the connections between became stronger, the entire root system became stronger, more entangling, supporting each garden and creating space for more to emerge.

I have to take a lot of photos to fit the whole wall in.

**Garden history**

Movement histories are important means of sharing successes and passing on lessons learned. They create a common frame of reference and a legitimating lineage. Throughout my field research for this thesis, I found that many community gardeners had a strong interest in learning about the history of community gardening, and in ensuring that important developments and meaningful initiatives were not forgotten. Despite this interest, a comprehensive account of the history of community gardening in Australia is yet to be written and collective memory of events from as recently as the 1990s has been almost lost by the current movement.

I have included this Appendix in order to address one of the interests expressed by the community gardeners who have been informants to this thesis, and because of more general trends of activists seeking out accounts of social movement history to inform their current practice (Bevington and Dixon 2005 pp. 191, 194). In this Appendix, I draw together movement-produced documents, oral history, personal experience, and published papers to offer a contribution towards a fuller account of Australian community gardening history. For the purposes of this thesis more specifically, this Appendix offers further context about contemporary Australian community gardening movement. It provides additional evidence for my arguments that community gardening can at times be seen as a form of social action and that, while drawing on historical precedents, community gardening emerged as a distinct phenomenon in the late 1970s. As in the main body of the thesis, I am interested in placing community gardening in its political and social context, working towards an understanding of community gardeners as agents of social change.

I begin this Appendix by describing the three waves of community gardening activity which were introduced in Chapter 1, namely (a) the emergence of Australia’s first community gardens in the late 1970s, (b) the second crop of community gardens, which were initiated in the mid-1990s, and (c) the current wave of community gardening activity. I then chart the emergence of a coherent national movement from these individual projects. The particular histories of Cultivating Community, Northey Street City Farm and the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network are discussed in Appendix 4.
AUSTRALIA’S FIRST COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens began growing around Australia in the late 1970s and early 80s. Nunawading is widely recognised as the first. Nunawading Community Garden opened at the rear of the Nunawading Horticultural Centre on Jolimont Road, Forest Hill on October 7 1977. A crowd of 300 people was there to celebrate and get their hands dirty. The garden was initiated by Nunawading Local Councillor, Dr Gavan Oakley, whose was inspired by the British allotment tradition. He saw community gardening as a way to address the social isolation he saw in his ward, with the additional benefit of helping to economise family food budgets (Brandenberg 1978). 65 plots—huge by current community garden standards at 4 x 9 metres—were snapped up by local residents on an annual lease basis. The Council, after some persuasion, supported the garden with a small start-up grant and it has operated independently since, run by a management group and financed by plot fees and working bees (Elliott 1983; Hering 1995). Nunawading Community Garden is still growing. It now has over 100 plots, brimming with vegetables and flowers, plus shared herb gardens and orchard, children’s playground and barbecue area. It’s one of a handful of community gardens that is registered as a co-operative.

Writers unanimously describe Nunawading as the first community garden in Australia (see for example Elliott 1983; Hering 1995; Phillips 1996; Gelsi 1999; Bartolomei, Corkery et al. 2003; Hatherley 2003; Astbury and Rogers 2004; Gaynor 2006; Grayson 2007a, 2008b; Kingsley, Townsend and Henderson-Wilson 2009) so I was surprised to hear gardeners in northern Adelaide say the community garden in Elizabeth was 30 years old in 2005 (making it two years older than Nunawading). With the first gardens emerging without contact with each other, it’s not surprising that several gardens thought they were the first. There are other contenders too. In her entry about community gardens in the Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens, Suzanne Hunt (2002) wrote that first ‘community-instigated’ community garden in Australia was at Collingwood in 1979. ‘The Collingwood Community Garden,’ she writes, ‘aimed to improve the quality of life and circumstances of people living in nearby public housing estates.’ It is unclear whether Hunt is referring to the Collingwood Children’s Farm, which was established in 1979 and continues to grow on the banks of the Yarra, or the 1979 attempt at establishing a community garden on the Collinwood public housing estate110. There are also reports of a community garden being established in Kambah in the suburbs of Canberra in 1976 (Legge 2005). I have found no one who remembers it, but there is a community garden growing in Kambah again, established in 2001. During the course of my research I heard of

110 I have heard several people refer to community gardens on public housing estates in Melbourne in the late 1970s. However, the 25th anniversary of community gardening on the high-rise estates was celebrated in March 2010, with a tenant-created garden on the Richmond Housing Estate established in 1985 credited as the first (Wynne 2010).
several other short-lived community gardens, which were established in the late 1970s in Melbourne and Sydney.\footnote{Sydney community gardening advocate and writer Russ Grayson questions claims that there were community gardens established in Sydney in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He cites lack of detail and evidence and believes the consensus is that Glovers Community garden, established in 1985 was the first community garden in Sydney (pers comm. 6th May 2010).}

Whichever site was the first to get their garden beds in, community gardens began growing around Australia in the late seventies and early 80s.

Community gardens particularly thrived in Melbourne’s ready soil. Nunawading was closely followed by Collingwood Children’s Farm, established on the banks of the Yarra in 1979; Ringwood Community Garden in the outer eastern suburbs in 1980; and CERES (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies) City Farm (later CERES Community Environment Park) on Merri Creek, Brunswick in 1981. Each of these is described below.

Collingwood Children’s Farm started in 1979 when a group of community members secured a lease on a small area of the Collingwood Convent. Their aim was to create a farm experience for children in urban areas, where they could learn about animal care and food production in a beautiful outdoor environment. School and community groups dug in to establish the site, and members of a Greek elderly citizens group and a Turkish welfare group helped to clear an area of flat land by the river for community garden plots. Collingwood Children’s Farm continues to be a place where children can visit a working organic farm in the city, with a focus on landcare and permaculture techniques. The Farm has 50 community garden plots, and hosts a monthly organic farmers’ market in its stunning cow paddock, bordered on two sides by a forested bend in the Yarra River.

Ringwood Community Garden was established after a public meeting in March 1980. It grew on its original four acre location for 23 years until the site was required for road works 2003. The garden’s committee, with support from local, state, and federal members, successfully lobbied for a new site, and the garden was re-established in near-by Wantirna in 2004. Ringwood Community Garden has 100 plots and a small waiting list. It celebrated 30 years of operation in March 2010 (Powell 2006).

In Brunswick, a group of people started meeting in 1979 with a vision for creating a space that would provide a focus for community building, generate environmentally sound and socially beneficial employment, and demonstrate environmental initiatives. In 1980 they secured 10 acres of polluted land on a former rubbish dump and began creating The Centre for Research and Education in Environmental Strategies City Farm. CERES now has market gardens on and off site, a bicycle workshop, nursery, technology park, extensive education programs at all levels, and conducts independent research. It has an organic cafe, wholefood shop and weekly produce market, as well as
about 50 community garden plots. It is a major community facility, with a regular cultural and festival program and a number of other community groups based on site.

By 1983, Eliott identified nine community gardens in Melbourne, located in Balwyn, Brunswick (CERES), Collingwood (the Children’s Farm), Essendon, Fitzroy, Hawthorn, North Richmond, Nunawading, and St Kilda (Eliott 1983). Ringwood, and probably others, did not make it onto her list. Other early gardens in Melbourne were Myuna Farm near the Dandenongs (still operating as a children’s ‘farm experience’ with 20 community garden plots) and Knox Community Garden (which continues to lease 110 garden plots in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs). Both of these gardens were established in 1984.

Sydney’s oldest still operating community garden was established in April 1985 in Rozelle. Glovers Organic Community Garden was initiated by a group of community centre users who approached the nearby Rozelle Hospital with a proposal to transform some of its land into a community garden. The garden established on this gently sloping 600 square metre site continues to be cultivated collectively—without individual allotments—with gardeners co-ordinating their work by the use of a log book (Grayson 2002, 2005).

Adelaide’s first community garden was established in the northern satellite suburb of Elizabeth in 1975. It is currently operated by Anglican Church welfare agency, Anglicare, and produces fruit and vegetables for a food bank and a lunch program for people with low incomes as well as running community development programs.

Hindmarsh City Farm in the inner-western suburbs of Adelaide was another of the early community gardens in South Australia. It was established in 1986 by permaculture activists with a vision for radical redevelopment of the suburbs. The garden was started after three South Australians returned from an early Permaculture Design Course held by Bill Mollison in Stanley, Tasmania. Colin Ball and ‘the Urban Permaculture Consultants’ went on to write the first permaculture book to follow the original documentation of the permaculture idea (Permaculture One, Mollison and Holmgren 1979). Ball’s book, Sustainable urban renewal: Urban Permaculture in Bowden, Brompton and Ridleyton (Ball and The Urban Permaculture Consultants 1985) re-applied permaculture in an exclusively urban context, detailing a plan to redesign the entire Hindmarsh area, which was undergoing transition from being a polluted industrial area to a gentrifying inner-urban suburb. Hindmarsh City Farm had a nursery, playground, shared and individual food gardens, and was a hub for community action in the late 1980s and early 90s. The Farm has since been through several incarnations, and currently operates on a smaller scale as Green Street Community Gardens under the management of the neighbouring community centre.
Community gardens were also established in Western Australia in the early 1980s. In 1979, the newly established Permaculture Association of WA began lobbying to establish a community garden in north Fremantle, with The Appropriate Technology Centre finally opening in 1983. It continues to have garden plots, a nursery, and educational programs (Davison 2006 p. 210).

These are just a few examples of the early community gardens in Australia. There is a need for further research to identify more early garden projects, and to learn the lessons of their successes and demises.

**A SECOND CROP: GARDENS ESTABLISHED IN THE MID-1990s**

As the History Wall showed, following the first cluster of community gardens in the late 1970s and early 80s, a second crop of community gardens emerged in 1994 and 1995. A number of new community gardens appeared in this period—it is never possible to say quite how many, as some gardens never make contact with anyone outside their local neighbourhood or users’ group and no comprehensive national audit of community gardens has been undertaken (a preliminary national survey was undertaken by Phillips 1996). Amongst the major gardens emerging at this time were Northey Street City Farm (Brisbane), East Perth City Farm, Randwick Community Garden and the University of New South Wales Community Permaculture Garden (both in Sydney) in 1994 and Challenge City Farm (Lismore, Northern New South Wales) in 1995. The development of Northey Street City Farm is discussed in detail in Appendix 4. Each of the other gardens is discussed below.

