EMPOWERED ENGAGEMENT:
HOW COMMUNITY GARDENS COMBAT SOCIAL ISOLATION

by

Carmin Michael Mazzotta

B.A., The University of North Carolina at Asheville, 2005

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Sociology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

December 2009

© Carmin Michael Mazzotta, 2009
ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that engagement in the non-exclusionary, place-based, participatory democratic forums of community gardens can empower participants to become civically engaged in the task of building healthier, safer, more dynamic and interactive communities. In so doing, community gardens offer a space from which to combat social isolation. Four interwoven forms of a globalizing experience of social isolation receive individuated focus; following each are considerations of how community gardens can assist in countering these forces, or 'problematics.'

For the first form, I offer the term 'homogenized mass experience' to describe a globalizing experience of increasing sameness and solitude in our daily routines and habits stemming from the proliferation and mass consumption of information and communications technologies (ICTs) (Harris & Pendakur 2002; Varnelis 2008). A second problematic stems from the proliferation of "non-places" (Auge 1995) — spaces such as shopping malls, arterial corridors, airports, chain restaurants, even suburbs (Flint 2006) — which perpetuate and deepen the first problematic while also being productive of dehumanizing non-identities. The bombarding presentation of mainstream news media, coupled with our reception of information in the isolation of non-places or the solitude of our ICTs, are productive of a third problematic, that of the disempowered and un(der)informed citizen (Radovan 2001; Wilson 2002). A fourth experience of social isolation is centered in consumer society, and relates to the absorption and assimilation of individuals into ICT-filtered matrices of consumption and production (Baudrillard 1998; Beller 2007).

Community gardens can be an empowering forum where individuals may begin to "delink" (Baker 2004) from a social isolation found in the global and discover an engagement rooted in the local.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................... iii

1  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

2  Structure of Paper ............................................................................................................... 3

3  Increasing Popularity of Community Gardens ................................................................. 5

4  History of Community Gardens ......................................................................................... 7

5  First Problematic: Homogenized Mass Experience .......................................................... 9

6  The Power of Place ............................................................................................................ 11

7  Second Problematic: Non-Places and Non-Identities ....................................................... 13

7.1 Sprawl as Non-Place .......................................................................................................... 15

8  Third Places and a Crucial Difference ............................................................................. 16

9  Community Gardens and Sustainability .......................................................................... 19

9.1 Economically Viable ......................................................................................................... 19

9.2 Ecologically Sound .......................................................................................................... 20

9.3 Socially Equitable ........................................................................................................... 21

9.3.1 Low-Income, Working Poor, Homeless ..................................................................... 22

9.3.2 Place for Elders; Knowledge Transfer to Youth ......................................................... 23

9.3.3 Inclusive of (Dis)ability ............................................................................................. 24

9.3.4 Gender, Resistance & Reproduction ......................................................................... 24

9.3.5 Recent Immigrants, Ethnic Diversity ......................................................................... 25

10 Third Problematic: Mass Media, News and the Disempowered Citizen ...................... 26

11 Pathways to Empowerment ............................................................................................. 28

11.1 Autonomy in the Association ........................................................................................ 28

11.2 Collective Self-Determination ....................................................................................... 29

11.3 Creative Self-Production ............................................................................................... 30

11.4 Learning Democratic Skill-Sets .................................................................................... 32

12 Social Capital .................................................................................................................. 33

13 Bonding & Bridging Social Capital ................................................................................ 35
14  Tensions, Exclusions, and Inequalities in the Garden Space  ................................. 37
15  Fourth Problematic: Consumer Society .................................................................. 40
16  The Need to Delink: Soil Citizens and Local Community .................................... 42
17  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 44
  17.1 Contributions to Community Garden Research .................................................. 45
  17.2 Recommendations for Future Research .............................................................. 46
  17.3 Beyond Community ............................................................................................... 47

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 49
1 INTRODUCTION

we have come to live not so much alongside other human beings – in their physical presence and the presence of their speech – as beneath the mute gaze of mesmerizing, obedient objects which endlessly repeat the same refrain: that of our dumbfounded power, our virtual affluence, our absence one from another. (Baudrillard 1998:25)

In the above quote, Jean Baudrillard is referring to an enveloping clutter of objects that we surround ourselves with, that we consume, and to him, that we are consumed by. Without knowing that the quote was written in 1970, one might venture that the author was describing our relationship/fixation with information and communications technologies (ICTs) in today's information age (Harris & Pendakur 2002:9). With laptops, iPods, smart phones, GPS systems, and Bluetooth technology, we are all individually and separately immersed in our technologies (Radovan 2001; Ritzer 2001; Wilson 2002; Zukin 2003; Coyne 2007; Varnelis & Friedberg 2008). At the same time, just as we are interpolated in ICTs, we are just as ingrained in a world of hipster apparel, spotless shoes, flashy (or modest) jewellery, fast cars, chain restaurants and the labels, logos and name brands that accompany them (Klein 2000; Ritzer 2001). We spend our days working in office parks so that we will have the necessary funds to purchase the above items at outlet malls and big-box stores on our return commute along arterial corridors congested with rush hour traffic – better grab a Starbucks latte and a Big Mac from McDonalds to tide us over – on our long solo journey back to our 3,500 square foot suburban homes (Ritzer 2001; Ritzer & Ryan 2002; Taylor 2003; Flint 2006). When we get home, the automatic garage door has barely clicked shut and we are already drifting off to sleep in our favourite IKEA chair with one hand in a bag of day-old Doritos and the other on an already half-empty can of cold Budweiser Lime as the latest overly sensationalized event of the day violently flashes across our
plasma screen televisions on CNN (Radovan 2001; Flint 2006; Soron 2006; Vanelis & Friedberg 2008).

The daily routine sketched above paints a recognizable picture for many North Americans (Flint 2006). Substitute the suburban elements for those found in urban life and a majority of individuals in developed nations around the world would likely find much in the above depiction they could relate to, either in their own lives, or in the lives of someone close to them (Radovan 2001; Zukin 2003; Ritzer & Ryan 2002; Vanelis & Friedberg 2008). Globally, we are increasingly similar, yet we spend increasing amounts of our time alone. More specifically, increasing amounts of our time is spent working or consuming (Radovan 2001; Ritzer & Ryan 2002; Wilson 2002; Soron 2006). There is today a prevailing lack of community around us; a global experience of social isolation. Significantly, we recognize this, and we are concerned, but we do not know what to do about it or where to turn (Ritzer 2001; Soron 2006). We are common people without commons in which to gather.

This thesis argues that community gardens can provide a non-commercial, inclusive and accessible place for individuals to begin (re-)engaging in their communities. To begin with, engagement within the locally-based garden space can foster a greater sense of autonomy linked to association, or an empowerment that emerges through the group recognition of individual contributions. This empowered sense of self found within the group may guide individuals to adopt an approach of 'collective self-determination' in garden activities. The collective work of a community garden may foster both increased civic-mindedness and the realization of skill-sets essential to democratic participation, which in turn may empower the collective to use their newfound social capital to become engaged in building community. The activity of gardening itself also allows us to become more aware of and engaged in the processes of food production
and consumption. To summarize, this thesis contends that the participatory democratic structure and place-situated activity of community gardens can provide a socially equitable forum that empowers collectives of individuals to begin to engage in the task of building better communities.

2 STRUCTURE OF PAPER

This thesis will begin with a look at how community gardening has become increasingly popular in the last decade, and is the subject of an increasing amount of academic research and attention from mass media and within popular culture. A historical background is provided to frame and provide some context for the current movement. Following this is the first problematic to be discussed: a form of social isolation that stems from 'homogenized mass experience,' a globalized experience of increasing sameness and solitude in our daily routines and habits. Though there are advantages in being linked to the global milieu, it is argued below that this force also contributes to the assimilation and erasure of distinct communities, leading to a pervading sense of being without place, or social isolation from a home or community.

Community gardens, which require physical locations and are centered in place-based activities, are presented as offering experiences created by, rooted in, and dependent upon local communities. As such, they are resistant to, and offer sanctuaries from the forces of homogenization. The second problematic to be discussed is that of "non-places" — spaces such as shopping malls, arterial corridors, airports, and chain restaurants — which perpetuate and deepen homogenized mass experience and are productive of dehumanizing non-identities (Auge 1995). The non-places of suburban living and the sprawl it produces are considered next. Following this, Oldenburg's (1999) "third place...beyond the realms of home and work" is presented, as it
helps in uncovering some crucial distinctions that distinguish community gardens from many other social gathering places (16).

The benefits of community gardens are discussed at length in the following sections. First is an analysis of how community gardens meet the tenets of sustainability. Economic and ecological benefits to communities, governments, individuals, and the environment are mentioned; the social equitability of community gardens receives a more in-depth analysis. Particular marginalized populations receive individuated focus: working poor/low-income and homeless populations; older persons, elders and youth; persons living with disabilities; women and the navigation of gender roles in the garden context; and recent immigrant and ethnic communities.

