

**'Doing Food-Knowing Food: An exploration of allotment practices and the production of knowledge through visceral engagement'**

Submitted by Rebecca Jane Sandover to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Geography in August 2013

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: .....

## Abstract

### **'Doing Food-Knowing Food: An exploration of allotment practices and the production of knowledge through visceral engagement'**

The original contribution of this thesis is through its conceptualisations of human more-than-human encounters on the allotment that break down the boundaries of subjectivities. This work extends knowledge of cultural food geography by investigating *how* people engage with the matter of the plot and learn to grow food. The conceptual tool by which this occurs is set out as processes of visceral learning within a framework of mattering. Therefore this work follows the material transformations of matter across production consumption cycles of allotment produce. This is examined through processes of bodily adaptations to the matter of the plot. The processes of growing your own food affords an opportunity to focus on the processes of doing and becoming, allowing the *how* of food growing to take centre stage (Crouch 2003, Ingold 2010, Grosz 1999). Procuring and producing food for consumption is enacted through the human more-than-human interface of bodily engagement that disrupts dualisms and revealing their complex inter-relationships, as well as the potential of visceral research (Roe 2006, Whatmore 2006, Hayes-Conroy 2008). Therefore, this is an immersive account of the procurement of food and the development of food knowledge through material, sensory and visceral becomings, which occur within a contextual frame of everyday food experiences.

This study is contextualised in the complexities of contemporary food issues where matters of access, foodism and sustainability shape the enquiry. However the research is carried out at a micro-geographies lens of bodily engagements with food matter through grow your own practices on allotments. Growing food on new allotments is the locus of procurement reflecting a resurgence in such activities following from the recent rise in interest in local food, alternative food networks (AFNs) and food as a conduit for celebrity in the media (Dupuis & Goodman 2005, Lockie & Kitto 2000, Winter 2003). Moreover, the current spread of the allotment is examined as transgressing urban/rural divides and disrupting traditional perceptions of plot users. This allows investigations into spaces where community processes can unfold, providing a richly observed insight into the broadened demographics of recent allotment life.

## **Acknowledgements:**

This work is dedicated to the memory of Gerald Leonard Sandover and John Storey, as well as the futures of Arran Horton and Bodhi Horton.

Many thanks must be offered to the inspirational supervision given for this project by Ian Cook and Henry Buller, a powerful thinking assemblage. The stimulating working environment of the postgraduate Geography community has also been much appreciated for discussing methods, approaches and literature as well as obstacles and difficulties. The NAMBIO research group has offered an especially fertile forum for theoretical discussions.

On a personal level several friends stand out as offering significant support both practically and through friendship. This includes Deb Hart, Mary Furlong, Liz Charles, Keri Jenner, David Harvey and Mary Hilson. However David must be singled out as my inspiration for returning to academia. Thanks too to Arran and Bodhi for putting up with my work and providing much support.

This work could not have happened without my wonderful participants at Lytes Cary and Somerton Allotments. Special thanks go to John Watts at Somerton for providing a warm welcome to the site and to The National Trust for access to Lytes Cary. However the work of Somerset Community Food has underpinned this enquiry and I wish them many future years of successful campaigning and work on food access. Thanks especially to Linda Hull at SCF for supporting this work.

Lastly, none of this could have happened without Helen Sandover and Gerald Sandover, thanks and love as ever.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>CHAPTER ONE DOING FOOD AND KNOWING FOOD</b>	9
1:0 Food Knowledge -Food Origins	
1:01 Thesis Structure	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO- THE LITERATURES OF KNOWING AND DOING FOOD</b>	17
INTRODUCTION	17
2.00 CONTEXTUALISING SPACES OF DOING FOOD	17
2.01 The Rise of Supermarkets	18
2.02 Food Retail Change and Social Change	20
2.03 Conceptualising the global and local in spaces of food production	21
<u>1: Reconnections Through Food: Problematising the Local</u>	23
2.10 INTRODUCTION	23
2.11 Local Food: Emplacing Producer/Consumer Relations	24
2.12 Quality Assurance and the Consumer Turn	27
2.13 Spatial Responsibility: The Consumer Turn	28
2.14 Spatial Responsibility, Sustainability and Social Justice	
2.15 Summary: Place, Territoriality, Networks and Local Food	33
<u>2: Material Bodies: Doing, connecting, Becoming</u>	
2.20 INTRODUCTION	35
2.21 The Call for Embodied Food Geographies	36
2.22 Embodiment and Feminist Geographies	
2.23 Traversing theoretical boundaries - Roe's Things Become Food	39
2.24 Traversing theoretical boundaries - Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroys' Visceral Geographies	41
2.25 Agency- Going Beyond the Human	42
2.26 Agency -Becomings and Connectivities	
2.27 Becomings in Practice	48
<u>3: Allotment Practices: Creating Landscapes</u>	50
2.30 INTRODUCTION	50
2.31 Conceptualising the Allotment	50
2.32 Allotments: Social and Historical Context	52
2.33 The Allotment: Literatures Bridging Nature-Society	55
2.34 Allotment Practices: Growing and Becoming	57
2.35 The Allotment: Cultural Shifts - Cultural Continuums	60
<b>CHAPTER THREE- AN EMPLACED METHODOLOGY</b>	66
3:0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:	66
3:10 INTRODUCTION	66
3:20 ESTABLISHING THE RESEARCH	67
3:21- Establishing the sites	69
3:30 INTRODUCING THE FIELDSITES: LYLES CARY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION	71
3:31 Situating Lytes Cary	72
3:32 Establishment of Lytes Cary Allotments	72
3:33 Management of Lytes Cary Allotment Association	73
3:34 Activities at Lytes Cary	75
3:40 INTRODUCING THE FIELDSITES: SOMERTON ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION	77
3:41 Establishment of Somerton Allotment Association	78
3:42 Management of Somerton Allotment Association	79
3:43 Activities at Somerton Allotments	80
3:50 METHODOLOGICAL LITERATURE	82
i) Problematising Ethnography	82
ii) Folding Theory into Practice	83

3:60 PHD RESEARCH FIELDWORK PRACTICE	87
3:61 The Fieldwork Process -Allotment Ethnographies	87
i) Preparatory Work	87
ii) Initial Talks	88
iii) Participant Observation and Auto Ethnography	90
iv) In Depth Interviews	91
v) Cooking Methods	93
3:70 DEVELOPING METHODS FOR HUMAN MORE-THAN-HUMAN RESEARCH	98
3:80 CODING ANALYSIS	100
3:90 CONCLUSION	
<b>CHAPTER 4- PLOT ORDERINGS: KNOWING THE 'LOCAL' AND DOING FOOD</b>	<b>103</b>
4:0 INTRODUCTION	104
4:10 THE TIME AND SPACE FOR GROWING	105
4:11 Beans Fighting for Themselves	106
4:12 Family Affects: 'You see such an idyllic life and you just want it.'	110
4:13 The Lure of the Plot	119
4:14 Resistance & Resilience- 'It's taste, the big part is ethical and sustainable'.	124
4:15 'I do like to know where things are from'	127
4:20 ALLOTMENT PRACTICES -ORDER, CHAOS & TRANSFORMATION	133
4:21 Plot Aesthetics - 'none of that's what its about for me'	138
4:22 Bounding Life/ Bounding Self - Pests, weeds and the dance of adaption	144
4:30 ANALYSING PLOT ORDERINGS AND DOING FOOD	150
4:31 Doing Food-Doing Culture	
<b>CHAPTER 5- MATTERING: VISCERAL ENCOUNTERS OF HUMAN MORE-THAN-HUMAN FROM PLOT TO PLATE</b>	<b>156</b>
5:0 INTRODUCTION	157
5:10 FIRST DIGGINGS	158
5:11 THE MATTER OF MATTER	161
i) Groundwork	161
ii) First Plantings	163
iii) Unwanted Life	165
5:20 LIFE UNBOUND	172
5:30 SEASONAL TRANSITIONS	179
5:40 PLOT TO PLATE-TRANSFORMING & TASTING MATTER	181
5:41 TRANSFORMING MATTER	186
i) Sharing Tastes, Sharing Know-How	186
ii) Community Cook-Ins - Sharing Tastes at Somerton Allotments Open Day	189
iii) Community Cook-Ins - School children experiencing food at Lytes Cary Allotments	196
5:50 SEASONAL PLOT NOTES -HARVESTS, TIDYING AND FORWARD PLANNING	205
5:60 SHORTER DAYS ON THE PLOT, LONGER SPELLS IN THE KITCHEN	214
5:70 CLOSING THE SEASON	
	221
<b>CONCLUDING CHAPTER</b>	<b>223</b>
DOING FOOD- KNOWING FOOD THROUGH MATTERING AND VISCERAL LEARNING	
	223
6:0 INTRODUCTION	223
6:01 RETURNING TO FOOD ORIGINS	223
6:20 DOING ETHNOGRAPHY	228
i) Emplaced Ethnography	228
ii) Embodied Ethnography	229

iii) Cooking as Method	230
6:30 FOOD ASSEMBLAGES	234
6:40 PROCESSES OF MATTERING	236
6:50 ALTERING MATTER BEING ALTERED BY MATTER	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY	243
APPENDIX 1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	252
APPENDIX 2 RESEARCH DATA	254
APPENDIX 3 CODING ANALYSIS	255
APPENDIX 4 SOMERTON ALLOTMENTS SITE MAP	263

## **List of Figures**

(Where page numbers are not shown the figure is on the same page as the preceding figure)

### **Chapter Three**

Fig 1 Map of Somerset	p71
Fig 2 Map of Lytes Cary Estate	p72
Fig 3 Photo looking N/W across Lytes Cary February 2011	p75
Fig 4 Photo Lytes Cary Communal Shepherd's Hut looking west	p74
Fig 5 Map Somerton Allotments at Ashen Cross south of Somerton	p78
Fig 6 Map Arrow showing exact location of Somerton Allotments	p78
Fig 7 Photo Somerton Allotments April 2011 looking west	p81
Fig 8 Photo The Community Cook-in Somerton Allotments 10/09/11	p82

### **Chapter Four**

Fig 1 Photo Lytes Cary Allotment Plot	p104
Fig 2 Photo Lytes Cary Allotments with Shepherd's Hut	p140
Fig 3 Photo Lytes Cary information board on communal plot	p141
Fig 4 Michael Lytes Cary July 2011	p148

### **Chapter Five**

Fig 1 Photo Lytes Cary George planting potatoes	p157
Fig 2 Photo Somerton Allotments preparing the plot early season 2011	
Fig 3 Hoe image & product description from Wolf Garten tools online	p168
Fig 4 Photo the planted Crown Prince	p176
Fig 5 Photo The first no-dig bed	p177
Fig 6 Photo First Harvest	p184
Fig 7 Photo Unwashed carrots	
Fig 8 Photo Cooked allotment potato wedges & bean sauce	p185
Fig 9 Photo Allotment potato wedges	
Fig 10 Photo Harvesting chard	p194
Fig 11 Photo Preparing the salad	
Fig 12 Photo Cooking Dhal	
Fig 13 Photo Adding colour to the salad	p195
Fig 14 Photo Community eating	
Fig 15 Photo Dishes ready to serve	
Fig 16 Photo Picking the crops	p202
Fig 17 Photo Showing children how to grate carrots and beetroot	
Fig 18 Photo Checking on safety as the children learn to chop onions	
Fig 19 Photo Children making the salad	p204
Fig 20 Photo The soup ready to eat	
Fig 21 Photo Gathering the flowers for the green salad	p205
Fig 22 Photo Serving the salads	
Fig 23 Photo Eating on the plots	p206
Fig 24 Photo Early September harvest	p207
Fig 25 Photo Neighbouring plot -Harry & Marion's chicken coop	p208

Fig 26 Photo The grown Crown Prince	p210
Fig 27 Photo The fading plant insitu	
Fig 28 Photo Freshly harvested first sowing carrots	p211
Fig 29 Photo October harvest	
Fig 30 Photo Storing potatoes	p212
Fig 31 Photo Harvesting carrots and butternut squash	
Fig 32 Photo Cooked seitan and squash roast	p220
Fig 33 Photo Steaming purple and green Brussels Sprouts	
Fig 34 Photo Dinner is served	p221
Fig 35 Photo Eating the allotment sourced Christmas dinner	

### Conclusion Chapter

Fig 1 Photo Plot produce Butternut Squash	p227
Fig 2 Photo Squash still growing	
Fig 3 Photo Roasting Squash	p228



# CHAPTER ONE

## Doing Food and Knowing Food

*'Food is currently the subject of much debate and controversy in the United Kingdom...Despite all this, consumers are often accused of having 'lost' their cooking skills and knowledge about food origins, preparation and nutritional values. Food is abundant, of consistent quality and often cheap, and yet it can also cause anxiety and illness.'* (Kneafsey, Cox et al. 2008: 3)

*'Few things taste as good as fresh from the garden as carrots and spinach...I grow because it feels fantastic to do so-it is a magical, almost alchemical, process that allows me to know what I'm feeding my family and lets them connect what they eat with the beds they can see while they are eating it.'* (Rob Hopkins in Pinkerton & Hopkins 2009: 18)

### 1:0 FOOD KNOWLEDGE - FOOD ORIGINS

This thesis is concerned with the processes through which we come to know food and how processes of doing food affect this knowledge. It is also concerned with the material of food and its transit and transformations through food supply chains at both extended and intimate levels. This chapter will firstly provide contextual theorisations of knowing food and doing food, before setting out the chapter structure of this thesis.

Soup that is bought from a supermarket for an easy lunch or dinner has its contents printed on the label that is read or glanced at when on the shelf. In contrast a soup cooked at home from bought vegetables provides the cook with more knowledge on how it was processed into a consumable meal. Both methods provide differing knowledges. For the supermarket soup knowledge of its contents and nutritional qualities are given but the locations where it was produced or processed are not. By printing scientific categories of nutrition on the label, codified and standardised knowledge is provided that is replicated from container to container. In contrast the homemade soup may be made with an assemblage of ingredients to hand to form an ad-hoc recipe for everyday cooking. Or the ingredients may have been bought specifically to follow a recipe that is unfamiliar to the cook. If following a specific recipe, it is possible that the nutritional contents of the dish are stated. Commonly, though in everyday cooking a homemade soup would be made with an unpredictable array of components to reflect the cook's desires or the produce to hand. This homemade soup would represent tacit knowledge where the specific nutritional value remains unknown. Another

knowledge difference would occur if the cook had information of where and how the produce was grown. If the vegetables were bought from a known farmer who used certification assurance schemes such as organic, not only would the location of production be known but also material knowledge of the vegetables would provide a basis for more fully knowing the soup cooked. In this case a knowledge gap begins to emerge between the soups as in the standardised food systems material origins are mostly hidden in contrast to the home cooked soup using organic produce.

What if the homemade soup was created using allotment grown produce? How would this change the knowledge of it? What if the allotmenteer did not really have growing expertise, how then could material transformations result in a soup? What if the squash was grown from straggling plants rescued from a hardware store and placed in stony, dry ground -could they really result in a harvest for cooking? What would these processes tell us about globalised food, access to local food and the ability to know the plot from which it was raised? These questions will be addressed throughout this thesis and addressed in depth in the final chapters.

Conventional methods of food provision presently exist within complex and extended systems of supply. The extended nature of the supply chain is hidden from most consumers with the development of standardised food products that are commonly available throughout the year in the UK's supermarkets. However the onset of food scares in the UK over the previous three decades have shaken consumer confidence in conventional processes of food supply, leading to the rise of alternative modes of provision. Alternative processes such as Local Food, organic food and fairtrade offer systems where consumers have greater knowledge of the modes and spaces of production. This has led to examinations of alternative food systems within the food geographies literature that set out the taxonomy of alternative food systems (Marsden et al. 2000, Morris & Buller 2003) which has led to the rapidly evolving focus of food geographies. This has also included explorations of the socio-cultural circuits within conventional food provision itself (Cook 2004).

However these alternative systems have been accused of being elitist and inaccessible to all but the wealthier consumers (Dupuis & Goodman 2005, Winter 2003). In recent years the economic recession has impacted the UK organic food market with 2009 seeing the first fall

in organic product sales since records began in 1993. The fall was of 13%, setting a trend of falling sales every year since<sup>1</sup>. However this fall in sales has been matched by the surge in people turning to growing their own food both at home and on allotments. This popularity of grow-your-own systems has been augmented by the attention given to them by celebrity chefs. TV programmes from Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Jamie Oliver and Carol Klein have highlighted how to grow fruit and vegetables and how to cook them too. In 2011 42% of British adults claimed that they would be growing their own produce. However the poll conducted by Gardeners' World also showed that many of these new gardeners do not have basic growing knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This reveals that issues of knowing food are also a concern for new growers.

Knowledge of how to grow food is taken for granted and fails to register in academic investigations into gardening and growing produce. However within food charities and local community NGOs, there is much concern in promoting grow-your-own practices, as well as cooking skills. This is notable within The Transition Town movement that calls the need for practical knowledge for everyday self-provisioning *'The great re-skilling'*:

*'If communities are to reclaim food production and supply chains from the environmentally damaging and nutritionally reckless systems of today, people within them need to be reskilled...'* (Pinkerton & Hopkins 2009: 35)

This is one perspective that seeks to extend growing skills (as well as others) in order to address perceived environmental concerns. Other food growing projects are based on concern for community health, as well as achieving access to fresh food (Somerset Community Food Report 2008).

Knowledge of how to grow food is not an issue addressed in food geographies literature, other food knowledges are explored, such as the development of product trust through quality assurance schemes that characterise alternative food networks (AFNs) (Marsden et al. 2000).

---

<sup>1</sup> Soil Association (2013) -organic sales market share available (online) <http://www.soilassociation.org/marketreport> accessed 28/07/2013

<sup>2</sup> BBC Media Centre (2011) -Gardeners' World Launches Harvest Week available (online) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/worldwide/130911gw\\_harvest\\_week.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/worldwide/130911gw_harvest_week.html) accessed 28/07/13

Morgan and Murdoch (2000) explore the differences in knowledge between standardised and alternative systems. This highlights the difference between codified and tacit knowledges that depict those systems. By exploring the changes in agriculture after World War Two show how scientific knowledge began to supersede local knowledge through a drive to industrially produce food based on knowledge of chemicals and technological innovation. Changes in farming knowledge have been reflected in consumer's knowledge of food. Extensive supply chains that distribute food products globally has resulted in the consumer in standardised food systems being reliant on brand, certification and labelling for knowledge of their food products. In the context of UK food scares this has led the concerned consumer to look for heightened forms of food knowledge by buying directly from farmers, veg boxes etc.

How much we know of the full material transformations produce has undergone when consuming food is limited by its modes of production and labelling. Knowledge of food can also be limited when we 'do' food, as in when we cook it at home. By an exploration of the different knowledges inherent in two contrastingly provisioned soups, a question can be posed as to how can we fully know our food from a material, life-history perspective? This will be responded to in the concluding chapter. Through this perspective on knowing food a question is posed that by growing produce on an allotment in this study, will I be able to demonstrate full material knowledge of produce grown and the following cooked meals? This enquiry embeds allotment research into literature on AFNs and agro-food by exploring the extents to which food is known, trusted and providing an alternative to supermarket produce. In following the full material pathways of produce as it is transformed from seed to harvest and to cooked meals, a number of further questions are raised as to how do allotmenters learn to grow food and how do food *doings* develop theorisations of nature-culture and the interactions of agencies on the plot? Growing on an allotment involves bodily performativities with nature, which provides the foundation to explore nature-culture engagements and to explore how people learn to grow food.

This enquiry forms the basis for developing research questions for this thesis:

*-How does this study extend knowledge of nature-society relations in the space of the allotment?*

*-How is practical knowledge enacted in such engagements?*

*-How does this study extend knowledge of the role of material visceral encounters in bodily performativities?*

*-How allotment practices explore alternative food provision through emplaced visceral methods.*

## **1:01 THESIS STRUCTURE**

This thesis follows the traditional structure of literature review, methodology enquiry, empirical chapters and concluding analysis and discussion.

An exploration of the knowledges of food is begun in Chapter Two that sets out the range of literatures that underpin this research and is divided into three sections. Drawing on from this chapter, the introductory section explores the literatures that set out the rise of global food supply chains. Exploring the rise of the supermarket through the lens of globalisation reveals the nested nature of spaces of food. Local food and other AFNs are set out in many works as responses to global food. Therefore this section explores the relational spaces of food to examine notions of the global and the local. In this context, the impacts of the global food trade are set out at local, rural scale.

Chapter two section one investigates in depth the literatures of AFNs and cultural food geographies. Key elements of AFNs are examined, including notions of consumers' prime concerns of trust, quality and transparency in the origins of their food. The rise in consumer demand for transparency of food production is reflected in the changing focus of agro-food literature as in Goodman (2004) and Lockie (2002), setting in train the consumer-turn in agro-food texts. The chapter then explores alternative ways of producing local food through examining Kneafsey et al. 's (2008) work that includes the consumer involvement in the production process, as in community supported agriculture (CSAs). This section ends on a question of the promise of alterity within AFNs and whether this question remains of interest to agro-food literature today.

Knowing food is investigated at another level in section two of Chapter Two by examining the literature at the level of the bodily engagements. This provides an investigation of food concerns through a nature-culture lens. The embodied nature of consumption is explored through the literature of Goodman 2001 and Whatmore 2006. Whatmore's (2006) paper is discussed in depth with its call not only to rematerialise research but also acknowledge the role of the 'more-than-human' within food systems. This raises questions about *how we know*

food and where does this knowledge enact? This is explored through literatures on embodiment.

This leads to an exploration of key matters of nature-culture enquiries, that of the agency of matter, the interconnectivities between matters, the nature of processual change and the performativities of change as set out in texts of doing and becoming (Crouch 2003, Nash 2000). Examination of these literatures provide a foundation into the prime concerns of this study, allowing for a questioning of the ways that knowledge is developed through performative material engagements.

Where food knowledge is enacted is examined in section three of Chapter Two, which takes the lens of enquiry to the field of the allotment itself. By taking a historical sweep of key moments in allotment history, a socio-cultural grounding is provided that can connect with rural lives today. This discussion investigates how allotments can provide spaces of cultural change as well as cultural continuum. During the late 20th Century the key elements of allotment resurgence are charted that provided a foundation to the rise in allotment uptake recently witnessed. This perspective then gives way to nature-culture considerations that undergird this enquiry of the nature of human more-than-human interconnectivities on the plot.

Chapter Three provides the methodological framework of this study and begins with the research questions, which are set out above. The theoretical underpinnings of the research are investigated through analysis of the overarching texts shaping this enquiry such as Law 2004 and Pink 2009. These texts bring out key questions of this study, namely how do we engage with the messiness of life on the plot? These concerns are investigated by a discussion of the methods of fieldwork chosen. This leads to an examination of the processes by which this research was developed within the contextual frame of local food projects. By following the work of Somerset Community Food, a Somerset food charity, this fieldwork was established.

The following two sections provide details of the sites of fieldwork themselves. This highlights how this work responds to Pink's 2009 call for the emplacing of research, by providing detailed information of the two allotment sites and the activities undertaken on them. The chapter then turns to an examination of the literatures of methodology underlying this fieldwork. By investigating the literatures of ethnography the need for fieldwork to be

self-reflexive and attending to the sensory mechanisms of the body is analysed to explore how ethnographic methods can investigate the messiness of life on the plot. Through considerations of sensory, bodily enquires, it is intended to investigate the full encounters of nature-culture on the plot by exploring the sensory and tacit realms. This methodological chapter then progresses to set out the methods undertaken in this research.

Chapter four marks the first of the thorough empirical chapters. The focus of this chapter is to explore in detail the data gathered through ethnographic methods that focused on talking to allotmenters on both allotments. This chapter places emphasis on the voices of the allotmenters from both sites through an examination of the key themes from coding of plot orderings, as well as the key motivations for growing- rural change and continuity, sustainability, a place to be, food transparency and resistance to the supermarket. The investigations set out in chapter four provide a starting point for answering questions on how knowledge is developed through embodied gardening practices. The dichotomy of issues of control and growth that allotmenters tackle is explored to highlight the impacts of nature and allotmenter attempts to both control and utilise it. The chapter ends with an analysis of findings that explore issues of orderings on the plots and the types of knowledges enacted by allotmenters that respond to the coding themes.

Chapter Five takes a deep auto-ethnographic account of experiences of growing on an allotment. The full impact of the physical labour, the material immersion into nature and the rollercoaster ride of learning and failing to grow and manage the plot are explored. By adopting an ethnographic narrative the chapter brings the reader close to the matter of growing to explore the full bodily, sensory engagements. By bringing the material of the plot into the kitchen, the full supply chain of allotment produce can be represented and investigated. The chapter ends with an exploration of self-provisioning through plot practices via the example of cooking for Christmas dinner as well as setting out the full cycle of growing by discussions of the end of the season and looking to the next. This chapter also provides key insights into how knowledge is developed on the plot through visceral learning and so providing opportunities to develop theorisations of nature-culture through plot practices.

Theorisations of the central findings of this thesis are developed in depth in the concluding chapter. This provides an opportunity to go back to the research questions to set out how the fieldwork and empirics of this research can add to understandings of nature-culture by immersing with nature at the plots. This is specifically developed through an examination of bodily immersions in and adaption to the nature of the plot. These considerations allow for a full investigation of how plot practices reveal differing types of knowledge enacted and developed on the plot. By analysing the findings of this research an investigation is also made into how this work takes forward understandings of AFNs literature and that of cultural food geographies. In particular the chapter sets out how allotment practices can add to understandings of alternative food networks and modes of accessing food.

This thesis is providing an original contribution to the knowledges of food geographies and nature-culture theorisations by investigating at an intimate bodily level, the processes by which practical knowledge is developed through plot practices. By examining in depth the complex interconnections between human and more-than-human through plot practices conceptualisations of these encounters are made into the full ecology of the plot, within which the allotmentee is placed. Through this, the questions raised in this chapter of how we know food can be thoroughly investigated by following the material transformations of matter on the plot.



# **CHAPTER TWO- THE LITERATURES OF KNOWING AND DOING FOOD**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **2.00 CONTEXTUALISING SPACES OF DOING FOOD**

The recent upsurge in interest in growing food on allotments is seen here within a context of a questioning of and seeking an alternative to the ubiquitous dominance of the supermarket that is characterised as selling globally sourced products. Such attempts to find an alternative to supermarket produce can be seen as consumers seeking modes of control over their consumption of food. This rise is established in this introduction before being explored through the literatures on Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in section one of this chapter that investigates responses to global food supply chains. Section one examines the promise of alterity in AFNs through the key characteristics of consumer drive for local food that is the pursuit of trust, quality and transparency in alternatively provisioned food. This literature sets out the varied practices of resistance to global food through organic produce, local food, fair trade products and other certification assurance schemes. Section two brings the examination into food relationships down to the realm of the body to explore the reconnection with food at an embodied level. This draws on the literatures of section one to move into an investigation into the literatures of nature-culture and embodiment. Section three brings the consideration of food relationships to the space of the allotment. By exploring the socio-historical context of allotment growing the recent rise in allotment growing is set out. The section then moves on to explore literatures that relate to the key aspects of this enquiry, that is the processes of person-nature interactions on the plot.

However within this literature there is a failure to explore the depth of engagement with food required through grow your own practices exemplified by allotment growing. Whilst responses to global food seek to restore modes of 'knowing' food, grow your own practices illustrate taking this process further by 'doing' food. Therefore this chapter will progress to explore engagements with matter through literatures on embodiment, relational materialism and becomings in section two. Section three immerses within the literatures of the allotment and growing to provide a comprehensive grounding in the history and cultural practices of

allotment growing whilst also exploring notions of human more-than-human assemblages through growing food.

However this introduction seeks to firstly explore the contexts of allotment practices through setting out the rise in supermarkets and the implications ensuing for consumers' abilities to *know* food purchased and consumed. This rise is given a spatial context by exploring the growth of global food supply chains through perspectives on globalisation and asking where is the local? Within this study the local is rurally based and so this introduction will proceed to investigate the impacts of these changes of food procurement within a rural context from a social-cultural perspective.

### **2.01 The Rise of Supermarkets**

Burgoine et al. (2009) characterise the rise of supermarkets as the 'major retail revolution since the 1960s' that has resulted in the domination of the food retail sector by four to five large supermarkets. This domination of the sector saw an increase of the largest brands- from a 60% market share of the food retail sector in 1990 that rose to 75.6% in 2011 (Burgoine et al. 2009, TNSGlobal 2011)<sup>3</sup>. However, the supermarkets themselves are mere nodes in global industrial food production networks. Helena Norberg-Hodge (2002) describes such global food trading as being based on the premise that different nations focus on the optimum monocultures of crops that each country or region can produce cheaply, which are then traded internationally in order to import products optimally produced elsewhere. This system she argues, results in the homogenising of tastes through the ubiquity of food products in this system from store to store throughout the year, resulting in the diminishment of seasonal eating. Another feature of this system are the industrial production techniques creating mass-produced convenience foods that are often sold cheaply. This has created calls for the reformulation of such products that are associated with high fat high sugar content to halt the rise of type 2 diabetes, cancer and obesity (Egger & Swinburn 1997, Caraher & Coveney 2003).

Sage (2012: 21-24) investigates these production and consumption shifts within the context of the rise of transnational corporations in the 1970s, which developed globalising trading

---

<sup>3</sup> By 1990, 60% of the UK 'grocery market' was controlled by five food retailers Sainsbury, Tesco, Argyll (Safeway), Asda and Gateway (Somersetfield)- Burgoine et al.2009. By 2011 [Tesco](#), [Sainsbury's](#), [Asda](#) & Morrisons shared 75.6% of the UK grocery market –TNSGlobal, 2011

trends. Globalisation was aided by the development of neoliberal economic structures such as The World Trade Organisation that sought to optimise US and European trading relations. Technological change underpins these developments with the ongoing development and global sourcing of machinery, supply systems and biotechnology for crops affecting current trends. Central to these emerging socio-technical tendencies is the commoditisation of natural resources as a means to generate profit through food.

This domination of the food retail sector by globally sourced agriculture has resulted in the counter-movement of local food and direct selling as an alternative to such standardised products. Local food trading networks are perceived as being more traceable and sustainably produced providing alternative retail arenas for those consumers wanting greater knowledge of food provenance. However, the rise of interest in local food is not only within this context as a counter to the rising supermarket domination of the retail sector. Whilst many have turned to local food initiatives as a response to the perceived standardisation of supermarket food, the arguably greater impact has been that of recent food scares. The 1980s BSE (Bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in beef and Salmonella in eggs along with the widespread Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in 2001 have also formed part of the turn to local food as discussed by Morris & Buller (2003) and Kneafsey et al. (2008). Such concerns of food contamination have been recently augmented by the 2013 horsemeat crisis in the UK and Ireland where processed beef products from several large supermarkets were found to contain matter derived from horse carcasses prompting a nationwide investigation into sources of food products<sup>4</sup>.

Such concerns with the material composition of food are reflected in the local food sector's recognisable food assurance labels detailing origins of production, such as PDO (protected designation of origin) or methods of production such as with the Organic label. Such regulated certification provides a degree of food becoming *knowable* to consumers in both its provenance and material origins. However consumers' ability to know even these products is limited by labels or brand marketing. Trust and traceability is built up through taste, consistency of quality and brand marketing. The work of Jackson (2010) reflects such food concerns following the decade of food scares by locating everyday cultural doings through

---

<sup>4</sup> Food Standards Agency 2013- Horsemeat Investigation accessed July 16 2013 available online at - <http://www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/monitoring/horse-meat/- .UeWxRRzGpII>

the professional and private voices of food anxieties. Here individual responsibility for food safety is explored through life history interviews with food professionals and private individuals, where notions of anxiety, risk and responsibility are developed. Jackson and his team's pioneering research investigating relationships with food '*in an age of anxiety*', have sought to explore the junctures of culture, economy and of moral and political economies through the voices of food consumers and food professionals. Such work highlights the unfolding, processual nature of cultural change, enabling such food relationships to be seen as cultural 'doings', providing a method of understanding societal codes of meanings through everyday experiences. However the findings conclude that consumers and professionals alike look to blame others when things go wrong with food safety.

It is within this febrile politico-economic environment that a continued rising number of the adult population is turning to growing their own food, with 1 in 6 having started to grow their own food in the last four years as shown in a poll by The City of London and the membership of Landshare, the UK online forum linking growers with owners of spare land, that has risen to 69,148 (Landshare 14/6/12)<sup>5</sup>. Through such actions consumers are bypassing commodity systems by becoming partially self-reliant for food, creating methods for more fully knowing their food and challenging perceptions of what is 'local food'. This rise is common to both rural and urban settings, however this study is located on two new allotment sites within rural Somerset.

## **2.02 Food Retail Change and Social Change**

The rise of the supermarket and global food supply chains has had further impacts within rural settings. Rural communities that historically relied on agriculture for employment have seen employment in agriculture fall by a third between 1990-2006, with agriculture providing only 2.6% of employment even in rural locations in 2006 (Atterton & Ward 2007). These changes have impacts at a personal level that combined with the in-migration of skilled workers into rural areas has changed the nature of the rural economy. With the spread of internet connectivity the division between the urban and rural in terms of possible employment is blurring. Such developments are providing new opportunities for work in the rural whilst also breaking down land-based working heritages.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.landshare.net/> Landshare is a charity established in 2009 by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall as a web tool for matching people looking for land to grow food with people with land to share (gardens, fields, community spaces, allotments etc.). Alongside this people already growing sign up to be part of a food growing community.

Such developments of employment change and the rise of the local food sector within rural locations in response to internet global connectivity and a resistance to global food supply chains, illustrates the nested nature of local and global space. One cannot be said to exist separately from the other, the local flows into the global and vice versa. Addressing this, the work of Massey (2004) and Morgan (2010) focus specifically on the relational space of local/global interactions. Massey explores perceptions of space where the local is valorised as authentic. As an antidote to this, she provides the example of Gibson-Graham's work on enplacing global practices, highlighting the global in the local and vice versa, giving a relational perspective on local/global space. Morgan's work brings such local/global considerations to the specifics of food ethics by problematising the criticisms of global food spaces, through a discussion of the value of Fair Trade products traded across the globe that are commonly held up as promoting more ethical working practices through this international certification regime. Through a lens of sustainability, Morgan contests the assumption of local food as inherently sustainable, particularly as parameters of local food categories are contested, such as organic food and health, or local food and sustainability. These discussions allow for the spatial complexities of food networks to be brought to the fore, disturbing the spatial simplifications within media food debates on 'good' and 'bad' food. The relational nature of space is emphasised through such food networks, strengthening the argument for the global within the local and vice versa. However, whilst the global or local is enplaced through discussions on food here, such ontologies remain positioned in space that is 'out there', not reflecting the material nature of food enplaced in the spatialities of bodily engagements. By coming down to the space of the body, we can bring the global/local into the personal, fully describing the complexity of spatial and material scales operating through engagements with food.

### **2.03 Conceptualising the global and local in spaces of food production**

The discourse of globalisation serves as a backdrop to all considerations of agro-food change as highlighted by the global nature of food supply chains, however, the conceptualisations of such an important backdrop are not commonly engaged with across the literature. Therefore, whilst local food is a key constituent of this study, globalisation as exemplified by supermarket dominance of the sector remains a background feature that requires consideration as a scene setter for agro-food debates as eloquently put by Allen & Massey (1995) cited O'Riordan 2001: 37:

*“If we wish to understand the local character of our lives, the changing nature of the places in which we live, we have to grasp both the wider, global context of which we are part and what it is that makes us distinctively local...”*

It has been noted by many including Voisey & O’Riordan (2001) that globalisation is multi-faceted, it is not one process but is made up of differing dimensions that are not all concurrently relevant to individual understandings of it. They state that processes of globalisation effect power relations within and between states, which in this study would be broadened to understand power-relations between producers and consumers at differing scales of food procurement. Of key importance here is Voisey & O’Riordan’s position that globalisation and localisation are not separate or countering trends, indeed, localisation is seen as a part of globalising dynamics, providing processes for ‘*self-determination and democratization*’ (Voisey & O’Riordan 2001: 37) such as in the form of food/land campaigns like La Via Campesina<sup>6</sup> or collective food projects such as CSAs (Community-Supported Agriculture) common in America and growing in number in the UK.

Indeed Massey (2004) views this problematising of global/local terms as a characteristic of relational space, where each are intrinsically part of the other:

*“For in this imagination ‘places’ are criss-crossings in the wider power-geometries which constitute both themselves and ‘the global’. In this view local places are not simply always the victims of the global...For places are also the moments through which the global is constituted, invented, coordinated, produced. They are ‘agents’ of globalisation.” Massey 2004: 11*

Thus Massey calls for the processes of globalisation to be ‘emplaced’, this way local responses to the global can be described revealing the varied nature of the global in the local. One particularly useful aspect of Massey’s work is I believe, her ability to convey the dynamic nature of global processes, revealing a continuum of political, economic and cultural processes of change that have effects at all scales. This focus on change embeds here the dynamics of temporal-spatial processes creating potentials for cultural change.

By bringing in the perspective of globalisation literature, the demand for local food can be seen to be part of, not counter to globalisation dynamics. Heley & Jones (2012) highlight these processes of rural change through globalisation by discussing the reducing domination

---

<sup>6</sup> La Via Campesina (2012) -The International Peasants' Movement (online) Available via <http://viacampesina.org/en/> accessed 12/11/12

by one agricultural industry in localities being replaced with the development of ‘complex assemblages’ of economic, political and social relations.

These debates reveal the complexity of globalisation issues and the importance of the dominance of the supermarket brands in relation to agro-food studies including perspectives on local food that is investigated in the following section of this chapter. However, key here for a contextualisation of this study is the role of processual cultural change that occurs as a by-product of the temporal-spatial dynamic of globalisation and the relational nature of space creating widespread effects. This study works within this described field to focus upon these effects in the realm of everyday relationships with food through the enhanced spaces of bodily ‘doing’ food by means of allotment practices. Through respecting these contextual considerations, it is also intended to combine cultural food geographies with bodily-politics via a visceral approach in order to explore practices that rematerialise food through everyday doings of food.

## **1: Reconnections Through Food: Problematising the Local**

*“Food is no longer polarized conceptually as totem or fetish, but emerges as an arena of struggle, as well as a realm of connectivity.”* Goodman & Dupuis 2002:17.

### **2.10 INTRODUCTION**

The discussion of the tensions between the global and local in food procurement provides an opportunity to break down the perception of their separation in scalar readings. Allotment practices occur within these tensions as an alternative mode of food procurement, reflecting the rise of interest and trading in local food products, discussed in the literature as a part of AFNs. Local food has been perceived and promoted as an alternative to the distanced, obscurely understood production and trading methods of global food commodities that has been discredited by some in response to the various UK food/health scares of the 1980s - BSE, Salmonella in eggs and 2001 -Food and Mouth disease. Local food enterprises operate at a scale spatially familiar to consumers such as from within a certain distance. Morris and Buller (2003:561) state that:

*‘In the British context “local food” is more often defined simply by reference either to the existing socio-administrative area, such as a county, in which it is produced or to an unspecified distance factor.’*

Harris (2010) and Feagan (2007) explore the notion of place inherent in local food within AFN literature, agreeing that place and the local are social constructions, with Feagan exploring how food assurance schemes reconstitute place by valorising local food products. Therefore the place and spaces of local food are important to explore conceptually, to problematise the characterisations of the local as providing more authentic relations (Massey 2004).

Such AFNs seek primarily to reconnect producers and consumers through local, organic or sustainably produced food networks in response to consumers calls for greater transparency over quality and trust in such products which are marketed through various quality assurance certification schemes such as organic, Red Tractor, Freedom Foods etc. The reconnection of the consumer with producer through the processes of local food production has been portrayed by some writers as offering an alternative to the perceived problems of industrialised agriculture (Schlosser 2001). However, many have urged for this alterity to be problematised to examine the complexities and realities of local food initiatives and the tensions within, such as food accessibility and privilege, power inequalities in the local etc. (Goodman & Dupuis 2005, Marsden et al. 2000, Watts, Ilbery & Maye 2005, Winter 2003). Through an examination of the literature on agro-food, key aspects of this analysis come to the fore as the issues of importance, namely – what and where is the local, what is quality food and how is trust enacted in such food production? These questions all require close attention and examination, therefore, this section will investigate the literature interrogating these issues, allowing debates on social justice, consumer power, the environment and the local to emerge, enabling the promise of local food as an alternative to conventional systems to be placed under the spotlight.

Initially the context of this extensive literature will be set out, revealing the directions of debate that emerge.

### **2.11 Local Food: Emplacing Producer/Consumer Relations**

Many papers refer to the seminal UK government Curry Report of 2002 that was implemented after the aftermath of the farming crisis and agricultural health scares at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Watts, Ilbery & Maye 2005, Marsden



et al. 2000, Morris & Buller 2003, Winter 2003). Kneafsey et al. (2008: 34) explore how this report implemented initiatives to shorten and simplify food chains through its predominant theme of reconnection within the agricultural system, to repair the perceptions of a detached industry. This supported a diversifying food sector, helping to make organic and local food more visible to the public and supported by policy. Key aspects of the policy was to add value through the promotion of specialised foods, to support organic production and to encourage farm diversification, which became the mostly publically recognised outcome of these changes. Some readily took up the intentions within this policy and looked to a new order of agricultural production that would challenge the hegemony of industrial-globalised agriculture. Hines (2000) saw the possibilities of localisation as creating communities where there is '*...a reduction in poverty and inequality and an improvement in livelihoods, social infrastructure and environmental protection...*' (2000:5). However, as will be explored through the AFN literature, others have challenged this perception of the power of localisation as an idealistic and simplistic reading of change within a highly complex and evolving system. This valorisation of the local, it is argued by many including Goodman (2002) simplifies and dichotomises food debates creating a barrier to promoting a food system accessible to all (Feagan 2007, Featherstone et al. 2012, Dupuis & Goodman 2005, Lockie & Kitto 2000, Winter 2003). This section will explore the literature problematising these debates, setting out the key points revealing and contesting the promise of local food. Many scholars have established the terrain of this new food sector enabling the debate to explore the range of production types. These are commonly characterised as Local Food, which can include Organic, other forms of Organic- operating on a larger scale and non-certified locally or organically produced products. However, as Marsden et al. (2000), Kneafsey et al. (2008), Lobley et al. (2009) and Dupuis & Goodman (2005) explore, the morphology of AFN's encompass a diverse industry, operating on different scales and with different intentions. Marsden et al. (2000) provides a systematic and thorough overview of this sector outlining both the changing relationships between consumers and producers through new arrangements of food networks, as well as the taxa of these differing arrangements. They explore the socio-spatial differences in these food networks, from direct face-to-face selling to proximate and spatially extended networks, using examples to illustrate such as French champagne, Italian Parmigiano Reggiano and Welsh Llyn Peninsula Beef. Throughout they explore whether such food networks offer benefits and conclude with the still pertinent question, of whether these businesses can survive the long term. On

returning to this potentially dated paper, it is apparent that few following scholars have set out the AFN sector as clearly and appositely as Marsden et al. In particular, through extensive searches, it appears that no present work answers their question as to the long-term nature, promise or survival of this contested sector. Giving an extensive overview to these food networks is Loblely et al.'s (2009) policy document that reports to Defra on the make-up of the local and organic food industry in the UK. Usefully, this report pinpoints misconceptions some consumers have in assuming that all of organic industry operates through local-scale enterprises. They show how pervasive the supermarket has become for bulk organic sales, which breaks down the distinction of global and local operations of AFNs.

Kneafsey et al.'s (2008) substantive text 'Reconnecting Consumers, Producers and Food' offers an in depth study into the AFNs in the UK, which is seen to offer an alternative to the conventions of the supermarket. Thorough studies of these alternatives are offered in their book, allowing for a look at both sets of actors' motivations. Space is given to the context of these food networks that are investigated from several positions, by exploring consumer motivations such as an ethics of care in such relationships and acknowledging barriers to such actions being adopted by others. Of much significance is the preponderance of the voices of the consumer and producers to emerge throughout the study creating a depth to the work. These voices reveal the changed nature of producer consumer relationships through the inclusion of an AFN that operates through customer involvement in growing vegetables and committing financially to the outcomes of the harvest. Along with Lamine (2005) and Hinrichs (2000) this work reveals the complexities possible within AFN operations, which may involve consumers and producers being united in the risks of production, through CSAs or other harvest-share means.

Such examples of the variety of AFN reveal the complexities of the relationships between producer and consumer that determine the spatialities of both the operations and the producer/consumer relationships through marketing, direct sales and mutual production schemes. What is missing in the literature is an assessment of a causal link between the degrees of spatiality and the affects of trust felt by consumers. However it is important here to recognise how the variety of relationships is reflected in the spatialities linking producers and consumers, which in turn shape the nature of the food businesses and how they are perceived.

## 2.12 Quality Assurance and The Consumer Turn

AFNs have been characterised as providing food that offers perceived elements of quality that can be both replicated and trusted through production and retail systems. Scholars often equate this expansion of AFNs with a '*turn to quality*' within food systems (Watts, Ilbery & Maye 2005, Dupuis & Goodman 2005, Sage 2003). As Watts, Ilbery & Maye and Dupuis & Goodman highlight, this turn cannot be looked at in isolation as other characteristics of AFN also shape the appeal of these food products. In particular, it is often through direct sales, known producers, produce and location etc. that have established a platform through which these networks have grown, suggesting that trusting purchasing relationships themselves become a code for the consumers, representing how the food itself is produced. Such products enable consumers' insights into the methods and modes of production, allowing consumers a degree of knowing their food in ways that go beyond simply what is on the label. As Marsden et al. (2000) pinpoint, the relationship of trust between consumers and producers provides the conduit through which the expansion of the AFN market has taken place. Therefore, this quality turn cannot be examined without also including debates on trust and the consumer turn.

Quality is set out by Goodman (2004) as a reaction to the agricultural health scares such as those responded to by The Curry Report. This, he argues has produced reflexive consumers, as well as producers looking to different ways to market their produce either through short food supply chains (SFSC) or certificates/labels recognising material territoriality where traceability is key to consumer practices.

Quality and trust are terms that are not simple to define and can mean different things in different contexts. Feagan (2007) and Harris (2010) argue that place, the local and the self are co-constituted through the activities of various actors such as producers, consumers, municipal planners etc. Perceptions of quality and trust are similar social constructions, as revealed by Kneafsey et al.'s study, where many consumer motivations are discussed. Their study showed that the local economy and producer livelihoods were as much a concern to consumers as concern for the environment and eating a healthy diet. Processed, conventionally produced food was mistrusted for a lack of transparency of the production of its ingredients. This desire for knowledge about food pervades the literature on AFNs suggesting a desire to control the matter being ingested, where the rising power of the consumer reflects an increase in the individualisation of lifestyle choices. Kneafsey et al. take

these individual concerns further to examine an ethics of care throughout these retail relationships. Their study supports the idea of consumption patterns being based on:

*'...care for local economies, environments and future generations...care for health and wholeness and...care about ..transparency and integrity in food systems.'* Italics in original Kneafsey et al. 2008: 113

Here care 'about' is stressed to highlight concerns, worries and anxieties about particular circumstances surrounding food production that go beyond the material composition of food itself. These motivations reveal the power of consumer perceptions and understanding in shaping not only their own actions but also in shaping how food itself is marketed through quality assurance labels as a response to the diminishment of consumer trust of spatially expanded food production systems. Such AFN practices, consumer motivations and producer transparency, if following Feagan (2007) and Harris's (2010) ideas on co-constituting place, are the methods through which certain places come to develop distinctive food identities.

### **2.13 Spatial Responsibility: The Consumer Turn**

These discussions highlight the rise of the power of consumers and their complex motivations in choosing local food products. These actions, via their relationships with producers, shape the designation and success of AFNs as well as shaping the nature of place, leading to an investigation by many scholars into the consumer turn within agro-good networks. As Goodman (2004) states, it is consumers' turn towards quality that feeds AFN expansion. Goodman (2004), Lockie (2002) and Goodman & Dupuis (2002) focus on the lack of attention the consumer is given at this time in agro-food literature. At the end of 20th century in AFN literature, production is predominant with little recognition of the impact of consumption and the complexities of its power in these food networks. As Goodman (2004:13) notes AFN reconfigure the relationships between producers and consumers but that it is imperative "*...that the active, relational and political role of consumers is acknowledged*" to fully appreciate how these relationships and networks function. It is as Marsden et al. (2000) noted, through these relationships that the turn to quality is enacted and embedded, notably through the face-to-face contacts made at farmers' markets, farm shops etc. where produce may be labeled by the producer as organic, in organic-conversion, grown without chemicals or grown proximately at named locations. Whereas products sold at an expanded spatial scale provide certificates or labels of place, territory or as certified organic produce such as AOC PDO used for wine, olive oil, cheese etc. often from specific European

territories (Goodman 2004, Morris & Buller 2003, Marsden et al. 2000). These spatially extended relationships require consumers to develop affinities with places and products at a distance, which is not so different, relationally, to those enacted through conventional food systems. Watts, Ilbery & Maye (2005) point out that such labels require policing for them to have meaning and that they are subject to fetishisation, creating a notion of exclusive eating products for those '*in the know*'. They also argue that such spatially expanded quality assurance schemes are vulnerable to both co-option by conventional trading networks as well as promoting hierarchical power relations, which will be discussed below. These papers highlight the spectrum of consumer interactions, motivations and access to such food products, revealing the complexities of this sector and the varied modes of consumer power. Since the mid 2000s, a flood of literature emerged on the consumer in these relationships that added to the depth and complexity to which they could be examined. The scholarship has investigated various aspects of this consumer turn reflecting the range of practices occurring. Guthman (2004) discusses notions of the conventionalisation of AFN through an example of a surge in popularity for organic salad mix in California, which is then copied by other producers. Roe (2006), uniquely in agro-food literature, examines affects of the material properties of organic food that are of appeal to consumers in developing AFN relationships. Little et al. (2009) explores the often forgotten issue of the effects of gender in local food networks, with the widely accepted notion that local food requires cooking from scratch, requiring both skill and time in its purchasing and preparation. However, it has resulted in the lone voice of Winter (2005) to note how the farmer has little focus within this more networked literature and that the food itself has become mostly an 'absent presence'. Indeed, Moragues-Faus & Soninno (2012) state that the relationship between quality, trust and place still requires further critical scrutiny. This review shows how responding comprehensively to these varied positions in the relationships between producers and consumers in AFN literature is challenging and that including the food itself in this perspective is rarely achieved. See Roe (2006) and Stassart & Whatmore (2003) for papers that do include perspectives on the food matter itself.

#### **2.14 Spatial Responsibility, Sustainability and Social Justice**

Maxey (2007) contends that the focus on quality, trust and place within the literature has ignored the fundamentally important question of ecological sustainability within AFN. Maxey, citing Bowler (2002) discusses the tensions within sustainability where the triple bottom line of environment, economy and society need to be considered simultaneously.

However Maxey questions whether sustainability has to be considered within a paradigm of economic growth and calls for wider analyses to consider de-commoditised enterprises. He sets out six key components of sustainability: physical limits, futurity, participation, equity, process and relationships. Such considerations are also commonly referred to within the literature of agro-ecology such as Cuellar-Padilla (2011). However Maxey, adopting post-structuralist perspectives states that the complexities of sustainability can add to the '*hybrid and transgressive geographies*' of contemporary human geography literature allowing for food matters outside of purchasing relationships to be explored, which enables the opportunity for alterity to reemerge as a central issue (Maxey 2007: 68).

Maxey's calls for food sustainability to be considered as promoting alterity and equality within AFN literature, reflects the theme of social justice, which has become a dominant focus in agro-food literature in recent years. Winter's (2003) paper on Defensive Localism questioned the power structures operating within regional or district levels which may regulate or control AFNs. Scholarship had already questioned how accessible such food products are and whether they promote hierarchies of consumption practices. However Winter took this further by stating that the expansion of local food can be both a progressive as well as reactionary movement, as farmers and others may represent rural power structures keen to preserve traditional customs, landownership and hierarchies in a rapidly changing world. Such work adds to the complexity necessary to describe the breadth of issues relating to AFN, preventing simple positions of advocacy or nostalgia to influence perspectives on these operations. Dupuis & Goodman's (2005) influential paper remains the cornerstone of the debate on inequality within the local food movements. It successfully took on the literature to give a thorough review on AFNs from the perspective of social justice, challenging the academy to seek answers as to how to make it an effective social movement. They reject the 'scalar fix' which positions the local as an antidote to global trading and that fails to recognise the complexities of power operating throughout food markets.

*"We have to move away from the idea that food systems become just by virtue of making them local and toward a conversation about how to make local food systems more just."* Dupuis & Goodman 2005: 364

This call to problematise social justice within AFNs has been widely heeded, with scholarship drawing on Guthman (2004) that highlights the processes of conventionalisation that have occurred in some Californian AFNs. This work explores how the explosion of demand for organic salad mix resulted in copycat operators mass-producing it through

exploitative labour regimes, co-opting it into conventional food trading systems. This example pinpoints the risks and pressures involved in preserving the ethical ideals of AFNs, where consumer trust can be lost through brand success. However losing core consumer trust does not necessarily equate with financial disaster as witnessed by the buying out of Green & Black's fairtrade chocolate in 2005 by Cadbury Schweppes, itself then bought out by Kraft in 2010, rendering it a mainstream brand<sup>7</sup>. These examples emphasise the merging boundaries between alternative and mainstream products, which can cross from one to the other and still be accepted by consumers.

Alternatively, food co-operatives and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) have come to be seen as offering truly alternative food systems as they offer alternative means of financially accessing AFNs. Trauger & Passidomo (2012) drawing from the work of Gibson-Graham (2006) investigate examples of civic agricultural enterprises in America to explore whether they are promoting a 'post-capitalist politics' which is based on '*...a more integrated, interdependent and cooperative economy of agriculture*' (Ibid: 282). Whilst the term post-capitalist is contested, Gibson-Graham are noted for promoting a co-operative economic system based on collective decision-making. Drawing on Gibson-Graham, Trauger & Passidomo cite the production technicalities of organic food as distancing consumers and reinforcing social inequalities. The need to know what is being produced and how, is again reinforced in this study. The examples of co-ops, direct sales and CSAs produced mixed results with the organic co-ops being seen as drawing in wealthy consumers in order to make the system work financially. Whereas the women's agricultural network using a CSA structure is seen as more mutually supportive. The on-line based Athens Locally Grown was seen as the system with the fewest barriers of access partly due to the produce being grown by a wide range of farmers including that from backyard vendors who posted online the quantities of products they have to sell. Therefore customers could choose what was in season, removing the pressure on the producers to unfailingly produce. All these systems are "*shifting the location of the 'farm' from the periphery to the center of the community*" (2012: 300), which potentially alters not only producer-consumer connectivities but also the places themselves.