East Perth City Farm (now City Farm Perth) was initiated by Planetary Action Network, the youth wing of Men of the Trees, on a polluted former scrap metal yard next to a railway station. ‘We talked about having a place in the city with a nursery, gardens, soup kitchens; a whole educational facility where young people could tend plants, meet each other, learn skills and find respect for themselves,’ said founder and co-ordinator Rosanne Scott. ‘It took a while to come about.’ (Men of the Trees 2007). City Farm Perth is now a thriving community hub and demonstration site for green city living with a strong permaculture focus. It runs festivals, exhibitions, education programmes, a weekly organic growers’ market, a nursery, and shared organic garden beds. The Farm is used by many other community groups, including musicians and involves people with disabilities, unemployed people, young people and others. In 2006, the Farm introduced a school kitchen garden project, in conjunction with the South Metropolitan Public Health Unit, the Child and Adolescent Community Health Division, Foodbank WA and the Sustainable Schools Initiative. Despite being on a valuable piece of land, for which they initially held a lease for only two years, City Farm Perth is still growing strong.

The University of New South Wales Community Permaculture Garden was initiated by the University’s Student Guild, who got the project started by arranging for a permaculture course to be
run on site. The focus of the garden’s initiators was on human rights as well as environmental issues: the garden included a memorial for the 1992 Dili massacre in Timor Leste in which a UNSW student was killed (Crabtree 1999 p. 40). As the garden developed, sustainability education became a main focus, in association with the adjacent EcoLiving Centre. Courses were run in the garden by a number of groups, including the University, community colleges and permaculture teachers. The UNSW Garden was a ‘food forest’ without individual plots. A number of groups used the site, including an ‘Arts in the Garden Team’, who brought thousands of people into the garden with performances and workshops and making the site a significant community arts venue in Sydney’s Eastern suburbs (Grayson 2006). The garden was saved from eviction in 1998. In 2006 the garden was once again under threat, and gardeners and their supporters rallied. The issue was raised in Parliament by Greens MLC Ian Cohen (Grayson 2006) and representations were made to the university by academics, sustainability educators, community workers, Labor and Green MPs, state Upper House representatives and local City Councillors. Supporters gathered a petition of 630 signatures (Luckett and O’Connell 2006). Despite spirited campaigning, the garden was closed to the university community and wider public in December 2006. Three other Sydney community gardens lost their land in 2006 and 2007.

Challenge City Farm was established in Lismore on the North coast of NSW in 1995. It occupied half a hectare of previously unproductive land in a residential area. Its originators had the combined aims of demonstrating the viability of permaculture and organic agriculture as commercial food production systems and providing a training and employment project for people with disabilities. The Farm was initiated by Lismore Challenge, a disability support organisation, and from the outset had a focus on local, sustainable food production (Roberts 2002; Phillips 1996). Lismore Challenge City Farm established one of the early Community Supported Agriculture Schemes in Australia, long before CSA began to be more widely recognised in this country. It was also home to the offices of *Permaculture International Journal*.

**RECENT EMERGENCES**

Between 2005 and 2010, there was a new surge of interest in community gardens. In South Australia, the SA Community and School Gardens Network identified listed 30 gardens in the state in their January 2006 and March 2008 directory brochures. By February 2010, they had 40 gardens on their list, as well as seven gardens-in-development. An informal audit at an Adelaide food conference and a SA Community and School Gardens Network Gathering in February 2010, after the publication of the brochure, revealed an additional ten established community gardens and several more in the planning stages (see Appendix 7). Attendance at the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network national conference increased from 70 in 2004 to over 750 in 2007. Coverage of community gardens in the media also increased dramatically, with numerous stories in newspapers, magazines, on radio and television.
This wave of interest in community gardens may be associated with the increased prominence of food issues, and the development and popularity of a range of alternative agrifood initiatives, such as farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and consumers’ co-operatives (Hinrichs 2000; 2003; Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman and Warner 2003; Baker 2004; Wekerle 2004).

Community gardeners have become increasingly allied with broader food movements, and have benefited from the increased awareness of food issues that they have brought about. The huge number of popular books published on the pleasures and politics of food in the last couple of years is one reflection of the increasing awareness of food issues. Many of these are accounts of responding to global food issues by eating close to home (as in Barbara Kingsolver’s (2008) Animal, Vegetable, Miracle or Smith and Mackinnon’s (2007) Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Rauous Year of Eating Locally, written by the originators of the ‘100 Mile Diet’; Gary Nabhan’s (2002) Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods or Brian Halweil’s (2004) Eat Here: Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket) or through backyard food production (as in Linda Cockburn’s (2008) Living The Good Life). Others focus more on the global issues (for example Raj Patel’s (2007) Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power and the Hidden Battle for the World’s Food System). Community gardeners have successfully positioned themselves as practical responses to issues of oil dependence, global warming, and water shortage, and are increasingly seeing themselves as part of broader food movements (see Chapter 3).

Increased interest also reflects the efforts of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network in organising high-profile events, presenting widely, and maintaining a well trafficked website112.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Although the development of community gardens in Australia has been carried out primarily by people working in voluntary organisations, there have also been occasional short-term inputs from state and local governments offering resources and paid positions to support community gardening.

In 1998, South Sydney Council created a three-month position for a Community Gardens Officer. The position was the result of a study commissioned by the Council in the previous year (Campbell 1998). I believe this was the first paid position created by an Australian government body specifically to support community gardening. The Community Gardens Officer was part of the waste department. Despite having a wide brief to support community gardens, the position framed community gardens as a waste management strategy. The Community Gardens Officer, Rhonda

Hunt, worked with gardens in public housing estates in Waterloo and Redfern, as well as other gardens. She drew heavily on ACFCGN for support and information (Crabtree 1999 p. 65)

After many years of largely unpaid work, Basil Natoli was employed by the Victorian Department of Housing in 1999 to write a manual on community gardens. In 2000, he was given the permanent role of Manager of the Community Gardens Project in the Department of Housing. Shortly after his appointment, the Department funded Cultivating Community to carry out the on the ground management of the public housing estate gardens (Natoli, pers comm., November 2004). Basil’s and Cultivating Community’s stories are told in detail Appendix 4.

In South Australian in the 1990s, EatWellSA, a state government health agency, provided informal and in kind support to South Australian community gardens. The Department of Human Services (as Department of Health following a restructure) in South Australia funded a small team of part-time community gardening support and extension workers (including myself) between 2004—2006. Project officers were commissioned to complete a series of tasks: producing a map of community gardens in the state, publishing a resource kit for people starting and maintaining community garden projects (Fulton 2004), and investigating ways established government programs could be used to increase the sustainability of community gardens. In late 2010, SA Health provided funding for a Community Kitchen Garden Project Officer to be based in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens with a brief to support and promote community gardens, particularly as a means of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.

In Western Australia, a Learning Centre Link project, based to some extent on the Community Gardening in SA Project, received lotteries funding in 2009 to build the capacity of community gardens around WA through research, training, networking, promotion, supporting partnerships and developing resources to assist gardens to grow.

Some community garden projects have also taken advantage of government programs for unemployed persons such as ‘Work for the Dole’, ‘Green Corps’, ‘Community Jobs Plan’ and earlier, the ‘Youth Employment Program’. Others community gardens have chosen not to participate in these programs on ethical or political grounds. Sometimes government workplace programs provide funding to pay a supervisor, as well as the labour of program participants.

While institutional support brings resources and recognition to community gardens, it can also be limiting. Funding tends to come with particular focus, which does not always encompass the broad range of concerns of interest to community gardeners. The ‘waste’ focus of the South Sydney Council project is a typical example.
CONCLUSION

The first community gardens in Australia emerged independently in different areas with little contact among them. The community gardening movement that emerged organically, with dispersed local manifestations. There has been no top-down direction or central leadership, no individual founder. While there have been attempts at outreach and coalition building from the outset, a coherent community gardening movement did not coalesce until at least the late 1990s. Efforts to form national community gardening networks have taken root most strongly since 2003 with the re-establishment of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network. The following Appendix takes up the story of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network in detail, illustrating the process of movement formation.
APPENDIX 4.
DING DEEPER:
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH SITES

Cultivating Community, Northey Street City Farm, and the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network are at the centre of the community gardening movement in Australia. In this Appendix I provide further detail about each of the organisations whose case studies form the core of this thesis. I discuss their histories, significant achievements, major activities, and the ways they are organised. These descriptive accounts expand on the story of the emerging Australian community gardening movement by focusing in more depth on some of the key organisations within it. They also provide additional background information about the case studies within this thesis.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Beginnings
Cultivating Community began with a dinner party. A group of activists, gardeners, and community workers who were interested in urban agriculture, permaculture, and community development decided to get together for a social gathering, to see where it might lead. Greg Milne113 was living in the cottage at Collingwood Children’s Farm at the time, and his lounge room floor was where they gathered.

113 Real names have been used throughout this chapter. They have been included either with permission or from published sources. Some of those mentioned and quoted are referred to elsewhere in the thesis under a pseudonym, others were consulted specifically about the subjects of this appendix and are not included in the cohort of interviewees referred to in the rest of the thesis.
I went away to this permaculture course and came back thinking let’s be active about it, let’s create more opportunities, let’s try and make more community gardens. A lot of people I was friends with or was working with were involved in community gardens and city farms, so we started meeting in my lounge room and talking about forming a group.

(Greg Milne, interviewed November 2004)

They were mostly in their 20s, several were involved with CERES or Collingwood Children’s Farm. Robin Parker described some of the different interests and agendas they brought with them.

Maya was studying Social Ecology and had written a thesis on community gardens, and Greg was coming from a food, urban community supported agriculture perspective, and I guess my angle was the horticulture stuff—like seed preservation and saving, and then cultural—promoting and celebrating other cultures, gardening culture.