Having considered sustainability, in particular social equity and the accessibility and inclusivity of community garden spaces, we seek to identify how engagement within the community garden place can lead to empowerment of the individual gardener. To help illustrate the necessity of these particular 'pathways to empowerment' with regards the broader democratic process, a third problematic is presented. Mass media, mainstream news, and our voting systems are shown to further contribute to another form of social isolation, that of the un(der)informed and disempowered citizen (Oldenburg 1999; Radovan 2001). To counter this problematic, community gardens are offered as participatory democracies of 'local control' (Glover 2004; 2005a) where individuals experience 'autonomy in the association;' make decisions more effectively together ('collective self-determination'); and oversee the entire creative process of their own plot ('creative self-production'). Engagement within the garden space is seen to lead to not only individual empowerment, but the inculcation of democratic skill-sets, which in turn may lead to increased civic engagement by a collective amalgam of empowered gardeners.
The above analysis is followed by an exploration of the social capital generated by empowered and engaged community garden collectives, and subsequent benefits for communities. Bonding and bridging social capital are discussed, and in addition to a brief discussion of the greater intercultural interaction made possible through the community garden forum, the potential for gardens to be spaces where racial and ethnic tensions are perpetuated is acknowledged. Gardens are seen to have the potential to be places of exclusion, and to possibly have deleterious effects on the greater community in which they are situated, inadvertently contributing to gentrification of neighbourhoods or the perpetuation of power imbalances through the unequal distribution of social capital (Glover 2004; Parry et al 2005; Kingsley & Townsend 2006).

The paper then offers a final problematic: that of the consumer society, which perpetuates a social isolation from oneself, and, it is argued, from our humanity. Here, the predominance of market relations is seen to further alienate, dehumanize and subsume the identity and history of the individual (Auge 1995; Baudrillard 1998; Ritzer & Ryan 2002; Beller 2007). An argument is made that we must attempt to "delink" from consumer society through engagement in our communities and our own self-productions (Esteva & Prakash 1998; DeLind 2002; Baker 2004). The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and some thoughts on engagement beyond local community.

3 INCREASING POPULARITY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

The academic, media and public attention surrounding community gardens and the activity that takes place within them is a relatively recent phenomenon. Just under a decade ago, in a West Philadelphia-based study considering community gardens as a possible aid in efforts to
alleviate urban poverty, Hanna & Oh (2000) noted that "sociologists have only begun to explore the social benefits of gardening" and that "possibilities seem endless" (215). The researchers observed that "older residents formed the core of the garden network" in their study, which led to recommendations for further research "on the idea that gardening may be a dying tradition" (Hanna & Oh 2000:215). Though their perception of the "endless" potential for academic exploration into community gardening has been legitimated by a rapidly expanding wealth of knowledge and awareness on the subject (Baker 2004; Glover 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Glover et al 2005a; Glover et al 2005b; Parry et al 2005; Chitov 2006; Kingsley & Townsend 2006; Martinez 2009; Teig et al 2009), one would be hard-pressed to contend today that gardening is a "dying tradition". Waitlists for plots of land in pre-existing community gardens are getting longer and longer, and new community gardens are springing up with the same speed and consistency as the plants, flowers and vegetables in their soils (Shinew et al 2004; Kingsley & Townsend 2006; Penty 2008; Hertsgaard 2009; Teig et al 2009).

As well, community gardening is no longer (if it ever even was) confined to a particular age, class or ethnic group; tied in with increasing awareness of and support for food security and food movements, community gardening has become extremely popular across a broad demographic of peoples. Indeed, it could be said that being a gardener with a plot of land to tend is now, and has been for the last four or five years, a sign of urban cool – community gardening has become chic. Mentions of community gardening in online, print, radio, and television media have become a commonplace occurrence. In a 2008 newspaper article entitled "Gardening Has Become Hip," a local food movement coordinator commented that "a younger generation of 'hipsters' is taking up the spade" (Penty 2008:G07). The activity has spread all the way to the White House where, less than 3 months after moving in, First Lady Michelle Obama turned a
large swath of the South Lawn of her new home into a large vegetable garden (Hertsgaard 2009).

In 2009, the documentary *The Garden*, about the struggle to save a South Central Los Angeles garden from development, received rave reviews, won awards at numerous film festivals and was even nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary. In Canada, over half a decade ago academics were already noting that "a national network of community gardeners is...emerging" (Johnston 2003:7). As Macias (2008) contends, "there is reason to believe that the local food movement is on the cusp of entering mainstream consumer culture" (1086).

4 **HISTORY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS**

Community gardens originated in England with the emergence of increasingly large urban areas during the Industrial Revolution, and were seen as a means of helping feed the large masses of the urban working poor who were "left without resources, including food to eat" (Hanna & Oh 2000:209). In the United States, from the late 19th century onward, community gardens would appear during economic recessions or times of crisis, and subsequently be replaced by development when stability returned or the economy got back on track (Hanna & Oh 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004). Community gardens also appeared during both World Wars, offering centralized "food supplies which required minimal transporting" (Armstrong 2000:319). However, America in the 1950s saw "the transition to large-scale agriculture and the expansion of the food distribution system," which featured food production completely antithetical to that found in the localized, small-scale community gardens (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:399).

When the next wave of community gardens began in the late 1960s and early '70s, once again the movement was a response to crisis, this time the onset of an economic recession
coupled with the localized crises of disintegrated urban landscapes abandoned by white flight and the pull of suburbia (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004). Yet this time the purpose of the gardens was different; rather than primarily food production, the gardens were being implemented on the "sites for drug dealing" that many undeveloped or vacant lots had invariably become, in an attempt to reclaim neighbourhoods as safe, public spaces for all residents. Areas formerly seen as threatening to communities now became "urban green spaces" that "enhanced the attractiveness of neighbourhoods and created opportunities for community development" (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:399). Another key difference between this and previous historical periods of community gardening was that this movement was almost entirely grassroots, stemming from a desire by neighbourhood and community residents to change their own communities in ways that they themselves perceived as beneficial (Chitov 2006).

The grassroots movement that began in the late '60s and early '70s continues today, and has proven resilient in the face of development, exemplified perhaps nowhere more strongly than in the successful late '90s struggle by New York City community gardeners and activists to hold onto gardens and community lands which then-mayor Giuliani had slated for development (Martinez 2009; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Chitov 2006). Giuliani's office mounted their efforts at a time when "the gardens of low-income neighbourhoods were transforming once crime-ridden communities into oases of vibrant cultures" (Chitov 2006:443). Defenders of the garden spaces were able to galvanize widespread public support by framing the issue as one of Giuliani versus local neighbourhoods and communities (Martinez 2009). Resistance efforts were intensive and effective enough to not only save a majority of the gardens from development, but to raise the public profile of community gardening and to enhance mass awareness of some of the community benefits they provide (Martinez 2009).
The battle for community gardens in New York City was a classic example of the interests of grassroots, local community members coming into conflict with a neoliberal perspective on development "determined by the sectional interests of business owners and real estate developers, and driven by the politics of social exclusion and NIMBYism" (Chitov 2006:443). Since the 1970s, the neoliberal approach to government has seen a steady retreat from the provision of social services, with responsibilities "downloaded...onto municipalities" and "compensatory resources" not provided for (Johnston 2003:8). Grassroots, localized, community-based forums and organizations have emerged to help shoulder the weight left by the withdrawal of government resources and programs (Johnston 2003; Macias 2008). Community gardens initially reappeared in urban landscapes as safe(r) spaces where healthy community interaction and communication, once found in the church or at the post office (Oldenburg 1999) but at present largely absent, could again be fostered. Today, as "large numbers of people continue to rely on the emergency food system, while the majority of consumers buy industrially processed food sent across thousands of miles through corporate distribution channels," the mission of community gardens has again been tied to food production, this time through the broader food security movement (Johnston 2003:6).

5 FIRST PROBLEMATIC: HOMOGENIZED MASS EXPERIENCE

The link to food security is an obvious one; to consider community gardens as actually helping build better communities is a bit more difficult. Part of this difficulty may be simply that most of us have little to no experience in civic engagement; as Oldenburg (1999) states, "community does nothing for [us] and [we] do nothing for community" (285). Today, with information and communications technologies (ICTs) a ubiquitous part of our daily lives and
routines, we do not have to be dependent on our local community or even the other members of our households for social interaction. Our world is our autonomous bubble, a "telecocoon" of communication, information, and fun that accompanies us wherever we venture, offering "intimacy at a distance" (Varnelis & Friedberg 2008:22). As we can only handle so many friends, Varnelis (2008) considers that "as we connect with others at a distance who are more like us, we are likely to disconnect with others in our community who are less like us" (157). The greater social freedom of our digital dalliances comes at the further cost of community; place and local community become nothing more than concepts, and irrelevant ones at that, in the age of information technology.

