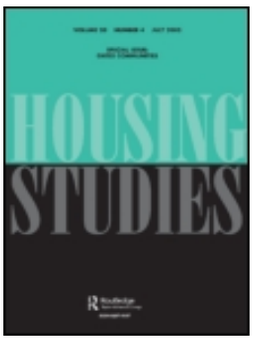

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Home, the Culture of Nature and Meanings of Gardens in Late Modernity

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ABSTRACT *The growth in the provision of gardens has been an important feature of housing in the UK during the 20th century, and yet the significance of the humble domestic garden has been neglected in studies of housing and home. This paper examines the role of the garden in the meaning of home, and draws on theoretical discussions of nature, environmental risk and social uncertainty in late modernity. Secondary empirical data is used to investigate the changing uses of gardens and practices of gardening. A survey of garden owners provides primary empirical data to examine meanings of gardens and personal experiences of nature. The paper concludes that the garden is an important site for privacy, sociability and sensual connections to nature, and these activities can be understood as negotiations and practices to address the social and environmental paradoxes of late modern life.*

KEY WORDS: the home, gardens, nature

Introduction: Gardens and Homes

A key change during the 20th century in Britain that has been largely ignored in social science generally and housing studies in particular, is the steady growth in provision of domestic gardens in both the private and public sectors (Kellett, 1982). This expansion in gardens has been accompanied by the growth of gardening as a popular leisure activity. National data indicates that 20 million households in the UK, 84 per cent of the total, have access to a garden. Gardening as a leisure activity has steadily increased over the post-war period; today 52 per cent of the adult population regularly engage in some form of cultivation in their backyards (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002). Traditionally the study of gardens and gardening has emphasised grand gardens and famous gardeners and designers (see Brown, 1999); the humble domestic garden has been neglected (but see Bhatti, 1999; Constantine, 1981; Hoyles, 1991; Ravetz & Turkington, 1995). This paper presents a discussion of the contemporary uses of domestic gardens based on secondary data and draws on primary data to examine some of the roles and meanings of gardens. It is argued that the study of gardens and gardening can significantly enhance the current understanding of the meaning of home in late modernity

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and the complex interactions between the home and wider social and cultural trends.

Previous studies of gardens have explored a wide range of social and cultural themes (Francis & Hestor, 1990). As part of everyday life, gardens and ways of gardening convey ideas about cultural change, personal identity, lifestyle and relations in the home. The practices of gardening provide insights into changing human-nature relations in late modernity (Bhatti & Church, 2001). The garden, like home, has also been considered as a gendered space (see Bhatti & Church, 2000; Morris, 1994) as well as a private haven from the world of work and politics (Hoyles, 1991), a functional space for leisure and household chores (Williams, 1995) and a space contributing to a home-based sense of place (Tuan, 1990). The media representations of gardens and gardening have also been considered and Gabb (1999) argues that the popular UK television programme 'Gardener's World' provides a feminine narrative that makes it distinctive from other 'ordinary' programmes.

Clearly gardens and gardening have multiple roles and meanings which can be explored from a variety of theoretical and conceptual directions. The broad aim of this paper is to consider the dimensions of gardening and gardens that provide insights into some of the contemporary meanings of the home. A complex range of theoretical perspectives has been developed to understand the nature of home (see Wardhaugh, 1999 for a review), but this paper seeks to engage with theoretical discussions concerning the home, nature, environmental risk and social uncertainty in late modernity. The reason for focusing on these concerns is that the garden is a distinctive space in the home where individuals (men, women and children) encounter nature in a direct manner that is not possible elsewhere in the home. There are other everyday domestic experiences, practices and knowledges that involve connections with nature but the garden and gardening offer particular opportunities for an embodied and sensual engagement with nature (Bhatti & Church, 2001). Furthermore, the garden, as is shown, is a space that is imbued with notions of privacy whereas many of the other spaces that people associate with experiences of nature are often shared and more public, even when they are physically isolated.