Whilst this study comprehensively sets out the working of these systems showing that alternative methods of producing fresh produce, it is almost exclusively focused on the

---

<sup>7</sup> BBC News Channel (2005) Cadbury Gobbles up Organic Rival (online) available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4543583.stm> accessed November 2nd 2012

producers and their modes of food production. The consumer is a shadowy presence within this study and whether these systems break down the barriers of access to fresh produce is not overtly stated. Instead the focus is on whether the systems operate equitably for the producers. Like Trauger and Passidomo, Hinrich's (2000) study of CSAs in America concludes that these alternative systems that bring producers and consumers together in mutual proximity and responsibility, do create and build community, which brings together understandings of food, land and nature. However, both studies agree that such models are ultimately based upon economic exchange preventing them becoming universally accessed. Hinrichs concludes that inequalities that exist within direct agriculture movements are also present in CSAs as they often fail to attract lower-income participants.

However, Alkon and Agyeman's (2011) new study of race, class and sustainability within American local food movements, do offer examples of where marginalised communities are creating, as well as accessing AFNs. People of colour are routinely discriminated against in American agriculture, therefore grassroots, community-based organisations are seen as the only solution to such groups accessing land for growing or accessing affordable fresh, produce. Morales (2011, in Alkon & Agyeman) explores such projects including the Latino Rural Enterprise Center in Minnesota, which assesses immigrants' agricultural knowledge, to avoid losing those with experience of agriculture to casual labour roles. It subsequently provides training for potential farmers whilst also creating community by building networks of Latino farmers with the aim of reducing food insecurity within such communities.

These examples help to illustrate the complexities within AFNs, showing that the existence of local food projects does not of itself guarantee equitable access to fresh produce. Within the UK experience, access invariably relies upon informed consumers seeking such projects. However, a recent example of a community food project in Todmorden that began as co-ordinated guerilla style food gardening is being copied around the world. With its no-frills approach to breaking down the barriers to fresh produce it has successfully persuaded public bodies to adopt its approach by including spaces for community food growing on their premises, resulting in harvestable crops available to anyone passing. The success of this enterprise has resulted not only in a growing community training company that markets organic salad crops, plans for creating a growing hub at the large secondary school as well as the creation of civic enterprise food tourism (Mary Clear -Incredible Edible Todmorden talk 14/7/12) showing that AFNs can take a wide variety of forms, with varied social consequences.



This subsection has investigated the intricacies of classifying AFNs, which do not necessarily conform to such orderings, underlying the dynamic nature of food relationships within evolving global/local, mainstream/alternative relations of operation. However, the rise of consumer power has been established in AFNs with their multi-motivations directing their involvement and shaping the food operations themselves.

To conclude, we are returning to the idea of place within AFNs to explore how the relational spatiality of their operations and of that between producers and consumers reflect and shape their integration within global food trading networks.

### **2.15 Summary: Place, Territoriality, Networks and Local Food**

Many papers interested in spatial contexts for their studies, for example Morris & Buller (2003) in Gloucestershire, highlight the two types of local food oriented activity which has already been discussed, the '*closed or bounded system*' such as Farmers Markets, farm shops, box schemes etc., or spatially-expanded systems utilising recognised labeling or certification schemes which add value to products that are often exported between countries, as mentioned in Marsden et al. (2000) (Morris & Buller 2003:559-560). This review reflects the spatial interest local food studies offer human geography, where place and space underpins not only the location of food production, but also its role in linking production, retail and consumption practices. Dupuis & Goodman (2005) problematising the nature of space and place in AFNs debates, refer to Amin (2002)'s contestation of place/space dichotomies as offering a useful perspective to reveal the complexities of space and place within AFNs. Amin argues that conceptualising the place or the local as 'in here' and therefore bounded, along with space or the global as 'out there' and unbounded provides a dualistic and scalar reading of space/place. Such conceptualisations fail to allow notions of place and space or the local and global to intersect, resulting in a simplistically valorised local and vilified global. As discussed through Winter's (2003) Defensive Localism paper and Guthman's (2004) paper on the conventionalisation of organic food production in California, problematising the practices of AFNs reveals the intersecting not only of place with space, the local with the global but also the power of grassroots food advocacy with global networks of production and trading power. The intertwined intricacies of local and global relations show that it is not easy to create distinctions between the local and global within these networks.

The emphasis on the networked nature of these intersections disturbs hierarchical readings of power in food networks that are highlighted in territorially based local food advocacy.

Contextualising local food networks within a nested global framework enables the power and influence of the informed consumer, or the local food advocate, to be as acknowledged as that of global food industries. This removes the perception of the local as a place of weakness and vulnerability. This perspective problematises understandings of local and global food as the relational networked nature of the local within the global and vice versa is emphasised, bringing out the effects of the '*networks of global connections*' (Massey 1994 cited Amin 2002: 391). This network can be understood as operating on manifold levels and in a multitude of ways that enables the effects of the territory or 'terroir' to be as enmeshed and interconnected as ephemeral global connections.

Of note across this broad and diversely focused literature is a lack of attention to the matter of the food itself and the relationships between the human more-than-human enacted in moments of production, harvest, purchase, preparation and consumption. Amin (2002) recognises this, referring to the practices between 'things' as being the conduit for '*the folding of things into the human world*' creating "*innumerable interactions between things and bodies which are placed at particular locations*" (Thrift 1999: 312 cited Amin 2002: 391). This stresses the effect of such human more-than-human immersions through the matter of food, as affecting the evolving nature of locations and their connectivities. This is an important area of investigation into the emplacement and embodiment of the matter of food within AFN and human more-than-human networks and will be the focus of the following section.

This section has reviewed the many issues of note within the literature of AFNs from the late twentieth century to the present day. Revealed in the scholarship are many contestations and areas of interest describing this heterogeneous sector, resulting in nodes of specialisms such as equality, sustainability, certification etc. Of particular interest in the literature of AFNs that has been set out, is the evolution of its focus from the morphology of AFNs, to the quality and consumer turns to the present concentration of the literature on issues of food equality. By following these turns it is noted that few authors take an overreaching view of AFNs to critically explore its present condition. Perhaps the sector is just too varied, however, the question raised in Marsden et al (2000) as to the long-term potential of these networks to sustain a vibrant regional agricultural sector, remains unanswered. There is little literature today that fully engages with this question as to whether AFNs can deliver their promise of alterity. By following the development of AFNs to include CSAs and community food projects that seek to offer greater access to local food products suggests that allotment

practices might be seen within the context of a turn away from supermarket produce and as an extension of AFNs. Alterity can be seen within such practices where a full immersion with the process of growing, the matter of the plot and learning how to grow may enable allotmenters access to affordable local food.

## **2: MATERIAL BODIES: DOING, CONNECTING, BECOMING**

*“...little so far has been understood about how the metabolic, material, fleshy connections consumers make with foodstuff inform their embodied knowledges.” Roe 2006:107*

### **2.20 INTRODUCTION**

Growing food on an allotment, possibly more than any other food procurement system, brings the engagement between producer and consumer to the site of the self. Therefore, this section will take a sensuous immersion into the literatures of bodily and material engagements, more-than-human assemblages, visceral geographies and the reiterative acts of performing and becoming. These acts place in the spotlight both single moments and single spaces, as well as the processual panoply of nature-human entanglements occurring through the stuff of food, the site of the plot and the allotmenter. This enquiry draws from key bodily material literatures exploring these encounters, providing a framework for this investigation. In particular it draws on Mol's (2008) investigation of material agency, Grosz's (1993, 1994, 2005, 2008) considerations of bodily becomings and nature-society relations, Whatmore's (2006) setting out of Relational Materialism and Ingold's (2010, 2011) investigations of agency, the material and human more-than-human connectivity. This section, within the spatial context of global/local food debates already discussed in this review, will take on the theme of reconnection to examine human more-than-human engagements through food at the micro-geographical site of the self, where human scale food growing reveals the material complexities of engaging with the stuff of food. To do this a discussion of the literature of bodily engagements will be combined with that on materiality to highlight these encounters between allotmenters and their plots. This will then lead to the literature on agency and assemblages, which will be explored to reveal power, decision-making and choice in human more-than-human relationships. Whatmore's term the more-than-human is used here to reduce the distance between the human and the non-human. Finally the section will conclude

by examining the literature of performativity, becomings and transformation to set out the processes by which such reconnections and food encounters are established and maintained. Initially however, a clarification is required to differentiate the usage of the terms materiality from that of materialism and post-humanism from that employed by trans-humanist thought. Materiality is used in this thesis as *“a rubric that tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota and abiota.”* Using materials being matter that: *“...are active and co-constitutive of their geographies, places, sites and spaces.”* both Tolia-Kelly 2012: 2

Today posthumanism is commonly understood as referring to going beyond a human centred view of life, which differs from earlier understandings that linked it with transhuman thinking. Transhumanism is linked with cyborg theories associated with Haraway (2001) that focus on the merging of humans with everyday technologies. For this reason Whatmore (2004) states a preference for using the term ‘more-than-human’ rather than posthuman, which she uses to refer to:

*“... what exceeds rather than what comes after the human... one works through the long practised intimacies between human and plant communities or the skills configured between bodies and tools, one never arrives at a time/place when the human was not a work in progress.”* Whatmore 2004: 1361

This quote not only clarifies the usage of more-than-human as going beyond the human-centred gaze, it also identifies the dynamic nature of these interweavings of matter and agency, reflecting the dynamic nature of these conceptualisations and others discussed in this review.

## **2.21 The Call for Embodied Food Geographies**

After the consumer turn in agro-food studies, the prevailing focus on recent food geographies has been to seek a more embodied approach to food research, as called for by Lockie & Kitto (2000) and Goodman (2001) who pointed to an ontological blind spot in food geographies where the prevalent literature was critiqued for using dualistic ontology. Agro-food literature was dominated by a focus on either production or consumption, on small scale or large scale, as well as a dominant focus on systems analysis and a political economic approach to food literature (Lockie & Kitto 2000, Lockie 2002, Goodman 2001, Goodman & Dupuis 2002). This call was welcomed by many scholars leading to a change of approach by several food geographers including that of Whatmore (2006) who sought research to *‘re-animate the missing matter’* within the literature, by pinpointing the need to place the stuff of matter at

the centre of geographical debate. By giving attention to the matter of food, at an intimate, ‘*in-here*’ level, Whatmore (2006) brings the site of food research to a new space where materials combine. Whatmore sees relational materiality as a ‘*gathering force*’ where cultural geographies find their way back to a focus on matter. Whilst Whatmore obviously draws on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the paper has a wide reference point including Spinoza, Merleau Ponty, Foucault and Stengers allowing an inclusive sweep of post-modern thought to develop a specifically posthumanist lens. For Whatmore, the posthumanist stance allows the lens of materiality to immerse in the intimate zone of corporeality, revealing the ‘*in-here*’ of human existence. For Whatmore the Relational Materialist perspective is ‘*co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth*’ (2006: 602). Taking materiality a step further than other scholars, Whatmore stresses the need to develop relational materialism through practice, highlighting that research limited to discourse either about the body or the earth reduces the researcher’s ability to fully comprehend the world.

However, whilst Whatmore’s work draws heavily on post-modern theory, there is limited reference to the debt to feminist geographies, notably on the legacy of work on the body.

## **2.22 Embodiment and Feminist Geographies**

It is such a focus on the body in feminist geographies that provides a key point for this study, with the work of Grosz providing the seminal text *Volatile Bodies* (1994) that critiqued the dualistic readings of scientific classifications of mind/body soul/nature that have created the ontological dominance of consciousness over bodily knowledge and over nature.

Fundamental to Grosz’s work on these Cartesian separations of the mind and body, soul and nature etc. is the recognition that such separations have led to the hegemony of viewing nature as shaped by humans but with them distinct from the non-human. Such thinking, with a focus on bringing together such separated fields through conceptualisations of the body, challenges ideas of the foundations of modern knowledge itself. By bringing a focus on the body that goes beyond the divisions of mind/body, male/female, such work enables the body to be rescued from mere mechanistic biological frames to that where it can be explored and understood within a sociocultural framework, breaking down the dualisms of nature-society (Grosz 1994: 3-22). Similar calls were also made by Haraway (1991) who stressed the agentic potential of bodies as objects of knowledge and ‘material-semiotic generative nodes’ (cited in Kuhlmann & Babitsch 2002: 435). As recognised by others including Simonsen (2000) the body had begun to receive considerable attention amongst these scholars at the

end of the twentieth century, however there was still little attention given to the material body or to the everyday material interactions of bodies.

Longhurst turned her attention to this theoretical gap by highlighting “...*the leaky, messy, awkward zones of the inside/outside of bodies and their resulting spatial relationship*” (2001:2). Her work at this time focused on ‘what is a body?’ going beyond Cartesian dualisms of the body and attempting to reveal the fleshiness of the material body. This was eventually encapsulated in Longhurst, Johnston and Ho (2009) that set out a visceral approach to researching socio-political relations using the affective medium of food to describe bodily, everyday experiences of women migrants in New Zealand. Drawing on the work of Rodaway who highlighted that senses mediate our everyday experiences forming ‘*the ground base on which a wider geographical understanding can be constructed*’ (1994: 3), Longhurst et al. developed the idea of using the visceral realm to understand bodily material engagements in everyday experiences. Longhurst et al. define the visceral as referring to:

“...*the sensations, moods and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live.*” (2009: 334)

Probyn (2000)’s influential work explores conceptualisations of the visceral. Discussing food through a visceral lens, Probyn contends, allows for the processes of interconnectivity to be explored.

“...*eating is of interest because of the ways in which it can be a mundane exposition of the visceral nature of our connectedness and distance from each other, from ourselves and from our social environment.*” (2000:13)

This thesis explores in detail these visceral moments of interconnection through not just eating food but by producing it as well.

Work such as Longhurst et al. and Probyn, stemming from feminist geographies, also seeks to disrupt conceptions of the body as being associated with the female and natural world in order to breakdown stereotyping of male and female characteristics. However, another important work in the embodied approach to food geographies literatures, Little et al. (2009) highlights the lack of a focus on gender in such food literature. This work brings such bodily conceptualisations to the everyday realities of household food experiences with an attention

on consumption that challenges the neglect of gendered perspectives in agro-food literature. The rise of interest in local food ignores the impact of buying local food has on women<sup>8</sup> that results in them having to cook meals for families from scratch. Such cooking from scratch requires both the time to do so and having practical cooking skills in order to be successful. Colls (2012) thoughtful paper on feminist critiques of Non-Representational Theory (NRT) (which draws together many threads of interest to post-humanist thought) has recently referred to gender blindness in NRT, highlighting the continued relevance of the issues raised by Little et al. and accentuating a tension in these literatures in the ability to make such abstract conceptualisations grounded in everyday socio-political concerns. Colls calls for a more engaged debate between NRT literature and feminist geographies, referring to the lack of acknowledgement NRT offers to feminist geographies that work in comparable fields, helping to perpetuate an unnecessary division between perspectives sharing similar concerns. Grosz (1993) also discusses similar tensions, wondering why the work of Deleuze & Guattari was not embraced by feminist literature at that time, as she presciently saw it opening up new ways to discuss nature, materiality and chaos. In particular, she highlighted how such ways of thinking about the world enabled us to understand:

*“...how the human body is linked to other bodies, human and non-human...linking organs and biological processes to material objects and social practices...” (Grosz 1993:171).*

These works reveal the tensions and blurred boundaries operating in contemporary human geographical literatures mapping the terrain from which this study develops.

### **2.23 Traversing theoretical boundaries - Roe's Things Become Food**

A key text that traverses the boundaries between agro-food literatures/feminist geographies, posthumanism and NRT, is that of Roe (2006) *'Things Become Food'*. This vital paper is influenced by Whatmore's (2006) work, taking a relational materialist stance to research the relationship between humans, plants and animals in agro-food networks. Also drawing from the work of Goodman (2001) and Lockie (2002) as discussed earlier, Roe takes scholarship on embodied consumers further to link them to production processes. Theoretically, Roe clearly sets out the heritage of ANT (Actor Network Theory) from which she draws, through the work of Goodman, Whatmore and Marsden (2000), which *'facilitates an ontological unity of humans and non-humans.'* (Goodman 1999:33 within Roe 2006:107). Crucially, for

---

<sup>8</sup> However this study acknowledges that women are not solely responsible for providing and cooking meals for the household. In some households men are also cooking from scratch when using local food products.

this study, Roe sets out the role of ANT and post humanist thinking in allowing for a full understanding of *'practices and processes that go on at a more primary level than those in political and economic structures'* (p108).

She specifically follows the material practices of organic food consumers to reveal the process by which a product becomes accepted as food. This unique text highlights the space between production and consumption to investigate what inhabits this space and how produce becomes food for consumption. Unlike other agro-food scholarship, Roe is drawn to explore what it is about the material properties of food that shape the processes in consumers accepting it as edible. Through video and textual ethnographies of a live art event where Sushi is prepared from live fish, and by following an organic consumer in his selecting and preparing potatoes to eat, Roe explores how the matter of the non-human moves from being matter to being food and how the labelling of food as organic shapes the journey of the consumer in accepting it as edible. For the consumer, the label provides prior knowledge of production methods helping to dispel doubts over the shape, texture or visual impact of the food. In fact, such labelling enables food, which is otherwise potentially defective looking, to be accepted for consumption due to a commitment and belief in the production processes. Here Roe shows how the labelling provides an added layer of trust in the quality of the produce for consumers sceptical of such matters. It would have been revealing to pursue this theme further to link with other work of an ethics of care in AFN literature (Kneafsey et al. 2008) to discover whether consumers feel that an ethic of care by producers is established by belief in such labels, leading to perceptions of care resulting in produce being selected for consumption.

The responses of Roe's participants' to food and the processes involved in accepting or rejecting reveal a more-than rational approach to food consumption. Such reactions speak of Miller (1998)'s investigation into disgust, suggesting a bodily or visceral response to food that goes beyond cognition. Miller explores how disgust goes beyond aversion or dislike. So suggesting a range of visceral responses. Of particular interest in Miller's work is the deliberation taken over the cultural and nurturtive bases for aversion and dislike. These considerations highlight how visceral responses go beyond either the bodily or the rational. Instead such reactions unite mind and bodily sensing through their gut responses.

Through this paper, Roe is exploring what inhabits the space between production and consumption that has been highlighted throughout recent AFN literature. Her important findings *'translate the distance'* between production and consumption by unveiling the



human and non-human relationships traversing this space and the processes that occur to transform non-human matter into that which is metabolically accepted as edible. Such perspectives expose the intimacy of human and non-human in such relationships, where the bodies of non-human matter nourish that of the human, disclosing the merging of interior and exterior encounters through such relationships. Here notions of dualism are overcome with deep probing into the intimate intercorporeality of humans and more-than-humans involved in such material metabolic journeys.

Roe is clear that she is moving on from political economic standpoints, which are left behind. Whilst personal politics are apparent through discussing organic labelling and the relational ethics of food, there is an intention here to delve deeply into the matter and the spaces of human and non-human relationships without referring back to the wider arena of food politics. Whilst the focus on the more intimate corporeal/material level does free up analysis to reveal these practices in a complex processual manner, it seems that focus on political or the economic issues dissipate.

## **2.24 Traversing theoretical boundaries - Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroys' Visceral Geographies**

Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, visceral geographers also working at this more material, intimate level, have concerns with keeping food scholarship relevant to political matters. In their work *'Taking back Taste'* (2008) they make a position for the role of visceral geographies to reveal *'identity, difference and power'* within agro-food studies. Here the zone of the visceral is explored to reveal consumer choices. Drawing from the feminist geographies bodily scholarship of Probyn (2000), Longhurst (2001), Grosz (1994) and Little and Leyshon (2003), as well as the scholarship of Foucault, Affect and NRT, Hayes-Conroy chart the progress in breaking down non-dualistic framings of the body using the fleshy, corporealities of visceral geographies. They point to feminist philosophy already breaking down these barriers, showing, *"...how the biological body – a seemingly bounded entity – is co-constitutive with the social self and actively agentic in the unfolding of life"* (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2008: 466).

Such perspectives seek to extend understandings of the agency of the body as a minded-body. They use Probyn's (2000) development of Deleuze & Guattaris' rhizome metaphor, which stresses horizontal pathways of socio-political, cultural, biological connections, allowing for dynamic non-hierarchical networks and so transgressing the ordered, progressional

hierarchies that result in binary classifications of life. Through this, Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy explore how the minded-body, the matter of food and social constructions of control are relationally linked through the acts of visceral engagements, resulting in consumers' food beliefs and choices. They point to other food literature as failing to show how such food knowledges and behaviours intersect as everyday attitudes and actions. By developing the idea of the material linking of humans and non-humans through food, they seek to extend such bodily behavioural knowledge and link it directly to matters of food politics, in effect linking posthumanist and NRT thought to socio-economic concerns. They pursue this argument through a case study of The Slow Food movement.

As a theoretical piece, I would argue firstly that there is a lack of such fleshy, materialities evident within it, missing the opportunity to illustrate what *is* visceral geography and the potential to engage us with sensuous examples. However critically important to their position is, that by using the example of Slow Food in the section on educating taste, they run the gauntlet of being accused of using an elitist example. Slow Food is associated with privileged consumers concerned about rare, exclusive food products, making it a food movement inaccessible to many. Whilst it is an issue of which the authors are obviously aware, without the balance of more accessible food project examples, this criticism is not fully squashed. Despite such concerns, Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy do provide a key moment in revitalising the wider issues of food practices at an intimate, personal realm. By highlighting the inner corporeal and sensory processes of food choice, they provide a starting point that has much potential for radical and applicable research. Through their later work '*Mattering, Relating, Defying*' (2010), like Roe (2006), they develop their theories through an exploration of the agency of matter via the relationships of human and non-human bodies. Here their development of the idea of the self within networked spatial dynamics provides contextualised notions of a self that has relationships to both matter and socio-political practice. These conceptualisations echo Probyn's work without evoking the lively materiality of food. For Probyn food in the form of consumption is seen as a mode through which viscosity can be investigated. However as this review demonstrates, few food studies explore the material nature of visceral engagements with food.

### **2.25 Agency- Going Beyond the Human**

Throughout this review a discussion of literatures that go beyond human centred analysis has revealed the potential of embracing the matter of human more-than-human engagements. Through such engagements modernist classifications that separate nature, space, the body,

material and social entities are broken down to explore the dynamic nature of these connections. However, in order to fully explore the role human more-than-human readings have to offer understandings of embodied food encounters, a deeper focus on the actors involved in such encounters and their agency is required.

Matters of agency and the embodied politics of certain food products are discussed in the innovative thought piece of Mol (2008). Like Roe, Mol's focus on food and materiality stems from an interest in exploring notions of agency and more-than-human relations, as well as giving a focus to issues of subjectivity in such relations. In her influential piece '*I Eat an Apple*' (2008), Mol explores subjectivity through the processes of chewing and ingesting an apple. Mol's paper, using simple language, explores the complexity of such processes that are often taken for granted in everyday experiences. Where is the apple from? How was it grown and who is ingesting it? Exploring these questions reveal the depths of complexity agro-food issues hold. Mol's intimate theorising explores notions of situated subjectivities and how they contain material and agentic complexities (such as through processes of ingestion) that go beyond what is commonly theorised in notions of human and non-human connectivity. By looking at the ingestion of an apple through the changing subjectivities within spatiotemporal frames, Mol explores how notions of apples and their usage by humans have evolved through time. In particular she highlights the bounded nature such consumption relationships had before the onset of industrial export and storage of crops, where in cool climates, apples had particular seasonal availability with household storage practices being the prime tool to ensure the longevity and availability of a crop. Mol takes the notion of the spaces of consumption further by thinking through bodily processes occurring after ingestion and ponders momentary processes by which the apple becomes bodily assimilated, or is the apple assimilating her? Furthermore, she explores the inter-subjectivities of herself and the apple from multiple perspectives, including the political significance that the Granny Smith variety embodied when it was exported from Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s. In that time she and her friends boycotted the fruit, which has resulted in a legacy of dislike of Granny Smith apples that continues to exist for her.

Investigations of the whole processes of production/consumption cycles have been explored by others including the important paper of Cook (2004) that allows the stories of farmers, sellers, buyers, consumers etc. to emerge and illustrate agro-food journeys. Such work reveals the power of following the matters of trade through their networks. However, Mol focuses on issues of agency, power and subjectivity in such relationships, exploring the limits

of human control, as well as the activity, work or doing-ness involved in such bodily processes. Drawing on the work of Latour, Law and Haraway, Mol takes a networked approach to looking at the inter-weavings of people into the intricate webs of food, nature-society, agency, control and the boundaries/ lack of boundaries created in such networks. It is a mix of inter-material relations revealing important questions about the nature of agency and our embodied relations with food.

Within the literature much discussion has been focused on the agency of human and more-than-human activity in these food webs and the continued dominance of anthropocentric thinking (Mol 2008, 2011, Bennett 2010, Roe 2006). The examples already discussed suggest the depths of possibilities in attending to the materiality of food; however, there is still an anthropocentric focus through much of these studies, which investigate human activity engaging with the matter of food. Such an anthropocentric view is a useful hook for hanging the idea of food processes on. In Roe's *Things Become Food* the investigation is made through the selections of an organic consumer. However, her *'translating the distance'* tool only gives partial comprehension to the *'livingness of the world'* (Whatmore 2006: 602). By retaining the gaze on human choices, the lens of materiality is filtered and its understanding dispersed. Realistically, our perceptions will inevitably retain an anthropocentric bias, however, the aim of this study is to go further in embracing the messy, inconsistencies of the natural world by understanding the intimate zone of materiality (Whatmore 2006, Probyn 2000). Roe, by drawing on J.J Gibson's affordances crosses over into this messy realm, however, as this concept accentuates the agency within the potato (in this case), suggesting it has the power to shape human actions. Roe's nuanced and thoughtful discussion reveals the complexity of cognitive and non-cognitive relations and responses between foodstuff and consumer. The concept of affordances is a useful term in exploring how *'the material thing becomes meaningful to the embodied human'* (Roe 2006:113). However, the definition of affordances as set and unchanging as the actor changes (McGrenere et al. 2000) again appears to give too much agency to material things, diminishing the dynamic relationship between them where all actants are changed. Such over-emphasis on the material does not bring to life the fullness of these entanglements where more is at play beyond the focus on the thing and the consumer. Theorising these connectivities requires a multi-layered, complexity driven gaze that has a multitude of actants.

Bennett (2010) explores these inter-material weavings through her exposition of Vibrant Materialism, with much thought devoted to notions of actor intentionality and agency. Going

beyond a human centred focus is key to Bennett's concern of uniting human and non-human intentionality and inter-connected doings under the term assemblage. Bennett draws from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which aimed to reveal the embodied nature of human activity and its reliance on non-human agency. However her:

*"Vital Materialism attempts a more radical displacement of the human subject than phenomenology has done..." Bennett 2010: 30*

For Bennett assemblages (which are discussed further in the following subsection) generate 'emergent properties' which cross the human non-human divide (2010: 24). The dynamic force of such assemblages are a key characteristic providing the 'Vital' in vital materialism, which Bennett describes as a 'congregational agency' that could otherwise be described as a force, an energy providing the notion of ever changing matter and ever changing connections (2010: 34). This ever-changing dynamism has been reflected throughout these discussions in different forms such as globalisation, processual cultural change and the becomings of embodied practices that provide a spatiotemporal frame to this exploration of human more-than-human entanglements.

## **2.26 Agency- Becomings and Connectivities**

However, a simpler way of looking at agency and the acts of producers and consumers within food networks could be drawn from Grosz's emphasis on natural selection. Examining the work of Darwin and his theory of Evolution, she looks to bridge its application to cultural analysis and highlights how this work helps to explain cultural processes as well as biological ones. Grosz reveals the dynamic nature of the progression of evolution, which uses the tools of natural selection, emphasising sexual selection, to reveal '*...life exceeds itself...in making itself more and other than its history*' (Grosz 2005: 40). This shows the indeterminism of Darwinian thought where the evolution of matter is based on what has gone before changing through the dynamic processes of adaption via sexual selection, leaving outcomes and the future unknown. Cultural change is seen to occur through reflected processes based on the matter of nature. By bringing the biological and cultural together through such a reinterpretation of Darwin, Grosz is able to cross the material-society divide, using the role of biological processes to explain the genesis of human-more-than-human relationships. Through these readings of Darwin, Grosz highlights how '*culture cannot be seen as the overcoming of nature...Culture is not a completion of an inherently incomplete nature.*' (Grosz 2005: 30). This work emphasises the generation of the new through dynamic and evolutionary change, giving an '*explanation of the dynamism, growth and transformability of*

*living systems*' (Grosz in Alaimo & Hekman 2008: 30). This excess and unbounded openness of life is, Grosz argues, showing how Darwinian thought goes beyond natural science constructions of an ordered world, to expose chance and unpredictable futures. Key to current explorations of human more-than-human networks and our conceptualising of the visceral/ sensorial affects within them, is the understanding set out in Darwinism that life pre-exists knowledge, challenging us '*...to understand dynamism, movement, endless becoming as the conditions, not limits to life.*' (Grosz 2005: 42). This dynamic force suggesting change and becomings, is an apt description for the role of adaptation necessary within the context of agricultural change, itself a perfect medium from which to investigate the merging intensities of natural cultural forces.

Ingold (2010) also investigates notions of dynamic interconnections through his '*process of life*' approach where the processual nature of becoming is described through a meshwork of interactions, allowing for the complexity of life set out by Darwin. However, Ingold disputes the notion of agency in these processes as he claims that it reduces the components of these processes to objects:

*'... things move and grow because they are alive, not because they have agency. And they are alive precisely because they have not been reduced to the status of objects.'* Ingold, 2010: 7

Whilst, I find Ingold's meshwork concept to be a lively, useful system to understand the tangled nature of material processes, I have reservations of his dispute with ideas of material agency. On looking to the work of Law & Mol (2008), agency here is used to suggest a subtle interrelatedness that goes beyond the idea of mastery of an object over another; as they say, an actor stands for a web of relations:

*"It acts in relation to other actors, linked up with them. This means that it is also always being acted upon. Acting and being enacted go together. What is more, an enacted-actor is not in control. To act is not to master, for the results of what is being done are often unexpected."* Law & Mol 2008: 2

This holds suggestions that echo Ingold's meshwork, however, unlike the meshwork, wider material processes of life are not part of the acted-enacted relationship. Their brief mention of unexpected results is the place where the power of wider material agency takes place. It is for this reason, of being more fully able to describe the complexities of material engagements,

that Ingold's meshwork adds a key idea in exploring the processes of life within this study, reflecting the complexities inherent in Darwinism.

Bennett's (2010) work on assemblages has many echoes of Ingold's meshwork concept, offering a way to theorise human more-than-humans relations. Bennett describes assemblages as:

*"Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistence presence of energies that confound them more from within."* 2010: 23-24

Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza, Bennett explores how agency operates beyond the solo body of human action. Instead agency is seen to reside in a 'confederation' of 'macro- and microactants' that includes memory, body chemistry and numerous external ingredients. This holds much resonance with Ingold's meshwork. In describing the 'improvisatory' pathways that form making follows, Ingold, resists describing life through relational agency. Instead, he sees a field of becomings:

*"They are rather lines along which things continually come into being. Thus when I speak of the entanglement of things I mean this literally and precisely: not a network of connections but a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement."* Ingold 2010: 4

Here we have two thinkers working on notions of human more-than-human interrelationships putting forward similar concepts, which aim to theorise most vividly that most complex of nature-society questions: who is acting and who or what else is acting or influencing this acting and how can these actions be fully described? Both theorists reveal that more is going on than a linear relationship between objects, with Ingold referring to the reinterpretation of networks in ANT, which should more accurately be describing a field of interconnectivity that includes awareness of environmental shapings. Additionally, by emphasising the 'processes of formation' that allow for an open-ended process of becoming, Ingold allows the full creativity of life to emerge, involving chance and the unexpected.

As Grosz explores in her works on Darwinism, the unexpected, chance and chaos are key parts of nature-society relations that often go ignored within academic literature. As:

*'a profound and complex account of the organic becoming of matter, of the strategies of survival and multiplications of these becomings in the face of the obstacles or problems of existence that life poses for them'* Grosz 2008: 46

Grosz explores the value of drawing from Darwin and his notions of chance, as a lively way to enrich feminist thinking. This then enables ideas of materiality and the inter-weavings of the human and more-than-human through a manifold, environmentally-situated meshwork to finally bring to life the complexity, control and chaos of such engagements, which create both the intimate and wider field of nature-society doings.

## 2.27 Becomings in Practice

Notions of the how people physically react and interact with the unexpected are also considered in the work of Crouch (2003) and Nash (2000), who explore the field of *how* nature culture, the human more-than-human interconnect. Both Crouch and Nash explore ideas of performativity as the process of becoming through human, bodily activities. Crouch's drawing from Grosz (1999), examines how performing and becoming can reconfigure life through moment by moment processes of change, which are particularly significant in actions requiring repeated bodily engagements. The elements of chance, of wider environmental material processes affecting the production and consumption of vegetables on allotments fits well with ideas of these processes occurring within a 'meshwork' (Ingold 2010). Nash (2000) has explored reiterative, visceral practices to explore how they utilise, "*pre-cognitive, habitual, everyday practices.*" (2000: 662). It is these everyday, visceral engagements that form part of the process of 'becoming' where unexpected, unplanned practices form the path of doing to becoming. Through such reiterative visceral processes, where the human and more-than-human combine, potentially "*the self and the world are transformed.*" (Crouch 2003: 1952) reflecting Darwinian notions of change through natural selection. Such bodily immersion in the material stuff of the plot may allow for practices where sensory "*...embodied and somewhat automatic knowledge...functions like peripheral vision.*" (Crouch 2003: 1952).

Like Crouch, this study is concerned with how people engage in activities and how knowledge is created through inter-bodily reiterations. This helps to understand:

*"... the way [people] make encounters with the world, and with themselves, and their immediate others, in a process of doing and 'making sense'."* Crouch 2003:1950

As Grosz (1999) notes such notions of becomings require a spatio-temporal frame. Space and duration have layers of significance within the field of allotment practices, as will be discussed in later chapters, where engagements between allotmenteer and plot are enacted across personal space and time experiences.



However, to end this section, the literature of interest has returned once more to the body and human-scale interactions within agro-food practices. It is at the site of the body that the relationships between the human and more-than-human, a bridge between nature-culture, can be most materially explored revealing a wealth of becomings and doings within a meshwork of visceral moments. In this study the body is situated within the rural field of the allotment allowing for the many issues discussed in this literature to be explored. It is at the site of the allotment that notions of health, access to food as well as media shaping of our food desires can be investigated. In the field of the allotment, notions of alterity and choice reconnecting consumers with food are revealed. The allotment also provides a space of enquiry into the nature of knowledge developed through material interactions between the human and more-than-human. Further more it is through bodily activity within the allotment and in the allotmenteer's kitchen, that human more-than-human entanglements can be seen, touched, felt and tasted, providing a place where the dynamic processes of adaption occurs. As Probyn contends:

*“eating conjoins us in a network of the edible and inedible, the human and the non-human, the animate and the inanimate. In these actions, the individual is constantly connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting with different aspects of individual and social life.”*  
(2000:17)

This quote underscores the dynamic, processual nature of bodily encounters through food that this thesis is exploring through allotment practices. However, before the allotment and this study is fully brought to life, a further journey through the literature must be made to reflect the thought and work abounding on the space of the allotment itself.

### **3: ALLOTMENT PRACTICES: CREATING LANDSCAPES**

*“The plot of ground was in a high, dry, open enclosure, where there were forty or fifty such pieces, and where labour was at its briskest when the hired labour of the day had ended. Digging began usually at six o'clock, and extended indefinitely into the dusk or moonlight. Just now heaps of dead weeds and refuse were burning on many of the plots, the dry weather favouring their combustion. One fine day Tess and 'Liza-Lu worked on here with their neighbours till the last rays of the sun smote flat upon the white pegs that divided the plots.”*  
*Tess of the D'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy, 1891: 384*

## 2.30 INTRODUCTION

Having explored relationships with food down to the site of the self, this section investigates the issues raised thus far - reconnecting producers and consumers through food and human more-than-human entanglements and doings - through the space of the allotment and practices enacted there. The literature on allotments is shown to reveal positions on nature-society encounters, doing and becoming through such engagements, and the place allotments have in reflecting cultural change through exploring shifts in societal participation on them. Whilst the amount of such scholarship is limited, allotment literature has been amply served by the allotment studies 'bible': Crouch & Ward (1988/1997). This section draws mostly on Geographical and Anthropological literatures and examines the contextual social history of allotment sites before moving onto the space of the allotment through the lens of nature-society relations, the performative engagements that growing entails before exploring the nature of allotment space and its relationships to cultural change.

## 2.31 Conceptualising the Allotment

An allotment literally means 'a portion' and is used to denote an area of land leased either from a private landowner or a local authority, through a group of allotments as a site, for the use of growing fruit and vegetables. Chickens, rabbits and bees are also commonly allowed and there is an increasing trend for chickens to be kept. An allotment traditionally measures 10 rods (also referred to as perches or poles), which is a measurement system dating back to Anglo-Saxon times. This area is now known as 250m<sup>2</sup>, similar to the size of a tennis court. However, this large space can be divided into 'half-plot' or 'quarter-plot' areas depending on the landlord and the tenant. No matter who owns the land, a user-group committee often run sites, with tenants being required to pay a rent and commit to a user agreement annually. If the local authority owns the site and it is listed as a statutory site, laws protect its preservation. Indeed "*all local authorities have a mandatory obligation to provide allotment provision under Section 23 of the 1908 Small Holdings and Allotments Act.*" (The National Allotment Society (NSALG)<sup>9</sup>). However, this obligation to providing allotments is interpreted in a fluid manner as authorities assess the level of demand. In this thesis I use the term allotmenteer to represent the participants growing on plots in this study. Allotmenteer is

---

<sup>9</sup> National Allotment Society (online) available at <http://www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/how-to-get-an-allotment/> - accessed 28/11/12

defined as- ‘a person who grows crops in an [allotment](#)<sup>10</sup>. This term is preferred over ‘plot-holder’ as not all participants are the legal plot leaseholder.

Crouch & Ward (1988/1997) set out a recognisable image of the allotment:

*“The railway traveller has always had the best view of the patchwork quilt of allotment landscapes. This is partly because the one-time railway companies were second only to local authorities as providers of allotment sites...within the fenced area of the railway tracks themselves, long narrow strips of vegetable garden could be seen between the platform and the signal box.” Crouch & Ward 1988/1997:1-2*

Railway companies used to be the second largest landowner of allotment sites; whilst this is no longer the case, the train continues to offer a rich view of sites occurring perhaps in the industrial outskirts of towns and cities or the less frequent but increasing in number, rural sites. However, this is only one allotment image set out by the authors, the following one being more steeped in the history of allotments:

*“...the solitary figure of a cloth-capped unemployed worker, his shabby collar turned up against the wind, pushing his bicycle home with a bunch of carrots over the handlebars.” Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 2*

These images reveal not only ideas of the *where* allotments are located but the landscape and people associated with them. Crouch & Ward’s book provides details of allotments across the urban/rural spectrum. However, across and beyond the academic literature is the perception of the allotment is commonly of sites in urban settings. Within the academy there is a preponderance of focus on urban settings in food growing projects due to the perceived lack of access to land (Perez-Vazquez, Anderson & Rogers 2005, Buckingham 2005, Milbourne 2011). Where allotments are located shapes their form and the mixture of allotmenters growing there. Therefore investigating the siting of allotments is important in these conceptualisations, as allotments provide the space where nature and society mix for the purposes of self-determined food procurement practices. Whether the presumption of urban location holds true is important in portraying how widespread allotment practices are and for whom they are important. Whilst some papers refer to allotments or gardening without specifying location (Hunter et al. 2011, Kiesling & Manning 2010, Lorimer 2005 and Wiltshire 2001) several (non-allotment) works do highlight the specifics of rural experiences

---

<sup>10</sup> Definition available at -<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/allotmenteer> (accessed online 24/11/13). The definition has not yet entered the Oxford English Dictionary

as being distinct from those of urban (Little & Austin 1996, Cloke & Milbourne 1992). For example Pinkerton & Hopkins's (2009) Transition Town book on Local Food begins in a rural farming landscape to locate what is wrong with contemporary food systems. However the rest of the book does not differentiate between rural and urban settings to describe the wealth of food projects occurring. In fact this position reflects how the rural is perceived to be the home of agriculture with the assumption that there is a wealth of space for all its inhabitants.

Crouch & Ward (1988/1997) have provided highly useful insights into the rural/urban debate in allotments with their research showing that allotmenters on urban sites saw them as giving a rural experience, transgressing urban/ rural boundaries, where the rural is synonymous with escaping from everyday life. However, those living in rural settings had different perspectives, for example in the Hertfordshire greenbelt, a planning inspector ruled against a new allotment site as he saw them as having no place in the countryside. As Crouch & Ward explain, for many living/working in the rural it is perceived as an un-peopled and inaccessible landscape outside of farming (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997:202-203). However, for others, rural allotments create a peopled landscape where individuals and communities can make their own mark in shaping the land, it is perceived that through such activities '*allotmenters create their own landscape*' (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997:187 original emphasis).

This introduces *what* allotments are and offers an introduction into the contested issues of *where* allotments are located and the perceptions of their location.

### **2.32 Allotments: Social and Historical Context**

Crouch & Ward give an overview to the history and background to allotments in the UK, which also provides an overview of *who* allotmenters were over the twentieth century. The authors take a historical perspective on the development of allotments, taking us back to the Seventeenth Century Diggers who were agrarian activists promoting equal access to land and property. They discuss the role of land enclosure as a key process of societal change through significant shifts in agricultural landownership, which led to the eventual setting up of what we recognise as allotments today. However throughout the book it is revealed how courses of cultural change direct the movement of societal involvement in allotments, unfurling the changed nature of participation from their inception by the 1887 Allotments Act. At this time allotmenters were characterised as working class male growers supplementing household

diets. This was the prevailing perception of allotmenters up until the recent resurgence of interest in allotments. It was the 1908 Allotment Act that enshrined the statutory right to allotments. The 1908 Act created a mandatory requirement of councils to provide allotments where '*4 or more people demanded them*' (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 240). This Act, as the authors discuss, creates an understanding of public entitlement to land for growing which brought some degree of satisfaction for a public deprived of such access to land since the escalation of enclosures and fenced and hedged farmland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.

Throughout, the authors combine historical details, allotment legislation, the rise of environmentalism and the changing nature of social participation on allotments in response to the undulations in popularity and provision of them, to establish the complexity and embedded cultural space allotments encompass. Allotment provision and take up during the twentieth century was predominantly defined in the peak years of the First and Second World Wars. Indeed the land committed to allotment production post Second World War, reached the zenith of approximately 1,500,000, plots, a figure that has not been matched since. Allotment and back garden production played a key part in the government's '*dig for victory*' campaign to raise the levels of British grown produce, helping to ameliorate the privations of the ration diet. The government estimated that such home gardening produced 10% of all UK grown food in 1944 (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 75-77).

However, after the war, with the decline in railway land and a turn away from grow your own practices, which became associated with times of want, numbers began to fall. This led to the rapid decline in plot numbers during the 1970s, when allotment land began to be under pressure for development, resulting in the general rise of site waiting lists (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 78). Such was the position of allotments up until the recent rise in interest and public support in the period after 2007.

Nevertheless, the largely forgotten environmental movement from the 1980s had begun to roll back this dearth of allotment appeal before Celebrity Chefs recently began to back home grown produce. Wiltshire & Azuma (2000) reveal societal change that may still be undergirding the resurgence of allotments. The authors focus on changes from the 1980s and 1990s that began with the pressure on allotment sites from developers leading to the 1988 Parliamentary inquiry recommending additional protection for sites. This, the authors state, was ignored by government departments. However, after the UNCED 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Local Agenda 21 (LA21) agreements encouraged individual countries to stimulate

sustainable development through local-scale projects, which the UK government decided could be partly implemented through Local Government Associations promoting communities growing produce on allotments.

*“The reference to Local Agenda 21 is of great significance to the future security and prosperity of allotment gardening. It represents the first addition in 30 years to the practical (if not the legal) definition of what allotments are for—enhancing local sustainable development...” Wiltshire & Azuma 2000: 141*

The promotion of LA21 can be seen here to have stimulated the early stages of allotment revival, albeit patchily, through an upsurge of interest in sustainability by a proportion of new allotmenters and as community-based land projects by Local Government Associations. As the authors note, the upsurge at this time was to some degree focused in urban cityscapes as promoted by forward thinking public bodies.

In recent years, following on from the rising local food movement and popularity of foodism, demand for allotments has increased from all sectors of society and new sites are being created. In 2009 Celebrity Chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall established the Landshare website that seeks to match people with spare land to people looking for land to grow produce. Whilst the original focus was on the idea of sharing large back gardens or unused ones, it quickly morphed into a site where any land available or wanted could be posted. It currently has a web membership of over 72,285<sup>11</sup>. Allotments are now seen as places where people can access fresh food in an outdoor space whilst also having contact with local communities. Hunter et al. (2011) argue that this resurgence in growing your own is influenced by these celebrity chefs as well as a resurgent local food movement reacting against the standardisation of supermarket food.

By highlighting the promotion of environmentally friendly activities/communities through allotment practices, a common thread can be traced to current grow your own projects. Hunter et al. (2011) point to the cascading of Transition Town initiatives and Incredible Edible communities, which are currently developing allotments and grow your own initiatives, as a practical response to a perceived ecological crisis and to the standardisation and concentration of food procurement in supermarkets.

The degree to which the popularity of allotment growing can be seen to relate to changing sizes in household gardens or to treacherous economic climates has not been explored in the

---

<sup>11</sup> Landshare (online) available at <http://www.landshare.net/> Accessed 18th July 2013

literature. However it is accepted here that allotmenters are growers seeking more space than their back gardens or seeking a different space. Grow your own practices refer both to home garden growers and allotmenters that are accepted here to be linked by a desire to have a closer connection to food<sup>12</sup>. Hunter et al. (2011) explore the conceptual merging of spaces of growing by highlighting that the scarcity of land for growing has resulted in innovative land sharing projects, such as Landshare, Incredible Edibles and Capital Growth. These projects aim to break down the barriers to accessing land to grow on, as well as providing an alternative to industrially produced food. Through the lens of allotment practices, this body of literature reveals the processes by which nature-society relations combine to create these spaces illustrating the issues of embodiment, doing and becoming discussed in section 2.

### **2.33 The Allotment: Literatures Bridging Nature-Society**

Several key allotment texts highlight the potential inherent in the study of encounters between humans and nature in such growing spaces to help animate nature-society discourse (Lorimer 2005, Degnen 2009 and Cloke & Jones 2001). Lorimer's (2005) exposition of non-representational theory explores the philosophy's criticism of earlier cultural analyses for creating a static 'deadening' effect in the early focus on 'identity and textual meaning'. This provides a useful starting point in considering the role of the allotment in developing nature-society discourse (2005:83). Lorimer sets out how such considerations can be opened up to focus on everyday practices, explaining his use of '*more-than-representation*' in the title of his paper. Here non-representational empirics are extended to consider relating to the matter of life through material doings such as the activities of allotment growing, 'doing' home as well as the processes of 'doing' work. Lorimer sets out research into the active practices of gardening, and specifically allotments, as providing a clear counter to the criticised 'inertia' of the cultural landscape school. Drawing on the performative work of Crouch (2003) and Crouch & Ward (1988), which reveals the cyclical performativity of 'doing' the plot, Lorimer highlights the human more-than-human affinities shaped by the material connections involved in such directly engaged practices. This focus on the dynamism and processual nature of such doings, resulting in material changes to the human and more-than-human in allotment practices, reflect themes explored in this chapter. These themes highlight the unfolding nature of cultural change shaping spaces of the landscape itself through nature-

---

<sup>12</sup> Which? (2011) (online) available at <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2011/07/which-survey-reveals-grow-your-own-trend-is-still-on-the-up-259281/> accessed 2nd October 2012

society assemblages. Hitchings (2003) also considers the dynamic forces of change in gardening that he describes as shifting relationships between gardeners and plants where agency is a fluid channel between them.

Similarly, Degnen (2009) from Anthropology supports the notion of the garden and the allotment as valuable research spaces to develop non-dualistic perspectives with human more-than-human networks. She cites gardens or allotments as uniquely useful spaces to investigate such material relationships, highlighting their role on reflecting identity, status - as an autobiographical tool in processes of memorialising life. Of particular interest is that her research seeks to break down the perceived barriers in human and more-than-human engagements through a comparison of western and non-western perspectives on bodily engagements with nature. Whilst non-western perspectives are portrayed as having holistic attitudes where nature and the human are seen as unified and co-constituting life, western perspectives are commonly portrayed in opposition to this. However, Degnen's research on gardeners in the North of England suggests similarly unified positions. Western dualisms focus on the body as a 'machine' in portraying practical engagements with the natural world, creating a distanced perspective whilst also limiting perceptions of such moments. However through participatory, ethnographic work alongside gardeners in gardens and on allotments, Degnen found reciprocal perspectives on plant and human bodies where the characteristics of the plant body or the sounds it made when weeding, were part of gardeners' language when discussing them. This was especially true when referring to the plants' care needs. However her paper does not investigate whether these perspectives contain anything more than anthropomorphic reading of plants' needs. The author states that her findings point to the gardeners' relations with plants exceeding physiological and rational positions, going beyond '*a simple 'human-other' divide of Western naturalist ontology*' (2009:163). However without a more thorough dissemination of such interactions, it is not possible to prove this through her paper. The paper suggests a closeness of relationship established with plant matter through gardening activities, where plants reveal will and intentionality by responding through growth or stagnation to display likes and dislikes. The language of the participants shows a close thinking through of the needs of the growing matter. However the degree to which these needs are projected onto the plants by the participants should have been considered. Whilst questioning the paper's findings, its focus of looking at the depths of the relationships between human more-than-human through such active engagements in growing



practices, has had minimal exploration in Geography and signposts a need for further research in this direction, as well as revealing the wealth of possibilities in such engagements.

The spaces of human more-than-human agency in co-constituting place is usefully and evocatively described in Cloke & Jones (2001) paper exploring '*Dwelling, Place and Landscape*' through the case study of an orchard in Somerset. Speaking to similar themes as Degnen and Lorimer, it explores human more-than-human engagements beyond dualistic perspectives, criticising the limitations of ANT both in obscuring the role of the more-than-human, as well as the lack of attention given to nature-based networks in literature exploring relational matters. This suggests a limit within relational thinking that describes two forces joining, limiting the degree to which the multi-engagements within the complexity of the network is conceptualised. Drawing from Ingold's notion of Dwelling as a way to explore how human more-than-human are bound over time in co-constituting place through entwined performances, Cloke and Jones examine the dynamic processes by which landscapes emerge and change. By using the example of an orchard they reveal the ways in which the trees themselves shape the processes of creating an orchard. The authors describe how the different characteristics of trees shape the actions of the humans managing the orchard, showing here how trees themselves are actants in the processes of managing an orchard commercially. Using the notion of a 'taskscape' where the activities of the human more-than-human combine through maintaining trees to produce fruit, they richly describe the complexity of nature-society networks in a growing landscape.

These examples in the literature focused on the practices of human more-than-human engagements through growing, explore the inherent potential of investigating these networks. At the micro-site the human more-than-human merging through growing food brings together both the socio-cultural practices of physical activity on allotments, as well as the vitalism of the matter of the plot shaping plot outcomes. As will be explored below, such human more-than-human assemblages are affected by wider cultural changes, shaping a shift in societal participation.

### **2.34 Allotment Practices: Growing and Becoming**

Scholarship set out above, reveal the importance of investigations emplaced within a growing landscape, to take on and go further with geographical theory. This section takes themes discussed in section 2 and situates them in co-constituted places where the role of the human and more-than-human are equally acknowledged in the way humans people and utilise

landscape. To fully understand these entanglements, an understanding of *how* the human more-than-human engage on allotments is important, a perspective set out by Crouch (2003). In section 2 the emphasis was on bodily performativity engaging with nature to reveal *how* the human more-than-human are produced in such relationships, through processes of doing and becoming. Here with the focus on the allotment, Crouch (2003) can be re-explored to discuss themes of doing and becoming specifically through gardening practices.

Crouch (2003) explores the allotment as a place where transformational moments occur through bodily practices and processual activities, creating potential for being and becoming. Crouch takes time to set out *how* these activities combine bodily, physical engagements between human more-than-human, together with notions of will, intentionality and how cognitive and non-cognitive practices shape activities on the plot. Drawing from fieldwork, Crouch quotes allotmenters who relish the physicality of the practice. However this is not restricted to simply the bodily working with the matter of the plot - the soil, plants, compost etc. It is extended to physically enjoying being in the space of the plot, including the weather elements of air, sun or even rain, so extending the notion of matter engaged with.

*“The air is always different and alerts the skin ... unexpected scents are brought by breezes. Only when on your hands and knees do you notice insects and other small wonders.” Carol in Crouch 2003: 1953*

Through such actions Crouch explores the notions of doing, being and becoming which form part of the processes of growing, showing that simple acts of growing occur through complexities of cognitive, non-cognitive and bodily responses directing physical activity resulting in the taking of risks, experimenting and going further. Growing appears to be like a human more-than-human dance where responses to the music (or here the realities of engaging through the plot) occur moment-by-moment, requiring continual change, bodily adjustment and negotiation in order to produce both a successful harvest as well as the potential for future harvests. Such thought takes notions of relational materialism, performativity and visceral geographies further by looking with greater detail at *how* and *what* is occurring through such engagements. Here dualistic thinking is replaced by the recognition of the importance of the non-human within growing spaces, together with an immersed theoretic of the entanglements occurring. However, still missing from such literature is a vibrancy of the matter of the non-human realm in the human providing the conduit for understanding, leading to a diminishment of the role of the non-human in such growing spaces.

There appears to be little human geography literature on the development of skills to garden or gaining gardening knowledge. A literature search found a long list on papers exploring children learning to garden at school (e.g. Waliczek & Zajicek 1999). However literature relating to adults learning to garden covered either development literature (Marsh 1998) or work looking at the role of grandparents in learning to garden, which again is focused on children (Ruby, Kenner et al. 2008). One paper looking at collaborative research where a research team held gardening meetings to supplement separate research, did not mention a need to learn how to garden (Woolhouse 2005). It seems that learning to garden or the processes by which gardening knowledge accrues is not of interest, or it is assumed we can all garden. In contrast in adult education and other centres, gardening courses are commonly run to inspire behaviour change or to extend skills (see Dowler & Caraher 2003, Pinkerton & Hopkins 2009). This is underlined by Transition Town literature such as Pinkerton & Hopkins (2009), whose book on local food has a chapter titled -‘The Great Reskilling’ referring to the need to reclaim “...*the skills and trades that once made up the thriving local food economies of pre-oil society...bread making, sauerkraut production and composting*” (2009: 35). This movement’s campaign and training to embed community resilience in preparation for a time of limited oil availability, stresses the importance of growing your own food, providing examples where communities are coming together to learn how to grow food. Therefore a gap in the cultural geography literature on the processes through which growing practices develop can be highlighted. Crouch (2003) provides the sole voice developing ideas of cognitive and non-cognitive moments driving these physical processes. Literature bridging nature-society develops the conceptual frameworks through which such investigations can be made, by breaking down the dualisms of human more-than-human agency to allow the liveliness of such encounters to develop. However, outside of the work of Crouch (2003), Crouch & Ward (1988/1997), Lorimer (2005) and Buckingham (2005), there is little focus on the practices taking place on allotments. Alternative literatures do provide a bringing together of allotmentee and plot through the skills required to grow food, such as the Transition Town literature discussed above. However these practical tomes give little attention to the debates within cultural geography, namely the agency, performativity of human more-than-humans in these growing spaces and how to investigate their processual merging vital materialisms.