Our immersion in networks has ushered in paradigmatic changes in human interaction, our understanding of self, and our conceptions of time and space (Beller 2007; Coyne 2007; Vamelis 2008). Daily routines and habits based around ICTs are becoming as globally universal as basic habits of eating, sleeping, and defecating. A homogeneity of human experience can be found in our increasing dependence upon our laptops, IPods, and smart phones; even in war-ravaged nations like Somalia, where cell phones are abundantly popular, ICT-filtered experiential similitude is becoming increasingly prevalent (Radovan 2001; Ritzer 2001; Varnelis 2008:158). Yet in spite of all this coming together and becoming more similar, we have not witnessed a corresponding erasure of inequality, nor even its reduction (Wilson 2002; Zukin 2003; Wacquant 2007). As well, despite the fact that we have left McLuhan's "global village" and are now all even more interconnected in the "global city," many scholars studying globalization and/or information technology assert that we are feeling no less alienated, isolated and dislocated from each other (Varnelis & Friedberg 2008:27; Ritzer & Ryan 2002; Coyne 2007; Wacquant 2007). Beller (2007) would contend this is because we have been "subsumed for
capitalist production" into the global city's matrices of similitude, our very sense of self absorbed into the "world-media system" (58;54).

However, long before the internet and information technology became omnipresent in our lives, academics were already chronicling drastically depleted levels of civic engagement in American society, with less people at the polls during elections, less people affiliated with unions, and less people participating in bowling leagues (Putnam 1995; 2000). Commenting on the entry process into the globalized world, which requires individualizing people with strong group affiliations, Esteva & Prakash (1998) observe that "more and more [are] suffering within the unbearable straitjacket of loneliness, the dis-ease of homelessness" (11). This homelessness is not necessarily a state of being without private shelter or refuge, but an experience of being without place, of commonality but not communality, and of living without a rooted sense of a public "home," whether a neighbourhood or a larger community with which one deeply identifies. Thus, whether due to technology, globalization, or any of the other forces discussed further below; whether one lives in the developing or developed world, continuities prevail: the individuated autonomy found in homogenized mass experience appears to carry with it a dislocating anonymity. To solve the problem of dislocation, we now turn back to location, and the power of place.

6 THE POWER OF PLACE

Counteracting the spreading experience of being without place is a first step in building healthier communities. Community gardens offer resistance to this advance of anomie through the provision of an "organically social" place not created for purposes of business or transit (Auge 1995:94). To participate in a community garden or "community place" involves a process
of "encounter, negotiation and engagement with the natural and built environment" (Stocker & Barnett 1998:183). One must apply for a plot, receive a space in the garden, and be in constant engagement with the entire process of production, from the turning of soil to the choice of seed, to the planting, subsequent weeding, watering and eventual harvesting of the food produced. Gardeners can also participate in garden activities, events, and decision-making at whatever level of involvement they choose. It is this "embodied engagement" that "conveys a sense of place to its makers and users," providing for feelings of attachment and connection to be (re)kindled (Stocker & Barnett 1998:183).

The aspect of place as a concrete location also contributes to building community by providing a forum for interaction amongst community members. Community gardens "offer places where people can gather, network, and identify together as residents of a neighbourhood" (Parry et al 2005:180). Newcomers to a neighbourhood may utilize the community garden place "to meet new people and build friendships" (Kingsley & Townsend 2006:531). Gardens provide a location for individuals and families to connect, irrespective of race, ethnicity, age, gender, class or ability. The production and consumption of food are basic, essential practices found in every culture; a community garden in a diverse urban area may serve as "a place where communication with people from other cultures [can] begin," with "food and shared experience as a starting point for understanding" (Wakefield et al 2007:100). Thus, gardens can directly contribute to community development through the transformation of a space into a dynamic location where interaction can occur amongst a diversity of peoples. In this way, gardens can change the thrust of a neighbourhood for the better, making an environment once perceived as hostile, bleak and threatening appear as a more cohesive, united and safe community (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004). As Baker (2004) contends, "through their constructions of place"
community gardeners are not only producing vegetables and engaging in collective decision-making, but are "actively producing space and culture" (Baker 2004:305).

7 SECOND PROBLEMATIC: NON-PLACES AND NON-IDENTITIES

Community gardens, as "organically social" places of diverse interaction and civic engagement, "can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity" (Auge 1995:94;78). "Non-places," in contrast, are the "opposed polarities" of place: spaces like shopping malls, supermarkets, transit corridors, and airports, where we are "relieved of [our] usual determinants" and personal responsibilities to family, friends, and our social lives (Auge 1995:79;103). Upon entering a non-place, our personal identity ceases to be of relevance. As Oldenburg describes:

Where once there were places, we now find nonplaces. In real places the human being is a person. He or she is an individual, unique and possessing a character. In nonplaces, individuality disappears. In nonplaces, character is irrelevant and one is only the customer or shopper, client or patient, a body to be seated, an address to be billed, a car to be parked. In nonplaces one cannot be an individual or become one, for one's individuality is not only irrelevant, it also gets in the way. (1999:205)

The paradox of non-places is that becoming the anonymous worker, consumer, or person in transit "can even be felt as a liberation" from the demands and responsibilities of one's personal life (Auge 1995:101). Going to the shopping mall with iPod on, headphones in, and oversized sunglasses on; going for a Sunday drive with the windows up and the air conditioning on; flying to a tourist destination to be waited on and treated in a standardized, predictable manner – these activities are so popular because they allow for a perfectly controlled and calculated, stress-free escape. Our continual usage of and patronage to non-places helps perpetuate and further the advancement of homogenized mass experience. Anonymity can be liberating for a time, but as non-places become increasingly predominant and unavoidable, the
"temporary identity" one assumes while in them begins to become a dehumanized non-identity (Auge 1995:101).

Entering the space of a non-place, we are identified by, and only by, our ticket stub, our wristband, our pass, our license plate or passport number, and our debit and credit cards. At best, we may need to show a combination of pieces of identification. Our personal histories and our personalities are not known to the majority of those we interact with in non-places; we are little more than a sequence of letters and numbers, momentary encounters of "solitary contractuality" (Auge 1995:94). The experience involves "neither singular identity nor relations," only an isolating sameness of "solitude and similitude" (Auge 1995:103). Klein (2000) argues that malls are widely considered to be "the modern town square," with the crucial difference being that instead of being places for debate and discussion on all things local and community-related, in malls "the only type of speech that is welcome...is marketing and other consumer patter" (183). As Coyne (2007) explains, non-places are spaces "where nothing much is meant to happen," beyond the basic functional premise for which the space was designed (32). Non-places inhibit "human action, being and engagement": we are to be good drivers, smart shoppers, courteous passengers, super hostesses, and knowledgeable tour guides (Coyne 2007:33).

Some theorists have criticized Auge's idea of non-place as being outdated and too totalizing. Sketching a scene out of any given Starbucks, with a number of people occupying the same physical space yet all immersed in their own digital worlds via smart phones, IPods, laptops and other devices, Varnelis & Friedberg (2008) comment that today "we gather at the communal watering-hole as we always did; only now we don't reach out to those around us," we choose to engage "far-flung souls" instead (16). Individuals in the non-place of a Starbucks maintain a "calculated copresence" with one another (Varnelis & Friedberg 2008:17). We choose
this environment, they argue, as the "bodily presence" of others is enough to make us okay with the solitude (Varnelis & Friedberg 2008: 20). A rebuttal may be that though we choose to enter non-places and may be comforted by simply being in the physical presence of other individuals, Starbucks and other chains and commercial outlets are still spaces productive solely of market relations, at best offering temporary anaesthetization for our anomic, alienated states. When the caffeine wears off, we are still left without community.

7.1 Sprawl as Non-Place

For many people, the Starbucks scenario presented above would be one amongst many non-places visited, travelled through, eaten in, or worked at in an average day (Flint 2006). Flint (2006) portrays an America full of non-places: the office parks we work in; the arterial corridors, highways and beltways of our daily commutes; the outlet malls, strip malls and big-box stores we shop at; the chain restaurants we dine in; and specific to his focus, the subdivisions, suburbs, and 'boomburbs' of sprawl that contain our oversized, three car garage homes. Perhaps the isolation of non-places is nowhere more evident than in the experience of sprawl; Varnelis & Friedberg (2008) contend that "detachment increased during the twentieth century as people fled decaying cities to suburbs" (18). With lengthy daily commutes to and from work, suburban residents are hard-pressed to find the time and energy needed for community development (Flint 2006). Even if those living in suburbs wanted to build community, with a surrounding world dominated by "the faux pastoral landscaping and cheap construction" of non-places, finding and establishing an organically rooted place would be exceedingly difficult, and in some cases, virtually impossible (Flint 2006:55). Instead, suburbanites are left with "nothing to walk to and no place to gather" (Oldenburg 1999:xiv).
As Ritzer & Ryan (2002) would argue in their thesis on globalization, the realities of 'nothing' and 'no place' mentioned directly above are aspects of a "worldwide spread of nothingness" to all facets of human experience (54). "Nothing" is defined by "lack of distinctive content, the generic, lack of local ties, time-lessness, and dehumanization" whereas "something" would be the unique opposite of the above definitions, that which is "indigenously conceived and controlled" (Ritzer & Ryan 2002:54;51). Thus far, fairly clear demarcations between places and non-places, and between 'something' and 'nothing,' have been presented. Yet what of spaces that blur some of these boundaries? One of these is Oldenburg's (1999) idea of a "third place," which he defines as any community space that appears to be a focal point in which locals regularly gather for the purposes of conversation and companionship (20). Oldenburg's third places include hair salons, barbershops, bookstores, coffee shops, sidewalk cafes, local pubs and taverns. As can be seen, and as Oldenburg (1999) fully admits, "third places are typically places of business," though for him, third places are defined by the depth of engagement occurring within the space – whether one is a business or not is irrelevant (xx). The same distinctions are used by Ritzer & Ryan (2002), who employ third places as an example of a "unique" something, as opposed to a "generic" nothing (53). Interestingly enough, none of Ritzer & Ryan's featured examples of 'something' are not also either businesses; "faux pastoral" landscapes, to cite Flint (2006:55) (colonial Williamsburg the "temporally specific" something to the "time-less" nothing of Disney World); or in the case of the binary of "human relations" something and "dehumanized" nothing, based in market relations (2002:53).
Ritzer & Ryan's 'something' and Oldenburg's third places both counter the first problematic of this paper, that of homogenized mass experience, in that they involve either locally-based spaces, are unique and distinct, involve face-to-face interaction, are not easily reproduced, or involve some combination of all of these variables. Though Auge may consider third places and all of Ritzer & Ryan's 'something' examples to be non-places, these spaces clearly do not just (re)produce "only solitude and similitude" (1995:103), nor do they fit many of the other qualities used to define non-place. However, though not non-places as in the Starbucks scenario, third places and 'somethings' are still commercial places and business establishments, and as such, their survival is still predicated upon financial success. A local community member may be able to enter a pub or coffee shop and sit and have conversation without purchasing anything for a while, but there is an expectation of consumption and at some point, this expectation must be met. One has to 'pay to play' in these spaces, so to speak, and as such, they are still exclusionary. Homeless, low-income, and working poor people may not be able to afford to enter many third places; youth are legally barred from entering most pubs and taverns; hair salons and barbershops may cater to specific genders. The marginalized remain silenced and excluded from community dialogue in these settings.