Franklin (2002) examines the role of gardens in the social meanings and construction of nature and makes major claims for their significance:

> Gardens are an apt nature for modernity, combining as they do the processes of globalisation and the technologies whereby we have learnt to manipulate and change or hybridise nature. Gardens and gardening illustrate perfectly the hybrid nature of our relations with the natural world. (Franklin, 2002, p. 16)

This paper examines gardens from the related, but slightly different theoretical perspective, concerned with changing environmental risk and social uncertainty. The social meanings and material uses of nature are seen as a central issue for understanding the changing role and significance of risk and uncertainty in contemporary society (Beck, 1992, 1995; Giddens, 1991, 1994, 1995). Arguably an ambiguity and ambivalence about nature are at the heart of social and economic life in late modernity (see introduction in Lash *et al*., 1996). By seeking to understand the interconnections between gardens, home, nature, risk and uncertainty it is possible not only to provide insights into the values attached to the garden as a domestic space, but also to develop a broader understanding of the

significance of the home in late modern society. The next section of the paper sets out in more detail the theoretical issues that frame the analysis and is followed by two sections based on empirical data, the first of which draws on secondary data to examine the changing role and uses of contemporary gardens. The second presents primary data from research by the authors, and explores the meanings and practices imbued in gardens. Finally, it is concluded that an analysis of gardens provides a useful and additional dimension to the study of the home in late modernity.

Homes, Gardens, Nature, Risk and Uncertainty

The extensive discussions over the role and meaning of home (for example Allan & Crow, 1989; Dupius & Thorns, 1998; Gurney, 1990; Saunders, 1990; Saunders & Williams, 1988; Wardhaugh, 1999) have concentrated on the range of social, political and psychological processes that construct the home. Changing levels of economic affluence, tenure patterns and gender relations are long-established contexts prefiguring the meaning of home. More recently, studies viewing home-making as an active process have sought to capture the role of individual agency and household practices in constructing and constituting the meaning and value of home (Putnam, 1993). Sociological interest has also considered the home as 'locale', as a socio-spatial setting that enables and structures everyday activities (see Saunders & Williams, 1988). This has led to an important debate over the degree to which the meaning of home is based on the desire for privacy (Madigan *et al*., 1990; Madigan & Munro, 1999), with some writers arguing that whilst privatism is important it should not be over-emphasised due to the sociability associated with home-based leisure (Allan & Crow, 1991). In studies of domestic consumption there has also been an increasing emphasis on how individuals may actively perform and negotiate the process of domestic consumption in order to produce a home that reflects a particular lifestyle. Chevalier (1998) has examined how consumption identities and lifestyles in the home are manifested and re-ordered in the garden. In previous writings the authors have also considered how the garden contains possibilities for differently negotiating gender relations in home-making (Bhatti & Church, 2000). In this paper, however, the garden is used as a space to explore further one of the key features in these debates over the meaning of home, namely the ambiguous tensions between privacy and sociability. In addition, there is an outline of the contemporary practices and negotiations individuals draw on to order the garden as a distinct domestic space giving meaning and value to the home.

A study of the garden also allows consideration of the presence of plants, wildlife and the physical elements, which enable a distinctive embodied engagement with nature compared to other domestic spaces. In other parts of the home, knowledges and imagined experiences of nature can be acquired often through media representations such as the television garden (Gabb, 1999). Hinchcliffe (1997) has argued that practices in the home can be used to distance environmental threat and contribute to a feeling of ecological certainty. This view echoes a common conclusion in the housing literature, which has been to stress the importance of the home in the construction of an individualised ontological security (Dupius & Thorns, 1998; Gurney, 1990; Saunders, 1990). However, the authors argued elsewhere that the garden offers more ambiguous ecological possibilities. In the garden individuals can develop sensual and personalised

connections to nature that whilst contributing to a sense of certainty and order can also heighten the awareness of environmental threats (see also Bhatti & Church, 2001).

Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) seek to develop a psychological understanding of human-nature relations enacted in gardens. They suggest that 'nearby nature' (by which they mean parks and woods within walking distance of residential areas as well as domestic gardens) plays four important psychological roles in contemporary society. First, nearby nature provides a 'restorative experience' (a recovery from stress and anxiety) that cannot be gained elsewhere. Contact with nature in general (flora and fauna in the garden) provides 'fascination', a form of stimulus for voluntary attention towards plants and flowers, which diverts people from either tasks involving directed attention or matters that are confusing and painful. Second, 'being away' in natural surroundings provides a context for day dreaming and restfulness; even remembering childhoods spent in gardens of houses one grew up in (see Bhatti, 2002). Third, they suggest that nature provides 'extant', that is, a feeling that one is in a completely different world where things are connected (to each other and to the self). Finally, Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) talk about 'compatibility' by which they mean a close association between nature and human beings whereby humans find it much less effort functioning in natural settings than in 'civilised' contexts. This last argument has similarities with the biophilia hypothesis, which suggests we need nature to realise our true humanity (see Franklin, 2002 for a discussion). Even so, the restorative experience is only fully confirmed when all four factors come together in time and space. Indeed, the Kaplans specifically highlight the garden and gardening as a significant place and activity that has strong restorative qualities as it enables personalised readings of nature (Kaplan, 1973; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1990).

Writers on the home have similarly emphasised the restorative role of domestic space. Putnam (1993) argues that "the home is a project to be realised as well as a centre for leisure and recuperation". The empirical evidence presented later in this paper suggests, however, that whilst the garden may offer restorative experiences these are often highly compromised by the need to 'work' in the garden, the influence of neighbours and the disappointments of gardening projects. Nevertheless, Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) present a psychological and technological account to explain the need in contemporary society for a restorative connection with nature. They claim we now live in a society where individuals have to process and retain much more information than ever before; there are growing numbers of processes that require our directed attention which requires greater effort. This leads to mental fatigue arising from the constant struggle both within the self, and between the individual and society as the mass media and new technologies deliver greater and greater amounts of information which requires our directed attention.

More recent theoretical discourses, however, suggest there are more wide-ranging processes behind the need for privacy in the home and recuperative connections with nature. In late modern societies, according to both Beck (1995) and Giddens (1991), there is increasing mental fatigue and anxiety arising out of the risks and uncertainty associated with the need to make the right life choices, and make constant decisions on what to eat, how to travel, and what to buy. The 'risk society' arises from the development of technology (for Beck), and globalisation (for Giddens) and signals qualitatively new hazards and anxieties which

cannot be managed by political institutions or science itself. Both Beck and Giddens argue that for a series of reasons this is fundamentally a different phase in modernity and leads to a change in human-nature relations (for a critique see Benton, 1997). First, risk now permeates all areas of everyday economic and social life and space, and more importantly into the future. Threats such as nuclear disasters, 'mad cow disease', global climate change and pollution cannot be confined in time and space. Second, everyone is at risk; whereas previously the rich could escape urban squalor (for example), now pollution exists everywhere and nature itself is threatened. Third, certain effects cannot be reversed as they penetrate the fabric of all life on this planet. Fourth, as the new risks have many sources no single organisation can be held responsible; there is a crisis of accountability and little confidence in the traditional institutions that protect society. Finally, the management of these new dangers has broken down as institutions and the state do not have the capacity to control them. But at the same time, and in the face of these daily threats, people have begun to question the causes of these environmental risks and the degradation of nature. This according to Giddens and Beck signals 'reflexive modernisation' whereby society confronts itself and critically evaluates the dangers and solutions on offer (see Beck *et al*., 1994).

Whereas Beck focuses on institutional reflexivity (that is, the way organisations involved in the identification and management of risk respond to this critique), Giddens offers a phenomenology of globalisation whereby risks and globalising factors (of all kinds):

> intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where the process of self-realisation influences global strategies. (Giddens, 1991, p. 214)

The consequences are that individuals become anxious about the threats to nature and begin to question everyday daily life. Both Giddens and Beck suggest that increasing uncertainty and awareness of risk penetrates everyday life and may lead to a growth of environmental action and efforts to protect nature. For Beck there is the possibility of the rise of a new politics ('sub politics') that goes beyond left and right, cutting across traditional class lines, where the distribution of environmental 'bads' produces new alliances across the political spectrum. This growth in environmental politics arises because the middle classes in particular

> … now sees itself robbed by ecological despoliation of the fruits of its labours—leisure, house and garden. (Beck, 1995, p. 54)

Even though Beck does not go on to consider the implications of this statement, consideration will be given to how 'leisure, house and garden' might act as significant filters through which the threat to nature is addressed and uncertainty 'managed' by people at the everyday level. People may not be radicalised by a new sub-politics, instead they may use domestic sites to distance or dislocate risk and uncertainty rather than engage in political action. Giddens (1991) does focus on the private and personal responses to globalisation and risk, emphasising a growing search for 'ontological security'. Thus in today's 'uncertain world' deep anxieties may lead to the construction of very personal and intimate barriers to the public realm.