### **2.35 The Allotment: Cultural Shifts - Cultural Continuums**

Our earlier discussion of the allotment referred to cultural and historical forces that have transformed perceptions of *who* now is an allotmenteer. These processes of change are continuing as the rise in new allotments attracts new growers in both town and country. Buckingham (2005) explores both the changes in *who* grows and the changing *spaces* of the allotment. She explores the merging of perceptions of private/public space on allotments, as well as looking at recent increases of women growing on allotments. As each plot is privately rented, it is partly seen as an extension of private garden space, with individual freedom, within reason, to choose how it is managed. However, as the plots cohabit a communal site allotmentees have to consider not only the comings and goings of other allotmentees to consider, but also the plot contractual agreement to be answered to, resulting in collectively accountable space. Therefore such differentiated spaces require cultural adaption resulting in behaviours consistent with the perceived space, which is further complicated by the behavioural norms and traditions of plot practices (Buckingham 2005: 173, Crouch & Ward 1988/1997). These perceptions of space reveal the importance of allotments as representing public access to land. As Crouch & Ward set out, the legal right of public access to them remains at the heart of allotment history as before the 1908 Allotment Act, creating them was at the bidding of private individuals. Therefore the nature of public/private space is both legally set out reflecting the changed history of land use, as well as a 'felt' personal experience.

Buckingham's research on the recent rise of women growing and leasing plots reveals perhaps the most important recent story of the allotment, the significant and widespread cultural change that has led to the resurgence in the popularity of growing on allotments, involving a broadening of the demographics signing new agreements. Both Crouch & Ward (1988/1997) and Buckingham, refer to the rise of women growing on allotments, which has been noted by Crouch & Ward as the most significant force changing and augmenting allotment traditions in recent times. Both sets of authors refer to the plot as a traditionally working class male space where activities both augmented family income and provided men with somewhere to escape. Crouch & Ward also discuss the exclusion of women from leisure activities before the 1950s, with some exceptions. However, with changes in attitudes, by the 1980s allotments began to see women growing and taking leases. Buckingham came to an interest in allotments following from a LA21 meeting, resulting in her taking a plot herself, where she became fascinated by plot life. It was, she felt, an unusually hybrid society without

some of the hierarchies common in wider life, which lead her to initiate research on the feminisation of allotments at several sites in London. Her findings supported perceptions that women were partly drawn to allotments as a response to environmental challenges and to a dislike of ubiquitous supermarket produce. Subsequently the women interviewed often referred to a desire to grow organically or without chemicals. Significantly this study showed that women taking part were better educated than the men traditionally involved, leading her to conclude that not only a feminisation but also an embourgeoisement of such sites was occurring.

Crouch & Ward (1988/1997) covers in depth these cultural transitions, tracking changes seen on the plot, tying into detailed information on allotment legislation and campaigns to protect provision. A significant theme throughout the book is the cultural life of the allotment stemming from the early traditions to the cultural changes that have occurred since World War Two. Through discussions of differing allotment communities across the country, the authors also explore notions of societal change on allotments, revealing a rise of middle class growers, especially within large urban communities. Crouch & Ward point to the rise in incomes and resulting growth in leisure activities that have developed this embourgeoisement phenomenon. Another variable underpinning the rise of the educated middle class on allotments, is the proliferation of environmental consciousness as discussed earlier, with Crouch & Ward pointing to growers from such backgrounds becoming the backbone of campaigns to protect sites in London (1988/1997:234-5). However, the authors also point to areas of continued working-class traditions linked to areas of widespread employment by single industries or widespread agricultural employment, where the middle classes have had less impact. In areas such as Northumberland and Durham, the continuation of traditional leisure pursuits such as pigeon fancying or showing leeks for awards provide a continuum of cultural practices linked through allotment culture (1988/1997:222-225). These cultural leisure changes and continuums are commonly linked with engaging with the materials of the plot, notably the shed, which has been perceived as a privileged male space. The changing attitudes to leisure and space since the 1960s effected shifting attitudes to the shed on allotments with a lessening of tolerance for the ramshackle, skip-salvaged versions. Rules on the aesthetics and siting of sheds have become commonplace on allotments, with a drive for sites to be seen as an ordered and aesthetic space for growing, requiring financial outlay in establishing an allotment (1988/1997:204-5). Such rules enacted through changing cultural

practices reveal shifts in allotment activities shaping the aesthetics and nature of the landscape in which they are sited.

Like Buckingham, Crouch & Ward note the diminishment of the male dominated working class space, partly driven through necessity, to become a 'place to be' for the family. The authors do dispute, nevertheless, the absolute divides between the male space of the past, to the family friendly one presently. Their lengthy research discovered the past involvement of women and children from the early Twentieth Century, to a 1934 report detailing the role allotments played in providing a space for family picnics and days out (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 93). Their position, it could be argued, is further supported by the fictional account of life in the countryside in the late Nineteenth Century, as set out in the quote at the beginning of this section that shows Tess and a female friend working the plots alongside neighbours. Therefore, as in the cases of previous divides discussed such as public/private and rural/urban, Crouch & Ward problematise perceptions of male/family space to reveal more complex experiences. They reveal that as much as cultural change is affecting allotment landscapes, cultural continuums fold past practices into present cultural life via the medium of allotment life.

Of particular interest here is the way the past is seen to unfold into present experiences through the continuation of what Crouch & Ward refer to as a 'common identity' based on past communities. Whilst acknowledging a revival in allotment activities, which has broadened to include leaseholders across the demographic, they state that the allotments themselves may have provided a space for traditional cultures to survive through growing practices in the allotment heartlands. Economic and social circumstances have provided conditions where present allotmenters have a similar relationship of necessity in growing their own produce as their Grandparents.

This section has set out the role allotments have in exploring some of the key matters raised previously in this chapter. It has been shown through an examination of the literature that allotments do provide a unique space to discuss human more-than-human engagements, helping to ground such debates in the earthy matters of growing for consumption. On the allotment, physical activity is a vital characteristic of the processes of growing veg, therefore by exploring the limited literature revealing the performative nature of such engagements the foundation has been laid for a deeper, more visceral exposition of such matters when we come to the empirical work of this study. Additionally, by situating this study in the specifics of allotment space, with its nuanced parameters, the relevance of this work to the academy

has been established. On the allotment, the processes of production of the space is co-constituted through human more-than-human networks providing an opportunity to delve into the vital materialism of such endeavours. The allotment represents a place of continuity as well as space of cultural change as reflected in the changes in societal participation on the plot. Crouch & Ward describe the allotment landscape as being created by the relationships between allotmenters and the rules of their landlords, partly through the variety of rules governing the aesthetics of sheds and other structures (1988/1997:207). However, I believe the authors would, like Cloke & Jones (2001) in the orchard, accept that soil, plants, weather and so on are also active participants in creating such landscapes, shaping the actions of each allotmenter in attempting to produce successful harvests, as well as the rules governing the aesthetics of each site. In such matters the topography of the land, the situation of neighbours, the ease of access and so on, is inherent in the land, carving out the positioning of each site; issues that will provide rich illustrations of the life of the plot throughout the empirical work to come.

## **2:36 SUMMARY**

This chapter has contextualised food procurement through multiple lenses: the commodification of food through the rise of the supermarket, the emergence of local food and contestations of AFN, human more-than-human engagements through food exploring agency and performativity and finally, the resurgence of the allotment as a space of procurement, including allotment practices. This broad context has required an engagement with multiple literatures. Whilst the dominant gaze has been derived from cultural geographies, literatures on cultural food geographies, geographies of sustainability, feminist geographies and public health, have also had impact in shaping this study. This wider literature examining complex issues surrounding the allotment as a space of food procurement provides a deeper understanding of how allotment practices can relate to socio-political issues of food accessibility and health, as well as the cultural materialisms exploring how human more-than-humans engage in the space of the plot.

This chapter has investigated recent food geographies that have explored conceptualisations of the space between production and consumption in food networks, revealing it to be a space that reflects consumer perceptions of food quality and production transparency. Key themes that have emerged through this discussion include the contestation between globalised and

localised agriculture. On investigating this space it has become clear that this apparent dichotomy holds a great deal more complexity than it is often given, with the blurring of boundaries between global and local food highlighted. The allotment arises as a potential space of doing local food that is under represented within the literature. The impacts of doing food in creating food knowledge also require investigation. Such debates highlight issues of spaces of doing food, food supply and knowing food through everyday practices on the plot. It is within these social issues that this study of allotment practices takes place. However, an exploration of allotment practices requires a cultural perspective to provide understandings of such immersive human more-than-human bodily entanglements. The moment-by-moment adaptation to the life of the plot necessitates an appreciation of the materialities and wills merging through visceral, bodily dynamics. This study therefore requires a broad frame in order to delve deeper into the matter of agency and assemblages created on the plot, creating the material outcomes of edible produce. Through this, conceptualisations of the space between production and consumption can be reconfigured and practices of food procurement can be investigated to problematise notions of food accessibility, food sustainability and the skills required for obtaining such self-determined food.

Through these cultural immersions by means of food, it has been shown how the plot is an ideal space to develop conceptualisations of non-dualistic engagements with nature. What the literature requires is a merging between food politics and food culture that can investigate and problematise notions of the individual and collective and private and public food spaces. Further investigation is also required into ideas of the allotment as a place of cultural tradition and cultural progress. The immersive nature of this study will enable an investigation into the *how* of allotment practices. How are the skills of growing produce developed? To what extent does the role of non-cognitive decision-making matter as much as that of planning, order and physical ability?

This review has shown the dynamic context in which individual moments and micro-geographies of food procurement exist. This chapter has identified key issues of food procurement including how the material of food is missing from most of the literature. Whilst allotment practices can be seen as a response to the forces of global food supply chains, they also offer spaces of nature-culture engagement, providing an opportunity to explore aspects of doing food that are hidden from supermarket food. Food doings exemplify the processual nature of cultural change that is identified by several authors as shaping human more-than-human engagements and our understandings of them (Ingold 2010, 2011, Grosz 2005). Such



changes were apparent in Section 3 where an exploration of the history of allotments over the twentieth century was made, showing that adaptations to wider socio-cultural changes manifest within allotment culture. In the space of the allotment, engagements between the matter of the plot and agency of the allotmentee are paramount and the processual rhythms of change and adaptation are a key issue in exploring how growers learn to create successful harvests and so come to know their food.

However the methods through which this immersive enquiry can be made, require careful consideration. The difficulties of following the processes of human more-than-human engagements on the plot involve investigating the realm of messy materialities and the unpredictability of nature. These questions of approaching the methods will be fully examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN EMPLACED METHODOLOGY

#### 3:0 -RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- *How does this study extend knowledge of nature-society relations in the space of the allotment?*
- *How is practical knowledge enacted in such engagements?*
- *How does this study extend knowledge of the role of material visceral encounters in bodily performativities?*
- *How allotment practices explore alternative food provision through emplaced visceral methods.*

#### 3:1 INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with both the human participants involved in growing food on allotments, as well as the space of the allotment itself. It is interested in the practicalities such growing involves- the decision-making, the planning, the physical activity, the harvest of produce and its consumption. It is interested in the wider implications of such activities, such as engaging with a local environment, engaging with a local community and the alteration to shopping habits by self-provisioning. The practice of cultivating food requires obvious, as well as subtle and messy interactions between conscious human intentions and responses to the dynamic of life on allotment sites. Therefore, the site itself as a key participant must be set out here to provide clarity on these situated methodological processes.

This research requires a qualitative, ethnographic approach in order to approach these complex, messy and differing strands highlighted by these research questions. Law's (2004) classic exposition on the nature of the practice of research, explores the importance for using methods that allow for the messiness of life to emerge. Law calls for going beyond a bounded approach to research where attempts to demarcate order prevails. Taking a radical approach where the subtle and elusive is seen as important as overarching themes, Law calls for methods that reflect post-structuralist and post-human discourses. A greater variety of practices are called for that go beyond the assumption that the social is a definite entity. Research taking account for the messy and elusive can explore events that '*exceed our capacity to know*'. Greater recognition of this is called for and reflected through methods used here (Law 2004: 6). This approach matches the intent here to explore the messy, elusive

realities in the field of the allotment itself. Here the complex interrelations of allotmentee, nature, communities and wider society create a chaotic web of connections and reconnections requiring a variety of approaches to further understanding. This research, immersed in the space of the field, provides an emplaced methodology that attends to the processes of experience required (Pink 2009: 25).

Qualitative methods such as ethnography, using participant observation and interviews allow for reiterative immersion in the field of study where multiple framings can be explored. Such fieldwork that encompasses both the broad sweep of processes, as well as those occurring at subtle or almost invisible levels, allows for intricacies of post-human concern and the subtle encounters between human more-than-human to be examined.

This chapter will introduce the field sites themselves, to situate this research and to emplace the methods adopted. The next section will detail the process of developing the research itself, before moving onto to outline the sites chosen. I will set out the location, topography of the sites, their background, activities undertaken as well as the managing of the sites. After this the chapter will explore the selection of research methods via an exploration of key issues raised within methodological literatures. This will then lead onto the fieldwork practices themselves before finishing by detailing the processes of data analysis.

### **3:20 ESTABLISHING THE RESEARCH**

This study was established and its fieldwork methods chosen through the processes of repeated interactions with local food projects and developing awareness of the issues affecting them, as well as literature searches and discussions with supervisors. The fullness of allotment life was to be represented in this research, which required an immersion into its ways, so that not only the stories of participants could be heard, but the moment by moment changes of the allotment itself, its nature, its weather, the changing activities of allotmentees who were not interviewed etc. In order to achieve knowledge of these processes, combined with the stories of the key participants themselves, ethnographic methods were selected.

These methods were chosen due to the potential to allow complex processes to emerge, be represented and analysed. However to explore these processes fully, it was decided to grow on an allotment myself to take extend the participant observation further by employing the more immersive processes of auto-ethnography. These techniques allowed for me to become 'known' as the researcher and to also become a member of the community itself on one of the sites. This enabled transcendence from a position of power as an outsider, to the more

inclusive and privileged position of an insider. This position was possible due to me living locally to the sites, but also required a careful tread along the path of researcher positionality. As someone who lives locally to the allotment sites, I was able to have embedded knowledge of the concerns of the area, the issues of rural living and local campaigns to promote local food and establish new allotment sites. This did require an awareness of research ethics, responsibility and positionality as a local researcher, which included avoiding using a friend from the allotment as a key participant. There were some notable advantages to being local to the research, such as being able to hold an allotment myself, which would not have been possible if living at a distance. I was also able to work with a class from a local primary school on one of the sites, as I had good networks and was 'known' to them, including having CRB clearance with the school. To create informed consent, I asked interview participants to sign an agreement to using transcripts from the interviews for this research and initially approached both sites through the allotment association chairs, as well as The National Trust in the case of Lytes Cary. Whilst children featured within the study none were ever left in my care or talked to without parents or teachers present. When working with the primary school I also enquired whether any children did not have parental consent to feature within photos or video clips.

Therefore the methods chosen were selected partly to match desired research outcomes, but also because they fitted with the circumstances presenting on the ground. The unfolding processes of fieldwork itself also shaped research methods, as at both sites I ended up running cooking workshops with participants. At Somerton Allotments, where I had an allotment, I was asked to help with their open day to mark their first season and official opening. Several committee members snapped up my idea of a community cook-in, using allotment produced ingredients from the site itself. At Lytes Cary Allotments, which is owned by The National Trust, I volunteered to assist with several visits by a class from a local primary school, which resulted in me running a cooking session with them on the allotment site. These events allowed for the entirety of the production-consumption cycle to be represented in the fieldwork, as well as providing moments where I could give back to the communities who had taken part in my research. Separately I developed auto- ethnographic representations of consumption by blogging and photographing experiments with home cooked meals made from my allotment harvests. This reflects how the methods were both chosen in advance and adapted to as conditions unfolded through the growing season.

Therefore opportunities were taken and adaptations made depending on the conditions encountered.

### **3:21- Establishing the sites**

The formation of this research began before commencing PhD work as I was embedded with local food projects and followed their work with interest borne out of a passion for good food for taste and health. During the months before beginning my PhD work I began networking with Somerset Community Food, a local food charity. It was by following their work that I formulated my research that reflected the concerns within their 3 year project called Somerset Land and Food. This project began in December 2009 and focused on increasing people growing food on community sites as a means of increasing the consumption of fresh, local produce. At the same time The National Trust, initiated a campaign to create 1,000 new growing sites by 2012<sup>13</sup>. This resulted in a new allotment site created at Lytes Cary Manor, near Somerton, Somerset where I began getting to know staff and organisers before getting them on board as research partners. Initially, I attempted to also work with Digger's Field allotment site in Langport as my other fieldwork partner, which I visited with the landowner. This site was run through a committee of local people with many allotmentees also belonging to Transition Town Langport. The committee itself remained elusive and did not respond to my varied attempts to contact them and I had to look elsewhere. However, through an article in the local paper, I heard about the activities of local people working to establish a site at Somerton. John Watts, a Somerton resident who was the driving force behind this scheme, was from the start a reliable contact. I soon became invited to visit the site as it was being established. Fortuitously, the site came together quickly and opened for growing in January 2011, in time for them to become my second fieldwork site and to engage in their activities throughout the growing season.

---

<sup>13</sup> BBC (2009) Land Freed for 1,000 Allotments (online) available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7898359.stm> accessed 6th February 2013



Figure 1 Map of Somerset<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Map of Somerset- available online at <http://www.somersetguide.co.uk/maps/>, accessed 30/11/13

### 3:30 INTRODUCING THE FIELDSITES: LYLES CARY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Between the small town of Somerton in South Somerset and the A303, the Lytes Cary Estate sits north of The River Cary. It contains a Manor house, a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Chapel and a Farm owned by The National Trust; it is bounded on the east by The Fosse Way, a Roman road (See Fig 2). The field N/E of the house is where the allotments are situated, bounded on their northern edge by a footpath and on the west by the entrance track to the estate. Being 4 miles from Somerton and close to 3 South Somerset villages, this small National Trust property is in open rural countryside.



Figure 2 Map of Lytes Cary Estate –[Image produced from the Ordnance Survey Get-a-map service. Image reproduced with kind permission of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland]

### **3:31 Situating Lytes Cary**

Lytes Cary sits in 149 hectares of uncultivated pasture, farmed fields, and woodland with grazing sheep and a collection of buildings mostly of local stone construction and the River Cary flowing east to west through its southern sector. Two roads bound it, one being the A37 (a Roman Road-Fosse Way). The Elizabethan manor house has formal gardens with an unusual yew topiary avenue, shaped into dovecotes (The Apostles Garden). Therefore, the allotments are situated in an area with many aesthetic assets, natural as well as cultivated, that already draw the public to view and share the tranquility of following the way-marked 'river walk' or exploring the historic appeal of the house and chapel. There are a variety of trees on the estate and throughout my fieldwork I often walked by the river to observe seasonal changes that form such a part of vegetable growing. However, this is not a remote piece of countryside, walks are accompanied by the buzzing crescendo and wane of naval helicopters from nearby Yeovilton and the steady drone of traffic from the very close A303. Even so, on these walks, or at the plots, the piercing cry of buzzards were frequently heard, timid deer were often seen and in the summer the common calling of skylarks formed a pleasant backdrop to plot life.

### **3:32 Establishment of Lytes Cary Allotments**

There had been a lack of allotment provision in the area for some time. After being approached by several local residents, the secretary of Charlton Mackrell parish council put up a notice asking for appropriate land available for allotments. Simon Larkins, National Trust South Somerset Gardens Manager, saw this notice as he lives at Lytes Cary and put in train the process necessary to establish the site. This was fortunate timing as it came in 2009 when The National Trust pledged to establish 1,000 new growing spaces by 2012. This campaign had partly been inspired by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's Landshare campaign. This is a web site based charity that aims to match potential food growers with potential land to share, encouraging more people to grow food for their own consumption; it currently has over 71,116 members (Landshare February 2013)<sup>15</sup>.

The allotments at Lytes Cary were eventually established in early 2010 with 40 plots that until 2012 included 5 communal plots used by 3 schools, 2 local primary schools and a group of boys needing extra- curricula activities from a local secondary school. This has now been

---

<sup>15</sup> Landshare (2013) -Connecting Growers to People with Land to share (online) available at- <http://www.landshare.net/> accessed February 8th 2013



reduced to two communal plots. The new plots are on land that has not been ploughed in decades, being used for sheep grazing in recent years; it has clayey soil. When the site was being established the National Trust had the site ploughed. The National Trust gardeners take overall responsibility for the communal plots, rotavating them between seasons. However, the overall responsibility of the site is managed by the allotment association through a small committee that liaises with the National Trust mostly through Simon Larkins, who often attends the meetings.

### **3:33 Management of Lytes Cary Allotment Association**

As the National Trust are on the committee, the committee's site and plot rules have been adapted to the requirements of The Trust. Many allotment associations follow the pro-forma recommended by The National Association of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG), which give a basic run through of requirements when taking on an allotment tenancy. These usually take the form of keeping the plot tidy, limitations on livestock and commercial usage as well as setting out the agreed rent for the plots. Added requirements stipulated by the National Trust include a prohibition on all sheds, an agreement to garden with organic principles which restricts chemical usage, along with the usual aesthetic requirements in regard to keeping down weeds, cultivating  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the plot and edging the plot. Additionally, there is an unusual access agreement in that visiting members of the public are allowed to wander around the site. National Trust gardens contain a strong aesthetic and it seems that this is required of the allotment site too; partly because the site lies adjacent to the car park giving it increased visibility. However, the Trust was awarded Defra funding for spreading environmental messages through its outdoor spaces and here the site was used partly as an educational space for visiting members of the public, visiting children and other visiting groups.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> This was the NT's 'Eat into Green Living Campaign'



Fig 3 Photo looking N/W across Lytes Cary A. A. February '11

### **3:34 Activities at Lytes Cary**

For the last few years this allotment site has had extended public activity through groups using communal plots with supervised National Trust support in the first year from Tracey Harnisch and the second Jemma Marsh. Primary schools and Charlton's Pre-school came several times a year for growing experiences whereas the extra-curricula secondary school boys and youth offenders came for weekly sessions. With the reduction of communal plots, these activities will be reduced.

The allotment association also holds regular events for allotmenters often in the form of social hog roast suppers held several times a year. Seed and produce swap events were held in the first year and then it was decided to leave this to informal channels between allotmenters themselves. Additionally to these, the yearly Vegetable Competition is a feature of plot-life. Outside of the allotmenters themselves, public growing workshops have also been held at the site, with advice on spring sowing, summer salads and autumn pumpkin and squash harvest and cooking events.

Of specific interest to this research, I took part in a growing morning with Charlton Mackrell's Red Class in May 2011. This was followed up when I ran, with Jemma Marsh, a cooking event for the class at the plots where the children picked, washed, cooked and ate salads and soup from the site.



**Fig 4 Lytes Cary AA Communal Shepherd's Hut. Looking W.**

### **3:40 INTRODUCING THE FIELDSITES: SOMERTON ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION**

Somerton Allotment Association is situated in a rented field on the southern side of Somerton, approximately a mile from the town centre. Brian Perry of Midney Farm who owns the field, operates a horse livery business whilst also producing arable crops on the farm. As the map shows, the field is situated in open countryside, bounded on the east by the B3151, which connects the towns of Street (to the north), Somerton and Ilchester (to the South). Somerton town is approximately 9m north of Yeovil and lies on a prominence bounded on the north by the flood plain for The River Cary. It is a small market town of great antiquity, being a site of Saxon kings and is known as “The Ancient capital of Wessex”. The allotment field lies on the southern edge of this prominence that looks out to the southerly low lying area of the floodplain of The River Yeo near the A303.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 4 for a hand drawn site map of Somerton Allotments



Fig 5 Somerton Allotments Association at Ashen Cross Sth of Somerton [Images produced from the Ordnance Survey Get-a-map service. Image reproduced with kind permission of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland]



Fig 6 Arrow showing exact location of S.A.A. site

Looking to the west of the allotment field is a working quarry at Ashen Cross, where blue lias stone is quarried. It has been said that the allotment field used to be a quarry and it is unusually stoney, with heavy clay soil. In the years preceding the establishment of the allotment site, the field has been used to grow arable crops. Directly on its northern boundary lies a small holding called Keeper's Cottage that sells a small range of flowering and vegetable plants. Therefore, the site is surrounded by rural commercial enterprises reflecting the long history of small-scale commercial agriculture in the area.

The two acres of the site sit high up after the prominence of Somerton dip down to the millstream south of the town and then roll back up to the high point of the allotments before again rolling down to the next river floodplain. The rolling topography stems from the area being formed by old Jurassic rocks, with Blue Lias limestone outcrops comprised of clay soils sweeping in a broad arc from Burnham, via Somerton to Staple Fitzpaine, which typically give rise to flat and gently undulating land.<sup>18</sup> Being high up, allotmenters have extensive views and can watch the weather come and go.

### **3:41 Establishment of Somerton Allotment Association**

Without the concerted effort of several residents of Somerton, notably John Watts, Somerton Allotment Association would not presently exist. Before 2010, Somerton had only 5 allotment plots behind the cemetery. These were themselves quite neglected and scruffy. John moved to Somerton in 2006 and asked The Town Council about available allotments, they told him that there was a waiting list of 20 people. In the next few years, this grew to 48 people, however there was no land available for a site. Eventually John took it on himself to write to 28 local landowners, asking if they would have land available to lease. Only one replied, Brian Perry, of Midney Farm. After establishing the possibilities of renting from him, John then went onto research plot agreements and he found a pro-forma on The National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners' (NSALG) website as well as receiving advice from their local representative Alan Cavill. He passed all these details onto the Town Council.

However, still the Council made no effort to create the allotments. Therefore, again John and some others took the task on and eventually established The Somerton Allotment Association

---

<sup>18</sup> Natural England (2013)- Somerset (online) available at [http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/geodiversity/englands/counties/area\\_ID30.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/geodiversity/englands/counties/area_ID30.aspx) accessed 6th February 2013

in November 2010. They decided to by-pass the council and sort the allotment provisioning themselves by leasing land from Brian Perry whilst also approaching the people on the waiting list to check their interest. Having established a committee, they were successful in receiving an 'Awards for All' grant of £10,000 for erecting a rabbit-proof fence and connecting a water supply. The field was twice ploughed in three strips in December 2010 and divided into individual plots, which began to be cultivated by allotmenters in early 2011.

### **3:42 Management of Somerton Allotment Association**

Somerton Allotments Association consists of a management committee that meets monthly and was formally voted in at their first AGM in November 2011. The chair, John Watts and some other committee members were instrumental in establishing the site. Somerton Allotments Association uses a pro-forma tenancy agreement from NSALG, which as discussed earlier provides general advice on the formal running of allotment sites. Allotmenters are encouraged to re-new their tenancy agreements annually via the annual general meeting. Having been created independently by town residents, the association is now supported by Somerton Town Council, who sponsors an annual award for the best plot.



Fig 7 Somerton Allotments April '11. Looking W. Note dug out stone pile

### **3:43 Activities at Somerton Allotments**

During their first growing season several community activities have been organised such as a bank holiday BBQ. The main plot event of last season was the Harvest Open Day, at which David Heath MP addressed those attending and presented best plot award and runner-up plot award, both awards sponsored by Somerton Town Council. I ran a community cook-in at this event as both an opportunity to give back to the community and as a research activity.

Last winter Somerset Community Food ran a growing evening class in Somerton especially for the allotmenters. These four classes were finished off in January with a site visit to



Charles Dowding's Farm where he grows organic salad leaves commercially through a no-dig method.

The AGM in November is also a time where allotmenters get together. However, informal social activities are more common than formal ones at the site.



**Fig 8 The Community Cook-In at Somerton Allotments 10/9/11**

### 3:50 METHODOLOGICAL LITERATURE

#### i) Problematising Ethnography

Ethnography has become a common methodological practice, used widely by various disciplines, notably anthropology, sociology and human geography. The intensity of literature concerning ethnographic methods have undertaken peaks and troughs over the last 40 years, with intense activity occurring in the 1990s and 2000s, when many tomes referred to in this chapter were written (Limb & Dwyer 2001, Blunt 2003, Cook & Crang 1995 and Shurmer-Smith 2002). Whilst many social science academics are using ethnographic methods and reporting these in their studies today, there are fewer works exploring the theory of ethnographic practice. This section will explore qualitative and ethnographic literature by firstly highlighting issues of debate and how methods are being adapted to reflect theoretical concerns. It will then move onto setting out the practices undertaken within this study in conjunction with how they intersect with methodological concerns.

Hillyard (2010) has explored the debates currently surrounding ethnography, in particular Hammersley's (2003) critique of ethnography. Pink (2009) has also been charting new developments in ethnography by developing Sensory Ethnographies. Both writers provide useful overviews of recent trends in ethnographic thinking, pointing to the end of the 20th century as a key time in developing ethnographic discourse. Pink charts the emerging of calls for and explorations of reflexive, embodied and visual practices at this time. This is matched by Hillyard's discussion of the impact of the cultural turn and the adoption of postmodern thinking at this time that went against the imposition of overarching totalising theories. Hillyard explores how this time saw the emergence of sophisticated approaches to understanding new arenas of life, such as human-animal interactions. Hammersley's concerns that Hillyard explores refer to the process by which theory can '*emerge from data*' through ethnographic practice. This is, Hammersley argues, particularly problematic as ethnographies tend to be site-specific (Hillyard 2010: 3-4). In conjunction with these concerns, Hillyard explores Hammersley's concerns that the '*notion of discovery*' possible within ethnography, can lead to the fieldwork lacking relevance unless the processes and researcher's positionality are set out (Hillyard 2010: 07).

Whilst Hillyard agrees with Hammersely that such matters are of great importance to undertaking effective research, other writers see the flexible reflexivity of ethnography as a key strength as it can adapt to matters in the field. Cook & Crang (1995) stress how the intersubjectivity of qualitative methods creates processes where the doing of fieldwork unfolds. Acknowledging how *'research on social relations arises out of social relations stretching between the field, the academy and beyond.'* (Cook & Crang 1995: 7 original emphasis) underlines the inevitable messiness of ethnography that can return rich understandings. Similarly, the situatedness of ethnographic work has been cited by many authors such as Rose (1997) and Haraway (1988) as being an essential part of the effectiveness of ethnography. Haraway (1988) explores Feminist thinking to set out how situated, local knowledge allow for the messiness of life to be explored. By situating knowledge the position of the researcher can be defined, the messiness of life can emerge resulting in work that reflects 'somewhere' (Haraway 1988: 590). Such positions are essential, Haraway states, as they prevent the closure of universalising theories that attempt to create order through simplicity.

## **ii) Folding Theory into Practice**

Ongoing concerns of how to reflect theory in fieldwork have been highlighted by various recent authors such as Whatmore (2006), Paterson (2009) Pink (2009) and Crouch (2003), each reflecting key issues of interest to this study.

Whatmore's (2006) call to attend to the practice and performance of research provides a foundation to this discussion of more recent methodological innovation. Both Whatmore and Crouch (2003) explore the potential for practice-based or performative research to

*"...amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject."* Whatmore 2006: 606

Crouch (2003) discusses *how* such performative approaches enable greater understanding of the processes of doing and becoming in fieldwork practice. Both authors stress the potential for performative methods to explore the bodily register of affect. Crouch explores, through studying allotmenters and caravan enthusiasts, how moments of physical doings include cognitive and non-cognitive adaptations to the processes engaged with, resulting in adapted outcomes.

A key ingredient of Whatmore's treatise is to develop such practice-based methods in order to attend to the *'stuff of the world'* at a more *'intimate...in here'* level of human being (Whatmore

2006: 602). Whatmore refers to a rise of interest in materiality where the materials of life are seen as active and co-constitutive of life (Tolia-Kelly 2012). By attending to these materials, these 'things' via a dynamic, generative approach, human geographers and others, are not only exploring the '*stuff of the world*' but also the relationships between humans and this 'stuff'. This brings us to the core of Whatmore's imperatives, to use this bodily approach to see how: '*...landscapes are co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth...[and to] interrogate 'the human' as no less a subject of ongoing co-fabrication than any other socio-material assemblage.*' Whatmore 2006: 603

This approach sees humans and the non-human material 'stuff' being given greater parity in empirical investigations, so that the encounters between humans and the stuff in the world can be more sensitively probed. Crouch (2003) taking a performative approach explores how these encounters can draw together notions of corporeality with a focus on human more-than-human encounters. By developing performative sensitivities and exploring how adaptations are made in the field, such empirical work can closely chart the processes from 'doing' to 'becoming'. Such perspectives are critical to investigating understandings of the developing of human knowledge through encounters with the more-than-human. Degnen (2009) and Ellen & Plattern (2011) take a similar approach to Crouch from the field of anthropology, by stressing the value of exploring these empirical and ontological matters within the garden or the allotment through the activity of gardening. These settings locate moments and processes of human more-than-humans within a complex field of interrelating.

Simonsen (2000), Mol (2008), Mann, Mol et al. (2011), Pink (2009) and Paterson (2009), have explored how corporeal emphases in research unify the mind and body in research practice. Paterson (2009) calls for sensuous ethnographies based on corporeal methods that explore feelings and 'somatic sensations' such as touch, which can unite visual and haptic fields of understanding. Therefore exploring corporeal understandings of the world can subvert the visual hegemony of representation, allowing the affective, visceral register to take ethnography to a deeper communication with the world. As Paterson states, such corporeally based ethnographic practices allow for the '*folding of theory into the practices of fieldwork*' (2009: 779).

Pink (2009) also emphasises that attending to the senses is a fundamental part of understanding and representing others (Pink 2009: 7). However, she explores the interaction of all the senses to dispute the dominance of ocular perspectives. Drawing from Ingold

(2000), she explores how the senses cannot be separated and that vision acts as a conduit for the other senses. Here a sensuous approach is also seen as critical in understanding human perceptions and feelings.

Mann, Mol et al. (2011) explore the merging of senses in an activist ethnography where the authors 'learn' how to eat with their fingers and how this technique changes the process of tasting. Through meal-based research they sensitively probe the processes by which taste is detected. The authors' findings discover that the more intimate approach of eating with fingers expand notions of tasting and sensing.

These examples illustrate how the senses have been explored within the literature, whilst also expanding perceptions of how the body acts as an interface in human more-than-human encounters. However, how to conceptualise the body as a sensing, as well as affecting space requires careful consideration that is begun here and developed in subsequent chapters. This review of sensory methods literature shows this to be an emerging research area where further developments of such methods of research are needed.

Using the term 'corporeal' methods evokes an idea of a minded-body approach, useful in exploring practice based methods or performative empirics. However, if this term has a future, it would need to be accepted that it represents a unified mind and body to overcome its connotation with physicality. Alternatively the term 'visceral' methods can be adopted here. As discussed in chapter one the visceral is used to mean the affects and feelings conjured through sensory engagements with the world (Longhurst et al. 2009). However, it also means pertaining to the internal organs of the abdomen and is used to suggest 'gut feelings' or instincts. Therefore, the term 'visceral' by its meaning and use already encompasses physical, sensuous and mental responses. The feelings and perceptions detected through the viscera or through the senses depend on the nervous system that extends from the brain, through the body to the fingers, tongue etc. Therefore the senses themselves not only unite the mind and body, but reach out to form relations with the stuff of the world. Their operating occurs in a complex socio-biological process that connects the interior and exterior life of the person with the surrounding field of life. How life is interpreted through such visceral perceptions is investigated by this research to explore the potential of its use in the field.

In order to set up the fieldwork of this study itself, it would be useful here to discuss empirical work setting a precedent in exploring a visceral ethnography. However, there are

few works of direct relevance. The papers of Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) theoretically explore visceral geographies that directly relate to these themes, however, the fieldwork undertaken receives little prominence in their work. Longhurst et al. (2009) conducted research into women's experiences of migration in New Zealand through interviews and a cooking/eating methodology. Each participant had a different country of birth and explored their cultures through traditional styles of cooking. Their research explored how cooking traditional meals from their cultural backgrounds evoked a sense of 'home'. The study discovered that stimulating the senses through food was a way into exploring issues of migration.

Drawing from Whatmore's (2006) more-than-human perspective and taking forward concepts of *how* this research could be undertaken is the work of Roe 2006. Her paper '*Things Become Food*' explores issues of cultural food geographies exploring the corporeal response to food and the processes through which matter is accepted as food. Having explored this paper in depth in chapter one, I will explore here its methodological approach. Roe takes an ethnographic approach to exploring these issues of embodied responses to food. Using a video diary approach in the kitchen, Roe studies her participant's responses to preparing and cooking potatoes. Roe sets out stills from videos to represent her participant's reactions to potatoes as he cooks. The use of visual representation is useful here as it illustrates visceral responses to the matter of food. However, in the paper Roe explores in depth what her participant is saying whilst he cooks, stating that the stills add an insight into his activity. Such visual representation is augmented by a detailed textual dissemination, however visual representation can be distancing, with the processes of engaging and feeling food occurring at third hand. Therefore, to bridge this gap between feeling matter and representing it, this PhD study has developed an approach, of not only interviewing or recording those engaging with matter on allotments, but to similarly engage with the 'matter' of a plot myself. It is through this immersing in the life of the plot and self-reflexive recording of these experiences through field diary practices, that the matter of the plot can be effectively reflected and enlivened in this research.

The literatures discussed point to the development of visceral methods as a vehicle to address the calls for greater awareness of the material in everyday life and so developing knowledge of human more-than-human encounters. By working alongside traditional ethnographic methods of interviewing and participant observation this study aims to provide understandings of how knowledge is developed through performative action in conjunction

with the matter of the plot. Self-provisioning through allotment activities results in changes to shopping habits, this research will explore how developing knowledge of food changes attitudes to food purchasing. This research engages haptic, visceral approaches to take ethnography to a deeper immersion with everyday experience. Such an approach provides an emplaced methodology that employs sensuous probing into the field of this study. An approach that, as Pink states, '*supersedes that of embodiment*' in that it goes beyond the uniting of mind and body, by reaching out to attend to the field itself (Pink 2009: 25).

### **3:60 PHD RESEARCH FIELDWORK PRACTICE**

This section will set out in depth what actions I undertook during the fieldwork process. Initially I will discuss preparatory work undertaken before the research practice itself is explored. Central to this subsection will be relating the fieldwork practice to key points highlighted in the investigation of methods literature.

This fieldwork was designed to follow a growing season from November 2010 through to the end of December 2011. This proved serendipitous, as I was able to document the setting up of Somerton Allotments, whose site opened January 2011. This period of time represented Lytes Cary Allotments second growing season.

### **3:61 The Fieldwork Process -Allotment Ethnographies**

#### **i) Preparatory Work**

As outlined above, this fieldwork began in some ways before the true beginnings of the fieldwork process in November 2010. Before and during the start of my PhD study I kept close attention to policy and third sector frameworks regarding food and health through an iterative process of networking and attending local food charity conferences. Through the forging of such relationships the foundation of this ethnography was put in place. During this process, such networks forged the direction of travel for the research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the priorities of health and food charity professionals, as well as the opportunity to engage in pre-fieldwork activities that also helped to shape the fieldwork.

During the forging of relations with the local National Trust, I was asked to run field cookery sessions at their Barrington Court property in South Somerset. I took up this opportunity in August 2010 as a chance to explore experimental fieldwork techniques. These four days spent in the walled kitchen garden of Barrington Court enabled me to explore how 'doing' food research is possible and to explore public reactions to engaging with the salad making

sessions. By keeping a fieldwork diary, I was able to note the patterns of the public response to the fresh produce. Furthermore, I was able to explore my fieldwork persona and the potential of obtaining data from such activist, auto-ethnographic processes. It also helped to cement the National Trust staff as willing partners in my research and to develop further understandings of how their policies were enacted on the ground.

Through this relationship the policies surrounding the setting up of the allotment site at Lytes Cary were explained. The National Trust had been given Defra funding to run a pro-environmental lifestyle campaign, which they used to run their 'Eat into Green Living' activities. Different South Somerset properties carried out various activities through this campaign, including promoting growing vegetables such as on the allotment site at Lytes Cary. This site, although run by an allotment committee, had a large amount of input from the National Trust, with staff attending committee meetings. This partnership meant that the site was not like ordinary sites, as National Trust, staff maintained the hedging and grass paths, as well as keeping 5 plots for community growing which the National Trust, staff co-ordinated. The result of this partnership was that the National Trust, could use the site as an educational resource, inviting school children to growing sessions on their own plots, as well as running sessions for people on probation. However, as the funding of this project has now ceased the National Trust, staff involvement has been stood down, with the number of community plots being reduced to two.

The wider background of the research is set here, to reveal the contextual network of third sector work on the ground that shaped the fieldwork as much as the literature search undertaken in the initial stages of the PhD study. Such repeated immersing in the field also enabled this work to reflect local third sector priorities.

## **ii) Initial Talks**

Creating trust is an initial part of the process of seeking research participants (Bennett 2000). Therefore initial repeated visits were made to both sites during the early stages of fieldwork. During these visits I approached allotmenters at each site to engage them in conversation to both explain my research and ask them basic questions. Whilst these were unstructured talks, for the purposes of creating research data, I repeated similar themes with each new participant (Cook & Crang 1995). Due to the different stages of activity on each site, I found



I had to develop these initial questions to fit each site. At Lytes Cary I asked allotmenters about how they found last season, any major problems or successes, as well as their past growing experience and motivations. At Somerton Allotments, as it was a new site and early on in the growing season, the talks focused on plans and visions for growing as well as past experience and motivations. I also gathered information about basic demographics at both sites: Are they growing alone? Where do they live? Do they work? Who are they intending to feed?

Obtaining access to the sites, whilst involving the National Trust at Lytes Cary, were chiefly enacted through engaging with the chairs of the allotment committees. Developing this relationship proved a key move in gaining acceptance by the allotmenters themselves. Initial talks took place in the early months of the growing season; however, I had to adapt to the seasons, as there was little plot activity before March. Once these initial talks had taken place, I used this basic information as the material from which to select who I would approach for in-depth interviewing. I used this information to select in-depth interviewees in order to fully represent the spectrum of demographics on each site.

By such repeated visits and initial informal questioning I largely become a known figure on both sites, this was reinforced by committee chairs introducing my activities in committee communications. By such means a degree of acceptance was won, with most allotmenters spoken to willing to take part in further interviews. This highlights the value of obtaining trust (Bennett 2000) and adopting a role that fits in with field. In this case, wellies and a waterproof were *de rigueur*. Until such trust is gained, knowledge from participants may not be forthcoming, as the interview process requires intimacy on both sides. As Limb & Dwyer (2001) state researcher reflexivity is key here, where awareness is kept not only of our positionality but also of socio-cultural preconceptions. Initial chats with participants are a useful way to develop a relationship of trust, where the research is explained and the researcher gauges the field with an open mind. If this initial contact is developed successfully it can lead onto more in-depth interviews. This process of adapting was a subtle one, borne out of repeated or iterative engagements and reflexive approaches (Seymour, Hughes & Morris 2000, Shurmer-Smith 2002, Cook & Crang 1995). Throughout these various approaches to ethnography outlined here, the intersubjective nature of the data collected is

key, providing a firm foundation for rigorous understandings of the world studied (Cook & Crang 1995).

### **iii) Participant Observation and Auto Ethnography**

Throughout the processes described above key skills of participant observation were employed -learning individual and group habits, becoming sensitive to individual or group issues, learning the field through repeated visits, getting to know participants and marking out key players as well as retaining a position of camouflage, that is blending in. The allotment site is a space where socio-cultural practices are enacted; issues affecting the wider area are reflected in allotment culture. Therefore, knowing the contextual field was useful in allowing this process of blending in to take place, providing a situated 'insider's' knowledge (Limb & Dwyer 2001). Such immersed knowledge is particularly useful in rural contexts, which suffer from prevailing stereotyping. As Cloke & Little (1997) observe, the rural is a more '*diverse, divided and fragmented*' than is commonly portrayed, therefore ethnographic approaches are valuable in going beyond these positions (In Seymour, Hughes & Morris 2000:5)

To embed such activities in the research, Cook & Crang's (1995) imperative was heeded and a field diary was kept to hand at all times. When I went to Lytes Cary and no one else was there, I would walk the estate's River Walk making seasonal field observations that added to the thick descriptions in the field diary. However, once I began to grow food myself using auto ethnographic approaches, I found the field diary even more valuable. Auto ethnographic approaches enabled a deeper, embodied engagement with the field, allowing for practice based research (Whatmore 2006, Paterson 2009, Holloway, Kneafsey et al. 2007). The singular nature of the activity compelled a need to record the activities, the reflections, the frustrations and doubts. The auto-ethnographic process became a lonely place, with the recording providing a sounding board that could reflect my journey. Indeed, the loneliness of the practice also became its virtue; by working alone, digging, weeding, harvesting and cooking, self-reflexivity increased to a more sensitive pitch (Chang 2008). Chang (2008) discusses how auto ethnography uses a variety of approaches including ethnography, cultural interpretation and self-narratives. It is the emphasis on autobiographical data that sets it as different from participant observation, however the degree to which this difference occurs varies, resulting in critiques that auto-ethnography differs little to participant observation methods. The heightened self-reflexivity of auto-ethnography allowed a sensitive focus on

my embodied performance, allowed for minute and subtle variations of physicality, mood and immersion with the field to be more keenly felt and reflected (Spry 2001). Therefore whilst auto-ethnography was a challenging process, its rewards were manifold in my ability to keenly 'know' the field through such self-reflexive embodied activity. Such self-reflexivity through embodied performance, enabled for the '*folding of theory into practice*', where affective, sensuous responses could be recorded (Paterson 2009).

However, the intention of this research was not solely to reflect on my physical embodied experiences, it aims to extend understandings of how allotmenters self-provisioning requires more intersubjective approaches. Consequently the participant observation of allotmenters in the field enabled a sensitive developing of the questions used for the semi-structured in depth interviews. Here the keeping of a field diary was again a useful process in heightening researcher reflexivity, as well as recording moments in the field.

#### **iv) In Depth Interviews**

After early stages of fieldwork, with the repeated visits and initial chats with the allotmenters that I met, I took a careful look at the demographics of those I'd talked to in order to select a representative group for in depth interviews. The criteria I used varied slightly from site to site to reflect their differing start up story. However across the whole sample group, I took into account -gender, age, household, growing alone or not, growing experience and motivations for growing in order to represent the communities. The motivations for growing category was a key criteria as it reflected plot life, here categories such as: growing to save money, growing for leisure, growing for taste and growing to produce sustainable food or to be semi-self-sufficient were represented.

Naturally, those I approached may well have declined; therefore this was a slightly tense stage where things could fall apart. Indeed, several allotmenters I approached seemed ideal and expressed interest in taking part but then failed to respond to emails or calls trying to fix a date.

Such uncertainties are a common feature of fieldwork, a theme that appears to be under explored in the literature. Shurmer-Smith (2002) highlights the time consuming nature of establishing research relationships, stressing the reiterative nature of this process. This process can add to the work of getting to know a community, which builds the '*authenticity of the work*' (Mohammed 2001: 104). As Parr (2001) states, ethnographic research allows for

messy, uncoordinated knowledge, as such it is able to reflect the messiness of ordinary life. Therefore these messy, iterative stages of the fieldwork helps to create research itself as research is a performative, processual undertaking (Law 2004).

The interviews began in May 2011 and ended in November 2011, with the process of establishing the later interviews occurring as the fieldwork unfolded. Certain potential interviewees who seemed of interest did not come forward. I therefore worked with who was present at the plots and in their own, fascinating narratives proved themselves ideal participants. There was an uncomfortable tension in trying to insistently pin down dates for the latter interviews, however persistence paid off.

I created a question script for the in depth interviews so as to have a consistent data field for the analysis process. However, I was happy for deviations to occur to allow each one to reflect the unique growing lives of each respondent. The script was used as a semi-prompt as in order to achieve a conversational experience. This worked well mostly, with participants taking the opportunity to expand on themes in depth or to deviate, with the longest interview taking close to being an hour and a half. However, one or two interviewees were more reticent, showing a tendency to stick rigidly to answering the questions, giving interviews closer to forty minutes. I began with demographic questions that added to the more awkward atmosphere at the start of interviews<sup>19</sup>. Here, again the earlier establishment of a relationship at the sites helped get over this awkwardness quickly. Each interview was recorded by a voice recorder with the interviewees' consent, which left me free to engage the allotmenteer in a conversational style, to put them at their ease.

The initial questions related to gardening experience, time waiting for an allotment and how this season (and the previous season if appropriate) was going. After these introductory questions I went onto to ask about pests, diseases or other impediments to growing. This section usually entailed a slowing down of the questioning process, as there was often much to talk about. The next stage of questioning related to the consumption of the produce grown. I asked a variety of questions relating to decision making in reference to how growing affected shopping and consumption practices. I was especially interested here in the degree to which allotmentees were interested in cooking or whether the process of growing was their

---

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 1

priority. Other key subjects covered by the questions included issues of time in relation to growing, growing philosophies and shopping philosophies, expenses, tools and 'things', wildlife and weather, plot and countryside aesthetics, effects on the body and socialising at the sites.

These interviews were mostly undertaken in the allotmentee's house (or garden). Several were conducted on the participants' plots, which proved a pleasant experience; there was some plot interference on these recordings, making transcribing harder. Some allotmentees grew together as a couple and therefore four interviews involved talking to both growers in the partnership together.

Shurmer-Smith (2002) states that such interviews can expose the '*differences, contradictions and complexity of unique experiences*' (2002: 151) that enlivens data making it more meaningful to individual situations. Therefore it is the openness of the interview process that provides space for the uniqueness of the participant to come forth, possibly developing away from planned questions. In-depth interviews allow much greater responsiveness than more rigid, inflexible processes such as questionnaires (Shurmer-Smith 2002: 151). As such, the researcher needs to be alert to the potential value of deviating from planned questions.

#### **v) Cooking Methods**

Integral to growing food is the implicit assumption of it being consumed. It is challenging to discover ways to record the use of the produce as food. A starting point is through questioning within the in depth interviews that allowed for the issue of how the produce was used to emerge. The degree to which this question elicited a response varied from interviewee to interviewee, which is in itself of interest. The exploration of the role of cooking on the process of growing food can also be made through auto ethnographic methods. Here again the process of growing on an allotment myself proved to be an invaluable addition to the study as I followed the process of growing through to harvest and to practices in the kitchen. By documenting the harvests I was able to represent the sometimes intangible material processes of 'doing food'. This was undertaken in several ways at home, I logged the harvests and each meal made with them in my field diary. Through this process I also could explore how the tangible harvests affect consumption decisions at home in a practical, visceral way. Here the sensory nature of food, both raw and cooked afforded this practical visceral approach as an ideal method of investigation. This home based kitchen

methodologies culminated in recording the processes of creating Christmas dinner mostly using allotment produce<sup>20</sup>. This demonstrated both the using of allotment grown produce as money saving practice, as well as representing a meal where the ingredients could be traced and tangibly as well as intangibly 'known'.

Short (2006), a food researcher with a professional cooking background explored contemporary attitudes to cooking through qualitative methods and highlighted how researching cooking is challenging methodologically. She states that the home, as a place of food practice, has been largely ignored (Short 2006: 2). Short justifies her decision not to observe participants cooking as:

*"...many practical tasks involve perceptual and conceptual abilities that are tacit and mostly unobservable."* Short 2006: 23

However, there are several other studies that have undertaken research based on cooking in the home. Meah & Watson (2011) investigated the perceptions of a decline in cooking skills through qualitative methods that included focus groups, interviews, the use of video as well as accompanying participants shopping. They chose to focus on two families, who provided 20 participants to investigate food life histories, using the methods outlined. This in depth and focused approach produced nuanced insights into the food life of the families revealing complex pictures that challenged the myth of previous generations of women being simply 'good cooks'.

Wrieden et al. (2007) explored a local authority food intervention scheme that offered cooking skills to people from poor neighbourhoods in Scotland. The scheme provided the participants with a cooking manual, cooking equipment and training. The researchers used questionnaires, several interviews and food diaries to investigate the impact of the training on food habits over time during and after the scheme. Food diaries were also a significant feature of Valentine's (2001) study into identity and cooking at home. This study highlighted the value of adding situating research by providing the context of food practices.

---

<sup>20</sup>Rebecca Sandover (2012) Eating Off the Plot -Wordpress (online) available at <http://rebeccasandover.wordpress.com/2012/02/02/eating-off-the-plot-christmas-dinner-december-2011/>

Little et al. (2009) researched the gender impacts of using local food products as such practices require changes not only in shopping habits but in cooking practices as well. Whilst not directly investigating the cooking practices themselves, this work highlights the need for cooking skills when buying local food, as such products require cooking from scratch. Therefore this study underlines the importance of cooking skills, together with the gender impact of food practices when investigating production-consumption practices that involve food requiring preparation and cooking from scratch.

This overview of cooking literature explores possible methods available when investigating matters of food preparation and consumption. As Short (2006) explores, even qualitative methods are often unable to perceive the nuances of such visceral practices. Therefore by cooking and eating the produce myself I attempted to go a step further into exploring the affective register of plot produce.

However in order to extend this exploration of consumption on the plot, the practices of the allotmenters was also explored through cooking events. As an embedded researcher I was able to create research opportunities through community cook-ins on both sites. I was party to the decision making for the planning of Somerton Allotments open day in September 2011 and put forward the suggestion of running a community cook-in on site. An interviewee who was also on the committee particularly liked this idea and I liaised with him and his wife to make it happen. The committee were keen to run the cook-in as it would promote the allotment to the visiting public and tangibly represent the rewards of growing. I felt that this was an opportunity to represent the sharing of skills, the allotment community cooking the produce as well as gain more information on how differing allotmenters were using their produce. Additionally I liked the opportunity to give something back to association. After a meeting to talk about how we would run this event, including what veg may be available to harvest and suggested dishes, a plea for produce was sent out. Whilst the beauty of using the produce on site meant that food miles could be turned into food metres, for ease and a concern for health and safety, I took all the produce home to wash in clean water. How to represent such an event proved to be challenging. I wrote it up into my field diary and as a blog post, as well as asking an allotmenter to take photographs. I asked my son to take a video with a go-pro that unfortunately proved to be poor quality. Added to this I interviewed

a willing allotmenteer about the event afterwards to represent another perspective on the event.