(Robin Parker, interviewed November 2004)

Robin was teaching horticulture at CERES, to a ‘really eager, really keen’ group of people, and she invited her students along to the dinner. Amongst them was Ben Neil, who was eventually to become Cultivating Community’s CEO.

And so all of a sudden we had this critical mass of people, and we just used to have these fantastic meetings. There’d be great food, there’d be a great balance of good people with great social stuff, eating beautiful organic food and hanging out, and because Greg and Maya were living in the farmhouse at the Children’s Farm, we were in an amazing location, so all this really contributed to the beginning of something really amazing.

(Robin Parker, interviewed November 2004)

The group discussed a range of possibilities—starting community gardens, creating a school garden program, lobbying and making things happen. Was it to be a guerrilla gardening campaign, or an appeal to local councils? How would they work with groups that were already working to get vegies growing in the streets of Melbourne? While these convivial gatherings and excited conversations were taking place, Basil Natoli’s long campaign to help communities develop community gardens was also coming to a critical point.

*Basil’s quest*

In the late 1980s Basil Natoli was studying horticulture at Bernley College. ‘A very small, grassroots’ community development organisation called Coll-Link asked him to go to a meeting on the Collingwood public housing estate. ‘They said “look, there’s a lot of people on the estate in Collingwood who want a community garden, can you go to a meeting and support them?”’ And so he did. At that meeting he met a group of non-English speaking Vietnamese people who were ‘desperately passionate’ about gardening, but had no soil to plant in. Basil heard their story and took it back to Coll-Link. Within a couple of weeks he had set to work supporting the development of a community garden on the Collingwood estate. Coll-Link came up with funding to pay Basil four hours a week. Sometimes. His work with housing estate residents became a ten year, mostly unpaid labour of love. These days, Basil speaks pretty good Vietnamese.
In the late 1990s, Coll-Link, which had by then changed its name to the more mellifluous Cultivating Community, finally ran out of the last drops of funding. For Basil this was ‘a huge relief,’ because, he says, ‘until that happened the state government wasn’t going to take responsibility for it’.

So at that point I met with the Minister [for Housing], made an appointment at Parliament House and said, ‘I’m handing this over to you now because I’ve done everything that I can and we’re getting nowhere’. So then of course, immediately the bells rang and everybody jumped.

(Basil Natoli, interviewed November 2004)

Basil was employed by the Department of Human Services’ Office of Housing in September 1999 to produce a manual on community gardening for the Department. In 2000, Basil was appointed manager of the Department’s new Community Gardens Project, a permanent position. Basil’s brief was to

oversee the growth of the community garden concept on other housing estates throughout Victoria and the introduction of a garden scheme for tenants of other public housing areas. One of the prime objectives of Basil’s role is to encourage tenants to take part in a ‘hands-on’ program of beautification and environmental improvements to their garden and open areas.

(DHS 2000)

Getting this kind of recognition for community gardens from the state government was a huge achievement. But with Basil now ensconced in the towering DHS building networking with government agencies and promoting community gardening across the public service, there was a need for practical, hands on support in the public housing community gardens themselves. So after much ‘convincing and badgering’ Basil succeeded in convincing the office of housing to fund and put out to tender a ‘significant community garden program’.

*Meanwhile at the Farm…*

In order to enable applications for funding to bring some of their ideas into being, the dinner party conversations were beginning to turn towards incorporation. The group contemplated becoming part of Permaculture Melbourne, or finding another community group to auspice them. Greg was friends with Basil, and Basil said to him ‘look, there’s actually this incorporated body called Cultivating Community that’s just having a rest at the moment, but really what you’re talking about is exactly what I was doing before’. And so in 2000 a ‘bloodless coup’ took place, and Cultivating Community as we know it was born.

We’d already done quite a lot of work on our core aims and objectives in that first six months, so we were pretty clear, and they were actually pretty good I reckon, reflecting on the work that Cultivating Community has done. So they replaced the existing aims and objectives, which is the central part of your constitution, and we were set.

(Greg Milne, interviewed November 2004)

*Cultivating Community’s early projects*

2002 was a significant year for Cultivating Community, in which several projects were undertaken and the contract to manage the public housing gardens, which was Cultivating Community’s primary focus for several years, was won.
Publications
Cultivating Community produced the 40 page *Good Practice Guide for Community Gardens* (Milne 2003) to assist other groups and organisations initiating and growing community gardens. It included practical advice on starting and developing a working group, finding a site, securing resources and funding, and working with people. It has been widely used by community gardens around Australia, and has been the basis for several other publications (Fulton 2004; Thomas 2008). It helped to position Cultivating Community as the Victorian authority on community gardening, and has meant that existing and emerging gardens have come to Cultivating Community for advice and assistance.

Cultivating Community also researched and published an A3 flyer bringing together for the first time details of all of the community gardens in Melbourne. With 45 projects listed, the ‘Green Map’ created a visual snapshot of a thriving community gardening practice in Melbourne. It also helped to develop a case for increasing support for community gardens and the development of more community gardens, listing the number of people on the waiting lists to obtain a plot at many of the gardens—some of which had queues of more than 100 people.

*Dirty Hands Happy Hearts*
Another of the early projects Cultivating Community took on was a collaboration with the Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria (HTAV) organising a conference called Dirty Hands, Happy Hearts in 2002. It was at this conference that I first encountered Cultivating Community. Despite its Victorian focus, the conference was promoted nationally through permaculture, community gardening and sustainability networks, and people from around the country attended. This made it a significant event in the reinvigoration of community gardening networks around Australia.

*The Department of Human Services tender and the contract*
Also in 2002, Cultivating Community won a contract with the Department of Human Services, which is responsible for public housing, to support 17 community gardens on public housing estates. Moving from being a group of friends meeting in each others’ houses, developing projects on a voluntary or activist basis to fulfilling a contract to manage the estate community gardens was a major development. Its undertaking was not without hesitation and reservations.

I was enthusiastically backing it. The thing that motivated all of us is that we thought we could give it a really good crack, the gardeners would be the first priority. We knew that there would be some things that we might fall down on, but we’ll cope.

(Ben Neil, interviewed November 2004)

There was conflict about the allocation of paid and leadership roles

It was not an easy process and there was a lot of bad feeling about that internally. It made the first six months incredibly painful. Not just the thing of starting from scratch—getting an office, buying cars, employing people—but there was also an incredible amount of tension … We’ve
come through it and come through in a good way, debriefing and resolution around it. It’s taken a long time but we’re all in a better place for it.

(Ben Neil, interviewed November 2004)

Taking on the management of these community gardens occupied much of Cultivating Community’s time and resources.

In some ways it’s opened doors to other things, in some ways other parts of the original intentions of Cultivating Community haven’t been followed through as much as they might have been if we didn’t get the tender. The original intention was to create more community gardens in the general community, and it’s not something that we have done directly ourselves in our own inner city neighbourhood. We’ve certainly organised conferences and developed manuals and all these things that have supported other people, and that’s important, good, but I suppose I was always wanting more of that direct, activist role of let’s get a garden in Collingwood, let’s get a garden in Abbotsford. It’ll start to happen now in the next few years.

(Greg Milne, interviewed November 2004)

And indeed, in the years since this interview Cultivating Community has again expanded its focus beyond the public housing gardens to community gardening more generally, and increasingly, to broader food security initiatives.

**Current activities**

The support of community gardens on public housing estates has remained a major focus for Cultivating Community. In 2009, it was responsible for 22 public housing community gardens with a budget of almost $400 000 for this program. In addition to ongoing tasks of plot allocation, garden maintenance and conflict mediation, Cultivating Community is involved with facilitating arts and community cultural development projects in the gardens, including a Fringe Festival weekend event called ‘Grow! Eat! Save the World’ in 2009, which brought many new people into the Happy New Life Garden in Richmond and won several awards.

Since the end of Cultivating Community’s involvement with the Kitchen Garden at Collingwood College in 2007, providing training, consultancy services and hands-on assistance to school gardens has become a major focus, with an Edible Classrooms Program team established. For several years, Cultivating Community has collaborated with Burnley College (part of the University of Melbourne) and the Royal Botanic Gardens to deliver training in community and therapeutic horticulture and kitchen gardens in schools. Beyond community gardens, Cultivating Community has also branched out into other community food security initiatives, particularly the establishment of not-for-profit community markets to enable greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Cultivating Community is unique in the Australian community gardening movement as an independent, locally-based organisation focusing specifically on community gardening but without a focus on a particular garden site. Although focused on developing a particular garden, Northey Street
City Farm fills similar roles to Cultivating Community in the South East Queensland community gardening movement.

NORTHEY STREET CITY FARM

Beginnings

Northey Street City Farm was started by a small group of friends who had previously been involved with environmental activism and grassroots community work. They were inspired by city farms and community gardens in England and in Melbourne and the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales. Dick Copeman remembered, ‘we were sitting in this bush regeneration site saying “wouldn’t it be great to get a proper city farm here”’ (interview June 2004). In 1992 they began looking for a site. Their original plans focused on land just down the river from the bush regeneration site. Residents from an adjacent nursing home were not supportive of the proposal and the gardeners approached the local council to find another site. The council were supportive and offered them the use of council owned land in the flood zone by Breakfast Creek. It was a flat, grassy site with a few mango trees, compacted soils, swampy patches, and areas of building rubble and debris. Although the land was degraded, the group accepted the site on a peppercorn lease and in April 1994 they set to work. They started small, meeting weekly and focusing on establishing a small area of garden while they studied the land and developed a site plan. Mòrag Gamble recalled the group only being able to work for short periods of time as there were no toilets on or near the site—and no established bushes (interviewed February 2004). TAFE horticulture students helped to establish the garden infrastructure.

From the outset, the group regarded community as being as important as gardening and they sought to engage local people in the project. Over 100 people attended their first public meeting. They also worked to build a strong working group with good interpersonal relationships, effective decision-making processes, and inclusive ways of working. Over several months of gardening together, they agreed on shared objectives and ways of working and formalised their organisation.