The similarities and differences between Giddens and Beck have been dis-

cussed by the authors themselves (Beck *et al*., 1994), along with critiques by Lash *et al*. (1996), Benton (1997) and Rustin (1994). Nevertheless, the theoretical commonalities of these authors include an emphasis on the increasing importance of individual responses as people faced by globalisation, social and environmental risk, are forced into a more reflexive mode of daily living. In short, in the age of uncertainty and increasing threats to nature people attempt to create new certainties. But a paradox arises, however, in that whilst people are worried about the state of the environment and nature, at the same time individuals may feel threatened by uncertainty and withdraw into potential spheres of certainty, including their homes and gardens. Cohen & Taylor (1992) take a similar view arguing that the home and the garden provide opportunities for escape from the 'runaway' world and growing threats to the environment. Franklin (2002), however, makes more explicit links between the risk society and gardens arguing that the rise of organic gardening is linked to the desire to avoid chemical pollution and gardens also offer an opportunity to work with an increasingly threatened nature. The empirical data in the next two sections provides an opportunity to explore some of these claims. Personalised connections made with nature in the garden are examined to consider how they are imbued with feelings of uncertainty and how they relate to certain key meanings attached to the home, especially privacy, sociability, escape and recuperation. An analysis of these everyday practices and spaces, however, must be informed by an appreciation of the broader influences shaping the changing roles and meanings of the garden. The next section uses secondary data to consider the interaction between domestic gardens and certain key social and economic changes in late modern society.

A Nation of Gardeners?

Recent surveys for England (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002) indicate that monthly participation in gardening as a leisure pursuit was relatively stable in the 1990s at 48 per cent of the adult population. This represented a slight increase from 42 per cent of the population in 1977. Market research organisations claim participation may grow in future as media portrayals of gardens as lifestyle symbols have encouraged more young people to take up gardening (MINTEL, 1999). Nevertheless, participation is still strongly influenced by age with 61 per cent of 60–69 year olds identifying gardening as a leisure pursuit compared to 21 per cent of 20–24 year olds. There are variations by social class with participation rates of 41 per cent for lower-income groups compared to 60 per cent for higher-income groups. The ownership and cultivation of the garden occurs within the context of wider social change and social class differences partly reflect changing tenure patterns. With two-thirds of households now owning their homes, the 'house with a garden' can be realised by the majority of the population. The Survey of English Housing found that 92 per cent of owner occupier households had access to a garden compared to 69 per cent of social rented and 61 per cent of private rented households (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002).

Despite widespread garden ownership, gardening amongst owners is a far from uniform leisure pursuit. A range of secondary data suggests that the degree of involvement varies significantly between certain social and lifestyle groups. Market research organisations, motivated by the need to identify market

segments, have used large-scale nationally representative sample surveys to categorise consumers by their practices and levels of interest in gardening. The data collated by MINTEL (1999) can be used to identify three broad categories of consumers on the basis of their agreement with certain attitudinal statements. The first category contains just over a third of adults who might be termed 'reluctant gardeners'. Only 7 per cent of adults had access to a garden and claimed to have no interest in it, but 33 per cent of adults viewed gardening as a chore yet despite their indifference kept their garden tidy. Men were more likely to adopt this latter view than women and for many adults gardening is not necessarily a gratifying process. A second category that contains about half of those with access to a garden are the 'leisure' gardeners who use the garden as a valued leisure space but only do a limited amount of gardening. This would include the 28 per cent of adults who agreed with the statement that they enjoy gardening but do not have much time or energy for it and the 27 per cent who enjoyed spending time in the garden but did not do much gardening. A key sub-group in this category is adults aged 25–34 who for work and family reasons lacked the time for gardening. The third category is the 'keen' gardeners and accounts for about a fifth of the adult population with access to a garden. Twenty-one per cent of these adults agreed that they loved their garden and spent as much time as possible in it. This figure was higher for women (26 per cent) than men (15 per cent) and keen gardeners are more likely to be aged over 55. An earlier MINTEL (1997) study claimed that about a quarter of the adult population were committed 'Horticultural Hobbyists', the most serious amateur gardeners for whom gardening was an important part of their lives. The General Household Survey (2000) found that nearly a half of adults cite gardening as a hobby but this will include both committed keen gardeners and the leisure gardeners who wish to minimise effort, but like the garden to look good. These differing data sources all suggest that for a significant proportion of the adult population the garden is an important domestic space and perhaps a fifth of adults are garden 'lovers' who place a very high value on the garden.