I also offered my services to The Lytes Cary site and was asked through The National Trust Staff to run a similar event there for a local primary school class. Earlier in the season I had spent a day at the site with this class whilst they experienced a practical learning session and had good contacts with them. Therefore later in September 2011 I ran a cooking session with Jemma marsh, The National Trust Allotment Officer for the site. This session was for a primary school class of 4 and 5 year olds. I had liaised with Jemma beforehand to discuss the practicalities and what produce was available. This session differed to the Somerton Allotments event in that Jemma coordinated the equipment, except for the gas stove, chopping boards, knives etc. that I brought. Health and safety had to be a priority, of which Jemma was very aware. As there is no mains water on site, Jemma brought a large bin-sized tureen on a sack truck of bore hole water for washing the produce, along with 6 litres of tap water to wash any produce that was not going to be cooked. She was concerned about Weils disease as the site was known to have an active rodent population. This session also differed from the Somerton Allotments one in that we did not only use produce from the site. Jemma brought in some produce that had been grown on other South Somerset National Trust properties. However a key focus for the session was in taking the children for a picking expedition at the beginning of it. Many of them were already switched on and excited by the session as they had been on several earlier visits there, which meant that some produce picked was from plants that they had themselves planted. The session was again recorded through field diary entries and by writing up a report for the teacher and The National Trust. I asked in advance if an accompanying adult could photograph and video the event, which resulted in a video that I subsequently viewed at the school.

A list of data figures has been added as Appendix 2.





Figure 9 Salad Making on the Plot with Red Class, Lytes Cary Sept'11

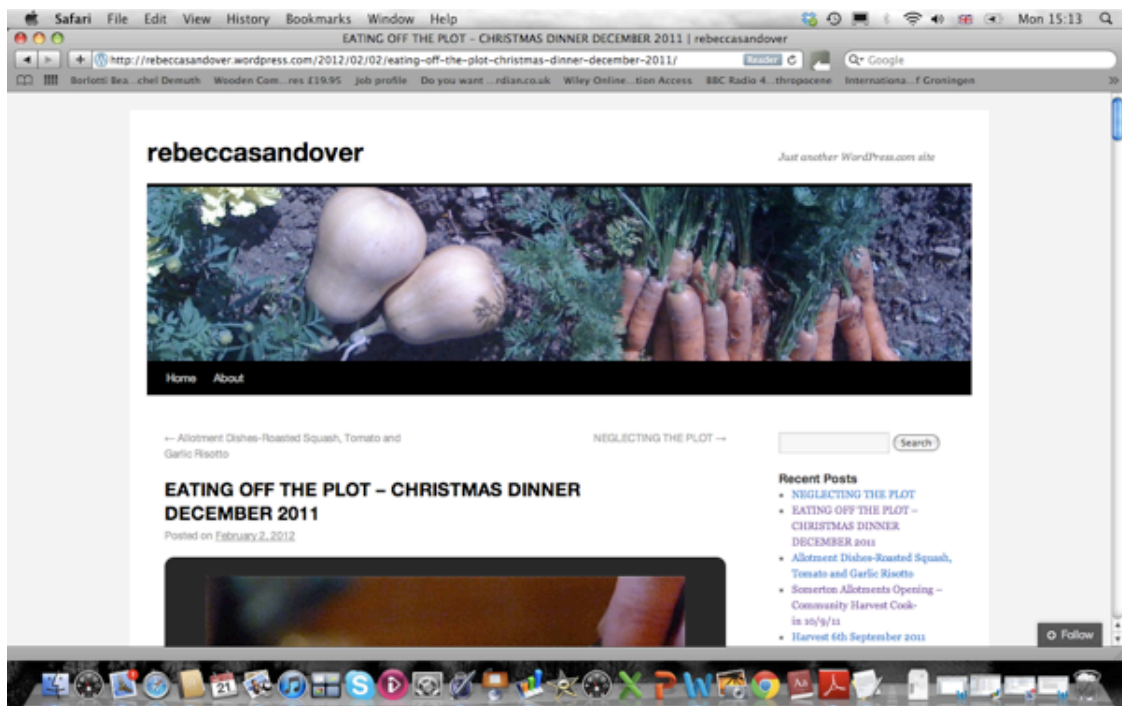


Figure 10, Screen Shot of Food Blog February 2012

### **3:70 DEVELOPING METHODS FOR HUMAN MORE-THAN-HUMAN RESEARCH**

Having set out the methodological literature and my fieldwork practices it is useful here to pause to reconsider how this approach can extend methods of researching human more-than-human interactions. Here a preliminary discussion that highlights the issues that require addressing are given. A more full exploration of how this research adds to human more-than-human methodological enquiries will be embarked on in the concluding chapter of this thesis. As discussed in 3:50 there are a number of issues around engaging with the more-than-human in research. More-than-humans may appear to exist externally to the boundary of the human body, however through practices of consumption, whether food, art, media etc. it can be said that they become incorporated within the human in various ways. On consuming food again the incorporation of matter into the human may appear an obvious process. However as Mol (2013) has asked, at what point does the food stop being external matter and begin to simply be part of the human body? In the mouth, stomach, small intestine or when it is filtered by the blood or kidneys?<sup>21</sup> This raises the question of when is matter matter and when is part of the human? However perhaps this itself is a dualistic question, can the human be matter? When does the matter of the human exist as the human and when is it matter? These questions help to situate the issues of importance to this study. In the garden as Hitchings (2003) has explored, the power of plants on the gardener or other garden dwellers can have subtle affects, even by simply looking and thinking about a plant, the gardener can find themselves entering into the plant's world, thinking through the plant and its needs, the memories it brings or the pleasure or concern it may bring. Such moments create '*shifting relationships*' where matter can exert a power over the human, leaving Hitchings to ask who is leading the activities in the garden the gardener or the plants (Hitchings 2003: 107)?

To address such questions through research requires highly reflexive methods of enquiry that can be sensitive to the affects of plant and plot agency, a process that cannot be quantified. Therefore the reflexive methods adopted in this enquiry of ethnography and auto-ethnography attempt to be attuned to the matter of the plot in order to give a voice to its impacts on allotmenters, rather than simply viewing the plots as spaces of human orderings. Of key significance within the methods adopted here is a focus on embodied, emplaced fieldwork techniques that seek to feel and taste the affects of plants and the plot as well as

---

<sup>21</sup> Mol (2013) -Keynote speech at The Emotional Geographies Conference, available (online) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTzX8tC75z8&feature=youtu.be>

observe them. By adopting the multi-sensorial methods extolled by Pink (2009) perceptions of the place of enquiry as well as the matters that constitute that place can be registered as fieldwork participants deepening knowledge of activities within such places. This is a taster of the discussion to be held in the concluding chapter that can fully set out the role of visceral methods in researching interactions between matter, the human and place.

### **3:80 CODING ANALYSIS**

The final stage of the empirical journey after the field data has been transcribed, is the practice of data coding and data analysis. This is a vital stage in the fieldwork process, requiring a collation of all the fieldwork outputs listed above for initial coding. Cook & Crang (1995) stress the need for iterative reviewing of data, where repeated viewing can detect patterns creating layers of analysis. This process allows key themes to emerge through a lengthy procedure requiring much reflexivity, where the researcher needs to challenge their preconceptions and attachments to research themes. Jackson (2001) explores how this process allows for perceiving both the surface patterns inherent in the data, as well as those occurring at depth. This attends not only to what participants say, but also what they do and also emerging attitudes to research themes (Jackson 2001: 202). Jackson also describes how in this process metacodes emerge, which are then explored across the data, providing metathemes. These coding processes can be achieved by hand or through a software package. However, Blunt (2003) urges for coding to be done by hand as she states that it allows for the nuances of the data to be appreciated, giving more sensitivity to the intersubjective themes emerging.

Pink (2009) investigates how sensory-based research often does not explicate processes of analysis and coding. She explores how this is often the case as many researchers do not see a division between the processes of fieldwork and analysis, stating that analysis is seen as a way of knowing (Pink 2009: 119-120). In this study, the repeated returning to the field through texts, photos, videos etc. allows for the matter of the field and its participants to be evoked, creating an emplaced process of data analysis. This then, Pink states, enables a continuous process to develop from fieldwork to analysis that foregrounds the matter of the field and the researcher's sensory engagements with it.

This approach was adopted during this study with the coding and analysis stages involving repeated reviewing of the research outputs to perceive patterns of data that detected themes and metathemes. This iterative reviewing of the research process provided layers of

understanding of the field, providing emplaced knowledge augmented by discourse from the academy.

As there was a significant amount of research output to code, initial code maps were created for each interview to allow predominant themes to emerge. All code maps were initially colour coded to reflect primary themes emerging. Once this process was completed primary and crosscutting themes were identified and colour coded in a meta-code map, developed by going through all research output. This resulted in a complex colour coded map where interweaving themes could be visualised, representing the interrelationships of themes as well as metathemes. In order to explore this representation fully, a coding analysis was written that explored primary and crosscutting themes, providing a platform for the following analytics chapters.<sup>22</sup> The key themes identified created a platform from which to write the empirical chapters of this thesis. Main themes were identified as:

- 1) Order/Chaos and Transformation
- 2) Bounding Life/Bounded selves
- 3) Constructing the plot/constructing the self
- 4) Learning/Adapting
- 5) Engaging the Visceral/Sensory
- 6) Engaging community
- 7) Sourcing Food/Knowing Food/Closing the connectivities of consumption and production
- 8) Cooking/Tasting

Cross-cutting themes were identified as:

- 1) Order/Chaos and Transformation
- 2) Matter/Place/mattering
- 3) Visceral/Sensory/feeling
- 4) The Body
- 5) Doing/Being/Becoming
- 6) Learning/Knowledge/Choice
- 7) Engaging the elements/the outside
- 8) Familial bonds

---

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 3

- 9) Community

(From R Sandover-Thesis Coding Analysis 2012)

These themes covered all aspects of working the plot and bringing home the produce for consumption, from planning the plot to interactions with insects, weeds and learning by doing. Themes that were both main and cross-cutting highlighted their importance to this study and all themes are discussed across the two following empirical chapters. Chapter 4 explores the voices interviewed on the plots and the key themes raised by talking to participants about working the plots. The chapter follows the key themes of order, chaos and control, constructing the plot/ constructing the self, as well community and familial bonds through classic participant observation style ethnography. Chapter 5 immerses in auto-ethnographic experiences to explore themes of the body, visceral and sensing, as well as processes of being and becoming. This chapter is written in an ethnographic narrative style to extend thick descriptions of interactions between human more-than-human on the plot and in the kitchen in order to bring the more-than-human participants to life. There are some themes that dominate across both chapters such as order and chaos, being and becoming, as well as learning and adapting, however they are given different emphasis in each chapter, with their differing focus on interview participants voices in Chapter 4 and auto-ethnographic reflexivity in Chapter 5.

### **3:90 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has set out the processes undertaken in the fieldwork of this study to provide a full understanding of the methods adopted as well as the sites themselves. By providing an emplaced methodology the space of the field is also represented as a key participant that is viscerally engaged with through the performative processes of growing and cooking. The processes by which this research developed and by which allotmenters were chosen as participants have also been set out to provide an informed position for following chapters discussing the research empirics and analysis. The research practice has been embedded within methodological literatures to contextualise the key discourses relating to it, as well as to highlight the key challenges of conducting such human more-than-human focused research.

The argument for undertaking viscerally based research has now been set out over two chapters from theoretical and methodological positions. Here the intention to investigate in

depth body and material encounters through practice-based research has been established in order to develop understandings of nature-society. Here this position is taken further to register the affects of the contextual environment. By emplacing this research with a specific place, such body-matter engagements are given added complexity by highlighting these practices within encounters with the environment containing it. The following chapters will take these themes further and illustrate them by the means of exploring research empirics and analysis. By such means this thesis aims to highlight how such nature based study of doing food can rematerialise food within agro-food literature as well as explore how allotmenters learn *how* to do food on their plots.

## CHAPTER 4



Fig 1 Lytes Cary Allotment Plot

## PLOT ORDERINGS: KNOWING THE 'LOCAL' AND DOING FOOD

*“Michael sees himself like a peasant going back to the earth and getting his hands dirty. He thinks the site is in a superb spot. Last year they started late, but staggered out a good season. Water became an issue and had to be brought in. He made a homemade pump to disperse it; he enjoys making things to make the job easier- intermediate technology... In terms of jobs, he has just finished a rabbit-proof fence that sits about a foot high. He was aware of pests last year, especially rabbits, but appreciates the local environment provides cover for birds of prey which help to control the rabbit population.” (Field Diary March 2011)*

#### **4:0 INTRODUCTION**

Growing on an allotment requires a deep engagement with nature on the plot that is at once an embodied and intellectual engagement. Attention within the site community and wider growing circles focuses on forward planning and undertaking repeated tasks at certain seasonal moments in order to produce a successful harvest. This traditional perspective emphasises the power of the human allotmentee to impose control and order. Nevertheless this study’s findings reveal how the space and material of the plot, nature itself, as well as forces of temporal and community change have a significant impact on growing and learning to grow. These findings set out differing knowledges and orderings enacted on the plot that are shaped by motivations and philosophies for growing. The range of knowledges expressed span from a focus on abstract, intellectualised positions where philosophies of growing are experimented with on the plot. Others enact a growing heritage where familial affects shape a longing for the land. Whereas other experienced growers articulate embodied attempts to grow with an affinity for nature at the plot. However, all approaches communicate ideas of control of nature to various extents, as illustrated by fig1 showing an allotmentee from Lytes Cary creating layers of control of their plot. Allotmentees expend significant time, energy and resources attempting to exert control over nature in order to grow, as the above quote and fig 1 shows. Findings from this study explore the various positions on control of nature held by allotmentees, which link to other fieldwork data themes of aesthetics, plot discipline and growing philosophies. This chapter will explore themes drawn from data coding of Order, Chaos and Transformation, Constructing the plot and Bounding Life/ Bounding Selves within an emplaced context that situates these activities within wider processes. These findings are drawn from in depth interviews with a selection of allotmentees, along with initial talks with a wider plot community captured through field diary entries from the growing season of 2011. These allotmentee responses to questions are supplemented by ethnographic



immersion into plot practices through observation and through experiencing growing on the plots myself. All of which were used as sources during the coding exercise. The main themes drawn out of coding represent themes that show key aspects of the living networks emerging between allotmenters and their plots.

The processual nature of growing unearths temporal and spatial affects that generate response and adaptation. The impacts of time and place will be explored through interview and field diary quotes to investigate their affects on successful harvests. As the previous chapter explored, growing is an emplaced activity with the space of the plot itself reflecting the networked relations of provisioning food. Therefore in order to contextualise these empirics, this chapter will begin by exploring these wider processes affecting plot practices and the plot itself before investigating motivations to take up a plot. Subsequently substantive themes drawn from coding- Control and Chaos will be set out through the voices of this study's participants in their everyday experiences of growing.

#### **4:10 THE TIME AND SPACE FOR GROWING**

Through interviews, observation and experience it became clear that the roles of time and the space on plot life contained more nuanced, layered affects than was first apparent. This section explores the subtle interweavings of temporal forces from the more apparent of diurnal, seasonal progression to the unexpected impacts of temporal pasts shaping motivations for growing today. The role of family growing heritage draws together temporal and spatial affects as will be set out in this section, where family practices create spatial yearning for a lifestyle based on the land. Temporal and spatial affects merge explorations of human more-than-human interactions on the plots with the range of motivations and philosophies of growing allotmenters demonstrate. Layers of temporal and spatial affects, motivations for growing and experiences of plot life shape the becoming allotmenteer, as well as the nature of the plot itself. The following subsections will examine the affects of the wider ecology of the plot, which merge with motivation for growing, before honing down to individual practices and knowledges enacted on the plot that are explored in 4:20. Whilst similar processes may be discussed within both sections, such as looking at the failure of a crop, they are explored from different perspectives to investigate firstly the affects from the extended context of the plot shaping plot life within 4:10 as well as motivations for growing. This then informs discussions within 4:20 that explores human attempts at orderings, control

and transformation that underpin everyday interactions between human and more-than-human in plot life.

#### **4:11 Beans Fighting for Themselves**

Plot practices are processes of becoming that involve emplaced activities shaped by temporal forces. Whilst the influence of time on plot practices may be presumed to be a straightforward response to the seasons, there are other more elusive affects of time. Temporality dictates growing practices for all growing fruit and veg whether farmers, allotmenters or back garden growers. However allotmenters as non-professional growers that are spatially separate from their growing space, may find unexpected outcomes of sowing crops. Growing necessitates activity taken at the right time to optimise the effects of day length, heat and weather. Therefore an overreaching concern for timeliness engender within growers a need to frequently attend to their plots in order to respond to the unexpected creating problems that may require adapting to. The generative power of nature inherent within the durational progression of the seasons necessitates timely responses. The following quote illustrates this from a couple Sabine and Johannes at Somerton Allotments. Sabine is German and works in a chemist's lab as well as some accounts technician work, Johannes is Swiss and is a retired bookseller:

*“Sabine: On the allotment things have to fight for themselves. I was early enough with the 2<sup>nd</sup> crop of broad beans. Other than that, when the beans and mangetout were coming through they got nibbled a bit. But it didn't stop them growing.*

*Johannes: They have to look out for themselves. The first time we had problems with the French beans, Sabine grew them at home in the green house, but when they were taken up to the plots the winds were so strong, they didn't like it.*

*Sabine: The next lot I grew in the conservatory until they were so big...and then I took them up, so they got the wind, the rain and the sun on the allotment. They need to be toughened up to cope up there.” (Interview July 2011)*

Here the couple are responding to multiple growing challenges, pests nibbling the beans, which on this occasion did not stop them growing. However the strong climatic conditions at the site preventing the beans from thriving resulted in crop failure. From this development, Sabine's previous growing experience gave her the confidence to try again; this time getting the beans to a good size and hardening them off before taking them to the wind exposed plot.

These adaptive practices enabled the couple to harvest their second French bean crop successfully. This extract reveals multiple forces at play, highlighting the complex processes of growing. Temporality is represented by the timely nature of Sabine's response to failure of the first sowing. By repeated attentions to the plot, she was able to nurture a second sowing in time for successful growth. However, the conditions at the plot itself dictated the need for the second sowing. Strong winds hit the plots, sited on the topside of a hill, resulting in the first sowing's unsuccessful growth.

Ben, a young professional gardener, has a plot at Lytes Cary and uses what he's learnt to adapt to conditions at the plots. Ben also had problems with his French beans but discovered that they had better chances of survival when he put the plants out a little later when they were slightly more mature:

*"Ben: ...Once they get tougher and a bit less tender, if you can leave them 'til they're medium sized, the same with onions and shallots. They get a stronger flavour as they get older, then, if you can keep them 'til that size, then you'll be alright." (Interview July 2011)*

Here duration played a key role in successful cropping by allowing tender plants to become more mature. In the case of some plants such as onions and shallots, a greater maturity also enabled the plants to develop their distinctive odour that repelled pests. These interactions between plants, allotmentee and pests reveal a deepening awareness by the allotmentee of the interplays of nature on the plot; by allowing his plants to develop, Ben is working with the processes of duration and growth on the plot.

In contrast, Michelle at Lytes Cary, a care assistant and mother of two young girls, is brought to the brink of giving up her plot through the failure of her bean crops:

*"Michelle: Yes, last season was really good and I had loads of everything. This year, so much has been eaten. I've put, I think, four sets of beans in and they've all been eaten. Proper developed plants in and they've all been eaten..." (Interview October 2011)*

Michelle blames the rodent and rabbit population and the response by many allotmentees to construct plot fences. With half of the site constructing fences, Michelle feels that her plot is

now a prime target. Unlike Ben, Michelle buys in her plants already grown, reducing her knowledge of how they were sown. However, she believes them to be a good size, a factor that did not aid them withstanding predation. For Michelle time is an additional factor in the form of significant time constraints, which may be the cause of her frustrating growing season. Michelle has significant caring responsibilities at home, she is effectively growing alone as her husband is away with the armed forces and she has a part time job. Therefore she has a restricted amount of time available to give her plot:

*"Michelle: I go up there for the odd hour. In the summer, I was going up there at 9 o'clock at night when there's no one else up there. Just because of shifts and stuff and kids, it was the only time I had free [...]"*

*RS: No, it sounds like time has been quite a factor.*

*Michelle: This year, more than last year.*

*RS: Really. So how much time do you think you go up there a week? Is it hard to say?*

*Michelle: I'm lucky to get an hour a week at the moment..." (Interview October 2011)*

Talking to Paul and Lyndsey, a househusband and student with four young children growing at Lytes Cary, underscores the importance of timeliness to successful harvests. In their first growing season they were late to preparing their plot, resulting in their falling behind and becoming anxious about how their plot looks:

*"Lyndsey: Yes and we were late getting established up there, they had already started and we had to turn ours over and get the plot ready..."*

*Paul: ...by then we were nearly a month and a half behind everyone else and it's been a sort of...catch-up ever since.*

*Lyndsey: Because we don't go up there every day like some of the retired people who've got pretty plots. We haven't got a pretty plot. But it does the job. We've said to other people, well it doesn't look as good as yours and they say, well if you've got the veg out of it, it doesn't matter that it doesn't look pretty..." (Interview November 2011)*

These series of extracts from in depth interviews with allotmenters reveal the impact of duration and timeliness on the growing season. Temporal forces are seen from the perspective of working with the seasons to plant or replant crops at the right time for success.

Time is also an elusive factor for an over stretched grower, such as Michelle who cannot undertake as regular attending to her crops that Sabine, Johannes and Ben undertake.

Time is inherent both within the potential of the bean seed and within the everyday practices of the grower. Here temporality is linking the actions of allotmenters in attending to their plants, the actions of pests in avoiding Ben's more robust older bean plantings, as well as the potential within the bean seed to grow and mature. Therefore whilst time may be an elusive commodity for some growers, the temporality of growing is an underlying force directing the success of crops. Unlike back garden growers, allotmenters are spatially separate from their plots, which can limit their ability to attend to plants. Unlike farmers allotmenters are not growing professionally and have to learn and adapt as they go. For the allotmentee attending to and caring for their crops is an important ingredient of a successful season.

The role of timeliness in shaping harvest success underscores how the wider environmental context impacts growing at the plots. Temporality is not controlled by either human, plant or landscape. It is intrinsic to plot practices in its inherence within the potential of the seed and the flow of seasonal change. It is also extrinsic as a physical force involved in diurnal progression, limiting daylight length that contains both human daily activity, as well as plants response to climatic conditions for growing. Temporality then is a key constituent in the field of plot activity, however by identifying its force, it is not intended to isolate its impact. The extracts discussed reveal the range of impacts temporality can have on growing at the plots. From the subtle affects of knowing when the right time is to plant out crops, in order to diminish pest consumption of plants. This can be summarised as experiential timeliness where knowledge of growing plants aids planting in harmony with the seasons. However the experience of Paul, Lyndsey and Michelle is simply understood as allotmenters suffering from time constraints. Here allotmenters are struggling to optimise their growing experience due to a lack of free time for growing. By having less time to spend at the plots, these allotmenters cannot give as much of themselves to their plots. These allotmenters carry out less frequent attending to their plants, resulting in a diminishment of their ability to respond to conditions up there. Here time constraints are shown to diminish the role of the allotmentee in shaping plot conditions. However, allotmenters with experience, such as John, the chair of Somerton Allotments, choose to leave parts of their plot fallow by laying a

thick plastic sheet mulch, allowing for less time to be needed to keep down weeds. This illustrates how pests, weeds and time can be managed by utilising experienced plot practices.

However, both types of temporal affects involve a sense of working up against forces that are to some degree external to the allotmenteer. Experiential timeliness in growing requires learning the right time for sowing and planting out. Often, as in the case of Sabine and Johannes this knowledge is developed through responding to crop failures. Here climatic conditions at the plots worked against the successful growth of their first crop. Their second planting of beans was successful due to their responding to the earlier failure in good time. Their repeated attending to the plot enabled this learning process to unfold through developing knowledge about the conditions at the site and responding to them. However, Michelle through having very little spare time for repeated visits to the site became to feel that she was working against the overwhelming action of pests eating her crops. For Michelle, her actions produced little effect as she was unable to frequently attend the plot due to other life pressures. The examples of Ben, Sabine and Johannes show that experiential timeliness develops through repeated attending, which create layers of knowledge about their plot. Through this repeated attending and *feeling* the plot, the allotmentees experience produces insights into the best course of action for optimal growing.

Temporality here is a complex process acting in cohort with the conditions of the plot, the actions of the allotmentees, the effects of pests as well as the resilience of the plants themselves. This reveals one layer in the processes of growing on allotments, highlighting its nested nature. Like plant nodes, activity revolves around an issue, in this case beans failing to grow, with the optimum nexus of response producing activity that can result in successful growth. Optimum responses result in moments of becoming for the allotmenteer where experiential timeliness develops knowledge of growing.

#### **4:12 Family Affects: 'You see such an idyllic life and you just want it.'**

Temporality, a layer of affects shaping plot practices contains a multiplicity of influence that go beyond the role of seasonal progression and timely sowing. Temporalities as the past shaping the present and future can be identified within plot practices. A key theme drawn from in depth interviews is the role of family history and childhood experiences in shaping activity on the plots as well as shaping motivations for growing and aspirations for the future.

Like other allotmenters, Sabine detailed her childhood where food growing featured. However, this couple highlights the varied degree of allotmenters' childhood experiences with food growing. Johannes's father was a farmer's son who had no interest in growing himself and Johannes grew up in Switzerland with no garden. In contrast, Sabine growing up in Germany, had memories of her father growing a small range of produce, along with rich memories of holidays spent in the countryside with aunties who grew extensively and kept pigs.

*“They would have a stall or two at the back of the house and keep a pig. Buy them small and feed them for 3 or 4 months and then slaughter them. So I was used to keeping pigs. I would get very fond of them over the summer, then in the autumn I'd go back and on the dishes they'd say - this is so-and-so and this is so-and-so (laughs). So I grew up with -you like them, they're nice and then you eat them.” (Interview July 2011)*

This extract highlights the direct experience some allotmenters had with food from their childhoods, reflecting food experiences from before the ubiquitous global industrial food trade. Sabine is in her 40s and so grew up in a world where industrially produced food was available but had familial experiences of food produced for home consumption. However, many of the allotmenters are aged 60 or older and reflect ideas and experiences of food garnered from parents and grandparents from before the domination of industrial food from supermarkets. Michael, a retired Naval Engineer, from Lytes Cary Allotments has strong memories of food from his grandfathers:

*“Michael: ...and I suppose there's a certain amount of inherited knowledge as my grandfathers were both great self-sufficiency and vegetable growers. When I was knee-high to a whatsit I was busy digging up potatoes on quite a large smallholding.*

*RS: Oh, so you were quite involved, when you saw them. Did you live close to them?*

*Michael: I did then.*

*RS: That must have been quite pleasant.*

*Michael: It was, very bucolic.*

*RS: Do you have memories of eating the food you grew?*

*Michael: Yes, I do.*

*RS: Anything particular, anything stand out?*

*Michael: Erm, carrots, fresh garden peas, new potatoes, all kinds of fruit. That sort of thing.”  
(Interview July 2011)*

Such memories refer to childhoods where direct experience of growing and tasting food shaped lifelong attitudes to food procurement and quality. References to childhood growing encounters were common throughout the research interviews with a sense that these experiences held a powerful resonance for some, such as Michael. For allotmenters such as Tasha, a fulltime office worker and mum who grows at Somerton Allotments, reminiscing about childhood growing experiences produces pleasant memories:

*“Tasha: ... He [her grandad] was one of these guys who had such gardening wisdom (RS: Really). And my great-grandad he grew vegetables I remember as a small child, visiting him in his greenhouse; seeds and things and chit-chatting to me and I always enjoyed that. And just the smell of walking in his greenhouse, the smell you’d get. It was lovely, an earthy smell. I really enjoyed that.” (Interview November 2011)*

This extract reinforces the idea that food memories are steeped in sensorial affects, providing powerful memories that may have shaped future food practices. Tasha, who is committed to her plot, has strong attachments to family histories of growing that fuelled her determination to start growing on an allotment. This background also gave her respect for older growers and openness to their advice.

These, and many other extracts, from research interviews cite the influence of family and childhood experiences in shaping motivations for growing on an allotment. These quotes establish allotment growing as a form of community continuity, where knowledge, experience and interests in growing are passed down the generations. However, these influences are mostly stimulated in subtle non-linear forms that can emerge within later life; passions are stirred rather than establishing life paths focused on growing.

For one or two interviewees, however, their reminiscences point to a hankering for a rural lifestyle from their family past. Matthew (Lytes Cary), Tasha and Jacqui and Christian (Somerton), come from rurally based Somerset families. Socio-economic changes in rural



industry and employment resulted in them not leading lives similar to their parents or grandparents, but threads of family heritage shape their lives today.

For these allotmenters the past emerges as an influence on the present, inducing aspirations for a future that contains temporal affects resonating down the generations. By tracking several extracts from the interview with Christian and Jacqui, a Fireman and hairdresser from Somerton, the rural land based family background is set out, before they then explore their vision of a future lifestyle based on familial affects:

*“Christian: ...My whole family, Dad and my grandparents, are gardeners. It’s quite fortunate, even now I still get guidance from my parents, my Dad especially. He’ll come up the allotment and give us advice and we’ll come home and look in a book and he’ll be wrong, he contradicts the book and his ideas work. I think, they’re not going to be around forever, so lets get his advice.”*

(Several Pages later)

*RS: And are you hoping to save money on food with the growing? Is that partly the motivation?*

*Christian: Yes, yes and to just know where it comes from. We do and I believe we will end up with pigs, if it’s on our own land or whether it’s on a farm or somewhere. Your [Jacqui’s] cousin is doing it...*

*Jacqui: You don’t make money but you don’t loose money. You get the quality.*

*Christian: You don’t loose money, you make a saving. It is cheaper but you don’t make a profit but you do know what’s going into your food. George (on the plots) again is a slaughter man and he said he would slaughter for us. But now we give him veg and he dropped some pork chops for us, didn’t he? Some Lamb chops, so we’re getting things back now. So hopefully, touch wood, if that happens, we will be very limited what we buy then.*

*RS: So you would quite like to be self-sufficient?*

*Christian: Food-wise*

*Jacqui: Yes. What is it? Tom and...*

*RS: Tom and Barbara (laughs)” (Interview November 2011)*

These extracts contain many points of interest that reveal motivations for growing that go beyond the more obvious ones of taste, trust and freshness. Here a clear path between a land-

based family past and the desire to recreate that in a rural land-based future carried out alongside their paid employment. These extracts show how the activity of growing on an allotment can be driven by a desire to establish continuity at a personal level. Here elements of a cultural past are filtered and cherished. This cherishing of certain familial past cultural practices result in the allotmentee attempting to reenact them on the plots. The motivations of these allotmentees combine both temporal and spatial resonance. Here past practices create a temporal family affect where yearning for a past lifestyle forms a basis for future life plans. However, attempts to create a life based on land for raising crops and animals demonstrates spatial as well as temporal yearning. Cherishing elements of community continuity can be seen as a form of nostalgia for a rural idyll. However, for allotmentees, such as Christian and Jacqui, this term is too loaded, as their interest in plot holding and small holding reflects a passion for a lifestyle very real to them from their recent familial past:

*"Christian: I enjoy that lifestyle. For me it isn't just about the taste, I just enjoy it. Probably my childhood again, grew up like it. You see it, you see such an idyllic life and you just want it [...]"*

*Christian: ...It's a great life. Great life for the grandchildren. That's what we want, eh? The good life, under a tree in an orchard (laughs)...Darling Buds of May! (laughs).*

*Jacqui: I could so easily go for that life. Not so much the black market trading and all that, but the table...*

*Christian: Yes the big family, loads of food on the table. All self-sufficient. You want all the kids round don't you?*

*RS: Sounds good.*

*Jacqui: I suppose that's what I was raised with; my mum was one of eleven. (RS: Really)*

*That's exactly what we had, really. My Nan always using the good produce, my uncles going off shooting and there was always a farmer giving them a leg of lamb or half a pig. We never went to the supermarket or the shops." (Interview November 2011)*

Delving into these motivations for Christian and Jacqui to grow reveals the affects of their recent familial past lifestyles, as an aspiration for their own future. Here temporal forces produces complex affects from the past influencing the present and plans for the future. However, the quote contains not only temporal affects but also references to the space of this lifestyle yearned for. Here this lifestyle will be enacted *'under a tree in an orchard...[with]*

*loads of food on the table'*. For Christian and Jacqui growing on an allotment provides the space to make this vision real, to recreate the affects of a spatially based past lifestyle. These affects relate to a lifestyle grounded within land-based practices, where both good food and family members are abundant.

Both Jacqui and Christian cite media references that stir up yearnings for this life. References to the television comedy-drama programmes 'The Good Life' (BBC 1975-1978, plus repeats) and 'The Darling Buds of May' (ITV 1991-1993) establish them within an age demographic where nostalgic resonances for the rosy side of rural life were portrayed on TV, a life that is seen as more simple, more nourishing and more cohesive. However, both can reach out and touch lifestyles from their recent family past through their own identity and their parents' memories that resonate with these programmes. Because of this they appear to be willing for socio-cultural change to halt and even reverse. Such yearnings for the rural idyll are also exemplified within current popular media. This phenomena was exemplified through TV shows such as Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage Series (Channel 4) which began in 1998 and is still running through various incarnations. Jamie Oliver's 'Jamie At Home' (Channel 4 2007) focused on growing veg organically at home and exploring different ways of cooking meals with them. However, not only did the celebrity chefs have an impact, this time also saw the rise in gardening shows that focused on growing veg, such as Carol Klein's 'Grow Your Own Veg' (BBC 2007) that reached an audience of 3.8 million<sup>23</sup>. These programmes are intended as entertaining ways to educate the public about how to source fresh produce for healthy eating and are mentioned by several allotmenters as an influence. In this series of extracts Christian refers to River Cottage on TV as a motivation and then a later extract shows Jacqui referring to using River Cottage cookbooks:

*"RS: So what made you want an allotment? Although it sounds rather obvious.*

*Christian: River Cottage! (laughs)*

*RS: Really?*

*Christian: Well that for me prompted it a little bit. Because I miss it and then you get these reality shows and I think. Oh, that lifestyle looks really good and it all seemed to come together with everyone wanted to be more self-sufficient and I thought we'll never get that*

---

<sup>23</sup>Doward & McDevitt (2007) -A Good Life for all as Grow Your Own Booms -The Observer Online, accessed 28/04/2013, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/16/television>

*opportunity, there weren't any allotments around. You think it's a distant dream and then reality hit in. [...]*

*Jacqui: We've got good cookbooks and River Cottage. We've done a few different things.*

*Christian: He's our mentor, Hugh (laughs).*

*RS: Yes, it's handy that he's done that new veg series.*

*Christian: Yes, it is for Molly [Jacqui's vegetarian daughter]. We'd love to go down there, go down to his place, have a lesson down there. [...]*

*Christian: Got them all haven't we [River Cottage books]. You get some ideas from that, don't you? Jacqui, you are a good cook aren't you? I think you are. You create some good dishes.*

*Jacqui: (pause) When I've got time. It's just having the time, if you get in late you do something quick. But I do like stir-fries and things rather than...I hate going to the freezer. We do do it sometimes." (Interview November 2011)*

For Christian and Jacqui media influences are referred to frequently, with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall becoming a dominant influence on their lifestyle aspirations. This visual prompt together with their family rural, land based past has become a powerful influence in their journey to create a land-based element within their lives. Temporal affects become mixed into yearnings for a rural idyll portrayed within the media, turning on a switch for Jacqui and Christian when the possibility of an allotment arose. However, within this extract there are elements of daily experience that undermine the reality of achieving the rural idyll. Jacqui refers to time constraints that scupper dreams of self-sufficiency. Here the aspiration for '*the good life*' meets reality when Jacqui finds she has not always enough time for cooking from scratch. It is clear from this extract that Jacqui holds the responsibility for cooking within this family, bringing an issue of gender into achieving '*the good life*'.

Through the interviews many participants talked about sharing growing and cooking responsibilities. However gender roles were implicit within many interviews. It was expected that men would undertake more physical or construction based jobs and women mostly had the job of providing meals. John, a retired engineer Somerton Allotments, referred to taking

his produce home for his wife to cook and although she did not garden at the plots, he would have liked for her to come and pick produce as she knew best what was needed:

*"John: ...I came up on Saturday to pick some beans, I picked some peas yesterday. I'll be pick some broad beans at the weekend (RS: That's quite a nice part of the gardening) Yes. But I would prefer my wife to pick the crops and for me to grow them [...] Because she's in charge of meals, she could pick what she wants." (Interview June 2011)*

These traditional positions are however contrasted with that of Paul and Lyndsey of Lytes Cary Allotments. Paul is the househusband for his young family and as a trained chef was fully involved in cooking for the family. However, it was noticeable within the interview that Lyndsey (a full-time student) frequently referred to cooking for the family. Therefore whilst traditional gender roles are not adhered to within this couple, Lyndsey has not fully relinquished a place in the kitchen: *'Lyndsey: Yes when I'm making cakes, I've got 3 children around me.'* (Interview November 2011).

By diffusing into a discussion on gender, the affects of temporality are shown to be non-linear and themselves creating layers within socio-cultural issues. Experiential timeliness is seen to be important for guiding the moments of response to crop difficulties and so underpinning the success of plot harvests. However success has been shown to be reliant upon allotmenters' access to spare time for growing at the plots. The degree to which their lives outside the plot are full is a crucial element in successful growing. Here gender roles can impact with women growing commonly being responsible for cooking family meals and caring for children resulting in the impact of time constraints on growing. However, this finding does not have universal validity in that we have the example of Paul, from Lytes Cary, who is the primary carer for his children. Along side this example are the women allotmenters growing and cooking for themselves, so further disrupting the traditional allotment stereotype.

Children are cited by several allotmenters as both a motivation and influence on their growing at the plots. Michelle talks about how her daughters' interest in growing spurred her onto growing veg at home before she got the allotments. When I asked her about her motivations to begin growing, she replied, *'Well, the kids were into it. It was for them really,*

*that's why we did it'* (Interview October 2011). For Sue, a mother of three young children and growing at Somerton Allotments with her husband Colin, taking on an allotment was a way of creating a link between her own farm-based childhood:

*'Her kids will have their own planting patches and she hopes they learn about healthy eating through growing and learn to try what they grow. She wants to see them grazing through their plot and having the freedom of the outdoors which she had growing up on a farm. Where they live in Somerton is slightly built up.'* (Field Diary 20/03/11)

Sally, a mother of two small children whose husband Matthew is their main grower at Lytes Cary also saw the plots as a place they could bring their small children to give them some freedom:

*'She feels that it is very child friendly up here and it gives the children the freedom to explore and be free, within reason, as it is very safe. She also said that she feels, George (her son, aged 5) in particular, has learnt a lot by 'doing' and that it may have helped him in general development.'* (Field Diary 19/03/11)

In fact Matthew, who lives in Castle Cary shares a plot with his father Brian who lives in Somerton. Matthew, in an in depth interview talks about his Somerset based family background and being inspired to study horticulture after a childhood learning to grow from his farmer grandfather. Now by sharing a plot with his father and showing his son George how to grow, they have three generations of growers on one plot. Here is a vivid case of a love for growing and growing knowledge being passed down the generations:

*'Matthew: I would always spend every moment of the summer holidays I could there [on the veg patch at the farm], because it was such a great place. I was always quite interested in what was going on watching him. I didn't realise at the time, I was picking it up, but obviously I was. I did learn sub-consciously.'* (Interview September 2011)

These series of extracts explore the power of childhood learning experiences in developing growing knowledge. Matthew talks about developing knowledge as a child visiting his grandfather's farm, in a similar way to how his wife, Sally discusses their son George's

experiences on the plots. Here is a tangible illustration of experience of growing leading to both competence and an affinity with growing. Developing an affinity with plants and the earth through growing for these allotmenters creates a sense of harmony that acts like a pull, back to the land. These examples of Sue and Matthew fit well with earlier extracts discussing agricultural family histories revealing how the space of the land acts like a draw and a repository of heritage to share with ones children. For these allotmenters growing on a plot gives them a sense of belonging, as well as familial continuity.

A key finding drawn from coding the data is the influence of familial history in shaping attitudes and aspirations for growing. The impact of family history is a powerful influence in shaping many allotmenters' motivations for growing. However for some allotmenters, such as Jacqui, Christian, Matthew and Tasha the influences of family pasts provide tangible temporal and spatial affects shaping their present actions and aspirations for a future lifestyle based on a piece of land for growing on. These aspirations, it has been shown, have been further stirred by contemporary media influences, citing the fashion for grow your own practices. However, there are further motivations for growing that also support a notion that allotmenters are aspiring to recreate a rural idyll. The discussion moves onto to explore the pull of being in the countryside for allotmenters, before examining other key motivations of sustainable lifestyles and reconnecting with food.

#### **4:13 The Lure of the Plot**

Underlying practices of growing food on allotments affect a direct relationship with the matter of food, allowing allotmenters to know what they are eating. However, many interviewees also value the space of the plot for its wider socio-cultural benefits. The desire to be out on the plot itself was expressed by many interviewees, as a means to enjoy the outside. This was an unexpected finding and pointed to affects that go beyond merely food being valued by allotmenters. Jan & Phil, retired teachers growing at Lytes Cary Allotments (Jan is also the chair of the committee), reflected this when asked about their motivations for growing:

*'RS: So what do you think your motivations are now for growing?'*

*Jan: I mean, you get fresh air. It's nice to be out, we like being out anyway. Its quite nice growing things you can eat, they're so much better.'* (Interview June 2011)

Lytes Cary Allotments, like Somerton Allotments, has widespread views over the countryside. Being located on a National Trust property means that their staff undertake basic tasks such as maintaining the hedges and grass paths, resulting in the site being unusually attractive and tidy. For some like Les, an experienced grower and retired aircraft engineer, growing at the site is like '*...digging in paradise*' (Field diary 03/03/11). Many Lytes Cary Allotmenters decided to take on a plot there having already developed a relationship with the site from walking the footpaths or volunteering at the property. Joy, a retired postmistress moved to Somerset in recent years and became a volunteer at Lytes Cary:

*“Joy: ...I began to work at Lytes, voluntary work and I realised how lovely it was, a lovely area. And when the allotments came up and then, of course they were two things I didn't get with the house [a view and a garden when she moved]. When I knew the allotments were coming up it solved both problems. It's lovely. A lovely place, I'm lucky with the plot I've got, although I haven't actually sat down and looked at the view, certainly where I am, I've got a lovely view of the hills and the garden.” (Interview November 2011)*

These quotes reveal the draw of being outside as a key motivating factor in growing produce on allotments. Joy's interview also shows how houses within rural locations may have a small garden, resulting in householders looking for additional places 'to be', a finding that challenges perceptions of the rural as mostly home to the landed wealthy. This position was reinforced by a large number of the other interviewees, many of whom also have small gardens. However, there are also a proportion of allotmenters who use their plot for growing bulk crops, keeping their back garden for growing produce that may be wanted daily, such as tomatoes and salad plants. For all the allotmenters, the allotment site is valued as a place they can go outside of the home, as well as providing access to the countryside. However are allotmenters seeking to create a space of rural idyll for themselves? This may be as a resistance to the nature of rural land ownership that sees many rural dwellers without regular access to the land. Or perhaps the hectic pace of mobility within contemporary lives that sees little time to dwell, preventing the formation of community. For some is this an attempt to recreate notions of an idyllic past where the community works the land?

Many allotmenters expressed a deep enjoyment of being in the space of the plot, however for some this keys into value judgements on contemporary life and food supply. Pat, who is a



town councillor in Somerton, reflects on access to the land, countryside aesthetics alongside agricultural self-sufficiency for the UK:

*"Pat: It's lovely to see a resurgence in allotments and its lovely that there is this interest. I applied for it through the allotment association. When I was working on the town plan something that came out, was when we have new housing development, there should be more allotment provision and I think that's a good idea. Houses seem to be getting smaller and gardens all the time and it must frustrate people's ability to grow vegetables. When you get stuck into something you start to notice it, I'm positive that when I go for walks I see peoples gardens that never used to grow vegetables and there's much more going on than there has been and its taking us back to how things used to be, not that long ago. And good. (RS: Yes like you say, more self-reliance). I would actually like for farming to be one of the UK's principle industries and I would like us to be self-sufficient which we could be." (Interview July 2011)*

For Pat growing your own food is a sensible practice at both a personal and national level. As a town councillor Pat associates growing your own on an allotment with self-sufficiency and practices that were common in her parents' generation. Pat sees self-reliance as commonsense and she aspires to recreate the past through allotment practices. However, whilst this may harken to recreating the rural idyll, previous examples and her own observations underline the rise in popularity of allotments and grow your own practices. In some sense these perspectives are looking to a more human-scale past to create a future based on familiar spatial practices.

In contrast Tasha at Somerton Allotments sees the space of the allotment as a necessary place to be. From Tasha's interview there is a sense that without her allotment, her life would be diminished with the demands of work removing any sense of quality of life:

*'Tasha: ...I just really enjoy being up there, it's so relaxing and when you've been at work all day (RS: You're in an office I guess). Yes, I'm confined to an office and I don't even have a window and I can't beat it. I'm itching to get home...literally, it's a superman change into my gear, do my flask and off I go. I'm only round the corner so if I decide to walk, I can walk down the road and then left and I'm basically there.*

*RS: Do you think it just relaxes you?*

*Tasha: Yes, definitely, so you can unwind and take in the fresh air.*

*RS: And do you feel you need to be a bit active to unwind instead of just sit down?*

*Tasha: Yes because I've been on the go all day, to just sit there is quite alien. I can do it indoors with the TV screen moving and we've got the fish tank and that relaxes me, that's because I'm confined indoors because the weather's dictating. If it's nice weather, there's no way I'm going to stay in the house and with there I've got an excuse to get outside. My garden's only tiny, I haven't got space to grow different stuff, so it's lovely.' (Interview November 2011)*

Tasha's evocative account of her passion for her allotment, implies a deep need for the freedom of the outdoors space. I asked her if she enjoys the outdoors in general, like walking footpaths, but she stated that she did not feel safe in the open countryside. Therefore for Tasha the allotment is a sanctuary, she can get to know the people there, feel safe and drink in the open air. Tasha is local to Somerset and has a rich family past of relatives working the land. Like Christian and Jacqui mentioned earlier, the allotment seems to reconnect her with a space of belonging.

Many allotmenters including Jenny and Peter growing at Lytes Cary echoes the sense of the plots as a *'place to be'*. Peter is retired while Jenny is still working. Growing at the plots is not merely a form of food procurement but a place to enact leisure, relaxation and community, as shown by this field diary extract:

*'They think the communal side is very good and find that they know everyone who comes up. They have site BBQs and swap shops along with plans for picnic tables to be bought and the shepherd's hut that is coming.*

*They really enjoy growing, planting, eating produce and the company that's available at the site. They mostly come weekends and were well set-up to enjoy the weather, with deck chairs, power tools and equipment. They said that they would spend a couple more hours there and then go off to the pub. They also enjoy bringing up a bottle to relax with after a day working there.' (Field Diary 19/03/11)*

This discussion explores how the space of the allotment itself is valued within rural areas, with enjoyment of the outdoors being cited by a majority of interviewees. Both sites exist within a rural area with only small settlements existing nearby that provide a limited range of community facilities. Therefore, allotment sites, in providing a space for community, are valued by allotmenters for providing a space to gather in the rural landscape. At the allotments direct contact can be made in informal ways, as well as being in a space where others are quietly working. Joy also talks about the benefits of this as a new resident of the area:

*“RS: So you got to know new people. (JP: Yes) Do you think it’s changed how you socialise?  
Joy: No, it’s just expanded [...] Meeting new people and getting to know the area. Where to go for different things even other gardens to visit.  
RS: Yes so it widens your local knowledge.” (Interview November 2011)*

Jacqui moved to Somerton from Glastonbury to live with Christian and has found it hard to meet new people, so for her the social side of the allotment is important:

*'Jacqui: I want it to be a social network for me as well, because I don't know anyone here. Nobody at all, I was quite lonely, it's only through the allotment I can say I know people now. So for me I wanted to socialise, but you don't, you're [Christian] working so hard.'*  
*(Interview November 2011)*

However for even a long term resident, such as Tasha, the allotments have provided a new space of community:

*'RS: So do you feel you've got to know new people?  
Tasha: Yeah I have, quite a few new people.  
RS: I guess you know Somerton people any way?  
Tasha: Yes, but I've always worked full-time, so I have been limited to who I've known...  
RS: Oh, I see, you're not just going to just bump into them.  
Tasha: No, I do feel out of the loop... I'm just not with it at all. Some people up there have got odd views...each to their own I say. But most people have been really helpful, if you just want*

*to chit-chat or advice, how are you doing that? Why are you doing that?' (Interview November 2011)*

These interview extracts and discussion reveal the importance of the allotment to allotmenters that goes beyond the procurement of food. Motivations for growing on a plot and the affects of these practices serve to provide the allotmenters with a space to be, as well as developing community in rural places. These extracts express how the allotments are valued in a variety of ways including for the space itself. There are elements here that wish to recreate a labour intensive agricultural past. However nostalgia for a rural idyll is grounded in stark statistics of the decimation in agricultural employment<sup>24</sup>. Therefore for some allotmenters and their families' global food trade has had personal and lasting impacts in their communities, shaping changes in traditional rural employment and family futures.

#### **4:14 Resistance & Resilience- 'It's taste, the big part is ethical and sustainable'.**

For a number of allotmenters, growing their own veg provided an opportunity to express lifestyle ethics, such as trying to develop a more sustainable lifestyle or to resist globalised food from supermarkets. Somerton Allotments was founded by members of the active group Sustainable Somerton, which has led to many members talking about sustainable living as a motivation for growing on the plot. John, a retired Engineer from Wales, who set up the allotment site, reflects on this link between Sustainable Somerton and Somerton Allotments:

*“John: ...I was a member of Sustainable Somerton. We started that in 2007/8. I wanted to have allotments as part of that movement. It grew from there really and I was determined, that if I was going to make an impression, on sustainability in Somerton, getting allotments was one of the ways of doing it.*

*RS: Ah, so that is a big interest for you and some of the others?*

*John: Yes, there's at least 3 of us, who are active with Sustainable Somerton and are allotmenters up here.*

*RS: So you see growing your own as a way of making food more sustainable?*

*John: Yes, yes." (Interview June 2011)*

---

<sup>24</sup> In the South West Agricultural Employment accounts for 2% of the workforce- Lowe (2007) Rural Futures -Lancaster Colloquium on Urban-Rural Flows accessed online 30/04/13 at [http://www.lancs.ac.uk/ias/annualprogramme/regionalism/urban\\_rural/index.htm](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/ias/annualprogramme/regionalism/urban_rural/index.htm)

Johannes and Sabine mentioned above are also members of Sustainable Somerton and cite sustainability as a motivation for growing on the plots. They also refer to consumer ethics and a dislike of supermarket veg as a motivating factor. This dislike of supermarket produce is one of the most widespread themes emerging from both the initial and in depth interviews across both sites. Whilst Johannes and Sabine were committed to buying organic produce, for them food miles comes first:

*“Sabine: Its taste, the big part is ethical and sustainable. I just think its crazy to bring milk from Poland over here.*

*Johannes: If it’s organic, it’s not organic any more because of the food miles.*

*Sabine: Where food comes, green beans from Kenya in Sainsburys...how organic can it be? It might be organic by Kenyan standards but is that what I expect from organic? Because at Merricks [Langport Organic Farm] I can talk to them and ask them what do you use? And when I buy something in Jane’s [a Somerton shop] I can ask are they happy chickens, what are they fed with? But in the supermarket...” (Interview July 2011)*

This common thread of a rejection of supermarket produce reflects how growing on the plots at these two new sites is also a desire to reconnect with food. Growing food on these two sites is for many, a reaction to the socio-cultural food changes epitomised by the expanded dominance of the supermarket. With these positions an ideology of resisting global agriculture, epitomised by supermarkets is a dominant theme expressed by most allotmenters. This extract reveals complex attitudes towards food philosophies that merge food ethics, food miles and organic production with sustainability. Ideological positions are shown to be fluid with statements that begin about taste becoming focused on food miles and quality. This shows how everyday ethics are not enacted within clearly defined parameters but instead show how ideological motivations for growing can overlay each other.

Of interest here is how Sabine's concern is expressed for foods meeting her own standards of food quality. In expressing concern about Kenyan organic standards, she is revealing a concern for her own standards of chemical-free growing and by implication a concern for her own welfare. In contrast, other allotmenters express dislike for supermarket produce from farms from Africa because they believe that it is not right to be importing food from what is

perceived to be a poorer continent. John B, a maths professor growing at Lytes Cary discussed this with me in an initial interview:

*'They [he and his wife] are also keen to keep down the food miles in what they eat and avoid food that has come from afar. He thinks about African countries growing beans to sell here and he thinks that it's a shame to be using their water for our needs.'* (Field Diary 19/03/11)

Here John, a well-educated grower is essentialising Africa as the poor continent and fails to appreciate its spatial and economic diversity. Michael takes a more informed view:

*'Michael: ...As a point I will not buy Peruvian asparagus, I have nothing against the Peruvians, but I'm very anti the African... (RS: the beans?) not anti Africa, I've been out to Uganda and areas of starvation and the thought that Africans are using their soils for unblemished red roses to go into the belly of a jumbo jet for plonkers in London for valentines day...it makes me quite angry. (Interview July 2011)*

Michael demonstrates a similar dislike for importing produce due to both food miles and a concern for the importer countries' economic well-being. However, even with a more informed position he places blame on UK supermarkets, a position that appears to belittle the power of the economic policies of Peru or Uganda. It would have been interesting here to have pursued his position on fairtrade produce and the impacts of some European consumers' switching to more localised provision.

Ben from Lytes Cary shares similar concerns on global trade but for him the focus is on supporting local farmers. In knowing where they get their food from, Ben feels that he and his wife Juliet can mix their concern for supporting local farmers with consuming tastier food:

*'By buying their meat from a butcher they trust (in Somerton), they [Ben & Juliet] feel they are getting better tasting food as well as keeping to their ethics. They believe in eating meat from animals whose life has been good. Additionally, they believe in using the local tradesmen, for them it's important.'* (Field Diary 19/03/11)

These concerns show a mixing of concerns for farmers here and abroad, with a desire to support local farmers and a belief that farmers from poorer countries, such as Kenya should not be using their land for our food. Other allotmenters such as Dave and Pat both from Somerton Allotments also raise the issue of disliking buying produce from far away countries such as New Zealand and African countries.

What is also noticeable from Sabine and Johannes's quote is how they begin by discussing taste but exploring their food philosophies rapidly overruns the discussion. Here sensorial affects that represent the materiality of nature are left aside to focus on ideological positions. These positions are shown to be complex and overlaid, however, nature itself is set aside from the discussion. This highlights the complexity of expressing principles stemmed from encounters with the natural world; retaining a central focus on the material of nature is lost in these sentiments. Whilst allotmenters can attempt to work in accord with nature on the plots, will and intention reveal the continuing separation of human and nature, diminishing an ability to overcome nature-society dualisms.

This discussion explores how principals and ethics of food can become jumbled within narratives of sustainability, with the divisions between them becoming unclear. Sustainability, whilst being cited by many allotmenters as a motivation to grow, is expressed through narratives of local trading, global trade and a dislike of supermarkets. Allotmenters are responding to socio-cultural changes both at a global level where food supply chains are extended, as well as changes at a more immediate level where local farms have had to grow, diversify or fail. These changes are exemplified at the local level by the spread of supermarkets and the reduction in employment within the agricultural sector. An important theme identified through this study is the commitment allotmenters have for supporting local food networks. On the plot and in the kitchen they are enacting resistance to global trading forces both through their shopping practices as well as by producing food for themselves. Therefore allotmenters are enacting spatial resistance through their growing practices in an attempt to diminish their dependence on supermarkets and global food trade.