For the first five years of its existence, Northey Street City Farm was managed entirely by volunteers, several of whom worked long hours on site. In 1999, the Farm began running a series of ‘Work for the Dole’ programs, which meant that some of Northey Street’s co-ordinators could be paid as team leaders and substantial works could be carried out on site by Work for the Dole participants. Since then, Northey Street has increased its paid staff, all part-time, through grants and enterprises, including its organic nursery, produce market, and education programs. The farm has also hosted Community Jobs Program projects. CJP is a Queensland Government initiative for people who have been unemployed for more than a year, in which a group of people work full-time on a community
project for a three month period, earning an Award wage, developing practical workplace skills and undertaking accredited training. Places in Northey Street’s CJP projects have been highly sought after, and many former participants have ongoing relationships with the Farm. Northey Street’s extensive gardens enable students to observe sustainable urban systems operating, and provide hands-on learning opportunities.

**Cultural Events**

Northey Street City Farm hosts several festivals each year, including a Harvest Festival, which celebrates the food and culture of Brisbane’s Indigenous and migrant communities, and summer and winter Solstice Festivals. They are an important way that the Farm engages with the wider community, with each event attracting around 4000 participants. Festivals include music and circus performances, ritual and food, and are described in more detail in Chapter 8. The festivals themselves, and the process of organising them, reflect values of inclusivity, creativity and Do-it-Yourself culture, and seek to model environmental best practice. The festivals focus on seasonal cycles, connection with place and cultural diversity. Northey Street is also the site of numerous art installations and community arts projects, some of which have been created during the weekly organic farmers’ market.

**Current projects**

Major floods in November 2008 and May 2009 caused damage to Northey Street’s gardens and office building. The Farm’s focus in 2010 was on developing site infrastructure, including the construction of an education and administration building, which will demonstrate innovative sustainable design and construction principles, such as a ‘meadow roof’, rendered straw panel walls, and passive and photovoltaic solar technologies.

In response to numerous requests for assistance establishing community and school gardens, Northey Street established the offshoot organisation, Growing Communities. Growing Communities provides consultancy services and practical assistance to school and community garden groups. Northey Street also runs a permaculture design and consultancy service. The Farm continues to act as a hub and venue for other permaculture, environmental and community organisations in Brisbane. Like Cultivating Community, Northey Street has produced resources that have been used by many others within the Australian community gardening movement, particularly the *New Farmers Training Manual* (Morton and Copeman 2004), which contains extensive material on running training programs in community gardens.
A garden tour

We leave our bags by an elderflower tree and John takes us on a tour. People are preparing lunch in the kitchen, an open air circle of benches and cupboards under a tin roof with a cob oven in the centre and gas burners that can be locked away at night. The kitchen is surrounded by clusters of tables and chairs, shaded by a mango tree. The kitchen gardens begin right next to the kitchen, narrow paths winding through beds of herbs, leafy greens and vegetables with carambola and cherimoya, rosella and fig trees in between. Small signs request that particular plants be left to grow or invite people to ‘pick here’. Playgroup is winding up for the day, and one and two year olds clomp along the paths, stopping occasionally to sniff or nibble.

We follow the path along to the backyard garden, an area the size of an average Brisbane backyard full of flowers, vegetables and herbs, complete with a hills hoist, which is being used by people who sleep rough to dry handwashed clothes.

We pass through the Food, Family and Culture garden, where multi-coloured corn grows alongside beds of beans and epazote and John guides us to more self-sustaining gardens. We wander through a series of permaculture ‘food forests’, each designed using the plants and traditional horticultural practices of a different region of the world. As we walk towards the cabinet timber plantation, John points out food and medicinal plants, familiar and unfamiliar. In a clearing, a large mosaic project is being installed by a community arts practitioner who has been working on site for several months. It will become a space for quiet reflection, yoga classes and community gatherings, and is flanked by wheelchair accessible raised beds and a cob oven.

We visit the community composting facility, which processes food waste from nearby restaurants, lawnclippings from garden contractors, and green waste from the Farm. Giant barrels are rolled along tracks to mix and aerate their decaying contents. The resulting compost is used in the retail nursery, which also produces plants for the Farm, and sold as bagged compost.

We return to the kitchen, detouring along an area of bush food plantings and through an open space used for festivals and performances. A hospital patient sits in a wheelchair by the chicken enclosure. A gong is struck as we arrive, signalling time to come and eat. Lunch is prepared here every day, mainly from produce grown on site, and served to all present at no charge. Today, the feast includes a coconut and vegetable soup, mounds of salad, and bread donated by a nearby bakery. It is delicious.
THE AUSTRALIAN CITY FARMS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS NETWORK (ACFCGN)

I was fortunate to be able to witness and participate in the current cycle of the ACFCGN’s emergence from 2002 to the present (mid-2010), and am currently a member of the organisation’s executive and one of its co-ordinators in South Australia. The following is an account of my observations and also draws on interviews and discussions with other community garden activists. I describe the development of this organisation at length as it illustrates an important aspect of the present cycle of community garden activism and its coalescence into a more strongly networked and coherent movement.

**Beginnings**

In 1994, Darren Phillips collated an inventory of community gardens around Australia (published as Phillips 1996). His research identified a number of active community garden projects around the country, and also the surprising lack of contact among them. Phillips noted that many of the gardens were grappling with similar issues and saw that they could benefit from sharing information and resources and from collective problem solving.

In the course of his research, Phillips had met Sydney permaculture teachers Russ Grayson and Fiona Campbell. From the early 1990s, Fiona and Russ had adapted the standard Permaculture Design Course (PDC) curriculum to have a more urban focus and their courses included a substantial focus on interpersonal skills, group facilitation and community development. Community gardens were a natural fit for their urban and social focuses, and they took participants in their both their permaculture and their organic gardening courses to visit community gardens in inner Sydney. Randwick Community Garden was started as a course project by students in Russ and Fiona’s 1994 PDC class. People began looking to Fiona and Russ for assistance with starting community gardens. In response to increasing interest, they organised a forum at a community centre so that people from community gardens around Sydney could meet. Darren Phillips was also invited. Around 45 people, including Phillips, gathered at Randwick Community Centre in late 1994 for an afternoon of introductions, information sharing and workshops. This forum was the first time community gardeners in Sydney had met formally.

Phillips was convinced that a national organisation, with an informal network structure, was needed to facilitate information sharing and mutual aid amongst community gardens. In the course of his research, he identified key people in each state and invited them to become regional co-ordinators of an informal network. Fiona and Russ agreed to become the Sydney contacts. Mòrag Gamble and Evan Raymond, who had been involved with Northey Street City Farm became the contacts for south east Queensland. Eric Bottomley at CERES took on the role of state contact for Victoria. Ed
Wilby, who was involved with school and community gardens in Adelaide, became the contact there, and Darren Phillips took on the role in Tasmania. There were no network contacts established in Western Australia or the Northern Territory.

The network’s regional co-ordinators communicated via email. Fiona and Russ met Mòrag and Evan at a Seed Savers Network conference in Brisbane and continued contact afterwards with Fiona recalling many late night phone conversations about the development of the network (Campbell pers comm. November 2009).

The first face-to-face meeting of the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network was at the Australian Permaculture Convergence held in Adelaide in early 1995. The Network met again at the Sixth International Permaculture Convergence in Perth in 1996, where it was officially launched, and copies of Darren Phillip’s inventory, newly published by the ACFCGN, were sold. Martin Anda and Josh Burn were instated as the Western Australian network contacts. Community garden organisers from around Australia met on a number of occasions during the convergence to discuss the development of the network and of individual projects and to get to know each other better. The establishment of face-to-face relationships enabled the geographically dispersed Network co-ordinators to work together more effectively online (Campbell interviewed November 2009). The conference itself included several papers on community gardens (including Bodel and Anda 1996; Campbell, Grayson, Ruffan and Gamble 1996).

A website and wider email contact list were established. Email enabled the unfunded Network to communicate cheaply and quickly to people involved with individual community gardens, but also excluded the many gardeners who did not have easy access to email at that time (Crabtree 1999 p. 39, 64). A logo was created. The Network published the first edition of its magazine, *Community Harvest* in 1997, and its fourth edition was published in Autumn/Winter 1999.

Russ and Fiona in Sydney and Mòrag and Evan in Brisbane felt that regional community gardeners’ gatherings were important, and encouraged different gardens to host networking events. Brisbane community gardeners met in for the first time in August 1996 and decided to hold gatherings every six months. They have continued to do so since. Sydney community gardens have also met regularly since their first gathering. The Brisbane and Sydney Network co-ordinators provided direct assistance and advocacy to gardens in their regions on a voluntary basis, and acted as media contacts. Network co-ordinators in other states helped to compile listings of gardens in their regions, and passed email contacts onto the Sydney co-ordinators who managed the email contact list, but were otherwise too busy with their other projects to contribute to the development of a national organisation. By 2000, the network was active on a regional basis in Brisbane and Sydney, had only nominal co-ordinators in WA and Victoria, and maintained some activity in South Australia with the support of EatWell SA.
The email contact list was retained and occasionally mobilised to support threatened gardens (the list was integral to the successful campaign to save the University of NSW Community Permaculture Garden in 1998), but emerging community garden movement leaders from outside Sydney were not aware that the email list existed. A website continued to provide a public face and useful information about starting community gardens.

**New connections**

In 2002 and 2003, there was groundswell of interest in connecting community gardens around the country. When Cultivating Community held its first Dirty Hands, Happy Hearts conference, community gardeners from around Australia attended, eager to make connections. In October 2002, Queensland had its first state-wide community garden gathering, with gardeners from around the whole state, not just the Brisbane area, in attendance. Gardeners began visiting each other. In May 2003, a group of Cultivating Community members arrived at Northey Street City Farm. The meeting was a fertile one, and strong relationships were seeded. When Cultivating Community held its Victorian community gardeners’ gathering a couple of months later, a strong contingent from Northey Street was there.