Secondary data sources also highlight the importance of the garden as a site for engaging with nature. The material uses of gardens have been changing. Until fairly recently many gardeners used to cultivate a mix of fruit, vegetables and some flowers, but this has changed, especially since the 1980s with the decrease in average garden plot sizes, with the result that there is less space to grow vegetables or fruit and increasingly the lawn and flowers are dominant. Only 24 per cent of households with access to a garden grew vegetables in 1998, compared to a third in the mid-1980s (MINTEL, 1999). Changing patterns of food consumption and decreasing real costs may be reasons for the post-war decline in vegetable cultivation. In addition, the rise of the garden centre is claimed to have encouraged a standard 'containerised' approach to gardening based around a lawn and purchased potted plants. Despite increasing consumerism affecting the nature of the garden, nearly a quarter of adults with access to a garden are still growing some vegetables. Eighteen per cent of gardeners claim to grow their own plants or flowers from seed each year. A significant minority of gardeners is still heavily involved in the process of cultivation.

A similar proportion of gardeners appears to actively encourage wildlife in the garden. The Survey of English Housing found 21 per cent of households with access to a garden leave dead wood and leaves around, 20 per cent put up

nesting boxes and 17 per cent feed wild animals The survey also suggests that wildlife-friendly gardening practices are relatively common. Nearly a third of households with access to gardens plant wildlife-friendly plants, 31 per cent avoid using chemical treatments and 23 per cent make their own compost (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002). These findings must be set against the findings of recent consumer surveys which indicated that only 13 per cent of adults expressed an interest in organic gardening (MINTEL, 1999). Franklin (2002) argues organic horticulture can become a new orthodoxy but whilst certain groups of gardeners may be developing innovative organic approaches to the garden, the secondary data presented here suggests such practices are not widespread.

Collectively, the secondary data sources point towards the conclusion that the garden is an important leisure space that should be acknowledged in discussions of the home. Changing tenure patterns, media representations of the garden and the garden industry all contribute to the changing uses and roles of the garden. But around a fifth to a quarter of the adult population in the UK value their gardens highly not only as a leisure space but also for cultivation and encouraging wildlife. For these people the home is a key site for engaging with nature. The secondary sources do not, however, uncover how the garden as a space relates to the meanings of the home and other social concerns that influence the domestic sphere. The next section turns to primary data to uncover the complex meanings of the garden and how the emotional and sensual engagement with nature in the garden interacts with the practices and meanings attached to the home in late modernity.

The Meanings of Gardens

The data presented in this section is drawn from a survey of visitors to garden centres. 150 respondents were interviewed at three very different garden centres, one urban in London, one peri-urban in Ashford, Kent and one rural in East Sussex. This survey was designed to obtain views on garden centres and information on respondents' gardens using a mix of closed and open-ended questions. Respondents were then asked to complete a secondary take-home questionnaire where they provided more details on their feelings and perceptions of their garden, their home and the environment. The second questionnaire used a combination of Likert scales, open-ended questions and a series of sections where respondents were asked to write what they felt on certain issues. Seventy-seven respondents completed the secondary questionnaire, a high response rate for a postal return questionnaire, many writing at length about their feelings for their garden. The qualifications and occupations of the 77 suggested the majority were drawn from upper and middle-income groups. Nevertheless, they provided a rich source of data on the variety of complex meanings attached to gardens. It is important to note that the quotes below were written not spoken, often in note form as respondents set out their personal feeling on their garden. They are presented in small groups in a series of boxes organised by the themes covered by the quotes.