Community gardens embody many of the traits that Oldenburg ascribes to third places. Like the best third places, gardens "focus on creating a healthy community at a specific concrete place" (Hanna & Oh 2000:209). They are also "stress-relieving" and can "contribute to improved mental health" by "offer[ing] spaces of retreat within densely populated neighbourhoods" (Wakefield et al 2007:100;97). A number of studies have gone so far as to make the direct comparison, describing community gardens as "non-commercial third places" (Chitov 2006; Glover 2004, 2005a, 2005b).
Yet there are some key differences. Firstly, gardens are not businesses with a profit motive. Regardless of the community spirit within Oldenburg's pubs and other third places, were these establishments to not make a profit, or at least break even, they would not survive. Community gardens are often run by non-profit agencies or are spaces lobbied for by community groups and allocated by municipalities. If a barrier to involvement exists, it is likely to be a wait list when all the plots available at a given time have already been allocated. Aside from perhaps an initial membership fee, one has to pay very little. Manure, water, shovels, healthy soil, and even seeds can often be made available without requirement of payment. Garden groups often subsidize these resources to make them universally available to those who can't afford to pay for them. The sharing of resources is "a necessary component" of the community gardening experience (Glover et al 2005b:79). This involves quite a different set of relations from that of the third place, where mostly anything provided for free comes with an expectation of payment or reimbursement. Thus, one significant difference between Oldenburg's third places and community gardens is that gardens are not exclusionary.

The notion of place advanced in this thesis is more closely aligned with the idea of a commons than that of Ritzer & Ryan's 'something' or Oldenburg's third place. Soron & Laxer (2006) define commons as "those areas of social and natural life that are under communal stewardship, comprising collective resources and rights for all, by virtue of citizenship, irrespective of capacity to pay" (16). Though many community gardens are and have been set in place by municipalities, a defining feature of them is that they are operated and given life by members of the local community. As Glover et al (2005b) contend, community gardens provide "an opportunity for people with different class, racial, or ethnic backgrounds to come together around a common interest" (79). Others have observed that "the garden is an inclusive grassroots
endeavour that depends upon the collaborative efforts of diverse residents to succeed" (Shinew et al 2004:339). Yet before moving on to how community gardens are socially equitable places for community development, it is worth taking a step back to briefly examine how community gardens are supportive of all "three pillars of sustainability – environmental soundness, economic viability, and social equity" and are on the forefront of "the shift toward ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just food systems" (DeLind 2002:219; Baker 2004:308).

9 COMMUNITY GARDENS AND SUSTAINABILITY

9.1 Economically Viable

Community gardens can be economically beneficial for communities, governments and individuals. Rather than being viewed as a social service draining taxpayer's money, community gardens present a case of long-term value worth far more than the initial start-up infrastructure cost and resource expenditure required from a municipality. Gardens can enhance "economic sustainability" by serving as "research, development, design, demonstration and dissemination sites for community science, horticultural techniques and innovative technologies" (Stocker & Barnett 1998:181). These long-term economic benefits to future communities are complemented by the more immediate benefits associated with reducing urban poverty, achieved through the creation of "jobs and small-scale businesses focusing on the sale of produce," and money saved that would otherwise be spent on "shopping and transportation" to and from the nearest supermarkets and grocery stores (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:410). Participation in community gardens can help ease the financial strain of supporting unemployed individuals, by teaching or "enhancing skills that can be used in the jobs market" (Holland 2004:304).
Job creation and money saved for and by low-income persons or the unemployed may provide some relief for social services and perhaps taxpayers, but the economic benefits of community gardens are undoubtedly most acutely felt by the individual garden participants and their families. Many studies note the money saved as gardeners are able to "lower their food bills," reduce "household food costs," bolster "disposable income," or even "meet an income gap" (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:410; Wakefield et al 2007:97; Hancock 2001:279; Holland 2004:290). A New York City-based study notes that gardens are able to generate savings of "$5-$10 per square foot" although figures go "up to $40 per square foot...in well-managed gardens" (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:410). Gardeners in another study mention saving "between $50 and $250 per season in food costs" (Armstrong 2000:320). Some gardeners have become entrepreneurial with their garden plots, "grow[ing] fresh herbs for local restaurants" (Hancock 2001:279).

9.2 Ecologically Sound

The community gardener as entrepreneur, selling their fresh produce in establishments within the same city or geographic area, is able to attain personal economic benefits while simultaneously contributing to practices of environmental sustainability. The individual economic benefit is also an environmental benefit, as it slices, however thin, into the corporate global food system's distribution chains (Baker 2004). Every establishment and every individual nourished by food grown within their local community garden(s) are being fed great, fresh food while effectively "reducing food miles, thus having environmental benefits" at the same time (Holland 2004:290). It is no small coincidence that as the 100-mile diet reaches the popular vernacular, and as an understanding of food security and awareness of food movements becomes
more widespread, community gardens are experiencing an unprecedented surge in not only participation, but also in frequency of implementation into municipal development and planning projects.

Community gardens also enhance environmental sustainability in urban communities by providing "an oasis of greenery, flowers and even habitat for various insects and birds" in what may otherwise be a concrete jungle (Hancock 2001:279). Gardens help with the beautification of neighbourhoods and (re)connect local residents with nature. Finally, as will be discussed in greater detail later on, community gardens can also be educative forums enabling the development of an "experiential knowledge of the natural environment" which may be of great value in the near future as the strain upon the global food system continues to increase (Macias 2008:1091).

9.3 Socially Equitable

One major difference between the mass agriculture of the global food system and the "civic agriculture" of community gardens is that while the former maintains "a strictly mechanistic focus on production and economic efficiency," the latter's locally-based mandate focuses on being "responsive to particular ecological and socioeconomic contexts" (DeLind 2002:217). Community gardens are better equipped to attend to the needs of local neighbourhoods and communities in part because of their human-sized locality. In a study of community gardens in upstate New York, Armstrong (2000) noted that many were able to cater to and focus on specific populations and demographics. As noted above, community gardens are not business establishments as are Oldenburg's chosen third places. Rather, they are socially equitable places built by and for the local community, often specifically to meet the needs of the
most marginalized and disenfranchised residents (Macias 2008). Gardens are "inclusive grassroots endeavour[s];" they are forums in which not only participation but leadership is encouraged, spaces where individuals can learn to work collectively to achieve group goals (Shinew et al 2004:339; Parry et al 2005).

9.3.1 Low-Income, Working Poor, Homeless

Community gardens are often established in poor or low-income urban areas "lacking in...public amenities" as a means of "promoting local pride and citizen participation" (Macias 2008:1087). Hancock (2001) observed how a garden in Santa Cruz, California, created for and with the help of the local homeless population, is now providing "access to food, job skills, social networks and links to the neighbouring residents" (279). As noted above, gardeners are able to save money on not only food costs, but also on the transportation costs that would be required to get to the nearest grocery store or supermarket. The fresh food grown in a local garden also provides a healthy alternative for those who cannot afford to shop at an expensive organic grocer. Observing food insecurity in a poorer area of New York City, Chitov (2006) comments that "gardening is...a means of confronting food poverty, as within a four-block radius there are...three fast-food restaurants and only one bodega, with a questionable quality of produce" (453). Gardens are often redistributive, providing "a portion of the harvest" to non-profits agencies and service providers such as soup kitchens and food banks (Hancock 2001:279; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004).
9.3.2 Place for Elders; Knowledge Transfer to Youth

Community gardens combat ageism by providing a socially equitable forum where elders "act as role models and tutors" for young people eager to learn proper gardening techniques (Chitov 2006:453). One study described how community gardens help residents in retirement homes "transition from a lifestyle of home ownership to the retirement community" by allowing them to maintain their previous gardening activity, and thus maintain some continuity with the past in their new living situations (Armstrong 2000:322). Wakefield et al (2007) observed how elder gardeners considered their gardening activity to be central to maintaining physical and mental health and well-being. However, as noted earlier, community gardens today are popular across all age groups. Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny (2004) observed that the most frequent visitors to New York City's Latino community gardens are pre-teen youth.