**Victorian Community Garden Network Gathering, Malmsbury, July 2003**

Beginning in 2000, Cultivating Community organised an annual ‘gathering’ of Victorian community gardeners. The gatherings took place over a weekend in holiday camps, with people bunking down in dorm rooms overnight, sharing meals and informal socialising time, and offering more formal workshops and skill sharing sessions.

In 2003, the Victorian Community Gardeners’ Gathering took place in Malmsbury, 95 km north-west of Melbourne. For the first time, this gathering included people not only from Victoria, but also from New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. Several people from Northey Street City Farm attended, after meeting Cultivating Community members on their visit to Queensland. Three South Australians (including myself) and two people from Sydney attended after meeting Cultivating Community at the Dirty Hands Happy Hearts Conference.

The 60 attendees were mostly organisers and activists, people whose interest in community gardening extended beyond their own plot or garden site. Sixty people sat in a crowded circle and introduced themselves and their projects in turn. Babies, bundled up against the cold, crawled across the room. There was much excitement about meeting others engaged in similar work, sharing stories, ideas and information. Conversations continually returned to the desire to stay connected, pool efforts and resources, and to build a movement, rather than continuing to work in relative isolation. The idea of ‘forming’ a national network emerged strongly from the gathering, along with an increasing sense that
now that we had met and formed connections we already were a network. People knew that ACFCGN had existed in the past, but no one present at the gathering had had any direct or recent contact with it, and it was assumed that it was no longer in existence. There was a strong sense that the time had come for a cohesive national movement. An email listserv was set up to enable people to continue discussions towards the establishment of a national community gardening organisation.

I had just accepted a place in a PhD program and was hoping to research community gardens. This was my first contact with Northey Street City Farm, and with the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network. This meant I was able to follow the development of the national network over a number of years.

**Strengthening ties**

Visits between garden activists continued. In September 2003, Ben Neil from Cultivating Community went on a bus trip to Sydney. He met with Russ Grayson and with John Brisbin. John was the founder of Australian Community Foods, an organisation supporting local agrifood initiatives. They toured a number of gardens in Sydney and discussed the past and future of community garden networks. In October 2003, Ben Neil and another Victorian community gardener attended a three day long South Australian community garden conference, which I organised in Adelaide. This was the first community gardeners’ gathering in SA, and Adelaide gardeners continue to meet regularly in different gardens. In February 2004, Northey Street held a two day forum called Growing Communities, which was attended by Basil Natoli from Melbourne, and myself and another community garden organiser from Adelaide.

In April 2004, a meeting was convened at the Ecoliving Centre in Sydney, at which people from Queensland (including Mòrag Gamble and Evan Raymond), from Sydney, and from Melbourne met to discuss possibilities for forming or resurrecting a national community gardening organisation. There had been some communication via email prior to this, and the newer community garden organisers felt they needed to form stronger ties with the people who had established the original Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network.

The Queensland state community gardening gathering in May 2004 became another de facto national gathering. Around sixty people, mostly from south east Queensland, but also regional Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia were in attendance for three days camping on beautiful Stradbroke Island. By this time, caring commitments had meant that the Sydney co-ordinators of the original ACFCGN had stepped back from their organising role. Queensland now had the most functional regional community garden network. State gatherings had been happening every six months for three years, and there were people who weren’t actively involved in particular gardens providing support to those who were. At gatherings practical workshops were led by people with
experience, the program being partly devised by people saying what they wanted to learn and what they could offer. In 2004 sessions covered writing grant applications, cooking and processing unusual plants, garden design, working with conflict, involving communities, working with schools, healing and spirituality, and seed saving. Mòrag showed slides of community gardens around the world. There was much discussion of strengthening ties among gardens and with other organisations to build a strong movement. This gathering also marked the beginning of my longest field research stay at Northey Street City Farm.

**First official national gathering, Bendigo July 2004**

A three day gathering at the freezing Wesley Point Camp and Conference Centre in Bendigo doubled as the fourth annual Victorian community gardens gathering and what the organisers then believed to be the first national community gardens gathering (national community garden gatherings had been organised in the early 1980s). Community garden activists from Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria were present. A Western Australian Community Garden Network formally convened just before the Bendigo gathering, and WA community gardeners sent a message that they were unable to afford the travel costs to attend the gathering, but were interested in being involved in future national planning and events.

While a handful of ‘breakout’ workshops were offered, most of the three day gathering was spent with all participants seated around a small hall discussing the development, aims, structure and purposes of a new or reinvigorated national organisation of community gardeners. It was the first time that many of the people present had been in the same room together. Despite the considerable diversity of attendees—social workers, permaculturists, gardeners, teachers, local government representatives, people from Christian organisations, queer anarchist squatters—there was striking agreement about the shared values that people saw as uniting the movement, and being necessary to forming a successful organisation. There was a strong concern that any organisation be non-hierarchical, and not take away from local level activities. A broad social justice and ecological perspective was taken for granted. Well facilitated participatory decision-making processes were also assumed, and the people gathered had a considerable skill base in effective communication and collective decision-making, as well as good humoured patience for sometimes lengthy processes designed to elicit and condense everyone’s best thinking.

There were occasional moments of confusion. In one of the early brainstorms about the purpose of a national community gardening organisation, ‘Bringing down the empire’ was one of the key agendas proposed by one small group, composed mostly of younger and more radical participants. When it came time to collate the ideas of each of the small groups of people into a shared document, the person facilitating the process, the co-ordinator of a Salvation Army community garden project, took ‘Bringing down the empire’ as a joke and left it off the collated list. He was told quite firmly that it
was a serious aim and it was reinstated. While the somewhat ironic language of ‘Bringing down the empire’ was not a familiar or comfortable fit for all at the gathering, broad anti-capitalist aims remained on the agenda for the remainder of the weekend, often couched in the more accessible language of relocalisation, bioregionalism, global justice/anti-/alter-globalisation, addressing environmental and social justice issues, ‘change from the bottom up’, and forming connections with wider social movements around the world.

Numerous other ideas were generated, from mentoring systems and gardener exchanges to facilitate sharing of skills and information among gardens to forming links with philanthropic organisations. Visions for the organisation included its immediate potential to aid new and established gardens through practical assistance such as auspicing grant applications or providing umbrella public liability insurance; creating a clearing house for community gardening research and information, and generating further research; representing and advocating for community gardens, including lobbying for increased support; and contributing to wider goals of food security, grassroots organising, sustainable living, and social justice.

There was one ‘plenary’ presentation at the gathering, which offered a bigger picture analysis of community food systems, based largely on the work of Helena Norberg-Hodge (1999; Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002). In this session, Greg Milne, who was involved with Cultivating Community and Collingwood Children’s Farm described trends like the increasing concentration in ownership of food production and retailing; the diminishing share of retail prices received by farmers; the increased international transport and trading of basic food stuffs; and the juxtaposition of the billion people facing starvation with the billion people facing illness from overconsumption. Community gardens were presented as part of a strategy to develop localised, sustainable food systems, which were argued to be an essential component of a solution to these problems.

By the end of the gathering much excitement and commitment had been kindled. Practical decisions about formal goals, vision statements, and organisational structure were deferred. A number of priorities were set for the coming year, with the focus on strengthening nascent local and bioregional community garden networks, and establishing national systems of communication. The embryonic national organisation was envisioned for the short term as a communications mechanism and site for collation and sharing of information and resources, rather than as initiating or managing its own projects. Those present agreed to a set of actions, and more than twenty people took responsibility for implementing them. The major focus of action was the establishment of communication mechanisms, primarily a new email listserv (the listserv established at the Malmsbury gathering was combined with the older ACFCGN email contact list maintained by Russ and Fiona and shifted to a new host. I took on the role of list administrator), the re-invigoration of the old ACFCGN website,
the production of a *Community Harvest* newsletter, and the organisation of another national gathering in 12 months time.

There was some gap in understanding between people getting together to discuss forming a new national community gardening body and those who saw the new energy as a revival of the established ACFCGN group. The flyer promoting the Bendigo national gathering in 2004 made no mention of ACFCGN. Discussions about a ‘national network of community gardens and city farms’ were on the agenda, and at least some of those involved assumed that this meant the formation of a new organisation. Other attendees, who were involved in the 1990s cycle of ACFCGN organising assumed that they were attending an ACFCGN gathering. The existing infrastructure of the ACFCGN—a website, some resources, a name and logo—though minimal, enabled activists to bypass some of the process of forming a new organisation—debating a name, establishing an identity, choosing a focus. Adopting ACFCGN as the name of the new/revived organisation also seemed to resolve potential tensions between the organisers of the 1990s ACFCGN and the newer generation of organisers. However, subsuming plans for a new national organisation of community gardeners also meant that discussions that were beginning to emerge in 2002 and 2003 about the potential purposes, ways of working, and immediate agendas of a potential national organisation, were sidelined. These discussions may have led to quite a different organisation being formed.

Between the Bendigo national gathering, and the next national conference, which would be held on the Sunshine Coast, The second Dirty Hands Happy Hearts conference, organised by Cultivating Community and the Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria was held in September 2004. As with the 2002 conference, the conference attracted community gardeners from around the country, with informal networking and relationship building occurring, but no formal discussion of national organising. My attendance at this conference marked the beginning of my longest fieldwork stay with Cultivating Community.

**Building Community From the Ground Up, The Second Annual Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network Conference, Coolum Beach, July 2005**

A small group of Queensland community gardeners, including people from Northey Street City Farm and Permaculture Noosa organised the second national gathering (this time described as a conference) to be held on the Sunshine Coast in south-east Queensland. The interest in the conference exceeded the capacity of the seaside youth camp/conference facility, and even with additional tents and some attendees staying off site, a number of people who wanted to participate had to be turned away. 115 people participated. The program included numerous workshops and presentations on topics including seed saving and community seed banks; developing school tour
programs; water-saving; making garden sculptures; running festivals and events; building partnerships; creating right-livelihoods through community gardens; and keeping project visions alive. Workshops included practical, hands-on activities and content-rich presentations, and were designed to be of interest and use to those starting out in community gardens as well as those who had been active in the movement for a number of years. There were also plenary presentations about community gardening and community food projects from around Australia and internationally. Informal time for socialising was also included, and well received according to participant feedback.