The quantitative data from the survey research reveals how perceptions of home are interwoven with the meanings people attach to their gardens, thereby pointing to the fluid boundaries between house, home and garden. Table 1 is based on the findings of a question that asked people to gauge the importance

Table 1. The personal meanings of gardens as places?

Question: The garden is a place …	0	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Of privacy	1	6	2	21	19	52
To relax	1	0	9	14	14	61
To get away from it all	6	4	6	14	17	53
To carry on a family tradition	54	10	14	10	4	17
To make a house a home	8	4	5	15	14	54
Where you can learn about nature	20	17	20	18	18	26
Where you can help care for the planet	20	12	12	19	11	25

Notes: 0 = no importance; 5 = very important.

of their garden according to a number of functional uses and personal meanings. By combining the percentages in the Table for the '4's (important) and '5's (very important) it is possible to identify the most valued uses and meanings. By far the most important meanings are focused around notions of 'privacy' (71 per cent), 'makes a house a home', 'getting away from it all' (70 per cent) and 'a place to relax' (75 per cent). These personal meanings are very much based on the garden being part of the home as a whole and playing a role in contributing to the home-making project. It is important, however, not to totally subsume the meanings of the garden in notions of home, as some of the qualitative data presented below show the garden has its own distinct opportunities for relaxation. Additionally, only 21 per cent of respondents, however, felt the garden was important for 'carrying on a family tradition'.

Table 1 also shows that connections to nature and the environment were viewed as rather less important. Only 44 per cent of respondents felt the garden was important as a place 'for learning about nature' and even fewer, 36 per cent, felt it was a place 'where you can care for the planet'. These findings resonate with the secondary data, which suggested that only a minority of gardeners in the UK is involved in environmentally friendly gardening practices.

Despite this important reservation the more qualitative data reveals that for some respondents highly valued connections to nature can be created in the garden. Some of the quotes presented below also expose the complex and compromised nature of the garden as a private space for relaxing or escaping. The group of quotes in Box 1 was typical of responses to the question 'how do you feel about your garden?'. One of the most common words used in these responses was 'love' as respondents outlined their personal affection for their gardens. Despite the enthusiasm of many respondents for their garden, others emphasised the functions of the garden and the fifth quote not only indicates a very functional attitude to the garden but also is an important reminder of the 'reluctant gardeners' highlighted using the secondary data. A number of respondents stressed the important function of the garden as a space for casual leisure, often described as 'pottering about'.

The last of the quotes in Box 1 mentions the role of the garden as a space for socialising. Not surprisingly, one of the key social aspects of gardens mentioned by respondents was interaction with neighbours. Comments on neighbours and gardens started to reveal some of the disappointments that along with positive emotions and experiences co-construct the meaning of gardens. The first three

Box 1: Importance and function of the garden

1. It is one of life's pleasures. (Man, TV Producer, London)
2. The garden is a very important part of my life and I would hate to move anywhere without a garden. (Woman, Secretary, London)
3. We are about to put this house on the market, and move to a large garden and a house. In that order—the garden is most important to us. (Woman, Carer, Kent)
4. I love my garden—it may get a bit overgrown—but it has a lot of wildlife which is important. (Woman, Clerical Officer, Kent)
5. I think my garden's too big and although I enjoy using the back garden, I hate gardening. Front garden is about 25 feet and does act as a barrier from a busy main road but would rather have a car park. (Woman, Carer, London)
6. Our garden's very small and only used for growing flowers and sitting in to relax. (Man, Retired, Kent)
7. It is a private sanctuary to potter in at one's own leisure, alone with your thoughts. It is possible to work in it, sunbathe in it, eat out in it, entertain in it—whatever pleases. (Woman, Administrative Officer, Ashford, Kent)

quotes in Box 2 all indicate how the desire for privacy and beauty in the garden is often compromised by neighbours and is the subject of complex negotiations and emotions. Allan & Crow (1991) noted the tensions between privacy and socialising in the process of home-making. In the garden the tensions related to socialising are also acted out as individuals value and negotiate their neighbours.