As young and old share the same space, community gardens provide interactive forums for learning and knowledge transfer to occur. Gardeners interviewed in several different studies considered their gardens to be places for teaching and learning; gardeners interviewed in one study cited "education of the youth" as "the most important reason for cultivating the land" (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Holland 2004; Chitov 2006:453). Hanna and Oh (2000) remark that gardening activity can be "an important focal point in the formation of [a child's] values," providing a safe, enjoyable and participatory learning environment for a generation of young people "whose first contact with food comes in the form of packages and sort lots in the aisles of supermarkets" (210). Gardens also provide youth with skills they will need later on in life, such as being able "to work with and learn from adults" (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:408).
9.3.3 Inclusive of (Dis)ability

Gardens are also socially equitable places inclusive of (dis)ability. Observing a number of existing gardens for the blind and gardens that are wheelchair-accessible, Hanna & Oh (2000) remark that "gardening can...be adapted to anyone's needs" (210). Gardens do not just provide an equitable environment for their own members, but are accessible to all members of a community. One of the Latino community gardens in NYC "hosts tours for groups of children with disabilities," while a community garden in Australia welcomes "a group of people with intellectual disabilities and their support staff/carers" every Wednesday (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:405; Kingsley & Townsend 2006:530). As far as cooperative group work within the garden, there is no standardized expectation of output; work is individualized according to ability, and "whatever one [can] handle physically [is] appreciated" (Parry et al 2005:184).

9.3.4 Gender, Resistance & Reproduction

Community gardens are places for both the resistance and reproduction of traditional gender roles. While some studies observe that there are more women in community gardens than men, the findings of another study contradict this claim. Perhaps this has more to do with cultural attitudes towards gender, as the study citing "very few women gardeners" is particular to Latino community gardens, while the others focus on African-American and multiracial gardens (Armstrong 2000; Hanna & Oh 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:403). Regardless of numbers, the study most intensively focused on gender roles concludes that the "empowerment" of women in the community garden context "is an important finding in this study" (Parry et al 2005:190). Though some women chose to seek out men for "heavy, labour intensive jobs," this "reproduction of traditional gender roles...did not result in a transfer of power from the women to
the men" as "women still maintained their control over the planning and implementation process of the garden" and "their leadership roles" (Parry et al 2005:189). A socially equitable place with regards gender roles, in the community garden women can explore "new identities, such as community leader, neighbourhood activist, and catalyst for neighbourhood change...through their involvement" (Parry et al 2005:189). Women noted feelings of "personal empowerment" and "great pride" stemming from their engagement in garden processes (Parry et al 2005: 190;187).

9.3.5 Recent Immigrants, Ethnic Diversity

Gardening and the growing of food are "at the heart of community and communion" (Esteva & Prakash 1998:53). Every culture has traditional practices and rituals relating to food production. Various studies noted the importance of growing "culturally appropriate food" to recent immigrant and ethnically distinct communities (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Baker 2004:306; Wakefield et al 2007:97). For recent immigrants migrating into urban areas alien to them, gardens can offer "a point of mutual support" and provide a forum for discussion and dialogue (Hanna & Oh 2000:211). Gardens can also allow ethnic communities to maintain some semblance of their culture amidst an ocean of non-places and a spreading westernized homogeneity of experience. In this regard, the social equity and inclusivity of the garden can transcend the fixed space it occupies and augment the experience of living in the broader community.

As has been mentioned throughout, gardens are places where people can learn or enhance a variety of skills whose application is not limited to the garden itself. The garden is a supportive space that makes possible the preservation of culture and tradition, the empowerment of women, the accommodation of people regardless of ability, the valuation of the elderly, the
intergenerational transfer of knowledge to the young, and savings and the development of job
skills for low-income, working poor, and homeless peoples. Engagement in the socially equitable
place of a community garden can be an "educative citizenship" for garden participants, as they
begin to experience a "sense of interconnectedness" linking "their private interests and the public
interest" (Glover 2005b:80). Yet how does this happen? What is it about the community garden
place that enables gardeners to become engaged citizens in the broader community?

10 THIRD PROBLEMATIC:

MASS MEDIA, NEWS, AND THE DISEMPOWERED CITIZEN

The sense of interconnectedness individuals begin to feel through participation in
community gardens may actually stem from the "informal networks of voluntary social control"
that are formed as a diversity of local residents work "side by side" as a collective in a shared
space (Chitov 2006:438). This is social control stemming not from government, mass media, or
the marketplace; the social control of community gardens is a grassroots, inclusive project that
all are able to participate in. Non-places and policies that have attacked and reduced "the urban
public domain" have resulted in "the loss of the monitoring function performed by...citizens"
(Oldenburg 1999:83). Oldenburg contends that "frequent visits [to public places] and the
familiarity resulting from them" allow for the development of normative standards that
community members willingly uphold and "actively enforce" (1999:83).

The above descriptions of the mechanisms of voluntary social control may still leave
gardens appearing as little more than eco-friendly grassroots panopticons. No wonder then that
community gardens are becoming so popular in development and planning departments of major
urban centres all over the developed world: community gardeners are neighbourhood watchdogs!
Whether in the name of community development, neighbourhood well-being, safety, local activism, civic engagement, food security, or any of the "three pillars of sustainability" – the wool worn may be that of the most socially conscious sheep in the pasture, yet still there is a canine complicit in the act of surveillance underneath.

Yet there is a significant difference between social control that emerges from government structures, media technologies, and the marketplace, and that which emanates primarily from the grassroots forums, community-based dialogues, and places of one's own neighbourhood. Social gathering places like community gardens harbour potentiality for a more accessible, dynamic, direct and empowering conduit for civic engagement than is possible through normative modes of engagement – following debates and learning of candidates and representatives viewpoints on issues through the gird of mass media and mainstream news, in order to adequately perform the solitary yet mass action of casting one's vote on the predetermined and scheduled election day.

We possess the autonomy to vote, yet we do so as anonymous "shut-ins" who "receive news in isolation," making us "more susceptible to manipulation by those who control the media" (Oldenburg 1999:70).

Part of this disempowerment of the citizen stems from the isolating experience of non-places, in particular the world of sprawl and endless suburbs documented above. Also relevant is that whether living in suburbs or cities, we receive our information in "limited" form through information technology and in the bubble of our telecocoons, thus negating the potential opportunities for "discussion and deliberation of meaningful issues" (Wilson 2002:384). Perhaps just as significant is the manner in which information is presented by the mainstream news media (Radovan 2001). With an increasing emphasis on "news making" over "news reporting," we are increasingly receiving information in bullet form and continual updates (Radovan 2001: 234). A
focus on headlines over stories and articles ensures that we remain underinformed on issues and events; the continual bombardment of sound bytes and visual snippets only leads to our further "distraction" and "the degradation of political and social discourse" (Radovan 2001:234). Though written in 1970, Baudrillard's contention that "mass communication excludes culture and knowledge" appears to still be applicable today (1998:104). In the same way that grounding ourselves in location was proposed as a counter to the dislocation of homogenized mass experience, here we propose that a counter to disempowering mass communication may be found in (re)focusing on local communication, where our voices can be heard and where we can engage in dialogues of substance and depth.

11 PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

11.1 Autonomy in the Association

The "face-to-face grassroots participation" possible in places like community gardens allow for local communication, for an individual's voice to be heard and their contributions to be recognized (Oldenburg 1999:70). The voluntary social control of community gardens, perhaps better considered as "local control," originates in collective decisions made democratically (Glover 2004:144; Glover et al 2005a:455). Within these settings, we achieve an empowering 'autonomy of person,' while losing some falsified notion of an 'autonomy of independence.' Correspondingly, we lose our anonymity amongst the masses, and gain the strength of association amongst a collective.

In the garden space, not only do we come together in the sharing of resources, but also, and more importantly, in the exchange of "ideas, across cultures and other social differences" (Wakefield et al 2007:98). The garden provides a forum in which "democratic values are
practiced and reproduced" (Glover et al 2005b:89). Discussion and dialogue begins at a moment where all participants are equally valid in their individual gardening capacity; the garden is not a performance-based workplace, but rather a place where each gardener works to the best of their ability. The equitability of garden work allows for a corresponding equality of value ascribed to each worker's ideas, thoughts, and cultural practices.