Discussions about the ongoing development and agenda of the ACFCGN were held in parallel with the workshop sessions. This allowed the maximum amount of time to be allocated to national discussions, but also meant that people had to choose between accessing important information in the workshop sessions and contributing to the direction of the ACFCGN. In practice, this meant that the ACFCGN planning sessions were attended mostly by those who had been involved in the development of the national network over the past three years. The final day of the conference included a well-attended plenary session which reported on the ACFCGN discussions of the previous days and invited the input of other conference participants.

The plenary session endorsed tasks for the coming year. Investigating options for employing a paid project officer to develop the organisation and carry out a number of other tasks was a key priority, with a widely held view that paid positions are important for individuals to sustain their activism. Organising a national survey to gain base-line data about the prevalence and activities of community gardens around Australia was another priority. A small group took responsibility for investigating options for formal incorporation of the group. Ongoing activities, such as the production of twice-yearly Community Harvest magazines, and the maintenance of the website and email listserv were also prioritised.

A national ‘reference group’ was established as an interim decision-making mechanism to enable the ACFCGN to make and enact decisions between conferences, and to work towards a more formalised structure. The reference group was composed of regional co-ordinators/contact people, who were expected to keep gardeners in their local areas informed about ACFCGN activities, and to create opportunities for people in their local areas to have input. A ‘job description’ for the ACFCGN’s regional co-ordinators/contact people was developed, reflecting the group’s priorities for the coming year. Key duties were to

- Distribute the community gardens survey, once developed
- Organise regional meetings or gatherings
- Act as a point of contact for media and public enquiries about community gardening
- Promote ACFCGN at any opportunity—including giving talks and presentations
- Feed back relevant information to other regional co-ordinators and the wider organisation.
I agreed to continue in the role I had been fulfilling as the South Australian co-ordinator of the ACFCGN, and to contribute to the development of a national survey process. The small South Australian contingent agreed to organise the next national conference in March 2006.

Following the community gardening conference, Growing Communities, an offshoot enterprise of Northey Street City Farm, organised a two-day ‘learning in the garden’ seminar. This was attended by some of those who had travelled to Queensland for the ACFCGN conference, as well as many local educators, gardeners, and local government workers.

**Putting Down Roots: The Third Annual Community Gardens and City Farms Conference, Adelaide Hills, March 2006**

A small group of Adelaide people who were working on a proposal for a city farm and centre for environmental research and education, agreed to organise the 2006 national conference. I took on the role of program co-ordinator, and later conference co-ordinator (and didn’t get any thesis work done for some months). A two-day seminar on gardening in schools was held prior to the community gardening conference. The seminar was organised by the ACFCGN conference organisers in conjunction with the Hawke Centre at the University of South Australia and attended by 130 people.

The community garden conference was held at a camp/conference centre in the Adelaide Hills, with participants, as in previous years, staying on site in basic bunk-house accommodation. Two days of workshops were followed by a day of garden tours. Workshop topics included gaining media coverage, documenting garden projects, the role of community gardens in local food movements, horticultural therapy, gardening with refugees, establishing produce exchanges for home grown and gleaned food, and running educational programs. There was also a presentation by Peta Christensen and Chris Ennis, Melbourne community garden activists who had recently returned from a tour of community food systems in Brazil, Canada, the United States and Denmark (see Christensen 2005).

In an attempt to facilitate discussions about the development of the ACFCGN, I asked people who had agreed to carry out tasks during the year to write briefs report about what they had done, and circulated these in a letter sent out to all registrants before the conference. The letter included detailed discussion and recommended options for incorporation and a proposal to develop a formal organisational description. It also included summaries of local co-ordinators’ activities since the previous conference, which included many meetings, presentations and interviews with the media. I also organised a pre-conference meeting and dinner to develop an agenda for how to use the conference to further the development of the ACFCGN and its aims. This pre-conference dinner was attended by around 40 people, who participated in a successful consensus process to structure
the decision-making agenda for the rest of the conference. The conference itself was attended by 135 people, from all states of Australia except the Northern Territory.

Due to the conference catering arrangements falling through, I spent most of the weekend in the kitchen, and was not able to observe or participate in any workshops or national discussions. An extended period of illness after the conference meant that I was unable to pursue formal accounts of what happened from others.

**Cities Feeding People, Melbourne, 20—25th March 2007**

Cultivating Community, the organisers of the 2007 national community gardens conference, moved away from the established model of national gatherings as opportunities for committed community garden activists to meet, network, share information and recharge their enthusiasm. Cultivating Community re-located the conference from windy youth camps to the Collingwood Town Hall in central Melbourne, and organised a program of high profile presenters aimed at reaching a wider audience.

The conference took place four weeks after the birth of my son, and any thoughts I had entertained of embarking on the twelve hour train journey with infant in tow vanished soon after he emerged. A number of people who did make it to the conference shared their experiences with me, and I was also able to listen to many of the presentations, which were made available as audio downloads.

The six day conference included theme days focusing on seed saving (incorporating the Seed Savers Network annual conference); gardening in schools; community gardening; and food security. International speakers (some in person, some presenting via video link) included Indian activist Vandana Shiva (1988; 1991; 1993; 2000; 2008), who spoke about the genetic diversity of food and the recent spate of suicides among Indian farmers; Malaika Edwards from the US food justice organisation, People’s Grocery, on the experience of creating community food systems in ‘food deserts’; Helena Norberg-Hodge (1999), founder of International Society for Ecology and Culture, who spoke of the hidden subsidies underlying the dominant food system; microbiologist Elaine Ingram on composting and soil life; and Mike Marston from the UK Federation of City Farms provided a European perspective on urban community food production. The conference also included high-profile local presenters, including permaculture co-originator David Holmgren (2002), who spoke of the role of sustainability movements in the wake of peaking oil supplies; garden writer Jackie French (1993; 2000) and television presenter Jerry Coleby-Williams. The conference also included tours to community and school gardens.
The organisers were successful in inviting the participation of a wider audience, with more than 700 people attending. The conference also strengthened connections between Cultivating Community and ACFCGN and community food networks in Australia and internationally.

The ‘public’ focus of the conference meant that there was little time allocated for internal ACFCGN business. People who had taken on leadership roles in previous years met in breaks and evenings. The conference was significant in raising the profile of the organisation, but was less effective in continuing with the solidification of ACFCGN, which continued to operate without a formal structure. There were no national community garden gatherings or conferences between 2008 and 2010. At the time of writing, ACFCGN was planning to organise a national conference in Sydney in 2011. Annual General Meetings of the ACFCGN ‘executive’ were held in Sydney in 2009 and Canberra in 2010 with people from Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania in attendance.

**Incorporation**

The Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network formally incorporated as a not-for-profit association in Melbourne in 2008. Under the Victorian *Associations Incorporations Act* (1981), associations can adopt generic model rules, and are not required to register official aims or objectives. As formal incorporation was required in order to apply for a particular round of grant funding, the model rules were adopted, and previous discussions about organisational structure, decision-making processes, and relationships between local nodes and the national body were not enacted.

On paper at least, the ACFCGN now had a president, vice president and secretary, and was committed to annual general meetings, quorums, and decisions made by majority vote of eligible members. The decision to become incorporated was a pragmatic one, with few people even aware that it had happened, and the majority of members of the 2009 reference group still unclear about the incorporation status of the organisation and of its official rules and structure. The idea, present in the network from the Malmsbury gathering in 2003, that regardless of formal structure, incorporation, and public activities, ‘we already are a network’ has persisted. Legal structures were seen as being necessary or useful in particular contexts—to be eligible to apply for funding, for example—but are not seen as defining ACFCGN. The network is the people, the quality of their relationships, and the work they do together. There is, however, a disconnect between the non-hierarchical, consensus based values that were articulated and enacted at the national gatherings in 2003, 2004 and 2005, and the conventional organisational structure officially adopted at incorporation.

In practice, other than enabling grant applications, formal incorporation has had minimal impact on ACFCGN. The day to day operation of the network is open to all contributions and is managed by a reference group (now called an executive, in line with the organisation’s official rules) composed of
people from each state or geographic region. The organisation held an AGM in November 2009, which fulfilled its legal obligations, but was largely based on the coincidence of the Western Australian and Victorian executive members planning to be in Sydney at around the same time. The AGM was combined with a Sydney network gathering, and was conducted largely by consensus, except for a formal AGM, which was carried out in consensus style, interrupted by reminders that we needed to move and second motions, and invite nominations for positions. I accepted a position as an ordinary member of the ACFCGN’s executive, having acted as the network’s South Australian contact from 2004 (along with Kate Hubmayer from 2007) to the present.

The relationship between local (state, bioregional) community gardening groups and the ACFCGN is not formalised, but is mutually supportive. State or regional groups continue to operate autonomously, with varying degrees of activity. Most hold gatherings once or twice a year, and operate a local email listserv. Events and activities from individual gardens and local networks are included on the ACFCGN’s website.