#### **4:15 'I do like to know where things are from'**

The principal motivation for growing on a plot remains the production and consumption of fresh food. As discussed above, the allotment is for many interviewees a place for procuring food that prevents a reliance on the supermarket. Every interviewee expressed a desire to

shop using local shops and local produce when procuring food, within a range of commitment to such practices. Therefore a desire to reconnect with produce is a dominant feature of this study. Allotment practices differ to local food networks in that it is the most proximal of food relationships where the producer and the consumer are the same. By growing on an allotment the network of connectivities linking producer and consumer is broken, with an alternative space of connectivities enacted through informal sharings of seed, plants and harvests. This alternative space of connectivities also includes the regular visiting of the plot along with tools and growing materials and the eventual transport of crops to the kitchen. Through these practices allotmenters are directly in touch with their food and the most knowledgeable consumers of how their food is produced. By growing and consuming the produce themselves, the allotmenters not only intimately know their fruit and veg, they also intimately know the space of the plot itself.

Michelle at Lytes Cary, a health assistant and mother of two primary school aged girls, refers to the value of allotment growing as being a way to know your food:

*“ Michelle: Yes, I don’t put in anything apart from the manure from my Mum’s horse in it. RS: And you know what’s in it. [...] So is it kind of knowing where everything comes from that’s important?”*

*Michelle: Yes, I do like to know where things are from. I like organic food, I like that it’s got nothing on it and I know where it’s from.” (Interview October 2011)*

This quote sees allotmenters expressing growing and eating philosophies through plot practices, enabling them to enact food ethics through everyday practices. In this example, the ethical stance is concerned primarily with care for the self and her family. It is through knowing what is in the food that they grow, that allotmenters seek to eat fresh, healthy produce. However, allotmenters may be misguided in thinking that they have total knowledge of their produce. Plot allotment sites are newly created with little knowledge of what the soil is composed of. At Lytes Cary the land has been pasture for decades and grazed by sheep. Whereas Somerton Allotments is situated on farmland that was used for conventional production of arable crops before it was rented to the committee. These previous uses of the sites create affects that cannot be fully known by allotmenters. Added to this is the use of commercial composts, neighbourhood horse manure or cow manure from



a farmyard. All these added soil conditioners can contain unknown elements and some are openly questioned by allotmenters, such as Matthew, a journalist with young children from Lytes Cary:

*'Matthew: Yes, I try to be relatively organic, erm I think Lytes Cary [allotment committee] stipulates that we're organic, not chucking slug pellets around there. I am conscious. But one thing I'm wary of is the compost, the very inexpensive compost that comes out of the recycling centre.*

*RS: That's right, because it claims to be organic.*

*Matthew: I don't believe that it can be organic, because there maybe wood chips in there... I would be concerned if there's wood chips in there, all sorts of nasties could be in there, carcinogenic things. I'm very wary I don't use that.'* (Interview September 2011)

Matthew's concern is not common on the plots, as many allotmenters are using the compost from the recycling centre. Dave bought a trailer load of this compost and described using these materials as *'vital to add bulk to the soil'* (Field Diary 20/03/11). However, Pat a retired retail worker at Somerton has concerns about the cow manure that was left for communal use:

*'Pat: ...When the 2nd batch of manure came I made use of it unlike the first batch which looked awful. Stuff isn't growing where I used it.*

*RS: I wondered what was in it?*

*Pat: I put some on my asparagus bed and it was like dust, it was just weird, it was like cindery dust. So I got some manure from Overt Lock (a Somerton hardware shop) to put in there, but the rest of it was from the 2nd batch and I put it on the surface and it wasn't the right time. I thought it would serve two purposes, like act as a mulch to keep the moisture in a bit and then they had that awful outbreak of Ecoli...*

*RS: Did that worry you?*

*Pat: Not really, I did think aww, that wasn't a sensible thing to do, I should have done it in the winter. But christ, we've been using manure for years.'* (Interview July 2011)

Using these materials highlights the grey areas where allotmenter knowledge of their produce cannot be complete. For Pat using this manure that did not look right created anxiety

as it coincided with a European Ecoli outbreak that was initially blamed on vegetable growers. Then she reviewed her practices and was cross with herself for not spreading manure at the right time. However, her suspicion of the matter was apparent reinforcing how even allotmenters have gaps in their knowing the material composition of the field in which they grow. Therefore allotmenters cannot completely control the material of their crops but do enact a spatial reconnectedness with their produce throughout the lifecycle of produce from plot to plate.

However some moments of consumption for allotmenters occurs at the plots themselves. An added sensorial enjoyment of allotment practices is the freedom to harvest and graze on the plot itself providing unique moments of consumption and spatial reconnectedness with food. Joy, once we're on the subject of picking harvests, rhapsodises about the experience of eating at the plot. We began talking about the financial savings of growing on the plot and Joy told me about her passion for raspberries:

*“RS: But then fruit's expensive.*

*Joy: Especially organic raspberries. (Whispers) I love them... they've been out of my price range since I've been retired. I've been down here [the plot] and they don't come home very often, if it's not me, it's George! [her grandson]. Perhaps, I got some home and made some jam and coulis. Most time...its quite nice. I was at a stage I didn't worry I had too much, there were always peas and raspberries to eat whilst I was there [at the plot]. It's not just the money. I'm sure you could save money [...]*

*Joy: So I don't keep a tally, but the price of organic raspberries, straight from the bush - priceless, to me.*

*RS: Yes, priceless, yes, that's good.*

*Joy: Peas! You know- open up, eat! You can't put a price on it (laughs).*

*RS: No. I agree.*

*Joy: Parsnip - dig up, come home - cook it! Again... Over the winter, you can get things like that in the winter time - priceless.” (Interview November 2011)*

For Joy, the value of the plot is in being able to eat copious amounts of luxury produce, such as raspberries, which are referred to most frequently as a now available luxury by allotmenters. This extract reveals how proximal growing practices provide an increased

wealth of fresh produce. However, woven throughout this extract are the layers of benefits that proximal growing provides. Here we see growing, direct consumption, widening the amount of fresh produce consumed, saving money, but Joy clearly values the access to flavour predominately. Of particular interest within Joy's interview is an earlier reference to picking and eating raspberries as a child in her family garden. At the plot, these positive food memories are recreated through plot practices and handed down to her grandson.

For other allotmenters growing their own veg, is not about them being able to access luxury, it is about them accessing the basics of fresh, affordable produce. Paul and Lyndsey, living on a rural social housing estate have four young children. Before they had the allotment, although both were keen cooks, they relied on frozen veg. Lyndsey and Paul explain in the interview how much the allotment has changed for them:

*Lyndsey: We usually buy frozen veg, just because of the cost. I'd love to buy organic vegetables and stuff from the local veg bloke but I just can't afford it. Every now and then I'll get fresh vegetables from the supermarket but its not. I don't do it for every single meal like we had at the allotment.'*

*RS: Yes. So how important is taste to you?*

*(pause)*

*Lyndsey: Yeah it's important, it's got to taste nice. We know when it's fresh, fresh is always better. Definitely. You can tell. I know we have frozen veg and it's not the same so you know in 6 months time we'll have fresh peas in a minute.*

*[...]*

*Paul: And knowing you made a soup made out of fresh veg tastes completely different. Completely different. So that's nice, now in the winter times when you do your soups and your stews. It's very, very nice and it is a major difference.*

*Lyndsey: There is a difference, which is why I sometimes go out and buy fresh veg if we haven't got some from the allotment. Sometimes you just want to taste a broccoli, that tastes like a broccoli, not like water.'* (Interview November 2011)

This extract powerfully underscores the gap in taste between the cheapest food available for feeding a large family with fresh produce grown on the allotment. Lyndsey goes on to express how eating fresh produce is important for her to support the children's health.

Therefore without the allotment, their experience of fresh produce and knowledge of how food is grown would be severely limited. These extracts reveal how allotment practices also allow access to quality food, where the costs involved in growing are mostly lower than the value of the crops harvested. On both sites the rent for a standard sized plot is £25 a year, which is renewed annually, along with a rental agreement. Through the interview process a variety of positions emerge from those who are expressly growing in order to save money to those who are not interested in saving money and just want to enjoy the produce and the practice. Many interviewees change their mind when discussing the costs of growing, from being pragmatic about the start up costs out weighing the harvests and later espousing that they are definitely saving money (Paul & Lyndsey, Lytes Cary). Allotmenters, such as Johannes and Sabine, at Somerton, are keeping a track of money spent and saved, whereas most other interviewees are not. Growing on an allotment can provide access to luxury products and abundant harvests as well as providing experiences that, as Joy puts it are 'priceless'. However for some allotmenters, such as Lyndsey and Paul the allotment has become an important place of food provision to improve their families' diet. As keen cooks they and other such as Joy, refer regularly to the improvement of flavour their plot grown produce has. Therefore, whilst financial outlay is required to run a plot, the food itself is produced largely outside of traditional commodity circuits. The produce itself can also form part of an alternative currency amongst allotmenters and their wider communities, when fruit and vegetable crops, plants and seeds are swapped and neighbourly services paid for in kind:

*Jan: ... We also pass...last year we had so many courgettes, we had a builder here...he took some stuff home, the lady across the road did, the next-door neighbour did, my dad had some, your dad had some. So courgettes were coming out of our ears at one point but other things did well as well. Cucumbers, tomatoes [...]*

*Phil: ...Last night I dropped off some strawberries and raspberries to our neighbour who lives opposite and she was very grateful for those. It is nice to feel you can give things away to families and friends...*

*Jan: But she keeps an eye on our post if we're away. She doesn't like it if we get her anything for doing it, but fruit and vegetables are ok. She's quite happy with that. She used to live on a farm and so I think it's her currency.' (Interview June 2011)*

This quote exemplifies the role plot products can have as an informal currency in the wider community. Not only are crops shared and given away in the plot and wider community, they can become a currency between neighbours.

Nevertheless, these experiences of producing crops for home consumption do depend on wading through the minefield of weather, injuries, pests and diseases, not to mention having sufficient time for growing. The next section of this analysis chapter will explore these challenges from a nature-society perspective and so concurrently examine the plot as a space of encounter between human and nature agentics.

#### **4:20 ALLOTMENT PRACTICES -ORDER, CHAOS & TRANSFORMATION**

*“After saying hello and introducing me to Bill, I asked Dave what he was doing today. He was sifting through the stony ground on half his plot to make it a beneficial medium for planting carrots and parsnips. On the other half he has dug in 6 loads of horse manure for onions and potatoes that won’t mind the stony ground so much. Bill said that his broad beans that he planted in January were now up, but the rabbits were now eating them... Pests became a dominant topic of conversation and Dave pointed out the perimeter trenches dug around the site... Dave and Bill discussed the various pests that the new fence would deter including badgers, rabbits and deer; badgers were seen as particularly damaging, whereas foxes were not seen as a problem with veg growing. However, one plot has got chickens already in a substantial run and another plot is considering having chickens.” (Field Diary 20/03/11)*

The field diary extract sets out an important theme identified through interviews, observation and experience, that of shaping and controlling the plot in order to manage harvest outcomes. The quote sets out key issues for allotmenters, adapting the growing medium of the soil and building defences to protect plants from key pests. Both tasks are key concerns for growers at the allotments as they create their new growing spaces. In the extract Dave, a guitar teacher from Somerton explains to me how he is working to change the soil structure of his plot, with different substances added in different places, depending on the crops planted. Here Dave is working to transform the matter of the plot itself through sifting and adding manure. He goes on to tell me how he is treating the two halves of his plot differently:

*‘...one half has been dug over and a mass of horse manure added. This has been planted with potatoes, onions, garlic and peas; where seeds have been sown, a barrier of twigs had been placed on the surface. The other half of the plot has been dug over... This is where he is going to plant the carrots and parsnips, adding that they need compost, not manure, otherwise they will ‘fork’. The compost he is using has come from Dimmer, the main local council-recycling centre... He said that it’s a good soil conditioner and makes the soil friable, which is necessary for carrots and parsnips. He tells me that the soil is a bit ‘claggy/clayey’ and the top soil isn’t deep, which isn’t good.’ (Field Diary 20/03/11)*

Dave is an experienced gardener, who other allotmenters turn to for advice. He has only one dividing path on his plot and no fences, which allows him to use the maximum growing area available, using small planks of wood as temporary walkways when working between the rows of crops. These extracts demonstrate how his planning process underlies plot practices, with cerebral decision-making an allotmenters’ tool at the start of the season. For an experienced grower, such as Dave, this process draws on layers of past practices, building up to shape his plan for the season to come. For others, who are not so experienced or confident, this planning process involves time spent with books, seed catalogues or asking others advice. Through these practices Dave is practicing embodied experiential knowledge built over years of 'doing' food. However, others turn to technical innovation to plan their seasonal growing. Tasha, Keith and Joy all referred to using an online paid-for growing programme that plans a four year crop rotation, sending fortnightly emails to remind them about jobs at hand. However, the extracts above illustrate how Dave uses his experiential knowledge to carefully respond to the matter of the plot, with adjustments made to both complement and alter his growing medium. Here, a mixture of knowledge, careful and repeated attending and the importing of materials sets up his plot for the growing season.

Planning and managing the plot is a job that occurs and is repeated throughout the season. Whilst these processes are largely cerebral practices, the extracts above reveal how for some these processes occur in response to the matter of the plot itself. However general literature on grow-your-own produce focuses on the role of keeping control in the form of intellectualised planning, where the actions of the grower, even in response to the matter of the site, are seen as predominant. This quote from the online growing guide used by Tasha, Keith and Joy, GrowVeg.Com illustrates this:

### ***'Example of a Four-bed Rotation***

***Area 1*** Enrich area with compost and plant potatoes and tomatoes (*Solanaceae*). When crop has finished sow onions or leeks (*Allium*) for an overwinter crop.

***Area 2*** Sow parsnips, carrot, parsley (*Umbeliferae*). Fill gaps with lettuce and follow with a soil-enriching green manure during winter.

***Area 3*** Grow cabbage, kale, rocket (*Brassicacae*) during the summer and follow with winter varieties of cabbage and Brussels sprouts.

***Area 4*** If this is your second or subsequent year, harvest the onions or leeks previously growing here over winter. Then sow peas and beans (*legumes*). When harvest has finished, lime the soil for brassicas which will move from area three to occupy the space next.<sup>25</sup>

The foregrounding of the power of abstract knowledge to control growing outcomes diminishes the role of embodied performativities, bodily adaptations, responses to matter and visceral engagements. In this perspective the agency of the human is dominant with the subtle interactions and responses to the matter of the plot overlooked.

Abstract and embodied approaches can foreground and recede throughout differing growing processes. However for the most experienced growers embodied knowledge is their most apparent form of practice. Planning and control are a dominant theme from the fieldwork and coding process, revealing an aspect of growing that is bound up with trying to impose order. This approach had to be tempered however, as most of the interviews showed that expectations of allotmenters had to adapt to the plot through experiential practices. Indeed discussions in this section on the role of planning of the plot reveal a side to plot practices where attempts to impose order can take over and undermine enjoyment of plot life.

Plot orderings can take different forms, as the following subsections will help to illustrate. At the allotments there are allotmenters growing from a principle of wildlife friendly growing. Whilst this is commonly ascribed to, allotmenters such as Tasha, Sabine and Johannes and Dave undertake this approach in a comprehensive manner. For these growers, their focus is

---

<sup>25</sup> GrowVeg.Com (2013) Grow Guide (online) accessed 30/04/13 available at: <http://www.growveg.com/growguides/crop-rotation.aspx>

not on borders and fences but in using the wildlife itself to produce a biological deterrent to pests;

*'Sabine: ...The Kohlrabi had a bad infestation of whitefly, but I had a brew up on the plots that my mum had made. Back in Germany, we have...using dried nettle, 500g packets. You use half a packet and 10 litres of water you let it stew for 3 weeks, it begins to stink, absolutely disgusting, but it got rid of the whitefly. It dulls the leaves but a week later I had no pests. (RS: That's worth knowing) I don't know for sure it worked.*

*Johannes: That's why we grow comfrey. It's very nutritious.*

*Sabine: The idea is to have a brew of that.*

*Johannes: And we will have a pond, a small pond. But its not first priority now.*

*RS: What do you think that will bring to the allotment?*

*Johannes: Maybe toads, frogs, wildlife.' (Interview July 2011)*

Here Sabine and Johannes are relying for now on home remedies to deal with infestations organically, however, they are laying plans for attracting more wildlife to their plot.

Meanwhile Tasha is using flowering shrubs as a method for attracting beneficial insects:

*'Tasha: ...At the minute, I've got that long line of lavender, I will be extending that all the way along down one side and then I've already seen some other plants and that, plants I can buy. So I'll bring them on...aquilga (sic)... Yes and they're loaded with pollen. So I'm definitely putting some of those in to encourage the old bees and stuff. And I'm also going to try and companion plant, so when I plant fruit trees, one of the things they recommend is to plant chives underneath as they deter wasps.' (Interview November 2011)*

Here Tasha is actively using selective planting as a draw to beneficial insects and as a deterrent to wasps. Wildlife friendly plots tend to be constructed in an open fashion with beds demarcated simply by paths, with none of these growers creating raised beds or other borders. These growing practices on a new site require experiential knowledge and a confidence with that knowledge. For the new allotmentee their days on the plot will be filled with digging out new beds, sowing crops and responding to pests with little spare time to consider nature-partnered processes.



However not all experienced allotmenters focus on wildlife friendly practices; for Pat, John, Michael, Sue and Colin and Christian and Jacqui a focus has been on various methods of constructing their plot for ergonomic use. For Sue, Colin, Christian and Jacqui much activity has been apparent with wooden planking used for constructing raised beds, borders and chicken runs. Whereas Pat and John took a methodical approach to weed control right from the start by fixing heavy plastic sheeting to prevent weed growth. John covered about a third of his plot this way, creating holes through which fruit bushes and sweetcorn could grow. He has also constructed a very large wooden compost bin. Whereas Pat created a highly designed plot by using the all-pervading stone she dug up to make a central path and bed borders. After laying thick plastic on the paths she bought in wood chipping as an additional covering. This premeditated activity resulted in Pat's plot taking on the look of a show garden in the summer months, an effect that was heightened when her 'teepee' canes were draped in white fleece to protect the growing beans.

The construction activity on these plots requires both the physical ability to construct wooden borders or chicken runs and finances to buy the materials. All construction efforts including John's and Pat's require financial outlays and significant time commitments. However, the most constructed plots are easier to manage, with Pat and John remaining unconcerned about weed growth, unlike Sabine and Johannes:

*'Sabine: ...We lost it at the beginning of June when we had all that rain and the bits we hadn't managed to weed, then the rain arrived and then they're really tough now. [...]*

*RS: Yes. So if I ask what jobs you been recently doing, would it be weeding?*

*Johannes: Yes, yesterday 3 hours, Saturday 3 hours and so on.'* (Interview July 2011)

This reflected my own experience, with the season being dominated by the weed question. In contrast, Dave did not undertake any construction activity on his plot. His focus was a thorough preparation of the soil, as discussed earlier. On most visits, he could be regularly seen calmly hoeing his loose and friable soil. Due to this regular tending of the soil, Dave also did not have weed problems. Not surprisingly he was a magnet for those needing plot advice.

These illustrations of plot practices set out the differing methods of orderings used by allotmenters. The various methods explored also had differing intentions, such as encouraging beneficial insects, keeping down weeds or simply constructing beds. Out of those discussed, Dave's soil care method is perhaps the most widely achievable as it does not rely on significant financial outlay or ability to construct wooden boundaries. However, Dave's soil care approach requires experience and significant time to achieve, as regular attending to the soil is key. These differing methods also imply allotmenters employing a variety of knowledge approaches to growing. Dave and John most overtly epitomise an embodied approach to growing where they already possess knowledge of best practices that work with the nature of their plots. However, Ben, Matthew, Sabine, Michael, Joy, Christian and Tasha are working towards gaining embodied knowledge but for now rely on others' advice, book suggestions, in the case of Joy and Tasha, an online growing plan and in the case of Matthew, Ben and Christian information learnt at horticultural college. Tasha and Ben it can be said portray an amalgam of embodied and abstract knowledge, but their passion for growing means that they will develop knowledge rapidly. Sabine has the green fingers in her growing partnership, however she and Johannes share the same growing and eating philosophies, resulting in their approaching the plots from an ideological standpoint. Organic eating and food ethics are key issues for them, shaping their growing decision-making. This approach retains abstract knowledge at the centre of their growing practice. In contrast Matthew, Michael, Joy, Christian and Sue and are growing based on familial knowledges of gardening. This repository of experience gives them instinctive confidence in their practices and a willingness to share ideas. They work with nature on their plots and tend to have less concern for abstract ethics or a need to retain absolute order. However whilst examining issues of control can sift through these varied knowledge positions, the appearance of the plots retained a dominant theme from the interviews containing layers of self-consciousness, effort, pride and even anxiety.

#### **4:21 Plot Aesthetics - 'none of that's what its about for me'**

Attempts to impose order occur at individual plot, as well as at site levels. In fact attempts to impose order at plot level were at times in response to committee complaints or requests. As new sites, anxieties about the aesthetic appearance, fitting into the landscape and pleasing neighbouring properties were common features of communications between committee and allotmenters. Each site had a different background as set out in chapter 3 that shaped these concerns and communications. For Lytes Cary, being a National Trust property meant that

visiting members of public were encouraged to enter the site. The site itself is sited next to the grassy overflow car park of the small Elizabethan manor house. There are public information boards at the entrance to the site and at several locations on communal plots with the intention being to inspire green living practices, such as growing your own food. Due to the input of National Trust staff, these communal plots are highly maintained, ordered and well displayed with the colourful display boards. To the north/west of the site an attractive pale blue shepherd's hut has been located that is open to the public to view information folders, as well as a space to store communal tools for the allotmenters (See Figs 2 & 3). As mentioned previously, Trust staff regularly mows the grass paths of the site. Therefore site aesthetics are important to the committee and became a theme of the interviews. Several allotmenters expressed stress and anxiety at the need to keep their plot



Figs 2 Lytes Cary Allotments with Shepherd' hut



Fig 3 Information board on communal plot

The Lytes Cary committee had phoned two interviewees with complaints about their plots. For Paul & Lyndsey this was a spur to action, leading to them spending money on path cover and edging for beds. Michelle received a phone call from the committee about needing to

edge her plot. For Michelle, this complaint was the catalyst at the end of a bad season to give up her plot:

*“RS: How are seeing next season? You’ve already committed to another season?”*

*Michelle: No I haven’t, not yet. I’m not sure I will to be honest. Although I love the allotment and I love doing it, it’s been a huge commitment this year, what with working extra hours and my husband being away and I wasn’t...I don’t like being called to why haven’t you grown on this bit and why haven’t you done the edging. It doesn’t matter to me what it looks like.*

*RS: Has that been quite stressful?*

*Michelle: Yes, I was quite upset about the whole manure situation [they put bags of manure to sell for charity and people who took them didn’t leave money] and this year to be phoned up and asked why haven’t you done the edging? I said sorry I didn’t realise I had to do the edging and then having another phone call saying you haven’t used your whole plot, would you be prepared to share it. Then I explained that I had used it all but that I had to dig it over again because it was eaten. So next year I’ll give it up because the commitment’s too much and none of that’s what it’s about for me. So I’ll go back to growing at home.*

*RS: Will you be sad to give it up?*

*Michelle: I’ll be really sad to give it up, yes I’ll be really sad.” (Interview October 2011)*

This extract illustrates how the need to impose order on the plot is not always driven by the allotmenteer but by the need to conform to site protocols. Therefore the drive for plot aesthetics is a nested convention imposed by wider anxieties of complying with perceptions of how the countryside should look. This was explored through in depth research interviews, where participants were asked how they thought allotments fitted into their perceptions of the countryside. Responses were varied from associating allotments with urban spaces to others seeing them as a space where people could get back on the land. The following extract from Christian and Jacqui's interview illustrates issues of order and plot aesthetics at Somerton Allotments:

*“RS: How do you think allotments fit into how the countryside should look? Bit of a general question.*

*Christian: Brown sheds/ green sheds! (laughs) [This refers to the recent saga at the AGM where the committee wants to impose a green sheds rule]*

*RS: Oh gosh yes, I didn't think of that!*

*Jacqui: Do you know right from your childhood, allotments are part of the countryside, are they not?*

*Christian: Inner city is always where I thought allotments were.*

*Jacqui: But no, everywhere you grow up, they're there.*

*Christian: I always put allotments down to be inner city or on dis-used railway lines. That's all they used to be. But now villages...Kingsdon's [a local village] got an allotment bang in the middle of it." (Interview November 2011)*

Christian here refers to a recent Somerton Allotment's AGM where John, the committee chair, revealed a new rule where all the sheds had to be painted green by the following AGM. The reasoning given was to make the site blend into the countryside. This was partly in response to comments made by the neighbouring property and from Somerton residents who see the site when they pass on the bus. It was a hotly contested point, with many arguing against it. However John held firm, saying that the committee would make paint available to allotmenters. Of interest here as well are Christian and Jacqui's differing views on how allotments fit into perceptions of the countryside. Christian sees allotments as a more urban activity, whereas Jacqui talks about growing up seeing them in the countryside.

The need to conform to an aesthetic ideal becomes a stressful pressure for many of the allotmenters as starkly illustrated by Michelle's comments above. It is plain that Michelle is upset by how the season has unfolded and the criticism she received from the committee was the last straw leading to her relinquishing her plot. These issues reflect the perceived need to impose order on the allotments that is enacted by committee rules and requests. Here the committee are keeping control of the site by addressing issues of order/aesthetics that they expect allotmenters to adhere to. However whilst allotmenters may vote the committee in and sign a plot rental agreement, they are faced with the unpredictable task of cajoling the matter of the plot to cooperate with their plans. Whilst most interviewees expressed appreciation for the work of the committee, some felt that at times the intention to impose order strayed too far in their attempt to rationalise life at the plot.

Brian at Lytes Cary expressed anger at not being allowed to have a shed on the plot:

*'He's not happy at not being allowed a shed, as he sees having them as part of allotment heritage. He feels very aware of the allotment management structure and that the National Trust control feels 'a bit like big brother'.'* (Field Diary 05/03/11)

Many other allotmenters at Lytes Cary expressed frustration at not being allowed sheds that meant that they were reliant on using their cars to ferry tools. However, Michael was sympathetic to the no-shed ruling:

*'Michael: Some people are fed up not to have sheds but you've got an Elizabethan Manor house, do you really want an agricultural slum next door? If it was a NT standard garden shed, I would welcome it. Maybe that's something for the future.'* (Interview July 2011)

These extracts reveal differing responses to committee rulings that shape allotmenters' experiences of growing. However, as in the case of Michelle, these rules and their imposition proved the catalyst for her giving up her plot. Brian feels that without a shed he is missing out on a part of the plot life he anticipated. Others, such as Norman at Lytes Cary also expressed this but felt that other aspects of plot life make up for the shed rule:

*'He [Norman] enjoys the communal nature of the site and seeing the variety of ways different people approach growing, such as growing and supporting runner beans. He said that last year was brilliant with a mix of people from first-time growers and old hands. The down side is the lack of sheds and he doesn't like hauling around gardening stuff in his car.'* (Field Diary 08/03/11)

However as we saw in the extract above from Christian and Jacqui, the shed issue remains contentious at Somerton Allotments with the focus on rules governing their colour. Many allotmenters see sheds as a bolt hole from the weather, as well as a crucial place for storage. As the largest constructions on the site they can become a repository of tension between differing allotmenters vision of the plots, which can extend out into neighbouring communities as opinions on their aesthetics are expressed. In summary sheds are perceived as posing the most danger to site aesthetics and as such are banned at Lytes Cary and are strictly governed at Somerton Allotments. In attempts to disassociate from the traditional perception of ramshackle allotments where sheds were constructed over time with 'found' materials and

then left to decay into the landscape, these new sites have placed site aesthetics high up their list of priorities. These policies attempt to standardise the aesthetics of plot life and represent frameworks creating spatial control. However spatial control is not simply imposed by committee standards it is a dominant theme affecting most allotmenters.

#### **4:22 Bounding Life/ Bounding Self - Pests, weeds and the dance of adaption**

Control becomes a dominant theme for allotmenters trying themselves to impose some order over the matter of nature at the plot. As the season progressed, interviews became dominated by talk of dealing with weeds, pests and disease. The approaches adopted by allotmenters reflect personal attitudes to the environment, nature, health, family and resources enacted in growing and eating philosophies. Some pragmatic allotmenters see this as an expected aspect of growing and ensure that they have the time to address weeding and crop management tasks. Others seem overwhelmed and stressed by the relentlessness of such tasks and fear failing themselves and the site.

Tasha at Somerton Allotments is a highly committed allotmenter, spending as much time on it as possible. Using wildlife friendly growing practices is part of her growing philosophy, however, as quotes below track, she is pragmatic and will alter her values to fit the seriousness of any infestation.

*Tasha: [Discussing loosing her strawberries to the wildlife]...You see a berry ripening off and I think, ooh, by the time I come up tomorrow, they'll have ripened off lovely and by the time you get up there, the mice have got them. (RS: Oh, frustrating). So it wasn't the best, but I still picked quite a few, but even so, I lost a lot.*

*RS: So you've already planned what you're going to do.*

*Tasha: Yes, a nice wooden frame - keep out! (laughs)I don't mind loosing some as I want to encourage wildlife, you can't have it all, encourage them but you can't eat that but you can eat that, you can eat the lavender, but you can't have...it's not going to happen, you know. I don't mind some loss.*

*RS: Yes, I was going to say, you're growing lavender and you've chosen some things to plant for wildlife haven't you?*

*Tasha: Yes, definitely (RS: What have you got?) At the minute, I've got that long line of lavender, I will be extending that all the way along down one side and then I've already seen some other plants and that, plants I can buy...*



*(Several pages later)*

*RS: So you said you're trying not to use sprays. Are you interested in organic or just...?*

*Tasha: Not necessarily, why use it if you don't have to? So I'm just trying to be eco-friendly to the best I can and respect other allotmenters. I know some around me use them willy-nilly. In fact everyone around me...I am in the middle of mass sprayers. I just think if I don't really need to then why? And Christian and Jacqui used old washing up water on...what did they use them on? I think it was their broad beans and that was pretty good, but you need to do it regularly for it to take effect and I thought, it sounds, wonderful and I applaud them but I'm not going to do that regularly. So if I've got bugs then yes I will spray, if I catch it early enough I'll pick off the relevant leaves or where it's effected." (Interview November 2011)*

These informative quotes from Tasha provide an insight into her position as a grower, with a care for the environment providing the basis for her growing philosophy. Tasha's motivations here are concerned with developing a good ecosystem for growing. Her concerns reflect a desire to nurture more than just her vegetables, but the wider space of the plot and all that it entails. For Tasha, plot practices include more than simply attending to her vegetables, attending to the wider matter of the plot includes concern for both pest control as well as wildlife protection. Tasha has taken on a double plot, as have Christian and Jacqui, which gives her space to experiment with matter other than fruit and vegetables, as shown here in her decision to grow flowering shrubs to attract bees and beneficial insects. Also evident in these extracts are the philosophies that underlie practices on the plot, here Tasha's position on wildlife friendly growing. The extracts reveal a philosophy of life where value is placed on the role of insects and wildlife in the ecosystem. However, this position has some flexibility in that if an infestation becomes too entrenched, a change of position is taken to deal with the issue, in this case the utilising of chemical sprays. This illustrative quote underlie allotment practices where adaptive action is required to attend to the matter of the plot as well as producing successful harvests. The development of adaptive practices are partly in response to Tasha's embodied experience, shown through her repeated attendings and 'feel' for the ecosystem in which she is growing. Therefore the abstract knowledge gained from the online growing guide has been shaped through adaptations on the plot to develop a more embodied knowledge.

Allotment encounters, illustrated here occurring between allotmenteer, plot and the ecosystem of the plot, do not occur in isolation. Plots are arranged cheek by jowl, with no space in between, apart from the borders and paths. Therefore issues of control are at times impacted by activities of neighbouring allotmentees, adding to the complexities of responding to life at the plot. Tasha provides an example of these concerns when she was trying to respond to carrot-fly on the plot:

*“Tasha: ...I only did one variety of carrots this year, fool that I was, and the first lot I picked, absolutely perfect but because I had too many of one that went slightly over and I was getting all the carrot fly in the world and by the time they were ready to pick they were demolished. My neighbour didn’t help me either, he was being very carefree when he was picking carrots, they were smelling that and coming on board, which made it harder for me even though I kept my carrots covered, I do use enviromesh, which is fantastic stuff.*

*RS: Oh, I never thought of that.*

*Tasha: Yes, your neighbours, if they’re not aware of the situation. Every time you pull a carrot up and chop the end off and leave it - Keep it away from mine, please! Because obviously the scent’s in the air and...and I was careful to keep mine covered. The 2<sup>nd</sup> two rows weren’t absolutely covered, I had to throw them away.” (Interview November 2011)*

The uncertainties of growing and responding to the life of the plot are complicated here by neighbouring allotmentees taking less rigorous approaches to plot practices. Here, Tasha’s growing philosophies and attempts to exert spatial control are undermined by a different approach taken by her neighbour, revealing the site itself as a wider ecosystem where the matter of wildlife crosses plot borders. These positions on control and order are individually held but have to co-exist with those taken by neighbouring allotmentees, as well as those of the wider site. Attempts to impose order can comprise allotmentees erecting borders to their plots or individual beds.

At Lytes Cary a problem with rabbit encroachment led to a large number of allotmentees to build small fences around their plot or beds. Commonly this was achieved using chicken wire fixed to short stakes banged into the edges of the plot. The photo below shows Michael (fig 4) at Lytes Cary standing in his plot, on the far bottom edge, it is possible to see his chicken wire border, protecting his crops from rabbit incursions. He is standing near his creatively

constructed scarecrow that remains from the previous seasons scarecrow competition run by The National Trust. There are a number of pest issues at Lytes Cary, however, rabbits nibbling or decimating crops was the most visible and commonly mentioned. Allotmenters responses to these problems again, reveal differing approaches to growing.

However, the solution of fencing the plot was not a solution that was universally applied. The erecting of a chicken wire fence requires the time, physical ability as well as the financial resources to purchase the materials necessary. The availability of these bought or created resources is therefore dependent on allotmenters differing circumstances. Michael as a retired engineer has the time, physical ability and skills to make adaptations to his plot. However, Michelle is trying to not spend money on her plot and so is not able to purchase the materials. Joy talks of not having the money to construct borders but she does have time available to experiment.



**Fig 4 Michael Lytes Cary July 2011**

Through ingenuity and observation, Joy adapts to her circumstances by making mini temporary borders around beds that need them:

*“Joy:...Although having said that, because of the rabbit problem earlier in the season, a lot of people started fencing their plots. And I think...couldn’t afford it, couldn’t do mine. I think, Plot 33 chaps - it’s easy to get to. So I think. I don’t know. (RS: Yes, at least half of them are fenced now). Yes, they’ve got to get through, so it’s easier to run on.*

*[...]*

*Joy: I fenced individual beds. Just use a bit of chicken wire. So I could roll them up (RS: Oh, that’s good). So I can rotate. Some things you don’t need to. I shall rotate it. Like I’ve just put the onions in, where I put the potatoes last year. Potatoes, didn’t need it, but the onions, the birds will just pull them out, so that’s, when I put those in.*

*RS: So is that things that you’ve learnt as you’ve gone along? Or have you?*

*Joy: Yes. I like solving problems, I’m practical. Something happens and I’m like ‘how can I get round it?’” (Interview November 2011)*

Issues of order and control at the plots occur at all levels illustrating how the wider ecosystem of the site has agency over both allotmentee activity and harvest outcomes. This discussion has explored how the allotmentee is not only attempting to manage the matter of their plot but in imposing fences and borders in attempts to control free flowing wildlife, becomes part of the ecosystem of the plot. Plot order is also a matter of committee governance, whose approach can both inspire and alienate allotmentees, making it another actor in plot life. The elements of plot life discussed in this chapter reveal how plot life consists of further subtleties such as limits on activities directed by personal circumstances. These complexities add layers to the life of the plot and the attempts to impose order. The ability to adapt to pest incursions with individual fencing on the plot is shown in this research to expose a constraint by gender on plot activities. Women allotmentees working predominantly alone found plot constructions of the plot a step too far. Michelle did not have the time creating constructions and had decided not to spend money on her plot, an experience that reflected my own. As a woman working alone on a plot with many other time commitments and without construction skills, I was unable to create borders and fences. However, other women working alone did

manage to adapt their experience to construct successful plot systems. Joy was also unable to buy expensive wooden edging, but undeterred she adapted by using chicken wire on a smaller scale as needed. Pat a retired retail worker and town councillor at Somerton Allotments, also had time to give her plot and was able to control weeds on her plot by buying and laying weed matting and covering her paths with stones and wood chips.

Therefore the ability to employ woodworking skills does not in itself determine successful plot practices, as there are other means of establishing order on the plot. A key determinant of successful plot practices is shown by these women's differing experiences to rest on the ability to give adequate time to growing as well as the ability to adapt to circumstances. Here time, is shown to add another layer of constraint, illustrating the multiplicity of levels on which plot life is bounded. Constraints on allotmenters can be overt, such as responding to pests and weeds with paths and fences, as well as covert, such as having time, money and physical constraints that impose boundaries to plot practices. Life is also bounded on the plot by the adoption of growing philosophies stirred by care for the environment or by familial growing heritage. Here boundaries to plot life are expressed through codes of behaviour, reflecting belief frameworks directing action. However, as discussed earlier, plot practices can also be bounded through governance conventions where the imposition of rules determines action.

Explorations of allotmenters interactions with nature can at times appear to be played out in the form of a battle where they attempt to mitigate the seasonal progression inherent within natural forces developing plant and insect life. The more experienced allotmenters anticipate these developments along with those with an embodied feel for growing produce on the plots. These growers put into place procedures to mitigate the impacts of weeds, pests or disease. These have been highlighted by practices such as Dave, completely transforming the state of the soil on his plot and then regularly attending its upkeep. John and Pat spending time and money laying thick plastic to reduce the impact of weeds. Michael, Christian and Jacqui constructing borders and fences or Tasha planting wildlife attracting flowers and shrubs to increase the biodiversity of her plot. These differing approaches all see the allotmenter working to reduce the impact of the wider ecosystem that may abound with weeds, insects, birds or mammals that also enjoy the flavour of their produce. In employing concerted attempts to shape and contain the nature of the plot it is shown that the realities of plot life

reveal aspects to food provision or landscape production that are hidden from those without first hand experience of growing food. For some seeking the aesthetics of the rural idyll this constant need to attend to its production will be unexpected and unwelcome. For these growers the hard work in maintaining a plot against the progression of nature will exceed their expectations that no amount of fresh air can compensate for. However for others such as Christian, Jacqui, Matthew and Tasha their family heritage has created a desire for the work itself of shaping the landscape into consumable forms. For them their plot gives them an opportunity to return to the land and craft it. Therefore there are multiple motivations for taking a plot, with the discussion revealing the complex layers of provision, aspiration and resistance they contain.

#### **4:30 ANALYSING PLOT ORDERINGS AND DOING FOOD**

The illustrations of plot practices set out in this chapter encompass both attempts to control nature at the plots as well as to express differing philosophies of growing whilst also revealing complex interactions with nature where allotmenters continue to foreground their will and intention on the plot. Ben who is a horticulturalist with a commitment to sustainable practices sums this up in a discussion on the place of the allotment in the landscape. He sets out his view that all landscapes are created through human practices, such as logging and rearing sheep that prevent forest regrowth on UK moorland:

*'Ben: ...Its exactly the same with the landscape around here, it's what man's done to it. There's no such thing as a natural landscape in the UK, not really. It fits in quite well (the allotment site). The countryside around here is cultivated land, it's used for farming and so it fits with the look of the English or British countryside...So it's still broadly consistent with the countryside being a place of work.'* (Interview July 2011)

Ben's opinions fit well with discussions with all interviewees and observations on the plots. Allotmenters themselves through their practices and expressions of intent seek to control the space of the plot. Embodied approaches that work more closely with the inherent potential within the seed or the soil are only enacted by the most experienced, confident growers such as Dave and to a lesser degree Tasha and Ben. Dave's practices place emphasis on developing the soil in line to benefit differing crops. Through these practices and his regular attending to the plot, you could almost believe that growing on a plot is simple and the inherent potential

in nature directs the processes. However, as has been explored, the will of the allotmentee is not necessarily paramount at the plots. The verdant expressions of nature in these fields of growing have led to multiple attempts to instill order and containment. Many allotmentees expressed a need to adapt to conditions and the failure to do so at the right time has been shown to presage crop failure and disenchantment.

Expressions of human control and orderings of nature are explored by overarching conceptualisations such as Grosz (2005, 2008) and Ingold (2011), however the work of Hitchings (2003), Degnen (2009) and Cloke & Jones (2001) explore these issues within specific spaces of fieldwork. Degnen (2009) states that the garden provides sites of understanding of human-nature relations. Her findings show that achieving control of the garden whilst simultaneously expressing care for the plants was seen as an important outcome for gardeners. However, expressions of satisfaction were evident when order was imposed. Hitchings (2003) also explores the dichotomy of creating order whilst expressing care for the plants. By observing the power of plants to direct gardener activity, Hitchings questions the assumption of the power of gardener over plant life. These perspectives on the agency of plants, the plot itself and wider ecology in directing activity on the plot has been observed throughout this chapter with new and experienced allotmentees learning to adapt to the conditions of the sites. The individual characteristics of each site represent their previous use, the local climate as well as the nature of the soil upon which they are based. However, the organisation of each site also shapes activities and individual plot experiences. At Lytes Cary the prevailing need for aesthetic considerations, as well as a lack of rabbit-proof fencing created an overarching requirement for allotmentees to impose order whilst also adapting to the predations of wildlife on their crops.

Grosz argues that it is in the experience of chaos itself that the need arises to explore modes of ordering that '*gives rise to the creation of networks, planes and zones of cohesion*' (Grosz 2008: 8). By exploring the practices of allotmentees in this chapter the tension between control, order and seeming chaos has been charted with allotmentees practices representing dances of adaption to the progression of life on the plot. Regular attending has emerged as a key ingredient to a successful season of growing and harvesting produce. By attending the allotmentee can observe, *feel* and respond to the expected and unexpected emergings of life on the plot. By regular attending the allotmentee is giving something of themselves to the

space of the allotment by their care and attention that draws them to weed, water, to move plants or construct borders between beds or neighbouring plots.

A difference in approaches to growing produce has become apparent across the sites with a divergence between more embodied and rational approaches. The embodied grower who is seeking to create an ideal growing environment has experiential knowledge of what this may entail, such as Dave's responses to the poor nature of the plot soil and adapting different areas to suit different crops. Embodied growers are aiming to optimise growing conditions by responding to the existent nature of the plot and its wider ecology over the growing season. Likewise allotmenters with a rationalist approach are also responding to conditions at the site, however their premise is one of planning and exerting control over the plot. Commonly growers may create constructions to help this process or purchase materials to bring control to the plot. Pat took this approach at Somerton allotments by controlling weeds through the laying of quality weed matting, constructing beds as well as laying bark chippings between the beds and on the paths. Christian and Jacqui also took a constructive approach to their plot by Christian constructing wooden borders for beds, chicken coops and laying grass seed on the paths to prevent mud in the winter. For these growers creating order on the plot is seen as a means to minimise the chaos of nature untamed. However whilst Dave and Pat remained on top of the weed problem, Christian and Jacqui (along with many others) found it to be a relentless task.

Therefore these differences of approach do not necessarily equate with differences in experiences at the plots. Whilst Dave took a simple approach to the plot -changing the soil and regular attendance, Pat's rationalisation of her plot resulted in a simplified plot, reducing the need for tasks. Whereas Christian and Jacqui approached their plot with great ambition-taking a double plot to fit a chicken run, a shed and mini lawn as well as a diverse range of crops. This resulted in a greater complexity of human-more-than-human networks created along with a greater range of requirements to establish care for their plot. In contrast Tasha's approach shows that simplicity can also be created through diversity, as through overt planning she planted both a diversity of crops over a double plot as well as a diversity of additional plants such as lavender etc. to attract beneficial insects. However Tasha's approach cannot be held up as a replicable model as her commitment to her plot was extreme, so showing the power of devoted attending to the space. Cerebral approaches to growing are



predominant in the growing literature, playing down responses to the matter of the plot and to the allotmenters physical and sensuous encounters there. Cerebral practices form only one aspect of the growing experience; embodied practices involve visceral encounters and processes of adaption that will be more fully explored in the following chapter. This marks the beginning of an investigation here into how life preexists knowledge, providing an illustration through plot practices where the environment of the plot has been shown to shape interactions. The dynamism of life has been introduced within this chapter and shown how it shapes our encounters with it.

These findings highlight the differing conjunctions of nature and humans at the plots, where networks of human, nature and produce are created across the varied approaches to plot production. These findings support Ingold's (2011) theories of developing knowledge through processual change and adaption as also explored by Cloke and Jones (2001). By foregrounding the power of nature to co-constitute place in the example of an orchard in Somerset, this research works to decentering the human by exploring the agency of plants or trees in directing human tasks. This key concept will be further explored in the concluding chapter, after an exploration of *how* these processes occur is highlighted within Chapter 5.

Within the allotment literature itself Crouch & Ward (1988/1997) explore the cultural changes that lead to a diminishment of tolerance for ramshackle allotment sites, whose constructions were characterised by the use of 'found' materials. Therefore control of nature increasingly became a feature of both tenancy agreements and plot practices after the 1970s when many sites were redeveloped or taken over for development. A key requirement the authors set out is the removal of corrugated metal roofs to be replaced by a drive for sheds painted '*regulation green*', which the author argue '*...never works...Partly rusted, the slightly aged corrugated-iron sheeting blends...in an irregular and unselfconscious way*' (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 204). However there remain allotmenters who strive to inject individuality into their plot aesthetic which perhaps is reflected in a drive by some to construct borders, chicken coops, paths and compost bins, or develop wildlife friendly planting.

#### **4:31 Doing Food-Doing Culture**

By situating this study within a rural location a distinctive finding emerged, that of the role of allotment practices as a form of cultural continuity. Whilst striking examples of cultural change on the allotments have been noted within the literature in recent decades such as Buckingham (2005), Crouch & Ward (1988/1997) and Hunter et al. (2011), this thesis reveals the role of allotments in fomenting cultural continuum and as a place where allotmenters can *do* identity. These findings draw a distinction between the fashion for nostalgia within contemporary media as epitomised by the success of Cath Kidston floral 'English' designs, the runaway success of TV baking competitions and the emphasis on the best of British food in celebrity chef TV programmes, such as *The Hairy Bikers* (BBC1 2013). The emergence of allotmenters attempting to continue family growing traditions by their plot practices is the more striking when traditions involved land based employment within rural Somerset. The findings of this study show a spectrum of cultural continuum, from remembering past family members as their inspiration for growing, some allotmenters who learnt to grow alongside family members as a child, to those who can cite a line of family members working on the land as their profession over the previous generations. For allotmenters such as Jacqui and Christian, a Somerset born couple in their late 30s, this change away from land-based employment is a recently occurring one, effecting the previous generation. Jacqui's description of her childhood at her Nan's where her Uncle's go shooting to procure food and her Nan sources sides of animals directly from farmers to feed the large family would sound to someone unfamiliar with rural ways of life to be from the 1940s rather than the 1970s.

These perspectives on familial continuum through land based activities support the work of Crouch & Ward's (1988/1997) findings into the role allotments play as places of socio-cultural change and socio-cultural continuity. Their work suggests that the location of differing sites shape whether change or continuity is a dominant force. This was highlighted by London sites embourgeoisement producing an increase in women growing. These changes contrasted to working class sites in Durham where elements of community continuity were cherished through competitive leek growing and pigeon fancying that shape plot life as it had done in past generations (Crouch & Ward 1988/1997: 222-225). Therefore the location of allotments is key to their characteristics and the motivations of those growing there. It is easy to misconceptualise the allotmenters of this study as these allotment sites are located within picturesque countryside. The scenic context of these sites is a motivating factor for

allotmenters, however it does not correlate that all allotmenters are living within an area of privilege. Many allotmenters were keen to provide themselves with access to a countryside that is largely owned privately, a motivation that commonly highlighted their own small gardens. Several others were growing produce to supplement an otherwise meagre access to food and were keen to see cost savings made by growing their own produce. The majority of allotmenters were growing to access produce of a quality and taste they felt was missing from supermarkets. Being within a rural location again restricts everyday access to shops, whereas the allotment being mostly within a mile away for allotmenters results in a diversity of food access as well as a diversity of food within the household diet.

These findings reveal the allotment site as an important location of community whether by *doing identity* as set out above or providing a space of community that can enhance social relations. However there is missing within the literature an exploration on *how* people learn to grow, with an assumption that we are all gardeners. Therefore an understanding of how allotmenters successfully raise crops or learn to grow can promote understandings of how more people can be encouraged into what is perceived by government, charities and council bodies to be a healthy and rewarding past time. Therefore the next chapter will immerse in the *doings* of plot practices to explore how learning to grow unfolds as well as to more acutely observe the interplays of agencies between allotmenteer and the plot itself.

The following chapter using an ethnographic narrative takes an embodied, visceral approach to nature-society entanglements through personal encounter, exploring the '*in-here of human being*' (Whatmore 2006: 603). A deeper investigation of the liveliness of life on the plot is needed to explore how agency unfolds between human and more-than-human through embodied encounters. Through emplaced, visceral research an investigation of the affects of processual change that shape human more-than-human encounters can be made to explore how knowledges are performed.

## CHAPTER 5



Fig 1 George planting potatoes at Lytes Cary



Fig 2 Preparing the plot early season 2011

### **Mattering: Visceral encounters of Human More-than-human from Plot to Plate**

‘The soil softens in rain, leaching any nutrients it contains into surrounding areas. In the dry season the soil draws together as moisture is lost, hardening and holding onto its nutrients. However, it is the seeds that enact the most extreme transformations. From a dry, small husk, it softens on planting in moist soil, for one shoot with two leaves to appear, which on reaching up to the sun soon multiply into four, then many more before the stem thickens as the plant matures with enough sunlight, for blooms to appear. These blooms themselves have their own life, attracting insects to pollinate them or utilizing the often-available wind to disperse the minute grains. So begins the moment of the plant fruiting into edible crops, whether they do so above ground or below. A roller-coaster ride now departs, from the slow start of the fruits swelling to size, to the plateau of maturation, before the dizzying rush of waiting for them to ‘dry’ off for harvest before mice, insects, slugs, rabbits or birds find the sweetness of their flesh before they’re harvested. All this occurs before further processes and decisions are made in the kitchen to further transform these matters; through washing, scrubbing, chopping and cooking into favourite dishes, a quick meal, a crop blanched for the freezer, saved for a special guest or snacked on the go. Carrots twice sliced for a stir-fry, lettuces torn for a salad, potatoes boiled then roasted in oil for wedges.’ (Fieldnotes 2011)

## **5:0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter progresses through an ethnographic narrative immersing in a season of growing produce and learning to grow on a plot at Somerton Allotments. Through this narrative embodied mergings with the matter of the plot sets out key concepts of developing practical knowledge through whole body engagements with matter that are described as moments of visceral learning. The previous chapter introduced key themes resulting from interviews and participant observation, providing a foundation for the issues raised by growing food on an allotment. However, this chapter delves deeper into plot experiences by reaching down to the material visceral world encounters of the human more-than-human on the plot. This chapter seeks to reveal not only the labour of growing but also a full reflection of the often ignored essential resource in producing vegetables and fruit -the whole ecology of nature that is apparent at allotment sites. This study highlights the key role of the agency of the plot that the allotmentee adapts to through visceral learning. The processual nature of this engagement is described here as processes of mattering with the matter explored being the material of soil, weeds, insects, seeds, rain etc. These processes extend beyond the plot, which is reflected within this chapter to describe the full cycle from production to consumption of the produce at the plot and in the home as illustrated by creative thought piece in the field note extract above. This reflection begins early on the plot in 2011 where I face the seemingly blank canvas of the uncultivated plot. The structure of the chapter will be

based on the growing season on the plot, going from first ground preparations to cooking an allotment-sourced Christmas lunch. In order to most fully explore practices with food here this ethnographic narrative will be interleaved with key points of analysis. This process allows both the narrative to flow intact whilst also exploring key concepts that are drawn out for further analysis.

### **5:10 FIRST DIGGINGS**

*"I began to pick out the stones, putting them in the middle for the beginnings of a path. All of this would take time, hard work and patience. I felt a little hopeless, seeing that most of the others had already finished this phase and were already planting. However, there's only one way to get there, and that's to begin. Liz used the fork and Bodhi, the spade, with me taking over from him when he got tired. As we went we kept finding significant stone slabs about 20 cm down, which took time to dig out, as well as having to dig away from our lines in order to find an edge to lever...I'd had to put on a hat to keep out the rain and was quite tired as well as damp." (Field Diary 26/03/11)*

It is early in the growing season and I am introducing myself to my new allotment plot at Somerton Allotments whilst trying to gauge the scale of the task ahead. I am beginning the journey of working with my plot here along with my son Bodhi and my neighbour Liz. Liz began the season sharing the plot with me but after two months stepped down when she moved house and hurt her shoulder digging. Bodhi quickly lost interest and the 10m x 12m plot became my sole responsibility. Even at this early stage the physical engagement required in growing food on an allotment was hitting home. The space, the condition of the plot when taking it on, all determined the nature of these engagements. As was discussed in the previous chapter the ability to grow food on an allotment is bounded by physical abilities, experience as well as personal limitations. However whilst this study is interested in whether I ever managed to grow some food, it is not its focus. Here the conjunctions of matter, space and human effort provide an opportunity to investigate the processes of these encounters, their affects and how they shape knowing and doing food.