Box 2: The compromises of neighbours and work in the garden

1. I see a garden as making a home more attractive. A place of beauty not only for myself but for neighbours too. It's a good point of social contact 'over the wall' … from October to March I surrender my garden to neighbours' marauding cats: from March to October I take charge again! (Woman, Civil Servant, London)
2. I would like my garden to be bigger and more organised. A bone of contention is my neighbour's fence which has fallen down—I don't get on with them but do on the other side. (Man, Local Government Worker, London)
3. I love gardening. It's not that hard work. I don't like children and loathe most of my neighbours' kids. (Woman, PR worker, London)
4. Hard work at times but enjoy seeing the 'fruits' of my labours when it's looking good. (Woman, Teacher, Kent)
5. Although I hate the work of a garden, it does add an extra dimension to one's living space—one doesn't feel 'imprisoned'. (quotes in original) (Woman, Teacher, London)

Box 3: Therapy, relaxation and work in the garden

1. I lived in a first floor flat for 7 years which was hell for me as I desperately wanted a garden. It is my 'piece of England', I just enjoy being in it. It's very therapeutic, especially after a hard day at work. (Man, Graphic Artist, Southwick, West Sussex)
2. It's an enjoyable part of our way of life. Animals, birds, cats, squirrels. For complete relaxation away from a busy, stressful job. (Woman, Nurse, Kent)
3. It is a peaceful place which should be for relaxation and to care for animals. (Woman, Secretarial Assistant, Ashford, Kent)
4. I just love gardening, it's very therapeutic to me. I have a large Alsatian who now she is old loves to lay under a shady tree. (Woman, Retail Assistant, Kent)
5. I enjoy the constant change—seasonal, new plants, a place to be busy but with potentially beautiful effects unlike work or housework … I like sharing my enthusiasm for plants with friends. (Man, Social Worker, Sussex)
6. I *love* it. I have worked as a jobbing gardener (albeit unprofessionally) and have many plants from other gardens which hold memories for me. I have also planted flowers taken from the wild and planted four trees which are very well established. (Woman, Housekeeper, London)
7. My pleasure comes from 3 things:
   - a connection with the passage of the seasons and the unchangeable pattern of growth;
   - the satisfaction of seeing a beautiful picture created by my efforts but enjoyed by everyone who passes;
   - the mental refreshment of simple physical work in a natural surrounding for creative ends. (Man, Management Consultant, London)

For many respondents the act of gardening can also be filled with conflicting emotion. The fourth quote in Box 1 and the last one in Box 2 both recognise the emotional and functional gains of the garden but indicate how these are compromised by the need for 'work' which is part of the embodied experience in the garden. Quotes 3 and 4 in Box 2 show that 'work' in the garden for some is a rewarding experience but for others it is an obstacle to be overcome and will limit any potential restorative experience.

The use of the word 'imprison' in the last quote in Box 2 further highlights the ambiguities and contradictions of home and garden. But despite the compromises linked to neighbours and work in the garden, many respondents claimed gardening offered highly beneficial restorative experiences of the type identified by Kaplan & Kaplan (1990). In Box 3, however, the differing ways individuals construct a relaxing or therapeutic experience start to emerge.

Quotes 1, 2, 5 and 7 in Box 3 all emphasise that 'work' also imbues the meaning of gardens in a creative manner. For these respondents 'work' in the garden offered a positive embodied experience because it can be contrasted with other forms of work. In quotes 2 to 4 animals are mentioned as part of the restorative process, whereas in quotes 5 to 7 plants and the seasons are