The support and consolidation of local networks/hubs has remained a strong focus for the national organisation. This reflects a belief in local level organisation and direct relationships, and a desire to avoid a hierarchical, out of touch national organisation. Local groups operate with complete autonomy, sometimes under the banner of ACFCGN, sometimes incorporated in their own right, as in the WA Community Garden Network (WACGN). Local community garden networks operate their own email listservs, and some produce newsletters. Gatherings of local networks are used to communicate information from the ACFCGN, and to invite grassroots input into planning and decision-making.
In the mid and late 1990s, New York’s many community gardens were threatened by development and a hostile City government. Community gardeners joined together to campaign for the gardens’ preservation. Writings about the conflict over community garden sites in New York City in the 1990s and early 2000s are a rare example of community gardening being closely associated with conventional ‘protest’ repertoires, including rallies, blockades, media stunts, petitions and law suits. A number of academics used their writing to support the efforts of gardeners protesting and organising to save the gardens. When community gardeners began using familiar protest repertoires, writers began seeing community gardeners as political actors and writing about them in political terms. Writing about New York’s community gardens was important to the development of a ‘literature’ about community gardening. In previous writing, there was little sense of their being a ‘field’ of writing about community gardening. Publications included references to other articles (often from movement publications) to add legitimacy to their claims, but rarely engaged with each other’s ideas. The result was often referral circles with no link to empirical studies. With a handful of writers all publishing papers on the struggles over New York’s community gardens there was, for the first time, a dialogue about community gardening, which could be built on and engaged with by subsequent writers. Along with articles extolling the gardens’ virtues (Schmelzkopf 1995; Armstrong 2000; Schukoske 2000), a more analytic and reflective strain of writing also began to develop, exploring the ways community gardeners organised to defend their gardens, and the wider issues illuminated by the struggle (Ferguson 1999b; Wilson and Weinberg 1999; Duncombe 2002; Mikalbrown 2002; Schmelzkopf 2002; Staeheli, Mitchell and Gibson 2002; Von Hassell 2002; Smith and Kurtz 2003; Meyer-Renschhausen 2006; Atkinson 2007; Staeheli and Mitchell 2007; Shepard 2009).
I have included this Appendix about the use of protest by New York community gardeners and its analysis in the literature as it is an example of how community gardeners, in particular circumstances, have been viewed as engaged in social and political action. The recognition of community gardeners as political actors when they utilise conventional protest repertoires can be contrasted with the lack of attention given in this literature to community gardening _per se_ as a form of social action. While my focus in this thesis is on the use of community gardening as a strategy for social action, rather than on community gardeners’ use of conventional protest, community gardeners in Australia have also used protest, lobbying and disruptive actions to protect threatened community garden sites. See the description of the campaign to save a community garden at the University of New South Wales, Sydney in Appendix 3 for one example. In this Appendix, I provide some brief background about New York’s community gardens, and explore the ways writers have addressed the political practices of New York community gardeners. I focus on the ways community gardens are framed in debates, and on how change is seen to happen. I then highlight the few sources that look at how community gardening itself influenced the ways community gardeners conducted their campaigns.

**BACKGROUND**

During the 1970s and 80s, fiscal crises and ‘structural adjustment’ programs left New York City with a legacy of urban decay and poverty (Meyer-Renschhausen 2006). Following mass disinvestment, the City was left with thousands of burnt out, rubble-strewn vacant lots, many of which had reverted to City ownership after being abandoned by their previous landholders (Schmelzkopf 1995 p. 366). The abandoned lots became havens of drug use and crime, filled with rubbish and breeding rats. In 1973, tired of government inaction on the issue, a group of activists calling themselves the Green Guerillas [sic] began taking over blight sites on New York’s lower east side, clearing out building rubble, abandoned cars, and mountains of rubbish, and turning them into community gardens. Despite their initial opposition, the City eventually began issuing leases to the Green Guerilla gardeners, and numerous other local residents became inspired to create gardens in their own neighbourhoods’ abandoned lots. Between 1973 and 1995 more than 800 community gardens took root in New York (Carsson 2008 p. 91).

The gardens’ tenure had never been secure, and New York community gardeners have been fighting to protect their gardens since the early 1980s when developers became interested in neighbourhoods which were beginning to gentrify (Schmelzkopf 1995 p. 376). The need for community gardeners to work together to protect their sites was recognised as early as 1978 with the formation of the American Community Gardening Association. However it was not until the election of Rudolph Giuliani as Mayor in 1994 that community gardens became systematically threatened. In 1994, the City stopped approving new leases for new community gardens. In 1996, it began moves to sell off all its disposable land and by 1998 it had stopped renewing leases for existing and long established
community gardens. When the City transferred the gardens from the jurisdiction of the Parks Department to the Assets and Sales unit of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, community gardeners began to organise to defend the remaining gardens (Elder 2005).

The sell off of City owned land appeared to disproportionately target sites with successful community gardens, even when other vacant land was available nearby. Activists believed that the Giuliani administration felt threatened by the increasingly engaged and organised communities that the community gardens catalysed (Mikalbrown 2002 p. 230; Staeheli, Mitchell et al. 2002; Atkinson 2007 p. 254), potentially mobilizing people opposed to Giuliani’s policies, and creating spaces with a degree of autonomy from the state. While some of the gardeners involved in protest and legal action in support of the community gardens were ‘educated poets and activists who revelled in media stunts’ (Ferguson 1999b p. 69) many were people who had become involved with community gardening through wanting to tidy up their neighbourhood, make it safer and to have access to a garden. Some of these gardeners became involved in political action reluctantly, and sometimes fearfully—particularly those who feared their citizenship may be challenged (Ferguson 1999b). If the Giuliani administration’s intention was to stamp out the radical potential of the community gardens, the effect was the opposite—not only experienced activists but previously apolitical gardeners became better networked and increasingly politicised by the campaign to protect the gardens.

**FRAMING THE CONFLICT**

A theme that can be seen in much of the academic literature about campaigns to save New York’s community gardens is the role that strategic framing of the issues played on each side of the conflict. In public debate, the issue was often discussed in terms of gardens versus low-cost housing. While Elder (2005) accepts these as the terms of the conflict, other writers demonstrate the ways in which ‘housing-versus-gardens’ was strategically deployed by the opponents of community gardening to define the terms of the debate, and to delegitimise the gardeners’ campaign. Smith and Kurtz (2003) argue that the housing-versus-gardens conflict was fabricated by Mayor Giuliani’s office. Schmelzkopf (1995 p. 377) supports the gardeners’ argument that there were many more vacant lots than community gardens, and outlines the Green Guerillas’ counter-plan which integrated 2000 units of low-cost housing with the preservation of all community gardens (p. 377). Schmelzkopf describes the ways community gardeners resisted the framing of the issue as gardens versus affordable housing, and how alliances were formed between garden advocates and housing activists to oppose the sell off. Staeheli, Mitchell et al. (2002) contend that the City’s arguments about the need for housing were strategic rather than sincere, as reclaimed community garden land was not going to be used for social housing, and City had not previously admitted responsibility for providing housing (though after protest, stipulations were added that some of the land be dedicated to ‘civic functions’ that may include affordable housing Staeheli, Mitchel, et al p. 199). They argue that conceptualisations of ‘the public’ were at the heart of the conflict, with the City understanding the public as ‘aggregation of
abstract political subjects’ (p. 202), while for gardeners, the public—the community—‘were not individuals so much as they were communal entities marginalized through the operations of power relations of capital and racism within society’ (p. 202). The gardeners’ claim in litigation was that as marginalized communities, they had a particular, communal right to space in which they could organise, mobilize, and seek empowerment. While Elder (2005) argues that attempts to frame the sell off of the gardens as an environmental justice issue were unsuccessful, as they did not stand up in court, Schmelzkopf (2002) drawing on the work of Lefebvre (1991, 1996) shows how market values and metaphors are incompatible with people’s right to ‘inhabit’ cities and public spaces, that they are and incapable of assessing the use value of community gardens. These articles began to consider, for the first time, the different ways in which it is possible to conceptualise the significance and worth of community gardens, and to draw attention to the sometimes incommensurate discourses which operate in debates around community gardens, and community space more broadly.

HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

Implicit in much of the writing about the conflict over New York’s community gardens are varying understandings about how change happens. The campaign to save New York’s community gardens took many forms, from petitions to blockades, carlivesque street theatre to legal action, supported by extensive networking and alliance formation across the City and the nation. A number of writers describe the specific tactics used in the campaign. Cohen-Cruz (2002) focuses on the use of Boal-inspired ‘Legislative theatre’, and on a forum theatre play produced by 43 New York City community gardeners. Smith and Kurtz (2003) analyse the ways in which community gardeners mobilised support at various geographical scales to resist the destruction of their gardens and the ‘neoliberalization’ of urban space through neighbourhood, local area, city-wide and national organising. Strategies included staging public protests to raise awareness of the issue, linking their cause to wider political struggles, and using the internet to gain support outside New York. Others note the transfer and development of analyses and tactics from earlier cycles of community garden campaigning (Ferguson 1999a). Shepard (2009 p. 185) argues that earlier campaigns in defence of particular gardens ‘radicalised a generation of garden activists and laid the groundwork for the 2002 garden settlement’ (see below).

Activists from other social movements became involved with the campaign. Duncome (2002) describes the campaign from the perspective of one of the community gardeners’ allies—Reclaim the Streets, which shared the gardeners’ concern for the preservation of public spaces and decided to support the community garden campaign. He describes the development of alliances between ‘normally apolitical’ (p. 223) community gardeners and radical urban environmentalists, and the ways in which Reclaim the Streets offered ‘activist services’ to community gardeners, introducing them to new strategies and collaborating with them in organising protest events, including an action to turn a street into a garden, and a carnivalesque garden party. L.A. Kauffman describes the diffusion of
protest tactics from Earth First! forest protesters, noting that many people moved back and forth between the community gardens in New York and blockades to protect old-growth forests in Oregon. She believes that ‘the New York City community garden fight was one of the first times that Earth First!-style blockading techniques were used in an urban context.’ In her analysis of the campaign Kauffman argues that these direct action tactics are often most effective for groups whose numbers are small but whose appeal is broad. And they worked really well here, putting the gardens issue onto the agenda, making the controversy something that everyone knew about, and helping transform what was a very small movement into a relatively large movement (interviewed in Shepard 2004 p. 378)

Writers differ in their analysis of the significance of different tactics. Elder (2005 p. 777) acknowledges the range of creative actions by the gardeners, but sees change as having been enacted through the courts and conventional political processes. In contrast, Staeheli, Mitchell, et al. (2002) argue that collective rights to the city—which they see as the heart of the community gardeners’ campaign—could not be adequately recognised within the legal system, and that the limited recognition of the gardens that was achieved was the result of campaigning more than litigation.