*'It was another bright spring day with pale blue skies, sunshine and a soft breeze. I parked around the corner from the site...As I walked along the narrow lane birdcall was very apparent. The grass verge was looking lush and verdant and the shorn hedge was budding.*

*As I walked along I noticed that the buds seemed more developed and abundant. I initially thought this was a privet hedge but actually the leaves looked more like elder or lilac; I will discover as the season progress.*

*As I walked into the gate of the site I saw a number of cars parked, including the recognisable old Peugeot estate of Dave who is my son's guitar teacher and had offered to introduce me to the allotmenters. I walked over to Dave, whose plot was nearest to the parking area on the right. As usual when the sun is shining, Dave was in his long shorts, with work boots and stood leaning on his spade.' (Field Diary 20/03/11)*

Located high up, Somerton Allotments is situated on the southern tip of the town's ridge before it sweeps down towards the floodplains of the River Yeo. As it is next to a main road leading to the A303 and Ilchester, many allotmenters' drive to their growing sessions. This entry marks my first visit to meet the allotmenters. As I entered the site through a farm gate I saw the space of the car park where several mounds of manure were; small ones by the entrance to the site itself and larger ones sprawling next to the hedge running by the rural lane. In March 2011, as the association's first growing season commenced, the feeling was still of a farmer's field as the predominant earthy hues prevailed:

*'The site is presently mostly brown, with the lighter stones laid as paths, the sheds (mostly new, one recycled) and the wood used for fences and borders, adding to the earthy tones dominating the field. This site will probably never look like this, so mono-hued again, as over-wintered crops may still be visible this time next year, along with fruit trees and shrubs.'* (Field Diary 20/03/11)

At this early stage of the allotment site there are ditches dug all around with fence posts laid next to them. John tells me that this is for the fencing that is to be erected soon. The association was awarded a lottery grant that means they can install rabbit-proof fencing that will be dug in by 25cm. As I enter, the central path ahead takes me to my plot that is in the far half of the site. Dave's plot is next to the car park on the far right, so also adjacent to the farmer's field. Walking down the grassy path towards my plot I pass mostly well tended plots to left and right. However plot prowess briefly rises as I come to John (the committee chair)'s ordered and well maintained plot on my left next to a cross roads in the path. Then is the

hiatus of Pat's perfect plot that during the season takes on the look of a show plot. After this (thankfully) we have an abandoned plot that is blanketed in weeds for the whole season; then we reach my plot that looks a little more attended to. Over on the far side of the site near the neighbouring smallholding of Keeper's Cottage are situated other interviewees' plots. There is another grassy path running up this side and a cross roads linking it to the path on my side of the plot. Jacqui and Christian's plot is the most recognisable on this side as they have the first chicken run built on site that becomes a centre of chat and plot activity (See appendix 4 site map).

It was time to get stuck into trying to transform this stony, rough plot into a field of production:

*"I've been up to the plots to prepare it four times recently. The ground is so hard, the soil so poor and the stone so abundant that preparation has been very slow, arduous and frustrating. The first time up there Liz and I worked on forking over as much as possible; we managed most of a quarter. The next time I took up my wheelbarrow, and we carried 6 loads of manure up to the plot and began covering the quarter in manure.*

*Going back and forth with the wheelbarrow from the plot to the muckheap in the site car park by the hedge... was about a 1/4 mile round trip. This was the hardest day's session we had up there, with the distance needed to travel (with barrow and muck) being tiring and a lot of hard work for both of us. After this session Liz has had a lot of trouble with her shoulder and needed some time off digging...*

*When I went up to talk to Dave he was standing on a thin wooden board between rows of garlic, hoeing. As we talked I looked at his soil and it looked amazing; fine, crumbly and dark from the organic matter. It shocked me how good it was, how great his plot looked and how it looks like a medium for successful growing. It looks/feels attended-to, cared-for- like a well-nourished child. It makes me think of a parent-child relationship- Dave and the plot in a symbiotic relationship, with Dave appearing to be tuned in to its needs." (Field Diary 25/04/11)*

The bodily effort of transforming the plot involved a physicality neither of us were used to. Fit and strong I believed myself to be, but transforming the plot required significant physical



input not once or twice but regularly in order to get the space prepared. We were making our plans, deciding how to approach the task on the hoof having only recently come together to grow on the plot. Dave, however was growing through experience. His planning appeared to be enacted in a seamless progression. Standing on his wooden boards, calmly hoeing, he was both a daunting role model as well as an inspiring one. Dave's experience meant that he knew what was required. Tasha, John and other experienced growers also showed their ease of approaching transforming their plots by forward planning. Whilst Liz and I were aware of the gap in our approach and expertise, the relentless push to get the plot ready in time for growing the range of crops wanted meant we could not step back to ponder what was needed. We had to get on with the obvious tasks to hand in the best way we could. However, having to get so physically stuck into the plot resulted in Liz retiring from growing with the flaring up of an old shoulder injury. This was her last time on the plot.

As a now solo allotmenteer I had to keep on with the task to meet the target of getting my desired crops planted. The possibility of harvesting fresh, self-grown veg was a tasty prospect to aspire to. I was given some moments of help when first Dave, then Christian brought their rotavators to help break up the soil of the part we'd already dug. However I knew that by focusing on this dug area the other half of the plot was being neglected. I knew that I could not garden to the high standards of these experienced growers; I had neither the time, nor the money to give the plot. I did not have the physical energy to spend half a day digging on the plot day after day, which is what it needed to thoroughly prepare the soil. Therefore I knew I wanted to do what I could in terms of digging and then get stuck into planting, weeding etc.

### **5:11 The Matter of Matter**

#### **i) Groundwork**

In these early stages of preparation, after digging comes the laying on of muck, manure or compost. This was an issue that dominated my thoughts as the composition of this matter concerned me as it would feed the crops and be incorporated to some extent into the plant matter. At the plot there was a large heap of manure, which we'd been told was cow manure that came from a farm further down the lane. Allotmentees were using it up but it had an unappealing look to it. It switched from parts that were claggy, slimy and greenish to dry with a white dusty bloom. The dry matter mixed into it did not look like straw or hay, more like broken up chipboard. It was unfamiliar to me and dubious as a material to add bulk and

organic matter to the soil. I was not alone in my doubts; as explored in chapter four Pat was also repelled by it. It came down to a visceral distrust of the matter, however after time and effort trying to source an alternative matter for the manure and not succeeding, I turned reluctantly to the manure heap. The soil itself was another unknown quantity, with the unknown state of the land causing some concern:

*'Christian: ...I spoke to the farmer and he hadn't put anything on that land for a long while.*

*RS: Oh that's something I wanted to know actually. Had he not?*

*Christian: Yes, not put much on it at all, it's barren land.*

*Jacqui: They did a test on it and it said that it's very, very poor soil.'* (Research Interview November 2011)

As allotmenters we faced the visceral evidence of the state of the soil that looked and felt neglected, leaving us with responsibility for our individual patches to decide how we would alter its material state:

*'Underneath the dry soil surface are some large lumps of yellow clay with possibly stubble mixed in. Adding in some organic matter is vital to try and change the material quality of it. However, the manure onsite isn't recognisable as horse manure, its probably cow muck. We've used 6 barrow loads and it is already helping the soil, but I have my doubts about it. Compared to the land at Lytes Cary, this seems so much poorer and so much more dubious and unknown. For someone like me who prefers to have material knowledge of how my food is grown (i.e. organic) it is demoralising to have that arena of the growing process at best unknown and at worst carrying compounds that I would prefer not to be in my food. However, beggars can't be choosers.'* (Field Diary 24/04/11)

Choosing what to add to the soil was a dilemma as I had to balance my eating ideologies with the material canvas in front of me. Ultimately thinking the soil was drowned out by the need for action, for digging, bringing in manure to reach the crucial stage of planting. These concerns went round my head but after a fruitless search for local horse manure the obvious course of action had to be chosen -using the onsite manure whatever its composition. Other allotmenters took a far more considered approach to this; Dave and Matt enacted their

growing experience through employing deliberated additions to the soil. Dave, as explored in chapter four, chose his material additions based on what would work best for differing crops:

*'...he is going to plant the carrots and parsnips, adding that they need compost, not manure, otherwise they will 'fork'. The compost he is using has come from Dimmer, the main local council recycling site...'* (Field diary 20/03/11)

Whereas Matt, at Lytes Cary sought to alter the general moisture retention of his plot in response to the previous seasons difficulties with obtaining water at the site:

*'Today, Matt was digging furrows and laying two types of compost, ready for planting Jerusalem artichokes and potatoes. The two composts were very differently coloured, with one being a rusty hue. George [his son] told me that it was made from coconut, mostly the fibre but with a tiny amount of the milk too. Matt said that the coconut compost retains the moisture, which was why they'd chosen it. They were going to plant Desiree and Kestrel potatoes.'* (Field diary 19/03/11)

Decisions made about altering the matter of the plot were based on experience, knowledge and a reaction to the physical condition of the earth. Dave's work on the matter of his plot was visibly discernable:

*'I could see the colour and bulk difference between the two, with the manured area looking more raised and with dark patches and the composted side a lighter colour with a finer soil.'* (Field diary 20/03/11)

I wanted to add compost or manure to my plot as I felt that the soil had been intensively used. By adding manure or compost I hoped that I would be more likely to raise successful crops. However, as an inexperienced grower with little time I used the easiest manure to access. Having now laid the foundation to growing on a small part of the plot through these preparations, I felt that at last I could focus on planting.

## ii) First Plantings

Accessing seeds, tubers and plants for crops proved both a considered and haphazard affair in enacting the most crucial material transformations. I created a plot plan with successional

plantings planned after thinking and talking to my sons about the right crops to plant. This was based both on what we all liked eating and what would help with the weekly shopping bill. We focused on strawberry plants, fresh peas, beans and squashes, which are expensive to buy. In addition I wanted to grow potatoes, carrots and lettuces to have access to more flavoursome vegetables and to save on the shopping bill. However, several crops were planted by serendipity. Dave gave me some shallots and potatoes that were leftovers, Tasha gave me excess swede plants, John the marigold flowers and I bought two trays of green and red cabbages and a tray of leek plants as they were available at a local plant nursery. I had gone to the nursery looking for kale or carvolo nero plants, but they only had cabbages and leeks. Earlier in the season on visiting the local hardware shop I bought some French bean and butternut squash plants to get the growing season going. However I had also bought borlotti bean seeds and only just had enough prepared room on the plot for both.

After the long period of digging to prepare the soil our first day of sowing seeds and planting tubers was a moment of satisfaction:

*'We [Bodhi and I] decided to get stuck straight into planting the potatoes, which felt momentous, after the weeks of preparation...I used the spade to form a trench and asked Bodhi to plant them whilst I got another bed ready. I discussed with him about spacing and about making sure they're covered...*

*We opened the bag of soil conditioner and spread it over the 2nd bed, I raked it in and then Bodhi planted the carrot seeds. I asked him to read the seed packet for guidance on how to sow. We made a shallow trench and I showed Bodhi to take a pinch of the tiny seeds to rub into it. I impressed on him that then the soil should only be lightly folded back on top, not pressed down...I left the plots on a high at finally getting to the point of planting, it made me feel that we are 'proper' allotmenters and that we can be a part of the growing community.'*  
(Field diary 08/05/11)

Adding tubers, seeds and plants for fruit and veg production saw new additions of matter being incorporated into the soil. The potato tubers had been another leftover donation from Dave that had been 'chitted' on my windowsill at home to develop the required sprouts, whereas the carrot seeds had been selected from Overt Locke (a Somerton hardware shop) for

resilience and flavour. The soil conditioner was made from collected household waste and sold cheaply in 40 litre bags from the recycling centre. Therefore this moment of planting reflected future plantings where different matters were gathered from ad hoc places, through varied commodified and non-commodified means.

### iii) Unwanted Life

*'I didn't really recognise my plot when I arrived, as the untouched half was green with weeds and the prepared half didn't look like a half more like three-quarters of a half.'* (Field Diary 01/04/11)

As I was slowly transforming the plot, I was at a stage in mid-spring when I had prepared and started sowing on the majority of half of the plot, which meant the other half was left free to grow weeds. As a new site that had previously been commercially managed for arable crops the weeds were particular and ubiquitous. Before long weeds became the dominant topic of conversation with growers there with all but the most prepared struggling to respond to their spread. This was reflected at a committee meeting I attended:

*'There was a discussion about the problems with weeds which are now a big problem and that a proposed communal weed burner could also be stored in such a [proposed communal] shed. Natasha [Tasha] said she has spent the last two days weeding and that John also has spent the last two days weeding.'* (Field Diary 18/05/11)

As the season turned to the most productive time of the year the overwhelming nature of the weed problem became apparent. Those who appeared on top of the weed problem such as Dave, John, Pat and Tasha were turned to for advice. Dave suggested two things to me— firstly to lay weed matting down and secondly to invest in a quality hoe. As it happened Dave had seen weed matting at a very cheap price at Mole Valley Farmers in Yeovil. This was the first route that I took.

I bought the matting but was surprised at how thin it was, more like the texture of the fine fleece gardeners put on plants to protect them from frost. Its fine texture also meant that it was translucent. Laying the matting was in itself a process, as the metre wide strips needed careful weighting down with stones at the windy site. Using a craft knife and laying the matting took time to achieve both an even spread of matting and the required weight of

stones. I was aware of growing in a communal space and so worked hard to prevent the matting uplifting with the wind. On finishing this task I was pleased that my plot looked attended to, less neglected. However, the saga of the weed matting had only just begun. Over the following few weeks on returning to the plot, I saw that the weeds were pushing up through the thin weed matting and that in fact only the stones prevented growth. The translucence of the material meant that light had been getting through:

*'On coming up to plant the French Beans and strawberry plants I'd seen that my weed protection matting wasn't working as it's too thin; its yet another case of buying the cheapest possible material back-firing. John has laid down the thick matting (from B&Q?) and fixed it with black pegs and it has worked very well, but I think it was at least twice the price of what I bought. Another frustration!' (Field Diary 31/05/11)*

Dave was at the site and again I turned to him for advice. He said that I would have to roll back the matting to remove the weeds, and then recommended laying old carpet on top as its weight would ensure weed prevention. He even dropped a roll at my house that he'd seen at the dump. However I knew that old carpet was not allowed at the site and that it was forbidden in the tenancy agreement. This was frustrating as it would have done the job easily, however on talking to John, he explained that the reason that it is disallowed is because it will most likely *'contain a lot of chemicals'*. This made me feel better at not being able to use it. However buying a large amount of the type of weed matting John and Pat had used was not possible for me as it was very expensive. It worked perfectly on their plots though being thicker than bin bags; a thick, robust pure black plastic that would not let light through.

Dave recommended using a Dutch hoe for weeding, such as he had made by Wolf Garten (see fig 4), as it works on the push and the pull. On looking at my weed problem he said that *'the hoe will go through there in no time'*. As he was going away for a couple of weeks with his wife Sally to France, he lent me his hoe. We talked at length about how to get it back to him on the day he returned; he would need it straight away as he uses it everyday.



multi-change® Push-Pull Weeder 15cm from WOLF-Garten, designed to be used with your choice of lightweight handles.

Wavy, dual edge blade works backwards and forwards below soil level cutting through weeds - Sideguards let you work close to plants without damaging them

Figs 3 Image and Product Description from Wolf Garten Tools Online

However the task proved far from straight forward for me:

I rolled back two halves of the matting and hoed the area. The hoe was good but even though it rained yesterday, it didn't sail through the soil and was hard work. It took about an hour to do the two halves, a quarter of the plot. I replaced the matting over this hoed area and re-placed the stones carefully...

I started with hoeing under half of the third line of weed matting. Even though it rained on Monday, the ground looks dry and weeding takes time and effort. I was aware of my body and tried to vary my position with the hoe, swapping my hands over so that both would have turns at 'leading'. I wanted to balance the effort across my body, taking care not to strain my back or shoulder...

I then applied the hoe to the wide weedy area that is the remaining quarter of the planted half. For this, the hoe didn't work as the area hadn't been covered, with the weeds' roots establishing a comprehensive hold of the soil across this area. This again, would need some thought on how to tackle it. I thought about the carpet Dave had left me, feeling that the ideal method of weeding, would be to cover this area in carpet for a couple of weeks to soften the ground and make it easier to fork over and weed.' (Field Diary 31/05/11)

It quickly became clear to me that the hoe was not going sail through the weeds; this was a problem requiring time, physical engagement and patient, determined effort. This one task on the plot was taking up a lot of my time and attention. However by physically working the space, the repetitive task released my mind to think the plot. Thinking through how the plot is, how it responds to weather, weeds and pests is a key element of getting to know it. Thinking in this case ranges from a free form daydream to open observation and onto concerted planning. All of which can occur within one visit to the plot. The process of doing the plot and thinking the plot provides moments of attending to it and so knowing the plot, ready for the next task or adaption. Doing this task enabled me to become familiar with hoeing using an unfamiliar tool. I not only observed but felt the moments of resistance as I attempted to hoe the weeds making physical adaptations as the task progressed, which revealed how the previously uncovered weeds would not relinquish their hold easily. I was becoming allotmenteer.

Being loaned Dave's Dutch hoe for a specific time frame mean that I had to attend to the plot regularly to attempt to get this task complete. However, the hoe loan was not the only incentive as general temporal forces required for me to get on with preparing this half of the plot for crop sowing. It was early May, I had begun sowing on the dug side of the plot, having planted seed potatoes, carrots, shallots, along with the added colour of the French marigold flowers donated by John. I had



also planted some butternut squash and strawberry plants bought from the local hardware shop. I therefore needed to make the most of the day length and daytime temperatures of this part of the year as we moved to the sun's zenith. Getting the weedy side of the plot prepared for sowing was an urgent task. Therefore I returned to finish the weeding under the matting on a morning after a night of heavy rain. March and April had been so dry and warm that the ground and plants were in need of it:

'The weather has been extreme with no rain in a month and the soil up there has turned to rock where it hasn't been dug, where it has been dug unbroken clay again turned to rock... John said that the soil was much better now, he'd been up there on Friday before the rain and said that the soil was like concrete and that he couldn't even get a fork in which is very unusual. He said that you'd expect to get a fork in no matter how dry it'd been.' (Field Diary 08/05/11)

Having used the hoe several times now, I was more experienced with it. It had previously worked quite well on the dry ground where the weeds had been covered, less well where the weeds had had free reign to develop into robust plants. Therefore on this visit I attempted to experiment:

'Experimenting with weeding techniques- using the hoe or just pulling them out, I found that I was the most effective weapon against the weeds; achieving faster results. I was aware of using my body systematically as a tool, alternating bending down and pulling weeds, with squatting on my haunches, which I found to be the most effective, achieving a 'weed roll' as I worked backwards. I moved down the area by degrees measured by my arm's sweep. I was aware of becoming the tool and having to put aside other feelings for myself- my dampness, my old gloves failing and rendering my hands wet and muddy, bodily fatigue and eventually a sniffing nose (hayfever season for me)- to get the task done, the machine must prevail.' (Field Diary 07/05/11)

This was pivotal moment for me on the plot; by frequently attending I became to know it. By now I was beginning to know these weeds, even though I could not name them. The extract above reveals a moment where I learn for myself the most effective way of removing the widespread weeds. The roots of this weed act like claws in the ground, spread out and fixed, mirroring the spread of the plant above ground. For me the hoe was very slow in removing it but by physically grabbing and pulling, the wiry shrub-like weeds gave way. However, I learnt that for this removal to be effective I had to apply pulling pressure carefully otherwise the plant ripped leaving the resistant roots in the ground. Therefore I applied an upward motion with a firm grip at the base of the plant. The wiry, semi-desiccated nature of the plants resulted in the pulled weeds knitting together. With the rhythmic bodily reaching, pulling and gathering of the weeds, a weed roll developed. By achieving a weed-roll I soon had large mounds of the removed weed that needed taking to the recycling centre. Removing

these weeds left the earth much more amenable to the hoe, where it could both aerate the topsoil and remove other more common dandelion-like weeds. However I never forgot that weeding lesson and regularly experimented with pulling weeds when hoeing was less successful.

This learning point through physically immersing in the plot was cut short by the return of heavy rain. I retreated to the car and whilst sitting in the car to shelter and reflect upon the session, I felt inspired to write a poem to further explore the sensorial nature of this task:

**AFTER THE RAIN**

*Through the flimsy black matting  
the weeds pushed with their usual vigour.  
Pieces of Blue Lias, dug when rotavating  
held the four long strips down.  
But the wind's endless fingers teased it free  
lifting, light-weight futility.*

*Within a moon's turn,  
the sorted weed problem rebounded.  
Instead of matting purposefully flattening,  
it lifted to raised mounds, haunting the plot  
as the weeds grow.*

*Today, after the rain,  
armed with borrowed hoe, matting peeled back.  
I push pull the now clumping earth,  
scouring the leaves, but roots hold firm.*

*So squatting on haunches,  
pulling, tugging defoliated stems; success.  
Jerking free, they come up.  
Systematically, moving backwards,  
gathering a roll of pulled weeds.  
Sweeping to an arms length.  
Soon, with wet, muddied hands  
through failing gloves, this minded-body machine  
succeeds (for today).*

Moments of visceral learning not only transform the matter of the plot but also transform the allotmenteer. Not only had I developed further skills but I also experienced a moment of affinity and satisfaction:

'As I drove home, my hands were dried with mud, my hair felt bedraggled, I had mud on my face and clothes, not too mention all over the car. However, I felt a sense of achievement and ability. For the first time, I felt that I was able to manage the whole plot myself; feeling on top of it. Experiencing the physical work, the weathering, the mud and engaging with the outdoors made me feel liberated and vital; truly like a pig wallowing in an ideal environment.' (Field Diary 07/05/11)

Within this experience was an enjoyment in working with the elements. Even though I had to work through rain in a muddy field, progress had been made. In fact rain was key to this success. The plot had experienced several months of dry conditions, leaving the soil hard and unyielding. Whilst weeding after the rain created a messy experience, the rain itself softened the ground, allowing for the easier pulling of weeds. Therefore this development depended on responding to the more-than-human matter of the plot and its wider ecology. These moments of affinity spurred me to return and deepen this growing relationship with the plot.

#### 5:11 ANALYSIS POINT - MATERIAL TRANSFORMATIONS VIA RATIONALISATIONS AND ADAPTING TO NATURE

In progressing the plot a moment of feeling affinity with nature there was experienced. However this affinity is within limits, I am cultivating this space to fit my designs of producing food for consumption. In learning the nature of this space and attempting to work it however, nature is not left untamed.

At the early stage of preparing the plot, processes of adding manure, compost etc. enact differing material transformations to the plot. Different allotmenters utilise different materials such as Dave who is using horse manure delivered by a farmer that he knew for one half of his plot and the recycled soil conditioner from the council on the other. Matt was using coconut compost as a preventative material to combat the precarious access to water at Lytes Cary. These two examples highlight the primary concerns expressed at the different sites, to improve poor soil at Somerton Allotments and access to water at Lytes Cary. My own experience in sourcing added matter revealed the limits to controlling the matter both of the plot and what was added to it.

These examples highlight both the attempts to rationalise matters on the plot and the limits to such attempts. Trust and transparency of production are key constituents of AFN literature as discussed in chapter two, however on the plot it is revealed that full transparency of constituent matter is unlikely. The later themes of this subsection of First Plantings and Unwanted life add to the evidence that attempts to fully rationalise plot activity is unlikely to succeed as planting decisions are added to by chance and weeding success is only progressed by trial and error.

The moments of trial and error experienced in this weeding example, delve deeply into the visceral processes by which learning takes place. It is only by full body immersion into plot practices that adaption takes place resulting in successful weeding. Here learning from others provides a support but not a path to success. In my weeding illustration the conditions of the plot directed the processes of success, with the heavy rain hampering hoe performance but heightening the chances of weed removal. Embodied moments, where learning adaptations enabled an unskilled grower to become an allotmenteer, were dependent on working with the materiality of the plot. By thinking and doing the plot I became more immersed in plot matter enabling learning through visceral processes when expertise proved less transformative.

This subsection provides the foundation for later discussions within the concluding chapter that will explore how visceral engagements with matter in growing provide conceptualisations of processes of mattering that combine human more-than-human agency through embodied, performative adaptations on the plot. This discussion takes further several key texts for this study such as the visceral geographies of the Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) by providing embodied emplaced evidence for the process. This work also takes on Whatmore's (2004: 1361) call to explore '*what exceeds rather than what comes after the human*' through a practice led enquiry by developing evidenced concepts of mattering. The fieldwork also explores Crouch's (2003) exploration of doing and becoming through performative engagements with nature, as well as adding to Crouch & Ward's (1988/1997) exposition of allotment practices by exploring processes of learning to grow. Already these early experiences on the plot reveal moments of acquiring knowledge through processes of visceral learning. As discussed in chapter two, investigations into how people learn to garden are missing from the literature. Therefore this study provides conceptualisations for how learning is accrued through bodily adaptations to nature.

## **5:20 LIFE UNBOUND**

Fortuitously, even the abundance of unwanted life on the plot did not visibly diminish crop returns. Over the following month I managed to plant up the prepared part with its rough raised bed and dug paths. Then I turned again to the unplanted half and began to remove some of the matting. After listening to some other allotmentees and attending a talk by Charles Dowding, a local vegetable growing guru at the local Green Scythe Fayre, I decided to go for a no-dig experiment on this side of the plot. Charles runs a highly successful organic salad leaf business in Somerset as well as running vegetable growing courses and writing books on this theme. The basic philosophy is that weeds respond to a disturbance in the soil with germination and growth of weeds. Charles says that weed growth is a form of recovery

for the soil after disturbance and that in contrast a no-dig method aids the development of soil structure. His advice is to pile up compost and manure to a depth of 6 inches, which is dug into to plant crops. This matter acts like mulch, suppressing weeds and adding moisture retention.

*'The idea of employing no-dig principles is very appealing to me as I have half of the plot un-dug and had thought that I wouldn't be able to use it until next spring after it had been rotavated in the winter. However, now I began to think about experimenting with these techniques myself on the plot. On 19th June, I decided to undertake some work on the un-dug side of the plot. Having spent a few weeks peeling back the weed matting to weed out this side, I felt it might be possible to make use of the space. I had bought a crown prince squash plant from a local shop; it looked so healthy. It is my favourite squash to eat; with its smooth, blue skin and deep orange flesh that is the most moist and flavoursome.'* (Field Diary 19/06/11)

I took this plant up to the plot with a bag of the recycling centre's soil conditioner...

*'When I got to the plot, I was pleased to see that everything planted was growing, including small French bean plants, one or two pea shoots and lettuce and rocket plants. Additionally, at last the area under the weed matting looked under control. I just had a small area to finish on the border on the neighbouring plot, which is full of weeds (it has not been cultivated at all). I struggled to remove the weeds close to the neighbouring plot and had to tell myself to keep going, as I'd had enough of this aspect of growing. Finally, it was done.*

*Now I had the much more pleasant task to think about where to plant the squash plant. I had wondered if it would fit into the already prepared and planted beds. However, I wanted the squash to have as much room as possible to grow abundantly, therefore, its own small bed would be ideal.*

*Working on the no-dig principles, I peeled back an area of matting that had little weed re-growth. I lightly hoed the area to remove the remaining weed stems. I had carefully carried the 40L of soil conditioner up on my shoulder, being aware of my bodily limitations and trying to prevent any injuries. Slitting open the bag I tipped the contents onto the hoed area. Using a rake, I spread it out to cover a metre by approx. 75cm bed, keeping the compost to*

*approx. 2 inches deep. Charles recommends spreading compost to a depth of 6 inches, however, I wanted to see if a lighter depth would be adequate. Using a trowel, I dug a hole through the compost into the clayey soil below. I made sure it was of adequate depth and girth, as I wanted to give this plant as good a chance as possible. I removed the plant from its plastic pot, carefully placing into its hole and then smoothing the soil/compost back around it and finally pressing the plant securely into the soil on each side of its stem. All looked well.'*  
(Field Diary 19/06/11)

Finally I was able to focus on the tasks of sowing, planting and attending to plants on the plot. By accessing the local recycling centre's cheaply available soil conditioner at a time when I wanted to try no-dig meant that I could begin to use the neglected half of my plot immediately. With the crown prince in place I felt an attachment to the plot, a sense of hope that it would feed me, along with a growing excitement by self-provisioning one of my favourite flavours- the crown prince that is extremely expensive to buy. Plot visits now incorporated time taken to check the growing plants, hoe between them and water if necessary. I was consciously not watering unless necessary; I had picked up this advice from Lytes Cary, as it is a sustainable growing practice taught by The National Trust staff there. If watering is too frequent then plants roots stay on the surface, leaving them more vulnerable in dry conditions. A number of allotmenters had repeated this advice to me at Lytes Cary and so the practice spread.

I was pleased on this visit to see the crops I had sown and planted responding to the day length and temperatures:

*'The beds where crops have been planted are doing well. Everything is growing, including the recently planted rocket, lettuce and peas. The newly planted French bean plants are growing well at about 8 inches tall. The earlier planted purple French bean plants from Overt lock are about 11 inches tall with some flat, rusty coloured mottled pods hanging from them. I worried that these haven't swollen because of the dryness; however, it could just be that they are not ready yet. Most noticeable are the abundant, flowering potato plants. All are tall and lush; 7/8ths have purple flowers with one or two with white flowers. I'm pleased to notice that the one Bodhi planted (the runt chitted potato) is growing well, just a little smaller than the others and yet to flower.'*

*The carrots are probably the least successful, with one side of the bed with many growing plants; the other side has much less growing. The shallots are growing well, with a few spaces. The butternut squash plants are finally looking healthy but are still not tall; the recent heat of the sun may have encouraged their progress. Both the transplanted swedes and the crown prince plant in its no-dig compost are looking great - happy and healthy. The Crown prince has grown noticeably, with a long, creeping stem and some forming yellow buds nearer the base of the plant. The weeded area that has the thin weed matting on top is looking flat and managed, however, there is some growth through a small tear in the fabric.'*  
(Field Diary 04/07/11)



Figs 4 The planted Crown Prince plant



Figs 5 The first no-dig bed

The development of these vital matters sown by me and growing in the medium that I had prepared, produced a sense of attachment to the plot, along with a desire to nurture it. With salad crops rapidly growing before me and pea plants shooting up, it would not be long before I would be able to experience the produce as food. The smells of the plot had already begun developing from the distinctive sharp, woody odours of the rocket to the sweet but still vegetative fragrance of the strawberry plants. As the plants developed so did their recognisable and distinctive aromas. As life began to unfurl on the plots the presence of insects became more noticeable from flies, gnats to bees and beetles scurrying through the soil surface. Worms were noticeable but not abundant and the new fence to the site was working in keeping out the rabbits and badgers that so plagued Lytes Cary allotments. Here the matter of life was abundant and apparent creating a sensorial field of plot life.

With the creation of the first no-dig bed, it made sense to develop further no-dig beds to utilise the space on the far side of the plot. Therefore when I was offered a large box of tomato plants by someone from my yoga class I could already picture where to plant them and how. Having lain the soil conditioner from the recycling centre for the first no-dig bed, I was pleased not only in how it created an almost instant veg bed, but also in how the compost's dark matter gave a visual distinction



from the plot earth. By spreading the 40 litres of the matter I was able to create a thickness to the bed where the earth could not be seen beneath. This I thought should prevent weed growth better than the weed matting. I returned to the plot with *'the hoe, fork, bag of conditioner with a bag containing a trowel and gardening gloves. The tomatoes are in the boot from yesterday. There are about 10 plants and so I think I'll need a fair bit of space and so I drop into the recycling centre for another bag of conditioner'* (Field diary 09/07/11). I was looking forward to developing the plot further.

However processes of life on the plot had unfolded unpredictably in-between visits...

'As I put the tomatoes down, I turn around to see a strip of the thin matting has disintegrated. The bare patch of ground is visible with a ragged ring of black matting on the edges where the stones are. Around the plot and in the neighbouring plot, small and tiny fragments of the frayed black matting lie in pieces. I stare deflated at the bare patch and the pieces of matting, finding it hard to believe that this weed problem seems to be taking over my plot life. I am so miserable and despondent about this new development; beginning to wonder whether it's worth it; will I ever get to the point of being on top of plot management? I think about John (committee chair) and wonder if he has noticed, whether I'm being talked about as a problem plot? It's so frustrating.

I have to go back to the car to find a spare plastic bag, to put the fragments in. I had talked to Shirley (a plot neighbour) when I arrived and she talked about pulled weeds on other plots blowing around in the wind. Now I'm thinking about the fragments and not wanting them to be blowing about in the wind. The desire to have a decent plot seems a constant battle; the comparison with others frames this desire creating a well of conflicting feelings about my ability, the likelihood of failure. Through this perspective, the vegetables pale into insignificance.' (Field Diary 09/07/11)

I had been dazzled by the satisfaction of calmly tending plants on my recent visits that I had forgotten that nature abounded, my efforts did not create a plot that exists in stasis until my return. Yet again I had to face that my meagre efforts to alter the matter of the plot did not amount to a state of lasting control of the space. I was a visitor, a tinkering tourist getting what I could out of this plot that I had developed a fond frustration for. However I could not roll up with an agenda and expect to enact my designs on this living space that would always contain more than I could know.

I spend about an hour picking up the matting pieces that range from fingernail size, to fist size. In places the tiny pieces are mixed up with weeds, soil and stones, in others, larger pieces are held in the clutches of the neighbours weeds. Once, the rubbished matting has been collected, I hoe over the bare patch. There are few weeds in this patch and would be good for plants. However, I have nothing right

for this strip and want it kept good for when I'm ready for it. I look around at the rest of the matting trying to work out if any of the rest will fail. There is another strip that looks holey and wasted. I decide to roll this back, removing the stones as I go. Again, this area needs hoeing to keep it good.'

(Field diary 09/07/11)

The tasks at hand demand attention when arriving at the plot; the planned activities are abandoned. As the soil is dry and the weed matting had created some weed prevention, the task of hoeing is relatively simple, leaving spaces on the plot ready for planting up, which is what was intended. However picking up these tiny fragments of matting, along with the stress of being a bad allotmentee leave me weary. I therefore turn to a simpler task:

I move onto the weeds in the vegetable beds, going bed by bed to remove the weeds. I started with a hoe on the paths, but it disturbed the soil so much, I worried about losing the raised bed's height. So I resorted to crouching down and pulling up the weeds one by one, occasionally using a trowel to help me. I was a little tired and took the opportunity to sit at times on the earth as I worked. The lettuce and rocket are doing well and I wanted to make sure the weeds didn't spoil them. These tasks were repeated on the carrot, french bean and shallot beds. Taking quite a bit of time, but its through such mindless tasks that the mind can float free to forget everyday concerns, making it quite relaxing.'

(Field Diary 09/07/11)

This sitting on the earth of the plot to remove weeds from the bed provided a moment to disappear into close proximity with the plants. Being close to the growing, precious crops provided succor to keep going. This was the type of gardening that felt akin to a child playing in the dirt, a basic worthwhile task with mind floating free. The pressure was off in this task, enjoyment returned. This gentler task allowed more attention to be paid to the wider ecology of the plot. The weather was pleasant with both fluffy and streaky white clouds in the largely blue sky. I also enjoyed watching the birds, with house martens swooping with their distinctive chatter as they catch insects on the wing, pied wagtails bouncing from plot to plot looking for worms and other bugs. In this activity my hands were again instruments of perception, feeling for how the varied weeds could be pulled, yanked or dug with the hand trowel. Grainy pieces of soil and mica would creep under fingernails, spikes of thistles meant gloves were put on, creeping bindweed or buttercup's trails were traced back to the source plant. As before, the pressure applied on removal of these weeds was key; sometimes the whole plant emerged root intact, other times the plant snapped, stem oozed and the root had to be dug for with my hand trowel. All the while I received visual clues from the veg plants themselves. The upright but juvenile French bean plants had an unmistakable vigour, whereas the bought butternut squash plants had yellow and dispiriting leaves. The donated French marigolds were thriving in the

centre of the carrot bed. Weeding here required close attention as the carrot seeds had recently germinated. This attending brought the thrill of discovering full germination of the seeds on both sides of the bed. Carrot seeds have so often failed in the back garden, it was encouraging to see growth occurring. These visual and haptic check-ins made me think of my own grandfather, a quietly inspirational vegetable and fruit grower, cook and wine maker. When he became blind in his 70s touch became a vital process of engaging with the garden. In his late 80s he could still be found up a stepladder '*feeling his way*' when pruning. With my spirits restored it was time to go; the box of tomato plants was left on the plot for planting next time.

#### 5:20 ANALYSIS POINT -DOING, LEARNING AND ADAPTING

This section reveals the naivety of a first-time allotmentee, just as a feeling of becoming allotmentee descended, the matter of my weed matting began to unravel, creating a deep plunge of despair and feelings of failure. These moments highlight the precarious levels of control over the plot held by an inexperienced allotmentee; as explored by Cloke and Jones (2001), in land-based activity the agency of nature can direct activity. In this instance the problem was based in making poor purchasing choices and learning that a thickness of matting was essential for weed control.

Issues discussed here raise interesting questions around controlling nature at the plots. On face value this narrative shows the limits of human control and highlights the power of nature on the plot. However on observing experienced, successful allotmentees practices it could be suggested that I had not exerted sufficient control earlier on in the season. If I had rotavated the whole plot, then dug and added matter to the whole plot, as well as regularly attended, like Dave, Tasha or Ben or if I had paid for quality weed matting, path borders and chippings like Pat and John. If I had taken either of these routes early in the season I would perhaps have exerted much greater human control or interference at the plot, as well as enjoying much more simple management practices. This disjuncture between my own practices and that of the more experienced growers highlights the processes of learning and adapting to the matters of the plot, as well as raising questions on how much control over nature to exert.

#### 5:30 SEASONAL TRANSITIONS

As summer took hold the regular plot activities of weeding and planting were joined by the new task of harvesting. During this time life continued to abound but the changing seasons could be detected:

*'It's the time when all is growing abundantly especially as we have had frequent rain; grass, shrubs, fruit, vegetables, flowers and weeds are all apparent. Today at the plots seems to be*

*the first still day for ages. Relentless gusty wind has been a very common feature for what feels like months. Today though, is very still...Insects are also abundant especially flies and midges near the flowering plants and trees.*

*Last week for the first time, I noticed on the way to the plots that farmers' arable crops had yellowed in the fields, ready for harvest. In some fields straw bales stacked like bricks are being packed to a lorry's worth with the shorn field's bright stubble creating a textured patchwork. On the plots I am at a pause with growing. I have produce in the ground and some is readying for harvest, but right now food doesn't excite me and I'd like to have a break from thinking about it.' (Field Diary 20/07/11)*

As crops began to mature both on my plot and in the neighbouring farmer's fields seasonal progression could be both observed and felt. With a wide selection of crops planted I could have a break from the plot. By now I was experienced enough to know that any break from the plot would entail returning to weeds. However I had already resigned myself to weeding throughout the growing season (and beyond). With the crops in place I could have a pause whilst the beans swelled, carrots lengthened, potato foliage died back as harvest neared, as well as hoping for ripened strawberries. When I returned to regular attending, the cycle had shifted with the maturing crops readying for harvest, a moment I had been anticipating since the early days of preparation as winter faded away in March.

It is a transition time on the plots that had sown veg early in the season. Pat, two plots away from me, has gone from having the most lush abundant, beautifully presented plot to a plot with gaps and sad looking cabbage plants in a bed that previously has broad beans. Dave has likewise harvested his potatoes and has a bed neatly arranged with cabbage plants, corner sticks with up-ended plant pots, all covered with fine-mesh netting. Having planted later, I am close to having my lettuce and rocket going over and the shallots are also looking ready. I would like to plant some more lettuce, as well as getting some winter greens in the ground and possibly autumn carrots. On one side of my plot are the tomatoes I was given a month ago. There are doing well, but are still only 30cm or so tall. Behind this, my crown price squash is doing brilliantly. I created a bamboo pyramid (after getting the idea from Alys Fowler on twitter) to support it a week or so ago and it has grown over it with a couple of gourds visible. Both of these beds are no-dig and have a coating of the council organic soil conditioner on top. This has worked effectively in keeping the weeds down; they both look good. Behind both of these, adjacent to Shirley's plot, is my bed that has peas growing well. The plants have

faded, but the pods look lush. I pick one to see if they're ready; the pod is fresh and edible, but the peas haven't swelled. I thought that these were mangetout, but they look more like ordinary peas.

On the other side of the plot, the shallots, lettuces and rocket are ready to pick. The carrots are now doing well. I accidentally pick one when weeding, it is very small, maybe 2cm long and 0.5cm wide. I wipe off the soil and taste it- it's delicious, fragrant and earthy but sweet. The butternut squashes are growing well with foliage, but there are no signs of gourds. Approx. 4 swiss chard plants are growing. The potatoes are beginning to yellow and droop, but there are now no signs of blight.' (Field Diary 31/08/11)

For the first time in the season, the plot was briefly self-managing with the sown plants, seeds and tubers maturing successfully as the days remained long. The sun was not always apparent but was sufficient for the plants. Weeds continued to require attention but I had accepted that my plot would not be beautiful, neat and organised. The flowering of the French marigolds John gave me added a vibrant orange that I appreciated on each visit. Having put in the hard work during the previous five months, I could at last rely on the effects of rain and sun, day length and sufficient daily temperatures to continue the progression of growth and maturation. With most of the groundwork done unfurling temporal and natural processes became the vehicle of growth on the plot.

### **5:40 PLOT TO PLATE-TRANSFORMING & TASTING MATTER**

With the maturing of crops on the plot I could at last think about picking and eating some. I cooked the first meal with plot produce in mid-July having harvested a large bunch of rocket that was beginning to bolt and used it in a vegetable sauce with pasta. By mid to late July the number of ingredients provisioned from the plot steadily grew, as I thinned the carrots and used the thinnings as baby carrots and harvested the first shallots. I recorded these early harvests in a blog post:

'It may have taken awhile, but in the last few weeks, we've been having some regular harvests from the plots. Regular crops of potatoes, carrots, shallots, purple French beans, lettuce and peas. The peas were sweet, delicious and quickly devoured. Due to time pressures, previous harvests have been simply steamed or lightly boiled and served with maybe a peanut butter sauce or some veggie sausages. These cooking choices also stemmed from a desire to taste the veg naked, to judge how good it was. The carrot's earthy sweetness was apparent right from pulling them from the ground, making me want to eat them there and then. I managed to get them home, though, ready to scrub the lumps of clay off. Once chopped, I did sample and the full, rich but juicy taste was thrillingly perfect. The shallots have the sharp, spicy tang that was hoped for too. The only disappointment is the potatoes. They have a great texture and look beautiful, however, I find them slightly bland tasting. I

was given these to plant by another allotmenteer, at a time I was chasing myself coming backwards, trying to get something planted in this first season.<sup>126</sup>

As the seasons transitioned so did my focus on the plots, now a concern for picking and consuming the produce became preeminent. Bringing the matter from the ground to the kitchen for further processes of transformation became the core activity. By bringing harvests home the processes of adaptation continued. As an experienced cook I could readily imagine how to transform the harvests into everyday meals. However I had to balance my experience and tastes with the appetites and desires of my sons aged 14 and 11. My adult cooking life had focused on wholefood recipes but this was constantly under revision thanks to my sons changing appetites. Early on in this time of harvest, the produce available on the plot was altering our usual habitual meals. This was represented in this blog piece, early experiments with harvests lead to a need to search for new recipes.

We had an abundance of potatoes, which were not a frequently used at home and so on finding the flavour of these potatoes to be disappointing recipe research was required. On talking to the boys about other ways of cooking potatoes my older son Arran wanted chips cooked and my younger son, Bodhi, French fries. On explaining that French fries would be time consuming, the delicious pan cooked wedges my mum made came to mind:

I had The Soil Association's Grown in Britain cookbook which is arranged around seasonally grown produce. On looking up potatoes they had a double spread with short recipes offering suggestions ranging from baked gratins to oven wedges. These wedges were exactly what I was looking for. The recipe was a short paragraph and looked so easy- it involved halving the potatoes, then quartering the halves, roasting them in a hot oven for 30 minutes with olive oil, salt, cumin, curry powder and oregano. I also added chopped allotment shallot. Turning them once half way ensured that both sides crisped up. I decided to make a simple tomato sauce with onion, French bean, carrot all from the allotment and (bought) carvolo nero, and serve it with ripped lettuce leaves. It was easy, quick enough and exceedingly good. Having two growing boys, used to risottos, pasta sauces, stir-fries with rice etc., they were excited to have a roasted potato dinner. They both enjoyed it thoroughly, with the older son asking for more wedges.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> rebeccasandover (2011) - Harvest 6th September 2011 -Wordpress available online at: <http://rebeccasandover.wordpress.com/2011/09/07/harvest-6th-september-2011/>



Figs 6 & 7, First Harvest, Unwashed Carrots



Figs 8 & 9 Cooked Allotment Wedges & Bean Sauce ready to eat and allotment wedges

By discovering how easy it was to make wedges I turned my back on the occasionally bought frozen oven chips. The taste between the two was incomparable. The texture of the allotment potatoes was very satisfying as they had a lightly crisp exterior and dense interior. The more intense cooking style of roasting with added seasoning proved to be a big family hit. Whilst my sons saw this meal as a taste treat, I had the satisfaction of knowing not only how the potatoes had been prepared and



processed but also exactly how and where they had been grown. My sons asked for more wedges and the dish has become a firm family favourite for all of us.

By the end of September I was able to make meals that entirely comprised plot produce and found that I had to purchase very little additional veg. From a cashew and vegetable risotto to a bean and sausage stew made with borlotti beans grown at the plot, I was adapting usual family meals to fit the produce as well as researching new ideas for when there was an abundance of a crop. Sometimes the plot produce was combined with other veg locally produced, as well as tinned products such as chopped tomatoes. The plot produce was combining with the materiality of other foodstuffs, as well as my tastes, cooking skills and the requests of my sons. Crops such as the peas, carrots and French beans were memorably flavoursome with the fresh, full impact of their flavour creating a vitality that was missing in shop bought produce. Plot produce seemed to have a more full and longer lasting taste resonance. Whereas bought peas would be described as sweet and soft, the allotment peas had a range of flavours that was dominated by sweetness but also contained more green and woody vegetative notes creating a rounder flavour. However the most striking difference was in the texture. With the allotment grown peas you knew you had a vegetable on your tongue, it contained a range of textures from the smooth but firm skin to the robust granular inner. The combination of more round flavour and robust texture made them very satisfying to eat. However the need for shelling the peas out of their pods meant that they were more time consuming to prepare. Most of the plot produce was more time consuming to prepare, especially those grown under ground that pulled up globules of mud on them. However, I found that I had a commitment to the plot produce that did not exist with shop bought. The need to knock lumps of dried mud off before the carrots or potatoes were washed became an accepted part of the preparation process. In fact these processes became a fascination and source of pride when I discovered the most ergonomic procedures for preparing them. My commitment to the plot produce was significantly more enhanced leading me to work hard to avoid waste. This purposeful attachment to the crops fell away sharply though when useless crops were harvested, such as the late sown winter carrots from the no-dig plot that were full of worms and holes. The logic of composting came into its own when encountering disease, alleviating any guilt of waste.

As a postscript to this discussion, I have to admit that my exuberant delight in the crops more robust textural presence was not universally shared in my house:

'After five minutes of eating the bean and sausage stew, I proudly announced to my sons that it contained two types of beans from the plot -borlotti and French bean. My older son, Arran froze and asked 'Are they broad beans?' He has developed a visceral hatred of broad beans, saying that they make him feel sick. He wonders if this means that he is allergic to them. I assure him that no as when

he was two he used to eat them directly off the growing plants. This conversation leads to him beginning a thorough fork search through the meal. I urge him to try one, he reluctantly takes a bite and says- no, he really doesn't like them! Later on I say how much I like the French beans with their firmer skins and that you can taste the plot in them. Arran replies that he doesn't like them with their tougher skins and begins another fork search. With my bubble burst, I'm now wondering how many are left at the plot and what recipes can be found that will result in him eating them.' (Field Diary 30/09/11)

#### 5:40 ANALYSIS POINT- SELF-PROVISIONING THROUGH CARING

As growers we share a commitment to the produce that marks the close relationship developed with it over the season. By beginning from the ground up, we have not only established a relationship with the produce but with the plot itself and its wider field of life. Therefore the harvested crops represent materially not only the matters of the seed, soil and climate but the care given by us as growers.

Whilst this care cannot necessarily be tasted, it exists in the successful harvest of the crops themselves. It exists in the care taken to remove the mud, scrub the skins, tie the onions, chop the beans or blanch them for freezing, source a sack or box to store the potatoes in darkness, gather the gooseberries for jam making, save and dry the beans or tubers to be planted the following season, keep the trimmings or gone off harvests for the compost. From out of a seemingly bare patch of ground either 10m x 12m or 10m x 25m, a spectrum of tastes can be sourced; by caring and committing to this patch, a care for the self can also be demonstrated.

#### **5:41 Transforming Matter**

##### i) Sharing Tastes, Sharing Know-How

As gardening expertise can be haphazardly implemented, so can cooking skills. Harvesting from the plot can lead to one crop dominating the household menu, creating a need to discover new ways of cooking it. Or the breadth of variety emanating from the plot can lead to issues of having more produce than the household can consume. Many allotmenters talked about sharing their harvests with friends and family, which sometimes involved the produce being used as neighbourhood currency.

One plot holding couple actively sold their produce to their neighbours, with another selling items off for charity at the local pub. I was also able to use my produce in a neighbourly way, as well as taking some when visiting family. I gave some French beans to my neighbour as a thanks for feeding my cat, I swapped one of my swedes for some potatoes in December in preparation for Christmas dinner and I took some carrots and potatoes to my mum when visiting. I also took some veg to Liz as the harvest time developed, a butternut squash and some carrots as a thank you for helping me get the plot started. I was given tomatoes and apples from her garden in exchange. Therefore grow your own harvests

could be used as a form of trading within the community that result in extending the range of produce available for household meals.

Ideas for extending household meals were found by searching in cookery books, looking for inspiration online, watching celebrity chef programmes, through everyday conversations at the plot and through more orchestrated plot events. By all these means allotmenters harvesting successful crops developed cooking skills and taste experiences via practical adaptations of knowledge. Jan and Phil at Lytes Cary, although experienced gardener relied on other allotmenters as a source of knowledge that extended their taste experiences:

Jan: Jenny [another allotmenter], the first year, she gave us some swiss chard to try and we'd never had it. I asked, what do I do with it? She explained and so we grew some ourselves this year and this year our daughter, and I said would you like some swiss chard and she said the same. What do I do with it?

Phil: Well it is a learning experience growing food.

Jan: It'll be interesting to see what she does with it

Phil: That option is always there (learning from others)! (Research Interview June 2011)

Growing on the plot results in less control over the household provisions in the way that the timings of the crops and success of the crops cannot be entirely predicted. The more experienced growers carefully planned sowings to reduce the impact of gluts. However as Jan and Phil discuss even with planning the plots, household meals could be randomly augmented through the impact of sharing produce and experience on the plots, producing cascades of knowledge. Joy, also at Lytes Cary turned regularly to the internet for recipes ideas for produce that she was less familiar with:

RS: So have you been looking up recipes?

Joy: Oh yes, gosh. I've got them from the internet (goes off to find her folder with recipes in). As crops become available, erm, I go into the...I've got so many of them, I had to go and get a folder! Oh, Borlotti Beans! I forgot to tell you about borlotti beans. The first time I had borlotti beans and I found a recipe as I don't eat...? Oh dear.

RS: Oh, look at that (looking at a print out for a borlotti bean and courgette humous) Borlotti bean and courgette humous.

Joy: I can't eat chickpeas. I don't eat chickpeas. When I saw this! I got courgettes and yes!

Courgettes, borlotti beans in the fridge, Yes.

RS: So was it nice when you made it?

Joy: Yes. These are all the recipes I've collected from the internet. Lots of beetroot cakes as...(RS: Did you make those last year?) Yes, yes, lovely. Got the chocolate one as well.

RS: Did your Grandson like it?

Joy: Oh, yes. He'll eat any cake (laughs). Oh and somebody introduced me to raspberry coulis. I'd never heard of it. (RS: Is that like a puree?) Yes! So I cooked them and it's free you know. So that was...! (Research Interview November 2011)

Joy is changing what she is eating at home by using what she has grown on the plots. Her commitment to her plot is apparent throughout the interview, along with her boundless passion for the produce itself. Joy's life is changed through working her plot and this transformation is taken through from plot to plate. Not only does Joy feel her life is benefitted by being at the plot, the tastes of the produce and the journey of finding new recipes creates opportunities to enrich her life:

RS: So did you say you've made some jams or chutneys?

Joy: Quite a few! (laughs) I could live all winter on jam and chutney!

RS: So what types have you made?

Joy: I've got my list somewhere...(gets up for her list). I give various ones away, ah my daughter for my birthday gave me this...ahh! Its lovely! (The Preserving Book) Yes so...(laughs!) (RS: Gosh! There's so many!) I won't read them all out.

RS: I'll just read a few out - Banana & Marrow (Joy: Ah, that was last years) Marrow, Ginger & Lemon, that sounds nice (Joy: I won first prize with that!) Did you! I bet that was really tasty. Plum Jam, Apple Cheese, Blackberry and Apple Cheese, Damson Cheese (Joy: The damsons were from the plot) Mixed Fruit- rhubarb (Joy: Yes, where I've got odd bits, because my grandson likes that, because it's not too bitty) [...]

RS: So you're going to be eating your veg through chutneys through the winter.

Joy: See the chutneys and the jams, to me, are the luxuries. They've always been...if I've only a little to spend, they're the ones I won't buy. Now I've got the store - it adds a little bit of extra chutney, makes all the difference! It's a luxury...! (Research Interview November 2011)

For someone like Joy, the plot is providing a sense of luxury having an otherwise financially constrained diet. Joy's enthusiasm for the produce results in her not simply steaming or boiling her veg to eat, she is using a multiplicity of cooking skills resulting in a range of tastes available over an extended period of time. However the success of the plot drives her to research different ways of preparing her produce.

However many other allotmenters' focus was on growing veg at the plot, with less to say about how they cooked and ate their produce. The benefits of sharing cooking ideas with allotmenters led to my setting up community cooking events at both sites. I wanted to explore practices of consumption and attitudes to the produce at home through a relaxed communal event focused on preparing and eating plot produce. By cooking and sharing food with the community I was able to extend this visceral inquiry in the field. By cooking on the allotment sites themselves preparation and consumption could occur at the sites of production. The produce being cooked was as fresh as possible, allowing the vegetables to have a visceral impact on those attending.

## ii) Community Cook-Ins - Sharing Tastes at Somerton Allotments Open Day

At Somerton, the cooking event was a public event at their allotment association's open day. Therefore by creating tasty, fresh dishes we, as the allotment association, sought to spread the word of how tasty vegetable dishes could be. At a meeting of the sub-committee of the allotment association that I attended we decided on the selection of dishes -Grated Carrot & Beetroot Salad, Potato Salad, Green Salad and a French Bean Dhal. I wrote up the event as a blog post:

'At home, I'd cooked the salad potatoes that Sabine had dropped round on Friday night, made a Balsamic & Honey Salad dressing as well as a Basil Vinaigrette which had a vivid green colour. The bags of equipment were packed up with chopping boards, knives, graters, large saucepans, cutlery, the dhal ingredients such as spices and red lentils. The 2 ring camping gas stove and gas bottle were also put in the car. I haven't made the Dhal for a while, and so I looked up the recipe to remind myself of the processes needed. The salads were going to be very easy as I'd done them before.

I went up to the plots at 10:30, where the wind was very gusty and there was a light rain. The committee members were busy putting up a gazebo, ready for the start time of 1pm. On finding Johannes, I asked him for the produce we needed for the cooking event. Sabine had left their beetroots, onions and garlic for us and we went into their plot to pick the chard and carrots. Their chard crop was looking excellent with very tall leaves on resonant yellow stems; the leaves were approx. 40cm long. The carrots were well spaced, with purple tops, Johannes gently forked around them, whilst I pulled up a good bunch. These were impressive looking carrots, fairly straight and with a good girth. It would be interesting to try their flavour. Jean came over with an armful of produce with salad leaves, chard, French beans, two lovely looking fennel bulbs, rocket leaves with some fennel fronds too. I looked at the array of veg, thinking about what we were growing, checking we had the right produce and the right quantities. Johannes was adamant that his purple French beans took about 60 minutes to cook and so wouldn't work in the dhal. I have the same bean, but a dwarf variety and find them easy to cook. However, it is a busy, full-on day and decided to use Jean's beans instead.