Box 4: Connections with nature in the garden

1. I enjoy it, it relaxes me and is a good place to watch the stars. (Woman, Carer, Hurstpierpoint, East Sussex)
2. My activity is carried out in the late evening, as the light fades. I often linger for half an hour listening to the birds; watching evening primroses open. (Woman, Civil Servant, London)
3. I would like to find plants more suited to the warmer summers. Garden centres have not cottoned on to this!! Still too many high water consuming plants on sale—we need more Mediterranean style plants. I will probably replant the beds with appropriate flowers and shrubs for next summer and I will plant rhododendrons. I like it to be COLOURFUL. Colours can be healing. I also like AROMATIC flowers and SHRUBS. (Capitals in original) (Woman, Tutor, Sussex)
4. I want to make the mini wood into a quiet area, with a seat up there—I grew up with shrubberies and woods on our land in Kent. There are a few bluebell and anemone and primrose plants up there already so I want to develop this further. It has been used as a 'dumping' ground area by the former house owners and has got to be cleared out. Ground ivy cover also has to be cleared. Woods to me are spiritual places for recharging my energies (Fengshui in the garden). (Woman, Teacher, Haywards Heath, East Sussex)

highlighted and seem to be part of a series of practices that absorbs the respondents into their gardens.

Whilst Box 3 indicates how different elements of nature contribute to restorative experiences, the quotes in Box 4 suggest that personal connections with nature are also constructed using all the senses. The quotes in Boxes 3 and 4 collectively indicate that highly personalised feelings about nature and the garden were for some respondents based on a complex interaction between nature, the senses, self-identity and personal creativity. The last two quotes in Box 4 indicate that these connections to nature are projects to be worked on and must be made and re-made. The need to continually 're-make' nature goes beyond the therapeutic and psychological experience of the garden outlined by Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) and involves on-going renegotiations of nature with lifestyle, creative ambitions and the function of the garden. Not surprisingly, such a personalised project will be affected by contradictions and compromises whether linked to neighbours, the need to work or in the case of quote 3 in Box 4, the sales strategies of garden centres.

Conclusions

The contemporary domestic garden may have received limited attention in housing studies but in other areas of social science commentators have recently made major claims regarding the social significance of gardens and gardening. Franklin (2002) claims that it is a key leisure activity in the Western world and in England it is central to popular culture. The empirical data presented in this paper, however, suggests it is important to be somewhat circumspect and

cautious about the degree to which gardens and gardening can enhance life and the home in late modernity. The garden may have the potential to be a site for human creativity and sensual connections to nature but it is also imbued with the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions of late modern living. A variety of secondary data suggests that a significant minority, perhaps as many as a quarter, of the UK's adults have a very strong personalised attachment to their garden and are regular gardeners. A similar proportion of adults, however, view gardening far less positively often seeing it as a chore and a form of unrewarding 'work'. Somewhere between these two contrasting sets of adults are another group who enjoy their garden but for a variety of reasons do not do much gardening. Of course, these categories of gardeners are fluid and individuals may move between them at different stages of their lives, especially since participation in gardening is much higher amongst older age groups.

Nevertheless, the qualitative findings of the research here do reveal that for a number of the respondents their garden was sited for developing sensual and embodied experiences and understandings of nature. These involved drawing on all the senses along with plants, pets, wildlife, the seasons, the elements, the landscape and the skyscape. The construction of hybrid relations with nature clearly involves interactions varying between individuals with the different components of nature. Interpreting these experiences of nature in a broader social context is rather more problematic. The therapeutic value of the garden was mentioned by a number of respondents, possibly confirming Kaplan & Kaplan's (1989) view about the restorative value of 'nearby nature'. Cohen & Taylor (1992) suggest the garden might be a site for escape. Many of the respondents sought to 'hide' in the garden, often seeking to create a sense of place or home in the process. But it is not clear about what they were hiding from; some from a fast changing world, others from domestic drudgery and still others from family members. These may be undesirable features of a 'risk' society but there is not a simple link between the garden and people's concern with environmental degradation. The limited take-up of organic gardening in the UK compared to 'containerised' and lifestyle gardens illustrates the complex relations between the garden and environmental concerns.

The findings of the research do indicate more clearly that the garden provides a distinct site for negotiating and addressing some of the paradoxes of home and domestic life in late modernity. The garden, like the home, is imbued with meanings relating to privacy and sociation but in the garden both these meanings involve compromise and sometimes disappointment, partly due to the presence of neighbours. Developing personalised relations with nature in the garden draws individuals into a similarly negotiated process that has ambiguous outcomes and potential. In this context the garden seems to be both a place in which to hide and a specific space from which to confront and understand increasing uncertainty in the social and natural world. Late modernity presents us with paradoxes and these imbue the search for 'nature' in our backyards.

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