Articles also vary in their emphasis on the role of entertainer Bette Midler. Midler formed and funded the organisation, New York Restoration Project to purchase the land of 50 community gardens on the day before they were to be auctioned to developers, and also provided one million dollars to the Trust for Public Land towards buying an additional 112 parcels of land (Elder 2005 p. 785; Fernandez 2003). Midler is seen by some as having saved the day. Others opt not to name her, keeping their focus on the groundwork that provided political impetus for the Mayor to sell land to trusts rather than developers (Duncombe 2002). Staeheli, Mitchell, et al. (2002 pp. 203 - 4) are cautious in their celebration of the transfer of the land to land trusts, noting concerns some gardeners expressed about outside organisations taking control of their previously autonomous gardens, and potentially limiting the ‘radical potential of mobilizations that occur within those spaces’ (p. 204). While they have not seen any evidence if it occurring, the writers note that the land trusts ‘may be able to limit the political potential of the gardens in ways that the City—and the Giuliani administration, in particular—could not do without having to address public outcry.’

**CAMPAIGNING COMMUNITY GARDENING STYLE**

The focus in writing about the campaign to save New York’s community gardens has been on garden activists’ use of protest, lobbying, blockades and legal action. The particular strategies used by community gardeners have been seen as coming from a conventional social movement repertoire, and sometimes as having been learnt directly from established social movement organisations such as Reclaim the Streets and Earth First!. However a couple of writers have suggested that the ways community gardeners organised to defend their gardens, and the particular strategies they deployed,
were informed by the community organising experience they had gained through community gardening.

While noting the range of forms in the campaign to save Esperanza Community Garden, including letter writing and direct action, Kerstin Milalbrown (2002) argues that the centre of the campaign was an innovation developed within the specific context of that garden—the construction of a giant coqui frog. This tiny frog lives only in Puerto Rico, where many of the gardeners were from. In Puerto Rican mythology, the coqui is fiercely loyal to its community and ‘will do anything to protect the environment it lives in’ (p. 231). The gardeners constructed a giant frog that towered over the threatened garden. It was large enough for two adults to fit comfortably inside, so as well as being a symbol of resistance, it was used to keep watch in and eventually sheltered people locking on during the eviction. The frog was constructed, as the garden itself, in an inclusive community activity, with children involved in the garden doing the painting. When bulldozers finally arrived, hundreds of people gathered to show their support of the garden. For Mikalbrown, the campaign to save the garden, though unsuccessful, was a call to action, ‘a challenge to find new ways of bringing the spirit of community gardening to our own lives’ (p. 233).

Shepard (2009) has attended to the ways community gardeners have drawn on their particular experience of community organising and place making in their political actions outside the garden gate. He argues that the day-to-day social action of community gardening has created spaces that have been important incubators for new ways of doing politics in ways which embrace joy and community participation. ‘From the 1990s to the present, the garden movement has served as an innovation space for activists to experiment with different tactics, strategies, and practices’ (Shepard 2009 p. 283). There is much more to be explored about the particular developments of repertoire generated by the community gardening movement, and their impact on community gardeners’ protests and wider movements.

Following a lawsuit filed by the state attorney general, 300 of New York’s community gardens were given an eight-year reprieve, and their management fell under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department. At time of writing (September 2010) this eight-year period was due to end in a couple of weeks (Quinn and Mark-Viverito 2010). Community gardeners were re-grouping to prepare for another fight to save their gardens.
## APPENDIX 6.
### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**TABLE 2: Interview Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Affiliations</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Lorna’</td>
<td>ACFCGN, Northey St City Farm</td>
<td>19th February 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Iain’</td>
<td>Northey St City Farm, ACFCGN</td>
<td>4th June 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Robert’</td>
<td>Northey St City Farm, ACFCGN</td>
<td>4th June 2004</td>
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<td>16th June 2004</td>
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</tr>
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<td>‘Vicente’</td>
<td>Northey St City Farm, ACFCGN</td>
<td>23rd June 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘David’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community</td>
<td>18th November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Rachel’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community, ACFCGN</td>
<td>21st November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Julia’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community</td>
<td>22nd November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Harvey’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community</td>
<td>22nd November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Allison’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community</td>
<td>23rd November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘James’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community, ACFCGN</td>
<td>23rd November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Henry’</td>
<td>Cultivating Community, ACFCGN</td>
<td>25th November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘George’</td>
<td>ACFCGN</td>
<td>15th November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Yvonne’</td>
<td>ACFCGN</td>
<td>15th November 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 7.

**LISTING OF KNOWN COMMUNITY GARDENS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, AS AT MARCH 2010**

**TABLE 3: Community Gardens in SA, March 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Garden</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adelaide Box Factory Community Garden</td>
<td>Box Factory Community Centre, 59 Regent Street South</td>
<td>Community Centre(^{114})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adelaide Dame Roma Mitchell Community Garden</td>
<td>Old Adelaide Gaol</td>
<td>State government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adelaide St Andrew’s Hospital Garden</td>
<td>St Andrew’s Hospital, 350 South Terrace</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adelaide Walyo Yerta Community Garden</td>
<td>Veale Gardens, South Terrace south of the conservatory</td>
<td>Public parkland/ local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Aldinga Beach Aldinga Community Garden</td>
<td>Symonds Reserve, Corner Butterworth Stewart Avenues, adjacent to Aldinga Community Centre.</td>
<td>Public parkland/ local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ashbourne Ashborne Community Garden</td>
<td>Ashbourne Primary School</td>
<td>School(^{115})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bedford Park Flinders University Community Permaculture Garden</td>
<td>Corner Hall and Sturt Drives, Sturt Campus, Flinders University</td>
<td>University campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Blair Athol The Gathering Place Community Garden</td>
<td>HEALS Centre, 5 Clifton Street</td>
<td>Community Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Brompton Green Street Community Gardens</td>
<td>19 Green Street, next to Community Centre</td>
<td>Community Centre/ local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Campbelltown Lochiel Park Community Garden</td>
<td>Southern end of Lochiel Parkway</td>
<td>Housing development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{114}\) Many community centres in South Australia operate on land owned by local councils.

\(^{115}\) School land is managed by the state Department of Education and Children’s Services
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Christie Downs</td>
<td>Anne Close Community Garden</td>
<td>5 Finian Road, Christie Downs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Christie Downs</td>
<td>Elizabeth House Community Garden</td>
<td>112 Elizabeth Road. Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Clayton Bay</td>
<td>Clayton Bay Community Garden</td>
<td>Clayton Bay Hall grounds, Corner of Alexandrina Drive and Grandview Drive Community hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Anglicare-SA Community Garden</td>
<td>91 – 93 Elizabeth Way Social service agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fullarton</td>
<td>Fern Avenue Community Garden</td>
<td>18 – 20 Fern Ave. Local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gawler</td>
<td>Gawler Community House</td>
<td>2 Scheibener Terrace (old ETSA depot) Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Gilles Plains</td>
<td>Wandana Community Garden</td>
<td>14 Blacks Rd Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Glandore</td>
<td>Glandore Community Garden</td>
<td>Malwa Street. Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Goodwood</td>
<td>The Goody Patch Community Garden</td>
<td>Surrey St Goodwood, adjacent tennis courts near Goodwood Primary School. School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Goolwa</td>
<td>Cittaslow Goolwa Community Garden</td>
<td>Corner Kessel Road and Skewes Road Local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hackham West</td>
<td>Urban Connection Community Garden</td>
<td>Malmo Court Community Garden in a cul de sac of Helsinki Reserve. Public park/local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hackham South</td>
<td>Hackham South School Community Garden</td>
<td>Melsetter Road School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hackham West</td>
<td>Hackham West Community Garden</td>
<td>268 Beach Road Social service agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Henley Beach</td>
<td>Henley Community Garden</td>
<td>In the grounds of Henley High School to the west of the oval. School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Hillerest</td>
<td>Kurruru Pingyarendi Community Garden</td>
<td>489b North East Rd Social service agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Kapunda</td>
<td>Kapunda Community Garden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Milang</td>
<td>Milang Community Garden</td>
<td>Corner of River and Coxe streets Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Morphett Vale</td>
<td>Wakefield House Community Garden</td>
<td>Wakefield House Over 50s Community Centre, 65 Acre Avenue Community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mount Barker</td>
<td>Duck Flat Community Garden</td>
<td>At the rear of the hospital and Health Centre, Wellington Road Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mount Gambier</td>
<td>The Old Mount Gambier Gaol Community Garden</td>
<td>Margaret Street behind the Old Mount Gambier Gaol complex. Local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Naracoorte</td>
<td>Naracoorte Community Garden</td>
<td>80 Ormerod St Community centre/State government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Community Garden</td>
<td>Address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Noarlunga</td>
<td>Noarlunga Downs School Community Garden</td>
<td>Canterbury Crescent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Nuriootpa</td>
<td>Barossa Community Garden</td>
<td>16 Gawler Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Port Lincoln</td>
<td>Port Lincoln Community Garden</td>
<td>Community House, 14 Conrad Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Port Pirie</td>
<td>Port Pirie Community Garden</td>
<td>28 Symonds Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>St Mary’s</td>
<td>Picket Fence Community Garden</td>
<td>Rear of 1167 South Road, next to church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Seaford</td>
<td>Seaford Ecumenical Community Garden</td>
<td>Corner Grand Boulevard and Main Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Semaphore</td>
<td>St Bede’s Community Garden</td>
<td>200 Military Rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Strathalbyn</td>
<td>Strathalbyn Disability and Community Garden</td>
<td>Myranth House, 1 Coleman Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Murray Bridge</td>
<td>Murray Bridge Community Garden</td>
<td>25 Joyce Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Victor Harbor</td>
<td>Victor Harbor Community Garden</td>
<td>Encounter Centre, Armstrong Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Wallaroo</td>
<td>Wallaroo Community Garden</td>
<td>Within the Walaroo Fauna and Wildlife Park, Ernest Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Williamstown</td>
<td>Williamstown Community Garden</td>
<td>Memorial Drive, Williamstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Woodville</td>
<td>Ridley Grove Community Garden</td>
<td>66 Ridley Grove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Wynn Vale</td>
<td>Wynn Vale Community Garden</td>
<td>32 Park Lake Drive, behind kindergarten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ‘Community Gardening in SA’ [brochure], Adelaide, South Australian Community and School Garden Network (compiled by Claire Nettle); additional original research.