We talked about washing the veg and I decided to take them home to do this as I felt it would be easier than doing at the plots in such difficult weather. It took half an hour to wash all the veg, my sink became lined with mud from the carrots and beetroot, and the kitchen table had mud crumbs across it. The Chard and salad leaves were fairly clean, however, the responsibility of feeding the public kept me vigilant in washing it all thoroughly. I loaded the veg into a crate and returned to the plots at 12:30.

At this point visiting the plots was a popular activity. I began the salad preparation with Jean who quickly created a good looking green salad. I said that I'd been hoping to put some nasturtium flowers in it and Jean went off to her plot to pick some. It was quiet for awhile whilst the plots were visited, however, soon enough several allotmenters began to get involved with the salad making including Sabine, Keith and an allotmenteer I didn't know. Keith asked what to do and I asked him to chop up the potatoes for the salad, Sabine took to grating the beetroot, whilst the other allotmenteer chopped up the chard. I began to chop the onions ready for beginning the dhal. I had concerns about cooking this on a gas stove in such gusty wind. However, once lighting it, the chopped onions, spices and bay leaves, were soon sizzling; when it had sautéed for a few minutes, I added the chopped chard. As this was going on, I asked them about what they've been cooking and how their harvest has gone. Keith said he was very pleased with the season, with the main issue now being one of storage. He said that he's thinking of building a potato clamp, which would involve giving some of the garden over to it. Sabine agreed that storage was an issue for them too. Keith said that he isn't an inventive cook and just gets the produce cooked for eating. Sabine was grating her own carrots and we paused to sample them. They were very good- a full, sweet flavour but with a hint of woodiness.

Meanwhile, several of the town councillors came to chat including Judith, who is very keen to get stuck into chopping and chatting too. She says that she isn't much of a gardener but enjoys eating fresh produce, but again feels she doesn't have broad cookery skills. She enjoyed helping by chopping the French beans for me. By now, the salads were all about done. The green leaves and nasturtium salad looked very colourful and inviting. The grated carrot and beetroot salad looked very juicy and I asked Bodhi to chop some rocket to add another colour in it. I also asked Jean to chop some fennel fronds to add to the potato salad.

It was now time to add the dressings. I used the basil vinaigrette, which was a thick, green dressing onto the beetroot and carrot salad as well as the potato salad. Then I added some Balsamic and Honey dressing to the green salad:

### Honey & Balsamic Dressing:

#### Ingredients:

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar

1 tsp. dijon-style mustard

1 tsp. honey

1 clove garlic, minced (optional)

1 shallot, minced

1/4 tsp. salt

1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

In a small bowl whisk all ingredients to combine or put all ingredients in a jar and shake to combine.

Use immediately or keep, covered and chilled, up to one week. Makes 2/3 cup dressing.

### Basil Vinaigrette:

#### Ingredients:

2 cups basil leaves (about 1 large bunch)

1/2 cup good-quality olive oil

1/4 cup white wine or champagne vinegar

1 small clove garlic

Salt and pepper to taste

In a blender or food processor, whirl basil, oil, vinegar, and garlic until smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Makes about 1 cup

At this time people began to taste the salads. I continued getting the dhal cooking by adding the water, red lentils, French beans and a little stock. Within 5-10 minutes, this was soon simmering; I placed on the saucepan lid and let it cook.

A crowd had now developed to taste the salads and I talked to many of the people tasting, including Pauline Clarke, who is a town councillor. She enjoyed the salads very much and we talked about growing, cooking and good food. She grows a little at home and has a big interest in food matters. I was also talking at length to Alison from Keeper's Cottage, which neighbour the plot site. She said that they've tried to be self-sufficient which means they've: 'had to get inventive with what we eat.' Pat (plot 35), expressed a lot of interest in the salads. She was especially interested in the dhal saying that she often didn't know what to do with French beans and just blanched and froze them. She hadn't thought that you could just cook them into a dish. Other people expressed interest in the grated salad,

saying that they didn't know that you could eat beetroot raw. I talked about this to Sabine, who is German; she is surprised about the limited range of British vegetable cooking and the reliance on pickling. By this time, the dhal was ready. Within half an hour the dhal had all gone, the eating of it generating much interest and comment. Many people asked me what had gone in it, what spices I'd used and what vegetables I used. John (committee chair) jokingly asked: 'Where's the meat?' but then came back for seconds and thirds. It was a popular dish creating much comment about the smells, the flavour, the use of veg and how quickly it'd cooked.

Liz (my ex plot-mate) was inspired by the food on the day. She said that it made her think about what she'll grow on her garden beds next year, including beetroot, fennel and chard. She'd eaten chard before but hadn't realised how good it is, with its slightly more robust texture and is now keen to grow some. Sabine, who had been running the cake and tea stall, told me that several people had told her that they'd been inspired by the food prepared, as it had given them new ideas on what to grow and how to cook the produce.

I took a lot of satisfaction from the day, being aware that on this occasion, the 'kitchen' had been brought to the growing space, the space of production, with 95% of what we'd been cooking and eating having been grown approx. 5 metres away from where we'd cooked and eaten it. From what I was told, sharing cooking skills at this event would change some of their food habits and choices. The cooking event had given the whole day a space of intimacy where knowledge was shared through the pleasure of food, as well as sharing the everyday act of cooking and eating.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> rebeccasandover (2011) - Somerton Allotments Opening -Community Cook-In, Wordpress - available at (online) <http://rebeccasandover.wordpress.com/2011/09/12/somerton-allotments-opening-community-harvest-cook-in-10911/>





Figs 10, 11 &12- Harvesting Chard, Cooking Dhal, Adding colour to the salad,



Figs 13, 14 & 15 -Community Eating, Preparing the salad, Dishes ready to serve,

The aim of the cook-in had been to get people whether allotmenters or the public, attracted to taste the dishes by presenting a visual impact of colour. Next it was important that these dishes tasted as good as they looked. Having undertaken pilot cooking research in a National Trust garden at Barrington Court, Somerset the year before I had some recipes that had a visual and taste impact and had generated discussion. However, on that occasion I had focused on salads rather than cooking, but

I was confident of the dhal recipe, I was just not sure how easy it would be to cook at the plots. To ensure the taste and visual impact I ensured that there were a variety of flavours and colours on offer. To underscore this all salad dishes were topped off with a garnish of contrasting colour as well as tasty salad dressing, adding layers to both the visual impact and taste of the dishes. The dishes epitomised a sensorial representation of plot life that sold the idea of growing your own to those not with an allotment and emphasised the variety of flavours available for those with limited cooking experience. These dishes acted as sensorial ambassadors for the plots, as well as becoming talking points. As I had lacked growing skills and was keen to gather them from other allotmenters, many expressed an appreciation of the cooking event as a source of inspiration for cooking at home. Pat in particular had been shocked at how French beans could be cooked so readily into a meal. After the cooking event she emailed me asking for the recipe, which I sent to her. A week or so later she emailed again to say that she had successfully cooked the dhal dish for a dinner for friends.

#### 5:41 ii) ANALYSIS POINT -SHARING SKILLS, SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND HYPER-LOCAL FOOD

The cooking of the veg at the allotment site allowed the veg to be consumed in the space in which they were produced. The food miles concept of food provision was converted into food metres for this event, representing how some allotmenters pick and graze on their crops as they harvest. Most allotmenters live within a mile or so of the site and therefore are able to self-provision fresh produce in a hyper-local manner. The elements and components of the soil, seeds and produce are utilised and transformed within a narrow circuit of space. These materials are augmented by brought in compost, manures and additional food provisions for cooking- the added matters needed within these narrower food circuits. With such hyper-local provision the question of whether we can taste the space of production within the produce could be asked, with only tentative and unformed answers available, such as perhaps the bland flavour of the potatoes that was commonly reported was due to the denuded state of the overworked soil? However the variety of sweetness of the freshly harvested carrots was heavily influenced by variety of seeds planted and when, as the early summer carrots had an intensity of sweetness the autumn carrots lacked. Plot produce had enhanced textures that may again be down to seed varieties as well as the freshness of the produce, the soil or added manures. Therefore it was commonly felt that allotment produce was superior to mass produced veg, with it comprising of a greater variety of textures and flavours detected on consumption. A definitive reason for this cannot be provided, however the interplay of soil, seed varieties, added matters and modes of tending might account for this. These discussions foreground the role allotment growing can have in highlighting a focus on matter in AFN literature. As an affordable activity, it also provides answers to the questions of the inequality of access to local food discussed by Winter (2003) and Dupuis & Goodman (2005). However allotment growing cannot be the only answer to affordable AFN as there are issues of access

to the activity based on the intense physical engagement required and having time available for growing.

### iii) Community Cook-Ins - School children experiencing food at Lytes Cary Allotments

The cooking event at Lytes Cary was undertaken with an Infant class from the local primary school who had a plot and attended growing sessions throughout the school year. This provided an opportunity to engage small children with the idea of eating what they had grown, allowing them to truly know where their food comes from. Here I will dip into the day to provide a sense of the second cooking event, this time at Lytes Cary Allotments. Jemma Marsh, the National Trust Allotment officer and I ran the day helped by the class teacher, Mrs. Reade and a number of adult helpers:

*'When we gathered around the plot-based cooking area, I introduced the activities for the morning to the children, explaining what we would be doing – first harvesting veg from two of the community plots, before we would wash them in the trugs, after this we would begin chopping, grating and ripping leaves for salads and begin cooking the soup. I ran through the dishes we would make that morning:*

- *Grated Beetroot and Carrot salad with Parsley*
- *Green salad with edible flowers*
- *Pan fried beans with garlic*
- *Potato and chard soup*

*During this introductory time I showed the children the veg that Jemma had picked the day before. She had brought the carrots, potatoes, and beetroot over in a hand-pulled cart. As the carrots were so fresh, their smell was powerfully earthy and sweet. I held out the bunch for the children to smell, hoping that some may make a sensory connection with the vegetable. We were now ready to start the activities. Mrs. Reade (the class teacher) pointed out the foliage of the carrots so the children could recognise them when vegetable-spotting...*

We moved onto a nearby community bed where there were tall canes with climbing French beans and a few runner beans. These were growing next to the sweetcorn that the children had planted in July. Jemma reminded the children that they had grown these earlier in the year, which they got excited about. Jemma rolled back a small section of chicken wire to allow the children access to the plots; the children were allowed in 4 at a time. Fortunately, the children were had been pre-warned to wear

outdoor clothes and wellies that meant they were fine to walk on the damp, bare soil. I also entered the veggie bed with a plastic blue tray, for which to gather the beans into. Jemma had introduced the beans, demonstrating how to pick them. Soon enough the whole group was within the bed, enjoying the freedom to pick which for some, eventually ended in a general exploration through the bed. Within a short spell of time we had an over-flowing tray with enough beans 'to feed an army'. The children had clearly enjoyed this task with some giving it much concentration and commitment. They commented on the bean sizes and shape; whilst most were in a regular semi-curved shape, some were straighter, which generated comment. As we finished picking the beans I explained to the children that as the beans were coming to the end of their season, we would have to cut them quite finely in order to cook them by pan-frying them, however, that when they are young and tender, they can be eaten almost raw, or would cook very easily. The other adult helpers expressed a lot of interest in how to prepare them...

When we returned to our base by the cooking gazebos and picnic benches we begun the task of washing the veg. Jemma had brought over a very large stainless steel water container, which she'd wheeled over on its detachable wheels; this was 3/4 full of water from the bore hole. In front of it she placed two plastic trugs that we could dip in the large container and then put the veg into wash. Unfortunately we only had one scrubbing brush and so the children had to take it in turns and we made sure everyone could have a turn. The height of the large container (approx. 1m) proved a mild concern, needing some monitoring as the children leaned over its edge to peer in. I was slightly time aware and so got involved in helping with the veg washing in order to hurry it along. This was a messy job, requiring sleeves to be rolled up. The children needed showing how to scrub the veg, with many of them scrubbing too gently to be effective. At the end of this task, we got fresh water in the trugs to rinse off the veg, with further fresh water being added for the children to wash their hands. Jemma was concerned about the water quality, asking for any veg being eaten without cooking to be washed again in tap water that she'd brought over in 6 x 1 litre bottles. She felt very responsible for veg to be disease free, a concern compounded by the presence of rats on the plots.

Whilst we began this veg washing process and moving onto to preparing the salad, Jemma took another group onto the squash and courgette patch for harvesting and then taking a few children to the NT's polytunnel to pick cucumbers, tomatoes and collect the previously harvested onions. When they returned, they were keen to get involved in the veg washing and salad preparation.

The salad preparation began with the marigold petals being detached from their blooms and placed in a bowl. I suggested that the chard leaves could be ripped to size, which would mean that children not involved with chopping by knife would be involved in the preparation processes. Mrs. Palmer (class

Teaching Assistant) led the carrot and beetroot grating, with various children, beginning with some year one's (5-6yrs). This task was demonstrated first, as there is always a risk of grating fingers and knuckles, however, all proceeded positively, with only the strong colour of the grated beetroot causing concern for staining the children's clothes. The children picked up the skills for this task quickly, some showing great co-ordination and maturity.

Mrs. Reade led the onion chopping, after I'd demonstrated chopping techniques to the children. I stressed how I begin with pushing down the point of the knife, before leading down with the rest of the blade. We had three or four selected year one's for this task, however, all needed very close supervision, as well as repeated demonstrations in order to achieve chopped onions. One little girl ended up chopping with streaming eyes. Our parent photographer (Mr. Brosius) became quite anxious whilst watching the children, as they didn't pick up very quickly the need to keep fingers back, he eventually helped a child, being an ex-professional chef and all chopping was achieved safely. Other parent helper's led the rest of the salad preparation - chopping cucumbers and tomatoes, whilst I started the preparation for the soup and the fried beans, by the gas hob, chopping potatoes, courgettes, garlic, chard, rosemary and the beans.

I got my large pan warmed before adding the oil which I'd brought, followed by the onions the children had chopped which I let cook for a few minutes, before I added the chard, potatoes, courgette and rosemary. This sizzled pleasingly, showing to me that the heat was right for cooking the vegetables through before I added the water. I sauté my vegetables first like this in the oil to develop the flavours, before I add the water. During this process, I invited some children to take turns to stir the soup, showing them how to hold the insulated handle to keep the pan steady. After 10 minutes, when the vegetables were softening, I added the water that brought the soup up to 3/4 of the pan's height.

Whilst the water was coming up to the boil, I began frying the garlic in oil on my other pan. Fortunately, the two large pans fitted on the hob with the garlic soon smelling sharp and tasty. As the beans were not young, I chopped the beans small, about one cm long. I also placed in a bay leaf to flavour the beans. This had to be cooked on a fairly high heat for fast cooking needed to penetrate the beans skins. I added some drops of soya sauce to give these beans a salty/spicy flavour. I thought that it may be that the adults eat these, rather than the children, as they may be too strongly flavoured (too garlicky).

By now, the soup water was boiling, so time to turn the gas down to a simmer. I added vegetable bouillon powder as a stock along with some ground pepper. I thought that this would take a good 20

minutes to cook, which meant that we would be low on time for the children to taste this.

Additionally, I wondered if there would be enough for everyone.

Whilst the soup cooked, the salad was being finished off with the younger children ripping the chard and lettuce leaves. Mrs. Palmer said that she hadn't eaten chard before. The chopped cucumber and tomatoes were added, along with the marigold petals. Mrs. Reade encouraged the children to taste the flower petals, which most of the children bravely did. Many said they liked them, some not. I tasted them and was not keen on the slightly bitter, peppery taste, however they looked fantastic in the salad giving it a striking colour. I was confident that their flavour would be moderated by the balsamic and honey dressing I had made. We also had some surplus chopped cucumber, so the children took a board with it on around for everyone to try. Soon it was all finished.

The grated carrot and beetroot salad was topped with some chopped parsley and was now ready to eat. As the salads were now ready and being time conscious, I suggested that the children began by tasting the salads and I would then bring some soup around for them to sample. With the help of the adult helpers soon the children had a colourful plate-full of grated carrot and beetroot salad, along with green salad with tomatoes and marigold petals, both with some balsamic and honey dressing on. They kept in their groups spread over the two picnic tables and willingly got stuck into eating the salads that they'd not only made, but had also picked and washed. As the children have gardened and grown vegetables at Lytes Cary, there was a general sense that they had grown the vegetables too, even though they may not have directly planted these (apart from the beans, which they did grow).

Out of the class of 24, half of which have spent only two weeks at school being in the reception year (4 & 5 year olds) only two children refused to try anything. These were both from the youngest year. In my experience, this is not unusual. For the rest, there was a split between the children who quietly ate everything up and those who actively exclaimed great pleasure in the food returning for seconds, thirds and fourths of the salad. The grated carrot and beetroot salad was extremely popular. By this time the soup was ready. If I'd been at home or inside, I would have blended the soup being a variation on smooth potato/onion soup. However, today we were cooking in the middle of the countryside on an allotment, where the vegetables had grown and without an electrical supply. Therefore, I'd brought my potato masher and set to giving the soup a good mash. The fried beans were extremely popular amongst the adults and quite a number of the children enjoyed them as well.

The soup again proved to be a successful dish; many of the children ate theirs up and enjoyed it. Several children didn't want it, however, there were two or three boys who asked for seconds and thirds of the soup, again exclaiming how much they liked it. One of these boys had his mum there

helping, she told me that he would never have eaten something like that at home and was amazed at his enjoyment. Several of the adult helpers asked me for the recipe of the soup and the salad dressing!  
(Field Notes 21/09/11)





Figs 16, 17 & 18 Picking the crops, Showing the children how to grate beetroot & carrot, Checking on safety as the children learn to chop onions

### 5:41 iii) ANALYSIS POINT -LEARNING FOOD -ACCEPTING FOOD

This cooking event on the plots saw children learning at first hand the processes in which food travels from field to fork. Even with the growing, picking, preparing, cooking and eating occurring on one piece of land (apart from the extra veg sourced by Jemma) distinct and time consuming activities formed the process. This day saw small children taking a role in all of these processes, taking the children closer to the material of food than many would have been before. The clear result of making them so closely involved in the means by which food is served to their plates was a nearly unanimous embrace of the dishes produced for consumption. The older year group (5 & 6 year olds) in this class had had growing sessions on the plots earlier in the year such as when they had planted sweetcorn plants in May. I had observed these children crouching on the veg bed digging the earth and carefully firming the plants into the ground. The earlier growing experiences had already developed their sense of being close to the earth and some appreciation of the processes of growing food. By these close connections with the matter of growing, a sense of ownership was observable amongst the children on the cooking day. There was a distinct enjoyment in the semi-freedom of wandering the site and picking produce (even though this was a directed activity). There was even an enjoyment in the time consuming tasks of scrubbing and washing the crops. The closeness to the matter of the crops from growing through to eating gave the children an openness to try dishes that were unfamiliar even to the adults, such as grated beetroot and carrot salad and green salad with flower petals. For all but two of the children, these proximal experiences with food resulted in the dishes being readily accepted. These results would back up the work of The Soil Association's Food for Life Partnership<sup>28</sup> that seeks to bring children back into close proximity with food production, as well as the work of The Transition Town as explored in chapter two. Within the AFN literature a focus on how children and others engage with learning to grow is absent. This study, by following the work of local food projects, shows understanding of how learning to grow enables access to fresh, local food as well as enhancing what is accepted as food.

This cook-in on the Lytes Cary site differed in that I was working closely with children who were assisted to grow there occasionally rather than the direct relationship with allotmenters that occurred in the Somerton cook-in. The children more fully engaged with the tasks in the way that only a handful of allotmenters had at Somerton. The children did not express surprise that they were being asked to eat grated beetroot or flowers as the allotmenters of Somerton had, as for many of them the whole day was a new experience that added to the new activities they had experienced when coming for growing sessions on the plots. I could see how the sensorial nature of picking, washing and preparing the produce allowed for a visceral engagement with the matter of the crops leading to the final sensory activity of tasting it. By engaging with the full supply chain of the meals on the plots the

---

<sup>28</sup> Food For Life Partnership - (online) accessed 10th July 2013 <http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/>

children were viscerally learning to accept the produce as food, as well as viscerally engaging with the new activities of picking, washing and chopping veg.



Fig 19 & 20 Children making the salad, The soup ready to eat



Figs 21 & 22- Gathering the flowers for the green salad, Serving the salads



Fig 23 Eating on the Plots at Lytes Cary

### **5:50 SEASONAL PLOT NOTES -HARVESTS, TIDYING AND FORWARD PLANNING**

As autumn took hold seasonal changes could again be observed at the plots and in the nearby countryside. The verdance of summer had waned as the seasons turned with the waning of the sun.

'Now the whole sweep of trees, from hilly forests to copses lining the side of roads, are transforming from green to the multi-hued tranquility of autumnal yellows/golds and brown. The colours are striking, with the dark red-leaved bushes giving a contrasting tone...Foliage, generally is fading in colour and liveliness, with branch frameworks becoming visible. On the allotments too, from the courgettes and squash plants to the tomatoes, the leaves are drying and fading with the fruiting veg still ripening on the stems. I still have good crops of French beans, carrots, potatoes and shallots, with winter cabbages, autumn carrots, autumn squashes still growing. The bed of tomatoes look lush, with many green fruits; however, with the wet, cloudy weather and cold nights, I'm wondering if they will actually ripen. Green tomato chutney recipes may have to be researched. The plots still have growing in evidence with flowers, veg to crop and veg growing for autumn/winter cropping. The weeds are diminishing and dying, but still are tough to the remove.' (Field Diary 19/09/11)

At this time I was still adapting to the large harvests of produce ripe for eating. In the beginning of September I harvested a large harvest of the onions that were tied up to dry, mature carrots, potatoes, lettuce, purple French beans, borlotti beans and chard (see photo below).

This focus on harvests and consumption did not lessen the need to attend to the allotment and I was back to being anxious about its appearance as the weeds continued to prevail. These feelings were compounded by the awareness of the tidiness of several of my neighbours plots, however one plot next to mine remained abandoned. Throughout the growing season controlling the weeds had been a prominent concern. Two of the plots next to mine were abandoned and then one was taken over and transformed by new allotmentees Harry and Marion who strimmed the weeds and then spread weed killer. They completely transformed this abandoned space by rotavating it and they then proceeded to build veg beds and a large chicken coop, providing additional company (see Figs 25,26 below).



Fig 24 Early September Harvest- Borlotti Beans, Shallots, Carrots, Potatoes, Lettuce & French Beans



Fig 25 Neighbouring plot- Harry & Marion's chicken coop

Another allotmenteer Sue used weed killer as a means of transforming the plot. She stopped to talk to me about struggling to cope with the weeds as a lone gardener. Several times through the growing season I felt overwhelmed by the weeds, this led to feelings of inadequacy as an allotmenteer.

Therefore when I saw how easily weed killer dealt with the problem on my new neighbours plot, I found as I continued to deal with the weeds the pros and cons of using weed killer played through my mind. On looking at Sue's plot the weeds she had treated were shrivelled, desiccated and blackened; the reality of weed killer was not appealing:

I work on, weeding the beds and paths between the beds. During this time, my mind is going over and over the weed problem. I feel very despondent by it and a little helpless. I drift back to the weed killer solution and wonder whether I should use it just for now to sort out the problem. After some time, whilst weeding the vegetable beds, I realise that I'm enjoying this task, conscious of a desire to care and nurture these plants that are growing for me. Many of them have grown with little effort from me (apart from preparing the beds) and I take pleasure in their growth. Whilst this task takes time, I'm aware of myself calming and relaxing into it. My attention is back on the actual vegetables. Towards the end of this task, it hits me that the vegetables themselves are key to this process. Having healthy veg that I can eat is my number one priority. Growing this produce successfully, in as simple a fashion as possible, that creates produce with vitality, vitamins and minerals are the reasons for

doing this. The aesthetics of the plot is not the priority. I have to remember this. Weeding through the beds always takes time, but it brings me into proximity with the plants, which I enjoy.' (Field Diary 31/08/11)

As I work into the autumn ideas come to me as to how to address these issues. I begin to relax into the idea that the weeds will die in the winter and that I can address the issue then. Each time I go to the plot I harvest, weed and think about how I can pro-actively manage the site to become stress-free for the following season. The close relationship with the ground and the vegetables themselves develops a sense of responsibility, as well as a relationship with this space.

As autumn turned to winter the changing temperatures turned my thoughts back to the vegetables themselves in the ground. My crown prince squashes still held pride of place in their abundance however they had failed to turn blue-skinned and so I left them to mature as long as possible (see photos below). By early November the colder nights became a source of concern as my 2nd sowing carrots were still in the ground and my squashes had not been harvested. I was also a little unsure as to how juggle the twin demands of caring for maturing crops along side the traditional advice of clearing the ground in late autumn to prepare for the following season. Therefore whilst I harvested my squashes and remaining first sowing carrots, I left the 2nd sowing carrots and cabbages in the ground. The first sowing carrots were precious to me as I was so thrilled by their flavour, their size and general appearance (see photo below) as the carrots germinated successfully and appeared to be largely unaffected by carrot fly. Another crop that I am pleased with at this time is the potato as they have lasted from August to December, providing a welcome addition to the family meals.





Figs 26 & 27- The grown Crown Prince, The fading plant insitu,



Figs 28 & 29- Freshly harvested 1st sowing carrots, Harvested carrots and Butternut squash on the plot



Figs 30 & 31 -Storing Potatoes, October Harvest –Carrots, Potatoes, Green tomatoes, French Beans, Borlotti Beans, Butternut Squashes a few last strawberries

On this visit, as the others time was also spent tackling weeds and continuing to tidy the plot. I could not see the logic in completely clearing the plot for winter as I had growing winter cabbages, leeks and parsley. I had also recently planted some raspberry canes and a rhubarb crown. Therefore whilst some allotmenters cleared and rotavated their entire plot, others dealt with things at a more responsive plot bed level. As one bed finished cropping it was cleared, turned and tidied for the following season. This was also the approach that I adopted.

As the days shortened, crops were finished, later maturing crops harvested, all of which were reflected through kitchen meals;

'Fourth Main Harvest 17/10:

Potatoes, onions, carrots, chard, butternut squash, parsley, tomatoes, strawberries

16) Roasted Squash Soup with chick peas & barley

[Squash\*, garlic, onion\*, chard\*, parsley\*]

17) Double baked Potatoes (Hugh F-W 'Veg Every Day') 19/10/11 with Chard & vegetable & tomato sauce

[Potatoes\*, chard\* onion\*, carrots\*, parsley\*] with Somerset Cheese, tomato sauce & rocket

18) Lentil, Chard & veg Dhal with rice

[Onions\*, carrots\*, chard\*, garlic]

19) Tofu & Veg Miso soup with Spelt 31/10/11

[Onions\*, carrots\*, chard\* wakame seaweed]' (Field Diary -Harvest & Home Cooking Notes 2011)

Key-\* Designates Produce from my Allotment

Over the autumn and winter I documented 31 home cooked meals made with crops from 8 plot harvests. They ranged from light pasta, pâtés and salad dishes in the mid summer to potato wedges, risottos, soups and roast dinners through the autumn and winter. My younger son did not particularly like squash and so I found using it in soups or roasts the best way to disguise it. He would eat it in this more inconspicuous form even if he knew it was there. My older son had gone off rice and so the addition of potatoes to the family diet made him very happy, allowing us to make a deal that he would tolerate rice once a week.

However the plot harvests did not only have impacts on my sons' food experiences. As I was growing and cooking with all of us in mind I found myself trying new recipes as a way to find a good use for the produce and as a way to please my sons' appetites. After the November harvest there was a set back in that the swedes that I'd grown from donated plants turned out to have an overly swedey pungency that even I found unappealing. Having cooked a squash and swede risotto, we all found it necessary to pick out the overly pungent swede pieces. I made a note in my field diary that '*Even with roasting the swede was still over-powering*' (Field Diary 11/11/11). However on looking at the list of my recently harvested veg- '*Fifth Main Harvest: Approx. 5kg potatoes, 3kg carrots, 4 small butternut squashes, 1 large swede, 1 large squash (crown prince?), small bag of chard*' (Field Diary 5/11/11), I realised that I had the perfect veg for cooking a roast dinner. Having spent many years cooking in a wholefood-style I lacked experience in cooking roast dinners, as we rarely had them. I was also

inspired to try this by finding roast dinner recipes in my weekend newspaper. On discussing this with Arran and Bodhi, they both requested Yorkshire Puddings. Strangely, although I was an experienced cook, I had never made Yorkshire puddings. Therefore it was useful to have these magazine recipes to hand on trying to make them. I had also decided to give the swede a final try by making a carrot and swede mash that I've always enjoyed. However the recipes were quite sketchy and I had to hope that they would work:

'All was going well, I par-boiled the potatoes whilst I had a roasting pan warming in the oven with olive oil in it with rosemary and salt. They then went into the top of a hot oven. I began the Yorkshire Puddings with my older son, Arran. Being 14 he craves any food that's a bit stodgy and filling and was keen to help. We read the recipe together and I cracked 3 local eggs into a bowl for him to whisk. Then Arran sifted the flour and salt. During this time I'd placed a bun-tin in the oven with some oil in each well to warm. The batter was placed in the porch to rest...It was time to focus on the veg. Again the carrots had a lot of clumps of mud on them and took some serious scrubbing. The carrots were in good shape and only needed a small amount cut out...It was time to put the Yorkshire Pudding batter into the oven and Arran ladled it into the wells...I drained all the veg and place a heat diffuser under the gravy to stop it boiling dry. Then I turned to mash the carrot and swede, I add plenty of butter, salt and pepper and mash well. Things are beginning to come together and so I take a look in the oven. The Yorkshire puds look brown and crispy but barely risen. The potatoes too look well cooked...The boys are very excited about the meal and request copious Yorkshire puds. The first sensation is that they are very tasty but half the expected size. I tell the boys that my mum used to make the best Yorkshire Puddings and that I'll phone her for some tips as we have spare batter. My second sensation is the roast potatoes and I'm thrilled, they are tasty, moderately crispy but the inner texture is what makes them special -fluffy and also dense, giving a satisfying bite. I am also pleased with the carrot and swede mash that has a great balance between sweet, sour and salty. However Bodhi is not keen. Although the boys have loved the meal and I've enjoyed it, I'm disappointed with the boiled veg. I prefer a meal that is built around the taste of the veg. After this meal we have some leftover batter, as well as leftover swede/carrot mash and boiled veg. I decide that tea will involve a soup made of the leftover veg served with garlic bread. That night I speak to my mum, telling her about our disappointment with the Yorkshire Puddings. She said that the key to them was to whisk then until 'you feel that you can't whisk them any more, to get air into them'. I told her that our recipe had not said this but she said that it is key. So on Monday, although I was cooking a simple pasta and veg meal, I decided to try the leftover batter. I decant it into a larger bowl to whisk with an electric whisk. I did the same process of getting oil hot in the oven as previously. After 15 minutes they had risen well and so I turned the oven lower for the remainder of the time. On serving the meal, I was thrilled

to have finally cracked cooking Yorkshire Puddings. The boys loved them and Arran asked to have them more often.' (Field Diary 15/11/11)

#### 5:50 ANALYSIS POINT- GROWING FOOD MEANS COOKING FOOD

What is clear from these processes of going from plot to plate is that growing produce is not enough to successfully self-provision, the progression of the produce to become tasty meals requires processes of learning, adapting, as well as cleaning, chopping, cooking and storing. Vegetable dominated diets are now regularly featured in the media as a means to improve health, improve sustainable production of food and as a means of increasing food security. However without the skills and know-how of how to transform vegetables from scratch into tasty and appealing dishes vegetable-based eating will remain for those already committed to it. By going from plot to plate the processes of learning and adapting to the matter of the plot reveals the key to successfully self-provisioning. By immersing with the plot and the produce grown, a process of mattering has occurred where I viscerally learnt to grow and respond to the harvests through kitchen practices. This fieldwork follows Little et al. (2009) in revealing the processes required in cooking from scratch that is mostly forgotten within AFN discussions. This study also responds to Short's (2006) critique that cooking is largely absent from investigations into everyday life, with the home ignored as a site of cooking practice.

Processes of mattering can be further illustrated by closing the growing season with both winter jobs on the plot and the preparations for a special family meal.

#### 5:60 SHORTER DAYS ON THE PLOT, LONGER SPELLS IN THE KITCHEN

Even with the shortened, cold days, there were still jobs to do on the plot as well as crops to harvest:

*'Ploughed fields are abundant along the roads to the allotment, as well as those growing winter crops of rapeseed. The trees are now losing the leaves more fully, leaving a framework of stalks and branches behind; twiggy hedges topped with the remaining one or two clinging leaves. The low skies, damp fields and occasional splash of vivid colour of the remaining leaves, give a grounded, drawing back look to the countryside like an earthing after the vivacity of summer. It feels like time to return to our burrows, hold up for the winter with stores of food and firewood... My thoughts keep returning to the veg I still have in the ground – autumn carrots are still growing, leeks and winter cabbages – how will they fare if the cold air returns with frosts? I keep asking allotmenters whether they'll be all right as the advice on-line seems to be full of getting everything out of the ground and putting the plot to*

*bed. No one gives me definitive answers, so I must look it up for myself. Or do I just wait and see?' (Field Diary 8/11/11)*

I occasionally found myself glad to be at the plots as a form of escape from other cares and this was the case in early December where I wanted the *'therapeutic effects of fresh air and just the plot to think about. I feel I need to be out in the fresh air 'doing''* (Field Diary 11/12/11). I found as I continued to attend the plot through the autumn and winter it eventually matched most other plots in terms of tidiness. However each visit still required time taken to tackle the weedy remnants that still involves heavy work.

Working the plot results in thinking the plot and making preparations for how to improve its manageability next year. The activities can be therapeutic, however, this is more the case when the pressure is off. As the winter leaves lie ragged on the ground, the damp chill retains moisture in the earth, leaving it constantly sticky; nowhere in nature is tidy now. With the waning of the sun and the shortening of the days there is little growth on the plots, except some weeds that fail to die back. Bird song is increasingly a welcome soundtrack to plot work in the quietude of winter and they reciprocally respond to the turning over of soil. On leaving my carefully raked potato bed ready for next season, I returned to find the earth clumped with mini-diggings, possibly scavenging badgers turning up abandoned tubers.

I return to the plot later in December as I realised that I had most of the veg I needed for Christmas dinner. Some was in storage in the kitchen but other produce was still in the ground, the late carrots and the winter red and green cabbages. Although my potatoes were finished I was able to swap a large allotment swede for a bag of locally grown potatoes from a friend. I warned her about the swede's excess of flavour, but she said she wanted one for her Christmas dinner.

'On December 23rd I went to the allotment to harvest the carrots and cabbages, of which I had green and red ones. There weren't many cabbages that were ready but I managed to find a couple of green ones and a red one. The green ones were like 'hispi' summer cabbages – very fresh and cone-shaped. The carrots planted in the no-dig area were small with thick, grey mud wrapped around them, with a number of purplish worms. These hadn't been planted until the autumn and so I couldn't compare them to the ones I'd planted in the late spring. However, they were quite small and once I wiped some of the mud off I could see a number of holes and decay on the carrots. I wasn't sure if this was due to

wormholes or carrot-fly. Keith and his wife were also at the plots harvesting for Christmas. I dropped by and chatted to them and they showed me their purple Brussels sprouts that I was fascinated by. They offered me a bag of them to try which I was pleased to do.

The mud was so thick on the carrots I had to scrape them off with the back of a knife before I could scrub them. As I scrubbed them I could see a lot holes and I had to spend time cutting out the bad bits. In the end, a hand full of carrots leave only enough good produce for the slaw and the stuffing for the seitan roast. My eldest son requested the seitan roast as it's his favourite vegetarian dish. It is something I learned to make at The Natural Cookery School about 10 years ago.

The menu was:

**Starters-** Veggie Sos Rolls **Dinner-** Seitan roast with roast squash and roast potatoes, served with Winter Slaw, steamed Brussels sprouts with sultanas, steamed red cabbage and roasted Brussels sprouts with shallots\*. Accompanied by Cranberry sauce and gravy. **Pudding** – Christmas pudding and Yule Log, with Cider Brandy butter and Vanilla cream

\* All veg from allotment except potatoes and green Brussels sprouts

A couple of days before I'd made the Christmas pudding from a recipe I'd developed about 7 years ago and has been declared by my mum to be 'the best Christmas pudding ever' – praise indeed. Anyway, it contains the usual dried fruit, breadcrumbs etc., but also has grated carrot and is soaked in orange juice. This year the grated carrots were from the allotment, it was a little tricky to grate these as the late carrots were poor quality, but tasty nonetheless. I also used locally made Cider Brandy for soaking the dried fruit and lighting the pudding. This beverage became a cause celebre several years ago as they won the right to call it brandy (rather than Calvados) at the European court. The night before making the Christmas pudding I soaked the dried fruit in cider brandy topped up with orange juice. I made a large pudding along with a small pudding that I thought I'd take to my Mum, as I often do at Christmas.

I'd seen a Hugh Fearnly-Whittingstall recipe for roasted Brussels sprouts online and decided that I had to try it out as I had all the right ingredients including some remaining allotment shallots. I decided to get the seitan and squash roasted first whilst I was chopping, shredding and grating the veg for the winter slaw. That way I could ensure they had got what they needed out of the oven, before I gave it over to the roast potatoes. For this I chopped the vivid orange flesh of the (crown prince) squash, removing the seeds and the skin, leaving them in large chunks. I'd poured a little olive oil onto the baking tray and then placed the seitan loaf and squash pieces on before sprinkling some salt and pepper on the squash. I put the oven to Gas Mark 6, expecting them to need about 30 minutes



before it could go onto the lower oven shelf. Once the slaw was made I scrubbed the muddy potatoes, before chopping them to size to be boiled for 5 minutes or so. These pots are firmly textured that need a little more boiling than others before they roast. Whilst they are boiling, I get the baking pan ready with olive oil, garlic and rosemary that is warmed in the oven ready to use. I can also get the Brussels sprouts ready for roasting, by firstly washing them and chopping off their outer leaves. By this stage the potatoes are ready for roasting. I remove the potatoes, keeping the hot water for steaming the greens. I arrange the potatoes in the pan, sprinkle a little more salt and then put them in the oven, to start with on the lower shelf. I have to keep an eye on the time, as in ten minutes the roast seitan and squash should be about ready and I will swap them over with the potatoes that need a good hot oven for successful browning and crisping.

During this time, I prepare the shallots that were left over from my crop, the aim is to try out the recipe and add another layer of flavour to the meal. By this time, the roast seitan and squash is cooked perfectly, cooked and browned. I remove the tray, taking the potatoes up to the top shelf. I now know I have approximately 30-40 minutes before dinner will be ready. I quickly finish preparing the roasted Brussels and get them in the oven on the lower shelf. I now give attention to the steamed greens and onion gravy. The red cabbage isn't large and so is quickly washed and chopped into large pieces. Chopping the Brussels sprouts takes time, as the outer leaves need to be peeled off individually. I have a few purple allotment ones to prepare and the supermarket bought ones as well. I'm a big fan of Brussels sprouts; the boys happily eat them too and so make sure we have plenty. I place them in the steamer pan over the hot water, adding some sultanas to jazz up the dish. I now get my large iron frying pan on, whilst chopping shallots and garlic for the gravy. I pour in some olive oil, add a bay leaf or two then the onion/garlic mix with a pinch of salt to release the sulphur, which makes the onions cook to softness. Once they're soft, I add a tablespoon (ish) of plain flour, cook this in and then begin to add some of the steamer water. This needs to be stirred as it warms and thickens to prevent lumps. Once I've added enough water, I add a couple of teaspoons of mustard, stock powder and pepper. Again this needs adequate stirring to mix the ingredients thoroughly so that they combine with the liquid, shallot mixture; merging, breaking down individual barriers to become a single entity called onion gravy, in which only the shallot pieces can be seen to have individuality. During this process the steamed veg is ready and turned off. I check the potatoes, turning them over to crisp on a different side. I stir the roasting Brussels sprouts for similar browning. As the potatoes need only another 10 minutes, I place the seitan/squash tray back in on the lower shelf, propping the roasted Brussels on an up-turned cake tin on the floor of the oven. The table has been prepared with a candle/ivy centerpiece and I call in my younger son to help get out the cutlery, crackers etc. I had already made a salad dressing, which I've put on the slaw to get it softening. The cranberry sauce also goes on the table, whilst I begin the process of dishing out the dinner onto plates. As I cut the seitan, I

can see that it has worked very well and call my eldest son into see it; he looks excited. However, once cut some pieces sort of fall apart, however at this stage I'm past caring! The boys choose not to have roasted squash as they're not keen, I find this amazing as it's probably my favourite taste on the plate, so more for me (as leftovers). I'm pleased that everything has come out successfully and looks how it should. However, I'm so hungry that I have to control an urge to skip the cracker jokes and just eat. Instead I tell the boys that I just want to taste the seitan roast first. It is just right, with a great chewy texture, savoury flavour contrasted with the sweeter marinated tofu and carrot. I'm content with a good, successful dinner and can relax into the occasion. On eating I'm particularly in love with the roasted squash, its thick, savoury sweetness is so satisfying. The roasted Brussels sprouts were finished with lemon juice that adds another layer of taste into the meal. The pots are great, the shallot gravy tasty and I'm quite a fan of cranberry sauce too. My only doubt is the winter slaw – yes it's tasty, fresh and a nice change, but on the Christmas dinner plate it seems too cold, a slight disappointment, but not the end of the world. However, it meant I got to use a range of allotment veg and we have a colourful display on our plates. We all eat up happily, with the boys having seconds of seitan. Later on we enjoy the Christmas pudding after it has been steamed in a pressure cooker for an hour. The Cider Brandy flavour is a little too dominant and next year I'll tone that down, however it is moist and tasty and enjoyed by all.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> rebeccasandover (2011) -Eating Off the Plots- Christmas Dinner, Wordpress available at <http://rebeccasandover.wordpress.com/2011/09/12/somerton-allotments-opening-community-harvest-cook-in-10911/>



Figs 32 & 33 -Cooked Seitan and Squash Roast, Steaming purple and green Brussel Sprouts,



Figs 34 & 35 - Dinner is served, Eating the allotment sourced Christmas Dinner

Being able to source the majority of the veg from the plot really helped make this Christmas dinner cheap to produce. This was especially helpful at this expensive time of year. Even though I had to deal with poor carrots that certainly would not have made the grade if on sale in the shops, I felt a commitment to the produce that went beyond what I usually experienced. I had a desire to prevent any waste of the produce and to make the most of the less successful crops. However this commitment had limits, after using the worm-holed carrots for Christmas dinner that took awhile to cut away the holey areas of the vegetable, I ended up discarding a handful of these to the home compost and

returned to buying carrots. The holey nature of these vegetables led to a feeling of disgust and a desire to reject them for consumption.

### **5:70 CLOSING THE SEASON**

Self-provisioning our Christmas dinner through plot produce was a satisfying way to end this first season on the plot. Through this time of shortest days and chilly temperatures life seemed suspended on the plot. The season had drawn to a close with the long pause before growth would resume there. However even in this quiet, cold period wider plot forces could create affects on the plot. Frost and ice help to break up the soil, excess rain creating clogging clay, strong winds drying the topsoil. Also active winter animals and birds could also impact, digging up abandoned tubers or searching for winter-sown garlic or beans. For the allotmenteer this pause gave a break from the physical engagement with the plot as it was time for planning the new season, checking seed supplies and working out how to tackle the stickiest problems from last season.

### **CONCLUDING ANALYSIS POINT - DOING FOOD - KNOWING FOOD**

The nature of working closely with the plot, the matter of the soil, seed, produce and elements creates a sense of *knowing* the veg in a way that goes beyond that with shop-bought or even farmers market bought veg. This knowing comes from the immersive embodied experience where processes of sensorial engagement allow for visceral learning of the produce. This visceral immersion in the process of producing food removes the barriers between the human more-than-human through sensory perceptions, allowing for the produce to not only be accepted as food but engenders a state of commitment to the veg where waste is avoided. This process of visceral learning can be said here to involve a process of mattering, where doing the plot resulted in engaging with and adapting to its matter that begins to uncover the agency of nature in doing food, so decentering the human in nature-culture debates and rematerialising food within AFN literature. These discussions work to illustrate Ingold's (2011) concepts of processual change that is highlighted by processes of adaption required on the plot and in the kitchen.

In the kitchen this sensorial engagement takes a different track as the focus shifts to transforming this produce into tasty, visually appealing meals where an abundance of vegetables are used in everyday, as well as special meals. In the kitchen, single food entities are transformed into food assemblages through processes of a merging of flavours developed through cooking practices. Therefore the shallots, oil, mustard, flavourings and water develop into shallot gravy. Squash, onions, garlic, parsley, oil and water become a roasted squash soup. Single entities are combined to become food assemblages, with actions of the cook partially directing, partially responding to the matter in these

processes of combination. The elements of chance come into these moments where the cooking can veer off track, away from the desired taste outcomes. At other times, inspiration and adaption in the kitchen can lead to meals becoming more successful than expected, such as when roasting the potatoes for our roast dinner in November. Here the enhanced texture of plot grown potatoes deepened the pleasure in the dish. These conceptualisations of the fieldwork show how this study can engage with Bennett's (2010) theories of Vibrant Matter where a greater awareness of how the human works in cohort with matter to create assemblages can be developed. Here individual matters can combine to create a new entity, such as in creating dishes in the kitchen.

## **CONCLUDING CHAPTER**

### **DOING FOOD- KNOWING FOOD THROUGH MATTERING AND VISCERAL LEARNING**

#### **6:0 INTRODUCTION**

By following the matter of food from seed, soil, rain and physical labour through to moments of harvest, waste, cooking and consumption this thesis provides original contributions to the academy by investigating how visceral learning takes place within processes of mattering on the allotment. By examining human more-than-human encounters on the plot, conceptualisations are formed that expose how material affects transgress human-nature boundaries through affective bodily registers within processes of material transformations. This investigation not only produced theoretical knowledge but also contributes to practical understandings of *how* people learn to grow food. As suggested in the Introduction chapter a difference exists between knowing food that is produced through standardised agricultural methods and food that is grown through known methods. The extent of that difference has been examined over the course of this thesis by an investigation into allotmentee practices. By immersing myself in ways of doing food, the ways of practical knowledge have been explored and how they contribute to materially knowing our food have been explored. Empirical chapters examined the interchanges of affects between nature and allotmentee in self-provisioning methods, revealing the blurring boundaries between subjectivities through plot practices.

This concluding chapter will first set out the original contributions of this research to methodological perspectives, revealing how embodied emplaced ethnography allows for the subtle affects of pre-cognitive encounters to be investigated. It will then move on to establishing how this work addresses its research questions, contributes to Cultural Food Geographies, AFNs, as well as nature-culture literatures.

#### **6:01 RETURNING TO FOOD ORIGINS**

A brief return will be made here to the question of food origins as set out in Chapter One. At the beginning of this thesis a question was posed about how we can know food from a full,

life-history perspective that follows the transformations of matter. An example was set out comparing homemade soup and a soup bought from a supermarket. The limits to knowledge were explored to reveal how both soups had limits to knowledge. However, now a comparison can be made between knowledge of a supermarket bought soup and one made from allotment vegetables grown myself.

I made a roasted Butternut squash soup was made from plot vegetables on 2nd October 2011 (see Fig 1). A comparison made to a supermarket bought butternut squash soup helps to distinguish ways of knowing food. The supermarket soup is purchased in a plastic container that provides labels with nutritional, origin of production as well as methods of heating it. By looking back over the course of the empirical chapters, processes that lead to the cooking and consumption of the plot soup can be reversed to reveal the material transformations and journeys of visceral learning that provided a foundation to its production. This leads to contrasting types of knowledge. The supermarket soup contains codified knowledge presented within a scientific format of calories, fat content etc. with percentages of daily recommended allowances. For someone following a strict diet such information would be essential to his or her meal decisions.

In contrast the plot-produced soup represents embodied knowledge. As the producer of the plot vegetables, as well as the cook of the soup, full knowledge of the material contents are within me. Tracking back over the course of the growing year reveals the material transformation enacted on the plot that can be traced to further deepen knowledge of the material composition of the soup. By reading my field diary, soup recipe and finding out what added matter I put on the plot, this knowledge is shareable in an abstract form but not felt until the food is consumed. Many allotmenters stated that the difference with homegrown food could be tasted. However this was not explored by this study and would be an interesting and methodological challenging way of developing this research further.

Knowledge of the ready-made Sainsbury's soup is on the label. Consumers of ready-made products are limited in their ability to know the material origins of the food by what information is presented on the label. This blinds consumers to the human labour required to both produce the vegetables and process them into soup. They are also blind to the location, material resources and agencies of nature or added matter and the climatic conditions



featured in their production. Therefore decisions to purchase and consume these items are based on consumer trust for a brand to deal truthfully, with belief in the contents of the pot matching the description on its label.

By revealing the impacts of human labour and reliance on natural resources of soil, climate etc. to produce the plot grown vegetables, Chapter Five highlights how current shop-based methods of food supply hide the resources on which food production is founded.

Investigations of growing food and its material foundation in nature are not common within cultural food geographies and AFN literature (Cook et al. 2013). As discussed in the literature review, whilst Mol (2008, 2013), Roe (2006) and Stassart & Whatmore (2003) do include examinations of material engagements with food there is no consideration of a bodily investigation of how food is produced and how people adapt to nature. Mol (2008, 2013) explores material transformations in food as it is assimilated into the body, a process that is also the conduit for a discussion of the origins of food. However these works have not linked explorations of material engagements with food with the question of how we produce food.



Fig1 Plot produced Butternut Squash Soup, Fig 2 Squash still growing



Fig 3 Roasting Squash

The key original finding of this work is focused on the whole process by which people adapt to nature through bodily responses that is termed here mattering. By revealing the processes of mattering that highlight material transformations through bodily doings with nature on the plots, this study has rematerialised perspectives on food systems. The concept of visceral learning also challenges the tendency for people to see themselves as separate from nature. Somatic encounters between allotmenters and the plot reveal a realm of immersion through sensing. These concepts are important to academic food literatures as they not only highlight the role of the often hidden (from consumers perspectives) matter of nature in systems of provisioning food but also provide a spotlight on the processes by which encounters with nature are conducted through the body, providing moments of visceral learning. As discussed

in the literature review a material, bodily focus on food is not addressed in literature of AFNs and has only recently begun to be explored in cultural food geographies. However, within cultural food geographies these explorations have not delved into *how* people 'do' food in bodily, material ways from either production or consumption perspectives. This was shown to be the case even in the work of Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) that provides a founding principle of the approach taken here. This key work switched from developing a theory on viscosity into exploring its ability to inform food politics without investigating what *are* visceral processes of engagement. Only the work of Roe (2006) has investigated this from the perspective of how matter becomes accepted by people as food. This thesis takes Roe's work further by examining at material, processual levels the practices of engagements between the human more-than-human that set up bodily responses of adaptation. This investigation has set out the material basis on which food interactions and bodily responses to them are based, thereby so setting out what visceral engagements *are* through a materially informed enquiry. Concepts developed through plot practices, I argue, can be utilised to further develop cultural food geographies and AFNs research. This point will be further examined later in this chapter.

## **6:20 DOING ETHNOGRAPHY**

### **i) Emplaced Ethnography**

By bringing to life the location for this research it has been possible to use the distinctive qualities of the place of fieldwork to inform the theoretical development of this thesis. In so doing this work responds to Pink's (2009:14) call '*to bring local voices into academic representations*' which this work does through the allotmentee participants. However by paying reflexive, intimate attention to the sites of fieldwork it has been possible to add the matters of the plots themselves as participants in the study and changes there that span a growing season. The spaces of the allotments themselves have been brought to life through detailed engagement via auto-ethnographic allotment practices, at Somerton Allotments and observation and engaging with school children's' activities at Lytes Cary Allotments. By exploring the material spaces of the allotments through visceral approaches, this thesis has attempted to reduce the anthropocentric gaze by sensing the nature of the plots. The contact made with allotmentee participants also extended over a season allowing for trust and familiarity to develop. Rich interview transcripts were recorded that, along with the participant observation and auto-ethnographic field notes provided an emplaced ethnography.

As discussed in chapter three the emplacement of this study is not only within the geographical location of the allotment sites. The work of local food charities also provided a socio-cultural context enabling this study to respond to contemporary social concerns. By exploring methods by which allotmenters learn to grow, this study can disseminate findings back to third sector organisations. Therefore by specific immersions within the plot an intensity of engagement of growing was experienced, providing a depth of emplacement that was key to this study, so tracing the matters of the plot via the transformations of growing food. Through auto-ethnographic fieldwork this depth of engagement allowed agencies of nature to emerge, shaping plot harvests as well as this study.

## ii) Embodied Ethnography

By adopting a visceral auto-ethnographic fieldwork approach this research has been able to develop embodied fieldwork practices. Embodied fieldwork, as set out in chapter three, is seen by Pink (2009), Paterson (2009) and others as an important method of extending knowledge of nature-culture interconnectivity. This study extends methods of doing embodied research by going beyond theorisations that separate mind and body. A visceral approach, as set out here, involves bodily attending to sensory affects and instinctual responses to nature through learning to grow food on the plot. The heightened self-reflexivity of auto-ethnography enabled the sensitive reacting to the matters of the plot providing a deeper immersion with doing ethnography. This original development of visceral-based enquiry was undertaken by closely attending to responses made at the plot where natural affects of the plot transgressed human perceptive boundaries via somatic pathways. This enabled responses to occur at the pre-cognitive level as well as through will and intention. This provides a unique example of the de-centering of the human by bringing to the fore the merging of person-plot material affects through visceral adaptations. This provides answers to a key research questions:

*How does this study extend knowledge of the role of material visceral encounters in bodily performativities?*

This question will be returned to throughout the following sections as it is fundamental to the findings of this thesis.