11.2 Collective Self-Determination

Gardens are places of "free choice and self-determination" where gardeners can "freely choose their companions without the restrictions that often exist in work and other formal settings" (Shinew et al 2004:338). This is a vital point; gardeners participate because they want to be in that setting, and they determine the quality and quantity of that engagement. To have that engagement validated as a worthwhile contribution by the collective can be incredibly empowering for garden participants (Glover et al 2005a). Yet far from being isolating, individualizing activity, gardeners soon realize "their individual goals [can] be achieved more successfully if pursued collectively" (Glover 2004:156). Rather than everyone buying their own shovels and other tools, gardeners share resources and save money, as one does not need to use their gardening tools at all times. Likewise, through communication and the fluid exchange of ideas, different cultural practices and approaches to gardening can mingle and may make for a stronger, more cohesive garden. Finally, gardeners may utilize different gardening methods and grow different foods, but come together with the uniting goal of strengthening community.

Community gardens are places of free choice and self-determination, yet they are also cooperative places where labour and production require a coordinated effort. As such, they could be considered sites of "co-production," or places centred in "the involvement of citizens in the
production of a public service" (Glover et al 2005a:451). These coordinated efforts, democratically determined by the gardening collective, lead to approaches of 'collective self-determination' within the garden space, as individual gardeners find they are more effective in achieving their own goals when working as part of a group effort (Shinew et al 2004). Glover et al (2005b) acknowledge that there is "a certain irony...in pointing to voluntary associations as a source of individual autonomy" (77). Yet this is precisely the point: engagement in garden processes enables one to have their voice heard in a forum where it will actually be recognized and count for something. Thus, engagement leads to empowerment, as one finds 'autonomy in the association.'

11.3 Creative Self-Production

Part of what allows for one's individuality to remain and be augmented rather than drowned out by the collective in the community garden space is found in the particular qualities of gardens and the act of gardening. To garden, one must work the soil, plant seeds, water and weed, and continue to make sure the growing plants that will become food are nourished. Once these plants become food, the gardener must harvest at the appropriate moment, and prepare the food however they may choose to. The food will then be consumed in a way again reflective of the individual gardener, their personal history, and perhaps their ethnic or cultural practices and traditions.

Like an artist with their craft, the gardener is involved in every step of the process of production, preparation, presentation, and consumption of their creation. As Marx notes, when one consumes the product(s) they produce, they become a "productive and self-reproducing
individual" (Marx 2003:254). This process of 'creative self-production' is a central activity of community gardens. As Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny (2004) contend, gardens are:

...much more than inexpensive [third] places to gather and relax. Community gardens... reflect the culture, creativity, and aesthetics of the members. These personalized, independently-created, and constantly changing "participatory landscapes" contrast sharply with the more uniform and refined aesthetics of institutionalized landscapes (409).

In a community garden, the gardener is engaged with their own creative self-production, which is in part a co-production as the shared resources and ideas of the garden collective likely contribute to one's creation. One's engagement in their own creation is thus intertwined with engagement with others and with the land(scape); to realize one's vision, to achieve the goals of self-determination, one must work as part of the collective. To become empowered, one must engage; to find autonomy, one must turn to the association. This process of engagement through the collective coupled with a strong emphasis on one's own creative self-production(s) enables participants to "negotiate their differences in a process that is a form of participatory democracy" (Stocker & Barnett 1998:183).

Oldenburg's third places feature moments of creative self-production as well. Poetry readings, gallery openings, and book launches could all fit a majority of the descriptive criteria applied to the gardener's creation. Yet there exist two significant qualitative differences. Firstly, the moments of creative self-production in third places are not enmeshed within the landscape of their environment, whereas in the community garden, the landscape itself is the creative expression. Therefore, the creative self-production of the community garden has a fixed locality to it; the experience of gardening is innately tied to a specific place. Secondly, the creative font of the third place artist flows outward in one direction, from creation to audience/receiver; in contrast, the creative processes of a community garden are a collective co-production, a co-
nurturing of creation. As such, every landscape of creative self-production – that is, every plot – is a lesson in democratic participation.

11.4 Learning Democratic Skill-Sets

As community gardens are grassroots, socially equitable landscapes where everyone's voice is valid and can be heard, they require "an organizational structure that is democratic, fair, and uniform" while being participatory enough to allow "gardeners [to] learn ways to mediate tensions among themselves" (Chitov 2006:451). The participatory democratic structure of community gardens often feature "direct participation in decision-making, high turnover in leadership (less oligarchy), and low hierarchy" (Glover et al 2005b:80). Engagement within the democratic processes of the garden may provide the individual gardener with a roadmap to political participation in the broader community beyond the garden boundaries, through the provision of "political skills" and the inculcation of "civic virtues" such as civic-mindedness, awareness, and a sense of citizenship (Glover et al 2005b:77). As the garden participant becomes familiar and comfortable engaging in garden matters using these "core competencies fundamental to democratic activity," it is in this moment that they may begin to feel a sense of political empowerment, or that they "could influence collective actions" with their newfound skill-sets (Glover et al 2005b:77). The social ferment that occurs within the community garden space may foster debate and dialogue on community issues and events that leads to broader action in the form of civic engagement (DeLind 2002; Wakefield 2007)

To summarize the pathways to empowerment facilitated by and within the garden space: one may gain strength in being autonomous but not anonymous; feel the efficacious power and
unity of a collective form of self-determination; utilize landscapes and the resources of their fellow gardeners in their own creative self-productions; and desire political and civic involvement beyond the garden space. These pathways to empowerment are all interconnected and integrated aspects of the greater garden experience. Yet it is the last manifestation of empowerment – that which transcends the garden space and leads to civic engagement – now requiring greater elaboration.

12 SOCIAL CAPITAL

As mentioned above, the skill-sets and sense of civic-mindedness acquired or heightened through engagement in the participatory democratic processes of community gardens may foster not only an interest in, but a perception of competence and capability in addressing core issues of the greater civic and political realm (Stocker & Barnett 1998; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Glover 2004; Glover et al 2005b; Chitov 2006). Thus, community gardens serve as "proactive sites" for the production of a more engaged and active population, and thus a more energized and participatory democracy in the greater community beyond the garden space (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:410). Engagement leads to empowerment, and empowered citizens power their communities. When the empowerment of a group of individuals becomes a "collective asset" or force capable of building more cohesive, united, dynamic and vital communities, it becomes social capital (Glover et al 2005b:86).

The concept of social capital is useful here not because it is a fashionable term used in both the academy and the mainstream (Putnam 1995;2000; Hancock 2001; Schultz 2002; Glover 2004;2005a; Chitov 2006; Kingsley & Townsend 2006), but because the processes that produce it can be found in the processes of empowerment within the community garden space that lead to...
civic engagement and the building of stronger communities. Social capital "is a structural byproduct of engagement" encompassing "the connective tissue, shared norms, and community values that undergird social cooperation and intercourse" (Schultz 2002:80). Central to both social capital production and the garden experience are "elements of...community, sense of place, social networks, [and] trust and reciprocity" that, when brought together, lead to political empowerment and civic engagement (Kingsley & Townsend 2006:526).

A gardener will develop a sense of place through an interdependent relationship with the participatory landscapes of creative self-production represented by soil, plot, and what is planted. Social networks and a sense of community will emerge through the collective self-determination of sharing resources, labour power, knowledge and the transference of ideas. Chitov (2006) considers the collective self-determination of the garden space to be of prime importance in building stronger communities, contending that "sweat equity" and "the mobilization of resources" are the "two variables" central to the generation of social capital (454). Regarding norms of trust and reciprocity, these will emerge through the garden's participatory democratic social and organizational structure, which allows for empowerment through the augmented autonomy one finds in the association. Indeed, two of the concepts advanced in this paper – 'collective self-determination' and 'autonomy in the association' – describe the individual being socially empowered through their participation and engagement in the collective; the growth of social capital results from the civic application of these concepts.

The breadth and depth of social networks are also of great relevance to the amount of social capital within places and communities (Putnam 2000). The interactions that occur within the garden space act as "the social lubricant...for social capital production" (Glover et al 2005a:468). Numerous studies have noted how community gardens foster the growth of social
capital through the dynamism and vitality of the social networks that form as members of these participatory democratic spaces practice collective self-determination (Hancock 2001; Hanna & Oh 2001; Shinew et al 2004; Chitov 2006; Kingsley & Townsend 2006).

13 BONDING & BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The community garden forum allows for both the development of "bonding" social capital, which can be found in "close-knit" networks demonstrating a "dense, multi-functional and strong but localised [sense of] trust;" and the fostering of "bridging" social capital, which is formed "as weak or thin ties of loose networks" of diverse peoples link together to "form mutual relationships" (Kingsley & Townsend 2006:526). Bonding social capital emerges as "a group of gardeners...labour together on plots of communal land," while bridging social capital develops through the linkages "between gardeners of one community and gardeners from other communities, or between gardeners and their friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and other external agencies" (Chitov 2006:411). The community garden provides a participatory democratic place where individuals can come together in dialogue and in the collective co-productions of the landscape, enabling bonding social capital as existing relationships become stronger and deeper. As socially equitable places open to and inclusive of all members of a community, gardens also provide a forum for interaction amongst a diversity of peoples, facilitating bridging social capital through the establishment of linkages and social conduits to and amongst diverse networks that otherwise may never converge (Glover et al 2005b; Shinew et al 2004).

As bridging social capital grows, the local acts of community gardeners can become connected to the national and global activism of the greater community food security movement...
(Baker 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004). Just as the participatory democratic processes of
the garden space may facilitate civic-mindedness and inspire political engagement in one's
community, participating in urban agriculture and learning about local food may also contribute
to a greater critical awareness of the deleterious effects of the "global corporate food system"
(Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004:400; Baker 2004:408). Learning of the vast inequalities of food
distribution while an isolated individual in a non-place would likely provide for yet another
source of disillusionment; becoming aware of the same information in the sustainable and
socially equitable garden forum may inspire gardeners to try to spread their empowering

As the politically empowered gardener may become engaged in community development,
so the critically aware and optimistic gardener may become engaged in food security and the
global food movement (Stocker & Barnett 1998; Hancock 2001; Baker 2004). For this latter
group, the local act of "growing your own tomatoes" becomes "a radical gesture against global
food chains" (Johnston 2003:8). Yet though resistance is projected towards a globalized force,
the mission of food security is tied to place, and rooted to the local. Though interests may differ,
the community garden "greens" who champion food security and the "reds" who focus on
community development both employ an approach grounded in "locally based systems of
production and consumption that support justice, democracy and sustainability" (Johnston
2003:6). The core value in the networks and communities that exist amongst and between
community gardens lies in the potential for an alternative dialogue occurring outside of the
global corporate food system and "the worldwide consumption space" in which it operates (Auge
Some of the networks that emerge from the garden space are of an explicit political nature, providing connections between local concerns and global issues through the conduit of social movements. Yet gardens can also foster intercultural connections through the interactions that occur as a diversity of peoples work side-by-side in the garden space (Glover et al. 2005a; Baker 2004; Shinew et al. 2004; Hancock 2001). Gardeners coming from a variety of ethnic or cultural backgrounds enter the garden space and are "bound together by a mutual interest in gardening" (Glover et al. 2005a:463). The smaller scale and size of a community garden prevents diverse peoples from effectively forming their own culturally homogeneous clusters, making intercultural interaction initially unavoidable and, in most cases, eventually very amicable (Hancock 2001; Shinew et al. 2004; Wakefield et al. 2007). Brought together through a common activity, some studies have observed the cultural milieu of peoples in the community garden place routinely sharing food, exchanging gardening techniques, and socializing (Hancock 2001; Wakefield et al. 2007). Others have noted how this intercultural interaction can be productive of social capital, as a cultural milieu of gardeners may choose to unite and take collective action on broader community issues initially deliberated upon within the garden forum (Armstrong 2000; Shinew et al. 2004; Chitov 2006). As such, the garden space can be a catalyst for civic engagement (Armstrong 2000; Glover 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Shinew et al. 2004).

14 TENSIONS, EXCLUSIONS, & INEQUALITIES IN THE GARDEN SPACE

It is worth noting that though several studies found that community gardens help build positive relations and enhance social cohesion amongst a diversity of peoples (Hancock 2001;
Shinew et al. 2004; Baker 2004; Glover et al. 2005a), other studies indicated that racial segregation and cultural tensions found in the broader community were perpetuated in the garden space (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Glover 2004; Martinez 2005; Parry et al. 2005; Kingsley & Townsend 2006). Two separate studies observed a lack of cultural understanding of the other in communal interactions between Puerto Rican and Whites in certain New York City community gardens (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004; Martinez 2005). At potlucks, the Puerto Rican gardeners would bring food made in their garden plots or baked in their ovens, prepared from scratch and presented in home-made pottery and ceramics. White gardeners, in contrast, would arrive at these gatherings with store-bought food carried in Tupperware containers. The Puerto Ricans considered this difference—coupled with their perception of the White gardeners' plots as unkempt and disorganized—to be a sign of bad taste, ignorance, and laziness (Martinez 2005).

Community gardens may end up privileging the voices of one racial or ethnic group over another. Baker (2004) noted cultural tensions in a Toronto community garden belonging to tenants of an apartment complex, where a group of "Sri Lankan gardeners formed the majority of people on the garden committee, [thus] creating tension between themselves and non-Tamil residents (320). Glover (2004) found that a significant number of African American residents living near the particular gardens he was studying "still perceived...[the local community gardens] as 'the white folks' project" (Glover 2004:154). In their study of Australian community gardens, Kingsley & Townsend (2006) remarked on the evident "lack of diversity in ethnic and social class" found in these supposed places of social inclusion (534).

In addition to being places where tensions from the broader community may continue to play out, several studies also noted how gardens can generate practices of social exclusion
(Glover 2004; Parry et al 2005; Kingsley & Townsend 2006). Glover (2004) contends that social capital, like all forms of capital, has the potential to be distributed unequally "and serve selfish or antisocial ends" (147). When a high level of social capital gathers within certain social networks, members of those networks then have the power to "exclude others" (Glover 2004:147). As gardeners spend large amounts of time working together in collective self-determination, the strong ties fostered can "detract from the bridging effects" as the close-knit association may become "clannish or exclusive" (Kingsley & Townsend 2006:535). Going beyond the garden space, a pair of studies contend that community gardens contribute to urban renewal, but also to the gentrification of formerly low-income and poor areas (Shinew et al 2004; Chitov 2006). Thus, not only can community gardens become places of social exclusion; they can contribute to the exclusion of those who cannot afford the greatly-inflated property values and taxes of newly gentrified urban areas.

Though community gardens may have the potential to be exclusivist or to possess inequality through the existence of power imbalances between garden members, they also have the potential to be socially inclusive and equitable places for all members of a community. As Shinew et al (2004) contend, "racially integrated community gardens at least provide the opportunity for interracial friendships to develop" (341). With the caveat "if properly organized" attached, Chitov (2006) states that "gardens not only promote more racial and social class tolerance, but also become green 'cosmopolitan canopies'" (438). These "diverse and heterogeneous spaces" provide an opportunity for participants to practice "the 'folk ethnography' of watching and learning from each other's differences" (Chitov 2006:438).
15 FOURTH PROBLEMATIC: CONSUMER SOCIETY

This kind of opportunity, to watch and learn about the customs and habits of another in a communal place, is unfortunately rarely available for most of us today. As Esteva & Prakash (1998) note,

Customs and rituals surrounding the growing, preparation, and serving of food are at the heart of community and communion...This communion of growing and cooking communal food is alien to "industrial eaters," using the metallic sounds and plastic screen images of their TV sets to fill the void and loneliness of humans without commons (53).

Socially equitable communal forums tied to place have been largely washed away by or absorbed into a spreading homogeneity of existence where our only commonality is found in our patterns of consumption (Baudrillard 1998; Oldenburg 1999; Klein 2000; Ritzer 2001; Ritzer & Ryan 2002; Zukin 2003; Varnelis 2008). We live in a consumer society, and in our consumption we are approaching "total homogenization," our identities subsumed and absolved into a collective, non-descript mass of non-humanity (Baudrillard 1998:29; Ritzer & Ryan 2002). Here we arrive at the fourth problematic, that of consumer society and some of the effects this force may be having on our identities and understanding of self.

Many totalizing frameworks have been presented to attempt to address aspects of consumer society. To consider the erasure of place, Auge (1995) posits the idea of a "worldwide consumption space," which consists of a massive, entangling web of corporate discursive networks and non-places wrapping around the globe (106). In a similar vein, Ritzer & Ryan's (2002) "globalization of nothing" thesis has already been mentioned, and draws from Auge and others to describe a globalizing movement ("grobalization") that with one hand erases the unique and distinct while the other leaves behind the homogeneous, uniform and generic. With regards identity and our sense of self, Baudrillard (1998) proclaims the death of the individual through assimilation into a mass "consumer totality," with our only sense of individuality coming from
the particularity of our consumer choices (125). Providing a revision to Baudrillard's vision for
today's "attention economy," Beller (2007) is even more apocalyptic, seeing our humanity fully
subsumed into a "world-media system" (53; 54). Relating to our daily routines and everyday
lives, this paper posits the ideas of 'homogenized mass experience,' which has been elaborated
above and throughout.

No matter which theory is adopted to elucidate aspects of it, social isolation in the
consumer society is felt everywhere. As the globalizing forces of consumer society continue to
expand into more and more realms of daily existence, local and indigenous places are either
absorbed into the global sphere or are erased, while an array of things, experiences, spaces and
relations devoid of substance but capable of being commodified continue to be proliferated
(Auge 1995; Baudrillard 1998; Ritzer 2001; Ritzer & Ryan 2002). Local communities are
continually under threat from a marketplace "which needs to create and operate [not only]
masses of homogeneous consumers," but also their necessary counterpart, hardworking
producers (Esteva & Prakash 1998:171; Marx 2003). Yet though high levels of consumption and
production may be great for the economy, "a good producer, a good product, a good consumer is
not at all the same thing as a good citizen" (DeLind 2002:218). When we spend inordinate
amounts of time working, we lose the ability to have our needs met "outside of the market"
(Soron 2006:234).

Instead, we turn to new cars, all-inclusive vacations, slicker smart phones, bigger
television and faster laptops, and define ourselves "through and by the consumer industry"
by identifying "logos" as "the closest thing we have to an international language, recognized and
understood in many more places than English" (xx). Individuals identify with their IPods, their
Honda Civics, their name brand apparel, their hair products, and their favourite fast food establishment; one's material choices are the signifiers of one's character and personality (Baudrillard 1998). By that token, those with the 'coolest' brands and the most expensive product should be basking in friends and happiness, as they would be the ones with the best character and personality. Yet, as Soron (2006) notes, increasing consumption has a "dark side" marked by:

- climbing rates of personal debt and bankruptcy;
- pervasive social alienation and disconnection;
- the growth of consumption-related health problems such as heart disease and diabetes;
- rising levels of depression, anxiety, and other emotional disturbances;
- job-related stress, chronic "time-poverty," and so on (223).

Being erased and absorbed into a consumer totality doesn't appear to be too quick and easy of a process. With this in mind, perhaps we shouldn't move to Civic Nation after all...

16 THE NEED TO DELINK:

SOIL CITIZENS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

Interaction in the consumer society occurs predominantly through the thinness of purely functional market relations, and this thinness seems to be grating on us (Ritzer 2001; Soron 2006). This thesis has argued throughout that a first step in countering all of the above totalizing problematics may be found through a (re)engagement in the local places and forums of our own communities. To begin building community, we must become cognizant of our role in perpetuating consumer society. As Ritzer (2001) argues, "the best thing that the citizen can do is to abstain from consumption as much as possible" (66). We must shed the confining skin of our consumer and producer identities and begin to "delink" from the consumer society (Baker 2004:308). Building community requires social capital, which is "not the sole property of any individual;" it is a "collective asset" that emerges through the civic engagement of empowered networks of individuals (Schultz 2002:80; Glover et al 2005b:86). The formation of an
empowered and engaged collective requires a grassroots, socially equitable place with a participatory democratic structure open and accessible to all community members. Community gardens appear to fit these requirements quite well.

It may be impossible to delink from consumer society entirely. Riding a bike to work is a less environmentally destructive form of consumption than driving a car, yet the raw materials that go into creating the bike frame and some of the other parts are still mass-produced in a process that the cyclist quite likely did not participate in. With regards the global food system, delinking is a combination of awareness and action. To live in an urban area and have one's food intake be entirely self-sufficient or locally-based is the reality of very few, if any individuals. Yet the engagement that emerges from public, place-based forums like community gardens helps spread awareness of food security and food movements, and may help in leading more and more urban dwellers to a greater self-reliance on self-produced or communally-grown food (DeLind 2002; Baker 2004; Parry et al 2005; Soron & Laxer 2006). As more and more food continues to be consumed within the communities that produced it, a 'complete' delinking begins to become perceivable.

As we "delink" and help build community through active, civic engagement, we must still consume and produce. Yet community gardens provide an opportunity for engagement in our processes of production and consumption "rooted in [the] particular soils" of our own neighbourhoods and communities (Esteva & Prakash 1998:171). The activity of gardening provides "an opportunity for people to dirty their hands, grow their own food, work with their neighbours, and generally transform themselves from consumers of food into "soil citizens"" (Esteva & Prakash 1998; DeLind 2002; Baker 2004:305). Our relationship with food ceases to be one of detached consumption; as we become closer to our processes of production, we enter a
more symbiotic and reciprocating relationship with the food we eat, becoming "productive and self-reproducing individual[s]" (Marx 2003:253-54). As soil citizens, we become direct and engaged producers of food, actively aware participants in our creative self-productions, detached and alienated no longer. Through this process, we connect with the soil, with the collective of gardeners working around and beside us, and with what we ultimately consume. As DeLind (2002) expresses, "it is in...our individual and sweaty sacrifices...that we begin to inhabit places in any deep and collective way" (222).

17 CONCLUSION

It has been argued herein that locally-focused, place-based engagement in the non-exclusionary, socially equitable, participatory democratic forums of community gardens can empower individuals to become collectively engaged in their communities. The paper begins with some observations about the current popularity of community gardening. This is followed by a historical sketch detailing the emergence of community gardens, which concludes with some brief comments on the current movement. The problematic of homogenized mass experience is presented; the power of place is discussed as a potential counter to this force. A second, related problematic, that of non-places, is followed by some commentary on the suburban sprawl as non-place. Third places are presented to help elucidate the importance of the non-exclusionary nature of community gardens.

A lengthy analysis on the sustainability of gardens follows, with particular focus given to how gardens are socially equitable places for marginalized or disenfranchised populations. A third problematic is discussed, that of the disempowered and un(der)informed citizen. Steps to counter this problematic can be taken through the pathways to empowerment found in the garden
space. Gardens are considered as participatory democratic places that foster civic engagement through the production of social capital. Yet there is potential for gardens to be exclusionary or to perpetuate racial and ethnic tensions. A final problematic is discussed: that of consumer society, and its effect on the individual's sense of self. A first step in countering the dehumanizing forces of consumer society is that we delink, and become more involved in our local communities. With particular reference to community gardening, the idea of becoming soil citizens is considered.

17.1 Contributions to Community Garden Research

Several components of this thesis could potentially contribute to the current academic dialogue surrounding community gardening. Firstly, the exploration of forms of social isolation, the four problematics, found in this paper goes far beyond anything – in terms of both conceptual scope and analytical depth – that I discovered in any pre-existing academic work on community gardens. Secondly, in pointing out the significance in Oldenburg's third places and Ritzer & Ryan's 'something' still being centered in market relations and thus still carrying the potential to be spaces of exclusion, another much-needed layer is uncovered between places (which move closer to the idea of commons, while third places move to a middle ground) and non-places. Thirdly, the pathways to empowerment within the garden space have not been broken down and explained in any other literature to the extent that, or in even remotely the same manner as they are here. Fourthly, it appears that no other article or text on community gardens has attempted to place such emphasis on both the importance of the garden as place and the garden as participatory democratic structure, and how both of these factors contribute to individual level empowerment, social capital production and civic engagement. Plenty of community garden
studies have commented on the importance of place, its democratic potential, its potential to
generate social capital, or civic engagement, but none to my knowledge have had the dualist
focus found here. Finally, this paper contributes the term and concept 'homogenized mass
experience' to describe a spreading similitude in our ICT-filtered daily routines and habits, and
three terms relating to aspects of the pathways to empowerment within the garden space:
'autonomy in the association,' 'collective self-determination,' and 'creative self-production.'

17.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could investigate how community gardens are combating Soron's (2006)
"dark side" of consumer society. It would be interesting to note how the mental and
physiological health of community gardeners compares with national norms. As well, future
research would do well to observe the continued effect of ICTs on gardens and gardeners. Do
gardeners bring information technology into the garden space? How are communication devices
perceived by gardeners? It will also be interesting to see if the current popularity of community
gardening is just a passing trend, or if participation will stay high. A qualitative study featuring
in-depth interviews with gardeners and their perspectives on the longevity of their gardens would
be useful. Also, a broad statistical analysis of garden participants might be beneficial; though
many studies have concluded that gardening is not just the domain of a particular demographic,
some numbers may help in indicating the extent to which gardens truly are socially equitable
(and in what ways they are exclusionary)!

Other recommendations are not specifically related to gardens. Though not
acknowledged in this paper, I am well aware of the postmodernist perspective on globalization:
rather than increasing homogeneity, as the modernists perceive it, globalization is really
'glocalization;' there is increasing heterogeneity and cultural hybridization taking place all the time. However, could a singularity of experience emerge from a mass, standardized form of heterogeneity made possible thanks to the wonders of the internet? A 'complete' homogeneity stemming from being so intensively subsumed into ICTs that time and place are no longer only instantiated in given moments of communication and information, but become largely irrelevant and inconsequential to and in our everyday lives? Can the body as we currently know it become a relic? These are questions I have for future research, though perhaps the coming years will hold some of these answers.

17.3 Beyond Community

As noted earlier in the paper, over the last four decades, the policy of neoliberalism has meant that services once provided by government have been downloaded onto the backs of publics through "the withdrawal of the welfare state" (Johnston 2003:7; Chitov 2006; Macias 2008). Grassroots organizations, locally-based service providers and public forums like community gardens have risen to the task of helping to shoulder this weight (Macias 2008). Empowerment and the building of strong collectives of local community members can do much in helping to build better communities, yet as noted by Hamelin et al (2008), empowerment and community efforts alone are not enough sometimes; we must also support coalitions, organizations and movements engaged in lobbying and pushing government(s) for more services and resources. For change to be effective, efforts must extend beyond the garden space and towards "state and extra-parliamentary arenas" (Soron & Laxer 2006: 36). We must also utilize our bridging social capital and the linkages it has provided us to the national and international
food movement, and channel the support, inspiration and resources of the global collective where and however possible.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Ritzer, George. 2001. *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption: Fast Food, Credit Cards*


Teig, Ellen, Joy Amulya, Lisa Bardwell, Michael Buchenau, Julie A. Marshall, & Jill S. Litt.