The performative aspect of visceral learning engages with Crouch (2003) and Nash's (2000) calls for investigations into processes of doing to becoming. The findings set out here over a growing season chart the path from doing to becoming through moment by moment processes of adaption, with my own experiences reflected in those of other plot holders. Sabine and Ben in particular provided direct evidence in their interviews of responding to plot conditions by adjusting their processes of raising French beans after their first sowings failed. Reactions to the material conditions on the plot resulted in the successful growth of their second sowing beans showing a process of adaption to failure. The butternut squashes used in my soup also required extra attention as I had to react to the poor state of the plants when I bought them, an issue exacerbated by the dry spring. Therefore whilst other plants were planted, watered and left, the butternut squashes required more regular watering and only bloomed into health when the weather turned wetter. However responses were also required later in the season as the gourds needed lifting off the ground by stones to prevent rot in the wetter weather. These processes of learning to respond to material conditions on the plot, through doing the plot, resulted in the becoming both of plot harvests as well as plot experience that for some participants led them along the path to becoming experienced and successful allotmenters. These examples provide moments of both tacit as well as overt visceral learning. For Sabine and Ben watching the failure of their first French bean sowings resulted in a deliberative decision to raise the second sowings differently. This was an overt adaption to the matter of the plot, where by changing practices the growers *felt* that they could make a difference. Whereas responding to the crops after sowing or the planting of the squash plants resulted in their being attended to in more pre-cognitive, instinctual ways, that sometimes resulted in conscious new knowledges of growing emerging. These differences between instinctual and deliberative responses to the matter of the plot show how knowledge and instinct can merge and emerge through visceral practices and so also provide evidence to answer the second research question-

*How is practical knowledge enacted within engagements of nature-society on the plot?*

### iii) Cooking as Method

As explored in chapter three, cooking has been seen by researchers as a difficult practice to investigate directly. Indirect methods of research have been used to interview participants about their cooking habits or to keep a food diary (Meah & Watson 2011, Roe 2006, Wreiden

et al. 2007, Valentine 2001). However as highlighted in Little et al. (2009) cooking from scratch can have major impacts on households with the tendency for women to be involved in lengthier, more complicated cooking practices. Therefore, cooking is integral to any debate on local food and especially so when discussing consuming food grown at an allotment. The volume of production that can result from a successful harvest has been shown to result in allotmenters sharing their produce and in researching new recipes, for both special and everyday consumption practices.

However it was only by experiencing myself the impacts of both producing and consuming my own harvests that the full impact of allotment growing on the household was recorded. Again embodied responses to the harvests shaped cooking practice, storage and waste. When unblemished, delicious carrots were harvested in mid summer an extra commitment was experienced for them. This was partly drawn from pride in their success, a desire to eat them as well as a recognition of the hard work involved in their production. Additionally I felt a need to experiment in cooking them, as well as to eat them raw in a salad. In contrast, when holey, diseased carrots were harvested in late autumn, disgust was experienced leading to a dismissal of many of them to the compost bin. With the butternut and crown prince squashes, again an extra layer of commitment was experienced for their storage and use. As crops that are expensive to buy, as well as being a favourite food, I had a heightened feeling of care for them and enjoyment in using them. When choosing to make the butternut squash soup I knew that roasting the squashes first added a depth of flavour and richness to the dish. As I would be serving the soup to my son who did not overly enjoy eating squash, I also intended for the richness of the roasted squash to make a more appetising meal. Finally, once prepared and cooked the soup was blended to make a smooth soup, which I knew would help my son accept it as food. These examples show the range of visceral responses experienced through this study. Here a tacit desire for the taste of a cooked meal (the soup) affects practices in the kitchen. Therefore, these experiences draw less from the instinctual and unconscious, but more on a forward expectation of flavour based on experiences of cooking, with the desired outcome a taste that is aspired to.

Cooking journeys made with the produce set out in chapter five reveal how the commitment to allotment produce continues after harvest within the home. They also reinforce the depth of embodied engagement with the produce throughout its supply chain where condition,

quantity and flavour of the crops affected cooking and storage practices. It is by cooking the produce myself that the full impacts of embodied engagements with the plot through auto-ethnography are revealed. Through cooking and eating the produce myself the full integration of subject and object are made within this study, as the matters of the plot are responded to through meal preparation before being consumed and assimilated into the body. Through these practices the matters of the plot, the plants, the inherence of climate and temporality as well as the labour of the allotmentee are consumed and assimilated into the body. A full cycle of allotmentee impact, plot conditioning of plant matter and injection of cooking skills are experienced on consumption and recorded within this study, taking further both embodied ethnography as well as experiments in 'doing cooking' in research.

However plot material journeys did not only flow from plot to home, in the examples of the community cook-ins, the matter of the plot flowed within circuits of the plot, the allotmentees and others consuming produce on the plots themselves. The space of the plot represented a place of production as well as consumption, providing representations for the diminishing of the supply chain in plot practices. Through these practices the space of the plot was engaged with both physically as well as conceptually, as it provided a location to disrupt perceptions of vegetable supply chains conventions by joining the space of production and consumption. Through these means, this discussion also addresses the final research question-

*How allotment practices explore alternative food provision through emplaced visceral methods*

This is not to suggest that the allotment provides an alternative to global food supply chains. However, for those allotmentees successfully raising crops this was a very real outcome to their practices as they could avoid supermarket produce that was so unanimously disliked. By addressing the other research questions of this study and showing *how* gardening knowledge is developed, this research does provide findings that can extend alternatives to commodified food trading networks.

The cook-ins themselves also provided an opportunity to extend cooking practices within research. By fully engaging with allotmentees (at Somerton) and with school children (at



Lytes Cary) this embodied researcher was able to fully blend into the research field by taking the position of a cook and obtaining an 'insider's knowledge' of events (Limb & Dwyer 2001). These activities showed that cooking events could form visceral focus groups where informal discussions, especially amongst the allotmenters at Somerton, were able to draw out attitudes and approaches to cooking that were more difficult to obtain through interview methods. Whilst allotmenters and visitors were engaged in tasks of chopping vegetables and preparing the dishes for the cook-in, talk was focused on cooking vegetables to reveal the range of practices engaged with at home. However these events went beyond talk by being embodied activities where visceral responses to growing and cooking produce could be explored, revealing a concern with storing the harvests and finding new recipes for produce.

For the Somerton cook-in I was able to record the event both through photographs, field notes and by recording a discussion with a participant after the event to explore their responses to the dishes cooked. This discussion highlighted the power of the cook-in, not only as a form of research but also as an impact where my familiarity with vegetables through cooking could be disseminated to the participants. The ability of the cook-ins to disseminate food knowledge to participants was even more vividly observed at Lytes Cary, where I cooked with infant school children. This event was run less like a focus group as few questions were asked of the children about their home experiences. Instead it ran as a cookery workshop that I could observe and record through photographs, field notes and as well as videoing some of the children's responses.

This discussion reveals how a visceral-based enquiry can examine that which is seen to exceed the human, providing methods for investigations into the tacit, the instinctual, the more-than-human, which will be further explored below. Through examining the contributions of this enquiry to methodological questions, it is already providing answers to the first research question:

*How does his study extend knowledge of nature-society relations in the space of the allotment?*

This is an overarching theme in the findings of this research and will be further examined in the following sections.

### **6:30 FOOD ASSEMBLAGES**

As investigations in chapter five showed, exploring cooking practices with plot produce reveals how individual vegetables and seasonings combine into dishes for meals. This is highlighted by the example of soup as no matter its origin, it represents an assemblage of food matters in a bowl. The example of the soup created by produce from the plot shows how the composition of this assemblage can be more fully known. By drawing on the knowledge of the location of production of the vegetables, this soup, if commercially on sale would be branded -Somerton Allotments Soup, or Ashen Cross Soup, as the place of production can be pinpointed. However, if instead the focus was on the methods by which the vegetable matters were acquired for growing, the soup would be branded Serendipity Soup, or Pot Luck Soup to reflect the chance encounters that brought the shallots, squash plants and parsley plant to my plot. This sets clearly the difference between home grown and mass-produced produce as on the plot chance and the unpredictable become a feature of growing and cooking. Responding to the unexpected is a key feature of the adaptations made on the plot and in the kitchen that become incorporated into plot and kitchen assemblages. This compares with industrial agro-food production and processing techniques where the emphasis is on standardisation and the diminishment of the unpredictable (Hinchliffe & Lavau 2013). Investigating plot practices shows the reality of unfolding life within nature and the irrepressible force of processual change.

The brand of the plot soup discussed in 6:01 would not change its material composition. However simply listing the ingredients of the soup and the location of vegetable production would still hide information on the matter that made the soup possible. Figs 2 above shows the butternut squashes still growing on the plot, showing that before harvest the plant looked healthy with strong green leaves and the gourds remained unblemished. The soil looks fairly dry and of a darkish colour, suggesting organic matter. However the most noticeable feature of the soil is the preponderance of stones. By careful observation it can be seen that large, flat stones have been utilised to lift the gourds from the ground. The plants have developed well, suggesting adequate amounts of sunshine and rain over the growing season. The dryness of the top layer of soil suggests there has not been a recent deluge of rain and perhaps a windy site. Therefore deeper knowledge of where this squash has been grown reveals the complexity of the material assemblage involved in the production of the soup. By following the material transformations of the soup across plot life and into the kitchen the full agentic

assemblage of matters involved are charted, highlighting both the myriad complexities of life involved in raising produce as well as the mergings between plot matters and human matters in its production.

Still there are elements missing from this picture of this soup assemblage. Whilst advice was received from fellow allotmenters the key themes of chapter five revealed the step-by-step bodily adaptations required to successfully raise harvests. The processes of visceral learning were based on the body sensing the most useful methods of interacting with the matters of the plot such as weeding, as well as the allotmenter relaxing into repetitive tasks on the plot that afforded moments of thinking the plot. These processes were shown in chapter five to be the methods by which knowledge and experience were accrued and were reinforced by extracts in chapter four from other allotmenters, such as Joy, Tasha and Ben. Via these practices the allotmenter also enters the soup assemblage through their attention and care to the plot.

These moments add to Bennett's (2010) conceptualisations of assemblages by looking beyond human intentionality on the plot. Whilst the allotmenter is an added component to the soup assemblage, the fieldwork set out in empirical chapters uncovers the power of the matter of the plot to effect plot practices. Chapter five showed in depth moment-by-moment bodily adaptations required by the allotmenter to learn how to effectively grow produce. The processes by which learning took place are described as moments of visceral learning as instinctive bodily systems sensed and responded to material engagements at the plot allowing for tacit understandings to be made of the nature there. The theorisations of nature set out here go beyond seeing human interactions with plot matter as being between two bounded entities. Whilst it may be clear that the plot is not one distinct entity, the explorations of how humans viscerally respond to the matter of the plot reveal how the boundaries between the human and more-than-human blur through plot practices. By viscerally adapting to the matter of the plot, human intentionality is diluted, subverted or distracted by needing to respond to plot matter. This adaptation, it has been shown do not always occur through planned practices but also through instinctive adaptations put into action through pre-cognitive processes. The distinction between agential matter and human intentionality has been broken down through the sometime failings of human orderings and the need to respond to matters at the plot.

## **6:40 PROCESSES OF MATTERING**

The practices by which human adaption to the agency of more-than-human matters through processes of visceral adaption are described in this thesis as processes of mattering. Mattering encapsulates the cultivation of both the plot and the allotmenteer through the practices of learning to grow. Visceral engagements involve the allotmenteer sensing the plot through touch, sound, sight and responding through both instinct and planned adaptations. These processes of sensing and response form the process of mattering where both the plot and allotmenteer are changed. This provides conceptualisations of how practices of doing food and knowing food by allotmentees are enacted on the plot. Mattering also provides a useful frame to explore Ingold's (2011) notions of processual change, as well as Grosz's (2005) theories of adaption through natural selection. In highlighting how processual change occurs between relations, Ingold (2011: 118-121) uses the example of weather and the land to conceptualise the blurring boundaries between entities, which relates to concerns of this study both directly and indirectly. On the plot the weather has been shown to be an actor affecting not only harvest outcomes but also plot practices and directing processes of visceral adaption. However these mutable entities are never the same. Processes of dynamic change through temporal and physical earth systems provide unique moments of interaction. Processes such as welcome rain that soaks into the soil, quenching the plants and providing the foundation for growth contrast with days or weeks of heavy rain creating mud, stagnant pools and floods preventing successful plot growth. However all of these elements form, in Ingold's terms, the meshwork weaving plants, earth, weather and allotmenteer into dynamic forms of interconnectivity that characterise practices on the plot. How the allotmenteer participates in this plot meshwork occurs within processes of mattering where embodied adaption is made through plot stimuli creating cerebral and non-cerebral responses to the diverse matters of the plot. However by examining how visceral learning occurs through tacit interchanges of knowledge from nature to human on the plots can be expanded to relate to a wider range of human more-than-human encounters. By developing conceptualisations of the passage of tacit knowledge through somatic bodily processes a wider application of this research to practices outside of the plot could also be explored. Processes that similarly rely on chance, encounter and adaption, suggest the applicability of this method of enquiry to other fields based on creative practices such as arts, craft and design, as well as bodily disciplines of dance and complementary therapies. This conceptualisation of embodied adaption through

sensing can also be applied to wider educative forums to explore the processes of learning new tools.

Grosz (2005) similarly looks to a wider context of forces affecting human and more-than-human interactions. Using Darwin's theories of natural selection, Grosz explores concepts of dynamic processes of change through adaptation; concepts that she seeks to extend from their focus on nature to also relating to cultural processes. Chapters four and five investigate these notions through exploring how nature and culture are cultivated through processes of embodied adaptation on the plot. Cultivation can be used to describe the processes of change enacted on the plot (Mol 2013), however the term implies human centred activity. As this study has shown nature is an unpredictable force that requires response in order to produce harvests. Commercial farming establishes protocols for managing this unpredictability; responding to a more unconstrained nature on the plot allows for its agency to impact in unexpected ways. Therefore cultivation on the plot has been situated within the full force of nature, climate and seasonality. Experienced growers were shown to anticipate this unpredictability using both embodied and rationalising approaches but were shown to still make adaptations as the agency of climate, pests and diseases encroached on desired plot outcomes. This opens the way to using the term *mattering* to describe the processes of doing cultivation that here are specifically situated in engagements with the matter of nature of the plots. The *mattering* of nature through visceral learning allows a focus on the blurring of boundaries between entities, reinforcing the idea that...'*the separation between a thing and its environment cannot be absolutely definite and clear-cut*' (Bergson 1988 cited Grosz 2005: 135). The wider environment of the plot has distinctive impacts on plot practices showing how boundaries between entities of nature-culture are traversed through tacit processes on the plot, where nature-allotment merge. This method of research by its full emplacement in the plots reveals the full impacts on this wider ecology on growing practices. This thesis also extends understandings of human practices occurring within nature, where human more-than-human agencies merge through sensory pathways. This theme could be developed in further food research to address issues of environmental sustainability by exploring the wider ecologies of food production. In particular it could be used to explore how farmers adapt to technological innovation within a concern for environmental impacts. In addition, this visceral approach to *mattering* could be used to develop further research into non-professional growers in, for example, CSAs.

Eventually the matter of the plot becomes accepted or rejected as food. By developing concepts of how matter and allotmenteer or consumer merge through instinctual and somatic responses this work develops Roe's (2006) concept of *'Things Become Food'*. The immersive nature of the research on the plots not only investigates the visceral processes of learning to grow. By running cooking workshops on both sites the processes of growing and preparing food were also seen as processes through which food became more fully known and accepted. The examples in chapter five that set out the community cook-ins undertaken on both plots reveal processes by which vegetable matter is accepted as food. This is particularly striking by the example of the infant school children at Lytes Cary Allotments. The immersive practices of growing, picking, preparing and cooking produce led to the children's acceptance of the matter as food that resulted in them eating colourful salads including unusual ingredients. These activities provide moments where experiential practises led to the merging of materialities between plot and children. Here processes of materially knowing the food for consumption occur, leading to food acceptance and consumption. These processes of material engagement where sensorial processes lead to the blurring of boundaries between human and more-than-human, result in the produce becoming familiar and known reducing the tendency for children to reject novel dishes. This research, therefore, takes further the work of Roe (2006) by revealing *how* visceral food practices can '*translate the distance*' between known and the unknown food. Unfamiliar food can create a fear response that may lead to aversion or even disgust. By entering into the sensorial realm between human and more-than-human, by touching, smelling and witnessing the food as a plant in the ground, the food becomes materially familiar. Incrementally, as the food is then washed, chopped, grated and cooked, it becomes known. Through the processes of describing to the children what was going to be cooked and by engaging them fully within the tasks of preparing the lunch, the dishes presented became not only known but also owned by the children through their embodied, sensorial connections with them. This led to a surprising level of enjoyment of all the dishes by most of the children.

These findings set out important pathways through which children can learn to accept food through regular interactions with their production and preparation for consumption. This thesis has shown how the affective boundaries between human more-than-human are blurred through material sensorial interactions. These findings not only take on conceptualisations of

cultural food geographies and AFN literatures, they also can have practical impacts outside of the academy. The food practices described here could be replicated in a range of locales, such as in school grounds, as growing can take place in varied settings. Small beds could be created via novel means such as tyre beds for potatoes, or even builders' dumpy bags, which were used in the Capital Growth London 2012 growing project<sup>30</sup>. As such this project takes on the work of Roe (2006) and Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) by not only developing conceptualisations of human-more-than-human encounters through food but by also providing a route for practical application. By developing conceptualisations of the visceral in this research, it has been practically shown how '*...eating demonstrates our taste for change*' (Probyn 2000:10).

### **6:50 ALTERING MATTER BEING ALTERED BY MATTER**

A focus on doing the plot through mattering and visceral adaptations develops and extends Whatmore's (2004, 2006) theorisations by revealing the processes by which the human and more-than-human merge through sensory pathways. This research brings another layer of understanding, of the processes occurring at the tacit level showing the mergings of matter with the human through sensory pathways. It is evident within investigations of food production and cooking that a more-than-human perspective is necessary to provide balance to examinations based on human socio-economic circuits within food systems. Whilst human management is central to food systems, the dynamic processes of the natural resources providing a foundation for food production require more attention within cultural geographies food research. Therefore this study reveals the agency of the matter of the plot as creating processes of mattering, which includes material doings on the plot and in the kitchen shaping moments of visceral learning.

Embodied approaches and embodied knowledge represent a minded-body approach, which integrate the cerebral as well as bodily human. Visceral approaches developed in this study work within an embodied perspective and take embodiment further by examining the processes through which instinctive experiences are sensed through somatic pathways and responded to via instinct as well as planned actions. Somatic pathways link the external of the plot to the internal allotment body through touch, sight, sound, taste and smell. Somatic pathways also link the mind and body as they traverse nerve pathways through the body.

---

<sup>30</sup>Capital Growth (2012) –available online at <http://www.capitalgrowth.org/>, accessed 5/12/13

These pathways extend the sphere of influence of the human from outside of the body as well as incorporating the affects of the external world through visceral processes. This interface of engagement via the sensory, allows the human more-than-human to merge, uniting external nature and internal nature. This concepts helps to break down perceptions of the division between human and natural worlds by showing them separate and yet joined through this sensory interface. Here the visceral incorporates instinctive and affective bodily registers that encompass tacit processes of response to the matter of the plot.

These findings take further conceptualisations of the visceral developed by Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) by revealing how visceral learning link the affective, the embodied and the material as discussed above. This thesis has provided in depth investigations into the role of visceral responses on the plot and in the kitchen that has provided detailed illustrations of what the visceral *actually is*, which was missing from the literature. It demonstrates how a visceral approach can take further cultural food geographies and nature-culture theorisations. Conceptualisations of the visceral developed within this research demonstrate *how* food is produced and consumed, so providing an ideal conduit to rematerialise perspectives of food systems. However this research also has sympathies with Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy position of seeking an embodied concept by which to develop food politics. By demonstrating the pathways by which knowledge is enacted on the plot the mystique of growing is diminished providing routes to understandings of how to grow. A process that can result in affordable, fresh produce. This research has also demonstrated the power of the allotment in providing a space of community growing, where growing knowledge, seeds and other community affects are circulated. Therefore this research can provide tangible evidence to support the work of The Soil Association, Capital Growth and others promoting community growing.

The immersion in nature required to successfully produce vegetables highlights that as allotmenters attempt to alter the matter of the plot, so they become altered by such matter. This research shows there is not a linear progression between plot planning, action on the plot and harvest. This perspective helps to decentre the human in discourses on cultural food geographies to allow the heady, sensorial affects of nature to be revealed. Visceral learning provides a concept to explore instinctual responses to the affects of nature as allotmenters do



the plot. However the investigation of the visceral as set out above can also be adapted to explorations in other spheres of nature-culture enquiry.

By setting out the findings of this work in relation to the literature that informs it, it has been demonstrated that this thesis adds to discourses on nature-society relations, specifically how human and more-than-human agency merge through plot practices creating a greater complexity of systems underlying how allotmenters learn to grow. By the immersive character of growing myself on the allotment it has been shown how allotmenters learn to grow produce. This focus on learning to grow is missing from AFN and Cultural Food Geographies literature and is important as these practices are cited by government, charities and third sector organisations as producing both healthy lifestyles as well as addressing issues of access to food and personal food security. By exploring how allotmenters learn to grow, the agency of the plot itself has been established, along with the limits to human attempts to create order. The more embodied approaches adopted by experienced growers were shown to create more simple, manageable systems of food production.

The theorisations presented here of visceral learning, visceral knowledge and mattering develop more unified conceptualisations of human more-than-human encounters, where nature and the human are integrated. This provides a framework for the processes by which people sense the more-than-human via tacit, instinctive somatic pathways and so producing responses. These theorisations can have far wider applicability through further examinations of nature-culture both within food systems and beyond. The originality of this work also resides in its model for undertaking research into the tacit, the instinctual and felt arenas of life. This provides frameworks for developing research on the affective registers of life through the application of visceral learning in providing somatic examinations of affect. Such investigations have been said to exceed human capacity to know (Pile 2010, Anderson 2006). However by employing an embodied viscerally focus ethnography, where the researcher attunes to the field of study, it has been shown that investigations into the tacit are not only possible but can have wide ranging impacts on developing understandings of human more-than-human relations. This investigation, in showing *how* people learn to grow food and transform food by cooking develops understandings of how knowledge is developed through nature-culture immersions and so providing a platform to comprehend the agency of the matter itself.



## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Alkon, A.H. and Agyeman. 2011. *Cultivating Food Justice*, The MIT Press
- Anderson, B. 2006. *Becoming and Being Hopeful: Towards a Theory of Affect*, *Environment & Planning D* 24:5 733-752
- Amin, A. 2002. *Spatialities of globalisation*, *Environment and Planning A* 2002 34 385-399
- Atterton, J. and Ward, N. 2007. *Rural Innovation*, NESTA Exploration 01
- Bennett, K. 2000. *Inter/viewing and inter/subjectivities: Powerful performances in Seymour, S., Hughes, A. and Morris, C. (eds.) Ethnography and rural research*. Countryside and Community Press: Cheltenham.
- Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press
- Blunt, A. et al. 2003. *Cultural Geography in Practice*, Arnold Publications
- Buckingham, S. 2005. *Women (re)construct the plot: the regen(d)eration of urban food growing*, *Area* 37:2 171-179
- Burgoine, T. et al. 2009. *Changing foodscapes 1980-2000, using the ASH30 Study*, *Appetite* 53 157-165
- Caraher, M. and Coveney, J. 2003. *Public Health and Food Policy*, *Public Health Nutrition* 1-9
- Clarke, N., Cloke P., Barnett C. and Malpass A. 2008. *The Spaces and Ethics of Organic Food*, *Journal of Rural Studies* 24 219-230
- Chang, H. 2008. *Autoethnography as Method*, Left Coast Press Inc
- Cloke, P. and Jones, O. 2001. *Dwelling, place, and landscape: an orchard in Somerset*, *Environment and Planning A* 2001 33 649-666
- Cloke, P. and Little, J. 1999. *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality*, *American Journal of Sociology* 10: 6
- Cloke, P. and Milbourne, P. 1992. *Deprivation and Lifestyles in Rural Wales. Rurality and the Cultural Dimension*, *Journal of Rural Studies* 8:4 359-371
- Colls, R. 2012. *Feminism, bodily difference and non-representational geographies*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 430-445
- Cook, I. 2004. *Follow the Thing: Papaya*, *Antipode* 36:4
- Cook, I. et al. 2006. *Geographies of Food: Following*. *Progress in Human Geography* 30: 5 p655-666
- Cook, I. et al. 2009. *Geographies of Food: Afters*. *Progress in Human Geography*

- Cook, I. et al. 2013. (forthcoming) Food's cultural geographies: texture, creativity & publics. in Johnson, N., Schein, R. & Winders, J. (eds) *A New Companion to Cultural Geography*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Crang, M. and Cook, I. 1995. *Doing Ethnographies*, Geobooks
- Crouch, D, and Ward, C. 1988/1997. *The Allotment: Its landscape and culture*, Five Leaves Publications
- Crouch, D. 2003. Spacing, Performing and Becoming, *Environment and Planning A* 35 1945-1960
- Cuéllar-Padilla, M. and Calle-Collado, A. 2011. Can we find solutions with people? Participatory action research with small organic producers in Andalusia , *Journal of Rural Studies*, 27 372-383
- Degen, C. 2009. On vegetable love: gardening, plants, and people in the north of England, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 151-167
- Dewsbury, J. D. and Naylor, S. 2002. Practising geographical knowledge: Fields, Bodies and Dissemination, *Area* 34:3
- Dowler, E. and Caraher, M. 2003. *Local Food Projects: The New Philanthropy?* The Political Quarterly Publishing
- DuPuis, M. and Goodman, D. 2005. Should we go "home" to eat? Towards a reflexive politics of localism. *Journal of Rural Studies* 21: 3 p359-372.
- Egger, G. and Swinburn B. 1997. An "ecological" approach to the obesity pandemic, *BMJ* 315 477-80
- Feagan, R. 2007. The place of food: mapping out the 'local' in local food systems, *Progress in Human Geography* 31:1 23-42
- Featherstone, D. et al. 2011. Progressive localism and the construction of political alternatives, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 177-182
- Goodman, D. 1999. Agro-Food Studies in the 'Age of Ecology': Nature, Corporeality, Bio-Politics, *Sociologia Ruralis* 39:1
- Goodman, D. 2001. Ontology Matters: The Relational Materiality of Nature and Agro-Food Studies, *Sociologia Ruralis* 41:2
- Goodman, D. 2002. Rethinking Food Production-Consumption: Integrative Perspectives, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42:4
- Goodman, D. 2004. Rural Europe Redux? Reflections on Alternative Agro-Food Networks and Paradigm Change, *Sociologia Ruralis* 44:1

- Goodman, D. and DuPuis, M. 2002. Knowing Food and Growing Food: Beyond the Production- Consumption Debate, *Sociologia Ruralis* 42:1
- Grosz, E. 1993. A Thousand Tiny Sexes. *Feminism and Rhizomatics*, *Topoi*. An International Review of Philosophy 12:2 167-179
- Grosz, E. 1994. *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington
- Grosz, E. 2005. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*, Duke University Press books
- Grosz, E. 2008. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, Columbia University Press
- Guthman, J. 2004. The Trouble with 'Organic Lite' in California: a Rejoinder to the 'Conventionalisation' Debate, *Sociologia Ruralis* 44:3
- Haraway, D. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The science question in Feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, *Feminist Studies* 4:3
- Harris, E.M. 2010. Eat Local? Constructions of Place in Alternative Food Politics, *Geography Compass* 4:4
- Hayes-Conroy, A. and Hayes-Conroy, J. 2008. Taking back taste: feminism, food and visceral politics, *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15:5 461-473
- Hayes-Conroy, A. and Hayes-Conroy, J. 2010. Visceral Geographies: Mattering, Relating, Defying, *Geography Compass* 4:9
- Heley, J. and Jones, L. 2012. Relational rurals: Some thoughts on relating things and theory in rural studies, *Journal of Rural Studies* 28 208 217
- Hillyard, S. 2010. What's (still) wrong with ethnography? in Hillyard (ed.) *New Frontiers in Ethnography (Studies in Qualitative Methodology, Volume 11)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.1-18
- Hines, C. 2000. *Localization: A Global Manifesto*, Earthscan
- Hinrichs, C.C. 2000, Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16
- Hitchings, R. 2003. People, plants and performance: On actor network theory and the material pleasures of the private garden, *Social & Cultural Geography* 4:1
- Hollows, J. and Jones, S. 2010. 'At least he's doing something': moral entrepreneurship and individual responsibility in *Jamie's Ministry of Food*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13:3
- Hunter, J. et al. 2011. *Landshare and Beyond: Big Society Responses to Land Scarcity and Food?* Social Policy Association Annual Conference, Lincoln 2011

- Ilbery, B. and Maye, D. 2005. Alternative or conventional? An examination of specialist livestock production systems in the Scottish-English borders. In: Gilg, A., et al. (eds.) Wallingford, CABI, pp. 85-106.
- Ingold, T. 2007. Materials against Materiality, *Archeological Dialogues* 14:1
- Ingold, T. 2010. Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials, NCRM Working Paper Series
- Ingold, T. 2011. *Being Alive; Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge
- Jackson, P. 2001. Making sense of qualitative data. In: Limb, M. and Dwyer, C. (eds.) *Qualitative methodologies for human geography*, Hodder Arnold Publication 199-214.
- Jackson, P. 2010. Food stories: consumption in an age of anxiety, *Cultural Geographies* 17 147-165
- Kiesling, F. M. and Manning, C. M. 2010. How green is your thumb? Environmental gardening identity and ecological gardening practices, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30 315-327
- Kneafsey, M. et al. 2008. *Reconnecting Consumers, Producers and Food: Exploring Alternatives*. Berg
- Kuhlmann, E. and Babitsch, B. 2002. Bodies, health, gender: Bridging feminist theories and women's health, *Women's International Forum* 25:4
- Law, J. 2004. *After Method: mess in social research*, Routledge
- Law, J. and Mol, A. 2008, Actor-Enacted, in *Material Agency*
- Lang, T. 2010. Sustainable Diet: Fact or Fiction?, Lecture CRPR, Exeter, 5/2/10
- Lamine, C. 2005. Settling Shared Uncertainties: Local partnerships Between Producers and Consumers, *Sociologia Ruralis* 45:4
- Law, J. and Mol, A. 2008. The Actor-Enacted: Cumbrian Sheep in 2001, in *Material Agency- C. Knappett, L. Malafouris (eds.)*, Springer Science+Business Media
- Limb, M. and Dwyer C. 2001. *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates*, Hodder Arnold Publication
- Little, J. and Austin, P. 1996. Women and the Rural Idyll, *Journal of Rural Studies* 12:2
- Little, J., Ilbery, B. and Watts, D. 2009. Gender, Consumption and the Re-localisation of Food: A Research Agenda. *Sociologia Ruralis* 49:3
- Little, J. and Leyshon, M. 2003. Embodied Rural Geographies: Developing research agendas, *Progress in Human Geography*, 27 p257

- Lobley, M., Fish, R. et al. 2009. Analysis of Socio-Economic aspects of Local and National Organic Farming markets. University of Exeter, CRPR
- Lockie, S. 2002. 'The Invisible Mouth': Mobilizing 'The Consumer in Food Production-Consumption Networks, *Sociologia Ruralis* 42:4
- Lockie et. al. 2002. 'Eating Green': Motivations behind Organic Food Consumption in Australia, *Sociologia Ruralis* 42:1
- Longhurst, R. et al. 2009. A visceral approach: cooking 'at home' with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34 333–345
- Lockie, S. and Kitto, S. 2000. Beyond the Farm Gate: Production-Consumption Networks and Agri-Food Research, *Sociologia Ruralis* 40:1
- Lorimer, H. 2005. Cultural Geography: The Busyness of being 'more-than-representational', *Progress in Human Geography* 29:1
- Mann, A. and Mol, A. et al. 2011. Tasting Fingers, *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 1:1
- Massey, D. 2004. Geographies of Responsibility, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86:1 5–18
- Maxey, L. 2007. From 'Alternative' to 'Sustainable' Food, in *Alternative Food Geographies*, Maye, Holloway, & Kneafsey
- Marsden, T. et al. 2000. Food Supply Chain Approaches: Exploring their role in Rural Development, *Sociologia Ruralis* 4:4
- McGrenere, J. and Ho, W. 2000. Affordances: Clarifying and Evolving a Concept, *Proceedings of Graphics Interface 2000*, Montreal
- Meah, A. and Watson, M. 2011. Saints and Slackers: Challenging Discourses About the Decline of Domestic Cooking, *Sociological Research Online* 16 (2) 6.
- Milbourne, P. 2011. Everyday (in)justices and ordinary environmentalisms: community gardening in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, *Local Environment* 1-5
- Miller, W.I. 1998. *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Harvard University Press
- Mol, A. 2008. I eat an apple. On theorizing subjectivities, *Subjectivity* 22 28–37
- Mol (2013) -Feeling, Wording, Eating, Keynote speech at The Emotional Geographies Conference, available (online) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTzX8tC75z8&feature=youtu.be>
- Moragues-Faus, A.M. and Sonnino, R. 2012. Embedding Quality in the Agro-food

- System: The Dynamics and Implications of Place-Making Strategies in the Olive Oil Sector of Alto Palancia, Spain, *Sociologia Ruralis* 52:2
- Morgan, K. 2010. Local and Green, Global and Fair: the Ethical Foodscape and the Politics of Care, *Environment and Planning A*
- Morris, C. and Buller, H. 2003. The Local Food Sector: a Preliminary Assessment of its Form and Impact in Gloucestershire. *British Food Journal* 105: 8
- Nash, C. 2000. Performativity in Practice, *Progress in Human Geography* 24 653
- Norberg-Hodge, H. 2002. *Bringing the Food Economy Home*, Kumarian Press
- O’Riordan, T. 2001. *Globalism, Localism & Identity*, Earthscan
- Parr, H. 2001: Negotiating different ethnographic contexts and building geographical knowledges: empirical examples from mental health research. In Limb, M. and Dwyer, C., eds, *Qualitative methodologies for geographers: issues and debates*, Arnold, 181–97.
- Paterson, M. 2009. Haptic Geographies: Ethnography, Haptic Knowledges and Sensuous dispositions, *Progress in Human Geog* 33:766
- Perez-Vazquez A., Anderson S. and Rogers A.W. 2005. : Assessing benefits from allotments as a component of urban agriculture in England. In *Agropolis: the social political and environmental dimensions of urban agriculture*. Eds Mouget LJA. London: Earthscan 239–266.
- Perkins, H.C. 2006. Commodification: Re-resourcing rural areas, from *The HandBook of Rural Studies*, Cloke, Marsden and Mooney, Sage
- Pile, S. 2010. Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography, *Transactions* 35:1 5-20
- Pink, S. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, Sage Publications
- Pinkerton, T. and Hopkins, R. 2009. *Local Food: How to make it Happen in your Community*. Transition Books
- Probyn, E. 2000. *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*, Routledge Publications
- Roe, E. 2006. Things Becoming Food and the Embodied, *Material Practices of an Organic Food Consumer*, *Sociologia Ruralis* 46:2
- Sage, C. 2003. Social embeddedness and relations of regard. Alternative good food networks in south west Ireland, *Journal of Rural Studies* 19:1
- Sage, C. 2011. *Environment and Food*, Routledge
- Schlosser, E. 2001. *Fast Food Nation*, Houghton Mifflin



- Seymour, S., Hughes, A. and Morris, C. (eds.) 2000. *Ethnography and rural research. Countryside and Community Press: Cheltenham.*
- Short, F. 2006. *Kitchen Secrets: The Meaning of Cooking in Everyday Life*, Berg
- Shurmer-Smith, P. 2002. *Doing Cultural Geography*, Sage Publications
- Simonsen, K. 2000. Body as battlefield, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographer's*, 25 7-9
- Soil Association 2009. *Food Futures: Strategies for Resilient Food and Farming*, Report
- Somerset Community Food, 2008, *Nourishing Capacity*, Report
- Spry, T. 2001. *Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis*, *Qualitative Inquiry* 7:6
- Stassart, P. and Whatmore, S. 2003. *Metabolising risk: Food Scares and the un/re-making of Belgian Beef*, *Environment and Planning A* 35
- Tolia-Kelly, D. P. 2012. *The geographies of cultural geography III: Material geographies, vibrant matters and risking surface geographies*, *Progress in Human Geography* 1–8
- Trauger, A. and Passidomo C. 2012. *Towards a post-capitalist-politics of food: cultivating subjects of community economies*, *ACME* 11:2
- Voisey, H. and O’Riordan, T. 2001. *Globalization and Localization in O’Riordan, T. ed 'Globalism, Localism & Identity*, Earthscan p25-42
- Watts, D., Ibery B. & Maye, D. 2005. *Making reconnections in agro-food geography: alternative systems of food provision*, *Progress in Human Geography* 29:1 22–40
- Whatmore, S. 2004. *Mapping posthumanism: an exchange*, *Environment and Planning A* 36 1341-1363
- Whatmore, S. 2006. *Materialist Returns; Practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world*, *Cultural Geographies* 13:600
- Wiltshire, R. and Azuma, R. 2000. *Rewriting the Plot: sustaining allotments in the UK and Japan*, *Local Environment* 5:2 139–151
- Winter, M. 2003. *Embeddedness, the New Food Economy and Defensive localism*. *Journal Of Rural Studies* 19:1
- Winter, M. 2005. *Geographies of food: Agro-food geographies - Food, nature, farmers and agency*, *Progress in Human Geography*, 29:5 609-617

Woods, M. 2006. Political Articulation: The Modalities of New Critical Politics of Rural Citizenship, in Handbook of Rural Studies, Cloke, Marsden and Mooney

Wreiden, W.L. et.al. 2006. The Impact of a community-based food skills intervention on cooking confidence, food preparation methods and dietary choices- an exploratory trial, Public Health Nutrition 10:2



## APPENDIX 1

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2: SOMERTON ALLOTMENTS & LYTES CARY 6/11

[Stories- Knowledge- Practises- Stuff- People- Place]

#### A)GENERAL QUESTIONS:

**Basic Demographics-** a) Do you mind telling me your age? b) Where do you live?, have you lived there a long time? c) What is your occupation? d)Are you married, or have a partner? Do you live alone? Do you have children? If so how old are they?

2) a- Have you had much gardening/growing experience? How have you learnt to grow fruit/veg?

b- Why have you wanted an allotment? What do you hope to get out of it?

3) a-How is this season going? What is going well- what is not so good?

b- What jobs have you recently done?

- How did last season meet your expectations? (LC)

5) a- How did you go about preparing the soil this season? /when you first got your plot?

b - Where did you get your seeds from? Do/will you save seeds?

c - How do you choose what you sow? Do you think about possible meals/dishes when you plan you plot?

6) Have you had any problems with pests/ diseases?

7) Are there aspects to allotment growing that you didn't expect?

8) a- Have you bought tools/equipment for your plot?

b- If not, do any of your tools have a particular history? What have been the most essential tools?

c) - Do you share/ borrow tools?

9) Have you encountered limitations to successful growing?

10) Do you have plans with your produce?

11) Do you have any intentions to process your produce, ie make jams/chutneys/sauces?

- -How have gluts changed what you eat at home?

13) Have you planned how to store your harvests?

Has growing changed what you buy/ cook?

How important is taste to you?

16) How much time do you spend on the plot? Is it more or less than you expected? Do you have enough time for growing? (Has any other activity been reduced to make time for growing?)

**B) SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IF NOT DRAWN OUT OF GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) How important to you is what goes into your soil?
- 2) Does this effect your buying habits ie organic/local food?
- 3) Where do you do your household food shopping? What shapes that decision?
- 4) Would you like to rely on what you grow for the majority of you vegetable needs? If yes, why?
- 5) Are you aware of what you've spent on your plot and what you hope to save in your shopping bill?
- 6) Have you got to know new people through allotment growing? Has it changed your socialising habits?
- 7) Do you share tips with people at the site? Is this mostly about growing or cooking?
- 8) What does the plot mean to you? Are you aware of wildlife/ weather up there?
- 9) Why have you chosen an activity that is based outdoors?
- 10) Are you aware of the work of the committee?
- 11) How important to you is how your plot looks? / how the site looks?
- 12) How do allotments fit in with how you think the countryside should look?
- 13) Has growing affected you physically?
- 14) How has growing changed your life?

## APPENDIX 2

### Fieldwork Data

- Field Hours spent on the allotment sites - approximately 110 hours
- Number of participants -34 - 29 allotmentees, 3 members of National Trust, 2 members of Somerset Community Food, 1 teacher from Charlton Mackrell School
- Number of Interviewees -16
- Hours spent interviewing - 12 hours
- Transcribed Field notes Lytes Cary- 37 pages
- Transcribed Interview notes Lytes Cary - 100 pages
- Transcribed Field Notes Somerton Allotments -60 pages
- Transcribed Interview notes Somerton Allotments - 82 pages
- Transcribed Auto-ethnographic cooking notes - 31 pages
- Initial Coding Maps - 16 pages
- Coding Analysis notes and report - 14 pages
- Approximately 900 photo images of field sites, harvests and home cooking
- 2 Videos of Community Cook-in events
- 5 Blog posts at <http://rebeccasandover.wordpress.com/>

## APPENDIX 3

### THESIS CODING ANALYSIS

**Main themes** (See below for sub-sections):

- 1) Order/Chaos and Transformation
- 2) Bounding Life/Bounded selves
- 3) Constructing the plot/constructing the self
- 4) Learning/Adapting
- 5) Engaging the Visceral/Sensory
- 6) Engaging community
- 7) Sourcing Food/Knowing Food/Closing the connectivities of consumption and production
- 8) Cooking/Tasting

### **Cross-cutting Themes:**

- 1) Order/Chaos and Transformation
- 2) Matter/Place/mattering
- 3) Visceral/Sensory/feeling
- 4) The Body
- 5) Doing/Being/Becoming
- 6) Learning/Knowledge/Choice
- 7) Engaging the elements/the outside
- 8) Familial bonds
- 9) Community

### MAIN THEMES

#### 1 Order/Chaos and Transformation:

This is a theme that is both a main theme in that it is observed and felt to be an important issue in the process of growing, planning, shaping the plot, as well as the self. Additionally, it is a **cross-cutting theme (see 1, 5 and 9)** as it runs across main themes. It is discussed throughout this analysis. These subthemes are relevant here:

- 1.1 Planning/managing
- 1.2 Nature
- 1.3 Doing/being and becoming

#### 2 Bounding Life/Bounded Selves:

This too fits under the **order/chaos theme (see 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)**, which shows how that theme is cross-cutting. Here the processes of growing, eating etc. within a framework of rules, expectations and pre-conceived norms are explored. Again this is discussed further on. There again are many possible sub-sections some reflecting how trying to live within such norms can create stresses:

- 2.1 Planning/Managing – controlling weeds, pests
- 2.2 Planning ahead/expectations – philosophies of growing and eating, future living (positivity)
- 2.3 Following (or not following) the site rules
- 2.4 Aesthetics- for self, the site and wider community
- 2.5 Finding Your Edge- Anxiety/Frustrations/Being good enough (Gender)

## 2.6 Limitations – time, money, physicality, support

### 3 Constructing the plot/Constructing the self:

Again **order/control** plays a large role here along with other cross cutting themes such as – **the body, learning/knowledge and choice, matter/place/mattering and doing/being/becoming** (see **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9**). This can't really be seen in isolation as it is affected by other themes such as **Bounding Life** – where planning, having an expectation of the plot and desired outcomes figure in its construction. Again, **limitations** and **chaos** play a large role here, as the final outcome of the plot will depend on being able to follow through a plan or adapting to unplanned for circumstances. See **2, 3, 5 and 6** for in depth discussions of this theme.

#### 3.1 Soil Care

#### 3.2 Nurture

#### 3.3 Learning/Knowledge/adapting

#### 3.4 Philosophies of growing

#### 3.5 Self-provision/food security/ closing the connectivities of consumption/production

#### 3.6 Constructing community/sharing

#### 3.7 Self as **limitation/ transforming self through doing**

#### 3.8 Duration/seasonality/temporality

#### 3.9 Expectations and desire

### 4 Learning/Adapting

This feels like one of the most exciting categories, as **knowledge and skill** were anticipated parts of the growing process. However, experiencing and recording learning-through-growing and gaining new skills, felt innovative, giving a depth to ideas of **skill, knowledge and knowledge production**. Possibly, all the cross-cutting themes come into this as they all effect either how learning takes place – ie **the body, sensing or sharing through community knowledge or remembering familial knowledge** (see **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9**). **Chaos** in the form of the weather, uncontrollable variables such as pests and diseases are especially significant here, as responding to such unplanned events powers the processes of learning, perhaps learning how to plan for such events in future. This leads to an idea that engaging the material matters here, where the matter of the plot is adapted to and also changed. This is partly done through the idea of **sensing through the body** 'what is right' or 'what works'; such sensing can lead the processes of **adaption and learning** in certain circumstances.

#### 4.1 Intergenerational learning- passing on **skills and knowledge**, rural nostalgia, children, memories.

#### 4.2 **Community learning** – asking, observing, rules

#### 4.3 **Sensorial learning** – through the body, sensing what's needed, learning by doing, becoming/transforming the self

#### 4.4 **Learning through material engagement** –adapting to and manipulating material properties.

#### 4.5 Learning from traditional sources – books, magazines, media, internet

### 5 Engaging the visceral/sensory

This is also a main theme as well as a cross-cutting theme, as it shapes others such as **learning/ adapting** discussed above. Here **the body, matter, mattering, doing, being and becoming** are major relevant cross-cutting themes (see **2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9**). This is all



about the engagement of the body, the senses with the plot, the weather, the elements, the seasons, temporality and general chaos and order. Again, **memories and family history** can come in here as they shape bodies and our norms of using them – we may ‘feel’ like our dad when pushing a wheelbarrow, which may feel more natural than wrestling a rotovator. This also deals with issues of gender as women may have less experience of using power tools. As a woman growing on my own my physicality limited my initial transformation of the plot, however, this experience could have been shared by a man, an older man or may have been mitigated if working with another able woman. Pushing oneself or not, again may have familial ties, wanting to nurture may also stem from knowing what it feels like to be nurtured. Conversely, the plot may be a place where we can ‘be’ in a way not commonly experienced in other realms of life. *The visceral/sensory is also an exciting theme where the physicality of our bodies works in conjunction with the ‘airy’ world of thought, norms, desires and expectations. It is an interface between these ‘selves’ where the sensory can dominate; feeding data back to our brains and engaging directly with other matter. It is also the interface between ourselves and not-ourselves or the human and more-than-human.*

- 5.1 Sensorial learning/ engaging knowledge/adapting
- 5.2 Pleasure – engaging the elements/the outside- ‘getting my hands dirty’
- 5.3 The body/matter/mattering- engaging matter
- 5.4 Doing/being/becoming
- 5.5 Taste/freshness/desire
- 5.6 Choosing
- 5.7 Cooking/knowing food

## 6 Engaging Community

This has already come into many other themes, especially **learning and bounding life** as there seems to be a see-saw experience of the community at the plot with many positive comments about sharing, learning, pulling together, support, making new friends etc. However, there are also negative comments in relation to the rules imposed by the committees, dislike of neighbouring plots practices accompanied by the belief that their actions could impinge on your plot’s success. **(See 1, 5, 8 and 9)**

- 6.1 Community sharing
- 6.2 Community learning
- 6.3 Constructing the community
- 6.4 Mixing – sharing extending choice, saving money
- 6.5 Frustrations/anxiety/ being good enough – **finding your edge- Control**

7 Sourcing Food/Knowing Food/Closing the connectivities of consumption and production This is also a major theme of the work. Whilst it comes at the other end of the spectrum to constructing the plot thematically, however it is in reality much more cyclical and broadly spread throughout the themes. Sourcing food in allotment growing occurs when the harvest can be made, however, in reality, sourcing food occurs throughout the growing season for most plot-holders as they can have crops to harvest throughout the year. Additionally, no plot-holder interviewed is self-sufficient, therefore shopping forms part of their need to source food Therefore philosophies of growing, shopping and eating play a role here, such as issues of sustainability, local food, food security, acting in contrast to industrial agriculture etc. **Knowing food** is essential to this work as it is often referred to – wanting to know what’s in their food is important, as there is a degree of lack of trust with current provision. This extends to the plot, to

wanting to know what's in the compost, manure or already in the soil. **Knowing** is a vague term here and can also refer to 'sensing'. Knowing is hard to pin point. Provision through growing your own closes the **connectivities of consumer and producer**, revealing the work, effort and commitment needed to produce food. However, producing it for yourself results in a higher degree of valuing the produce and avoiding waste. Much of this theme is dependent on others – **order/chaos, constructing the plot/self, learning/knowledge/adaption as well as visceral engagement/the body. (See 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)**

- 7.1 Quality/trust/local food/authentic veg
- 7.2 Taste/freshness
- 7.3 Sustainability – philosophies of growing/eating
- 7.4 Feeding the self-self provision, feeding others/**familial bonds**
- 7.5 Luxury/valuing what's grown/avoiding waste
- 7.6 Harvest/skill/confidence/storage
- 7.7 The 'whole process'
- 7.8 Rural nostalgia/how it should be
- 7.9 Preparation/cooking/processing produce

## **8 Cooking/Tasting**

This follows on nicely from the previous theme and has many linkages. Again, many other themes come in here, especially cross cutting themes such as **the body, the visceral/sensory, learning/knowledge and choice, doing/being and becoming, matter/mattering, familial bonds etc. as well as order and chaos (see 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9)**, which underpins the cooking experience. Probably, the strongest link is to **engaging the visceral**, as tasting and cooking play a visceral role through sensorial engagement and the body. 'Doing' plays a large role here as cooking is an active engagement with the plot and the matter of food. However, like an iceberg it relies on a huge bank of **skill and experience**, which are not greatly seen or valued, especially in everyday cooking scenarios. It falls at the far end of the thematic spectrum due to coming after harvest, however, again it is occurring throughout the growing season and harvest can begin from the early summer onwards (or even through the winter).

- 8.1 **Knowing food**
- 8.2 **Skills/knowledge/experience**
- 8.3 **Learning/sensorial learning**
- 8.4 **Mixing, adapting, tasting the unfamiliar – transforming matter**
- 8.5 **Familial bonds – nurturing (children, partners), family history – familial cooking skills/intergenerational learning**
- 8.6 **Cooking life journeys**
- 8.7 **Freshness/taste/sensing/ the visceral – tasting – doing/being and becoming**
- 8.8 **Transforming the self through taste and skill/The Body**
- 8.9 **Everyday meals/complex dishes- simple luxury – saving money**
- 8.10 **Storage, preparation, processing, waste – valuing food**

### **CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

#### **1 Order/Chaos and Transformation**

See main themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8

This is a cross-cutting theme as its effects are felt across the themes. In particular, reacting to unplanned/unexpected natural events, the matter of nature is important – attempting to instil order through the potential chaos of the elements of natural matter and attempting to transform this chaos into useable matter for human consumption.

## **2 Matter/Place and Mattering**

See [main themes -1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8](#)

Matter and engaging with the material is a major theme throughout the work. This is apparent in the unboundedness of life and nature that then invokes human desire to control and manage it. This process of managing natural life, working it, manipulating it involves a deep engagement with nature, whether you have sympathies to nature unbounded or a fear of it. Here, this process is called ‘mattering’, in that the matter of nature is being worked, changed, engaged with through active physical, sensory processes and planning. This mattering occurs in a specific place, here being the two allotment sites. (2)

Philosophies of growing and eating shape the process of mattering, with attitudes to soil care describing characteristic differences between plots and their plot-holders. These differing philosophies shape the material outcome of the plot and the produce for consumption. It also shapes how the plot materially engages with nature at the plot as differing practices attract different biophysical outcomes (ie insect, bird life, plant disease, soil microbia) (3)

This process of mattering is also a process of learning, developing skills, food knowledge, where inter-generational, community and sensorial learning comes in here. (4)

Ideas of learning by doing is brought into focus through understanding how these processes occur through visceral and sensorial engagement which allows for mental thoughts and physical effort to be brought together. It is the process through which adaption and learning occurs through ‘sensing’ and ‘feeling’ what is ‘right’. (5)

Matter and mattering occurs in defined spaces, allowing for the notion of place to come into focus. Here, the allotment sites with individual plots, wider wildlife and topography shape the matters of place in this study. However, engaging with this matter again occurs through physical, visceral, sensory processes. (6)

Matter and mattering is fundamentally important in the cooking/tasting theme as through visceral/sensory processes learning how to cook takes place, learning how flavours goes together happens and valuing the material form of the produce occurs. Deciding what material output is desired occurs when the soil is adapted and augmented, carrying on with decisions made on how to manage the growing crop. This material journey follows through into the kitchen, where choices are made as to how the food is finally presented and consumed. (8)

## **3 Visceral/Sensory/Feeling**

See [main themes 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8](#)

This again is a main theme and has been dealt with in depth in [Main Theme 5](#) and throughout earlier discussions (see above and below).

## **4 The Body**

See [main themes 2, 3 4, 5, 7 and 8](#)

The body is an obvious theme given the physical nature of growing produce that has minimal use of mechanical tools being reliant on the physical effort of bodily engagement with the material of the plot. Additionally, it is the body that is being fed by eating the harvested, cooked produce. What is grown, cooked and eaten materially shapes the body. Therefore, how this produce is grown and cooked materially informs the body, constructing self.

The body is where sensory mechanisms of sensing, feeling are placed. Therefore, the body is also a place where the visceral, sensory and material of the plot converge externally and internally – growing and eating being two physical activities describing the interiority and exteriority of engaging with matter at the plot. Perhaps what is the body will need to be defined in this context.

The body is rarely directly referred to in interviews except in response to the question ‘How has growing affected you physically?’ where some respondents refer to getting tired or achy due to digging on the plot and some refer to feeling more fit and healthy and less achy. Therefore the body is a hidden theme that quietly dominates as it shapes all relationships between the self, the plot and the produce (7 and 8). Awareness of physical limitations are referred to by participants and by myself growing and touch on issues of gender, time and money. (3 and 6)

### **5 Doing/Being/Becoming**

See [main themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8](#)

As this cross-cuts all main themes it is clear that this is a centrally important theme to this work, being the hub of the investigation.

Part of gardening/growing involves immersing in the space being controlled or managed. Here the gardener is doing/being/becoming but it can be argued that through their interventions and natural processes so is the space of the plot – changing as the plot is developed or neglected. Therefore, the doing and becoming part seems of direct relevance to [main themes 1, 2 and 3](#) in this context where physical activity, mental preparations and natural processes alter the plot for both desired outcomes and unexpected ones which then may require further interventions and adaptive behaviour. Planning is part of doing and becoming with desired outcomes imagined and planned for. Here the theme of order/chaos and transformation directly correlate with doing/being and becoming where the human and more-than-human agentially operate, shaping actions until it is no longer a case of two separate actors but a plot-plot-holder combined assemblage creating the produce/plot/plot-holder outcomes.

Doing and becoming are clearly seen themes in growing veg, eating and gardening fitting well with themes discussed, however, ‘being’ is a subtler theme requiring gentle teasing out. Being is in the present and can relate to the plot, the plot-holder, the produce or the site/community itself. It is both a snap shot of now – how the plot is, as well as a state of mind where ‘doing the plot’ results in an immersive state where the cognitive, planning human has transformed into a minded-body tool or a plot/plot-holder assemblage. Here the plot-holder themselves can be more-than-human. Laying aside mental control appears to be a symptom of ‘being’, with it being characterised by surrendering to the physical activities involving visceral and material engagements and sensorial connections that lead to the formation of a more-than-human assemblage.

The complexity of this cross-cutting theme means that related themes do not necessarily stand out in ordered sequences. The previous paragraphs look at Doing/Being and becoming within [main themes 1, 2 and 3](#) together; however, [main themes 3, 4, 5 and 6](#) can be seen together in terms of the key theme of ‘learning by doing’ being the way plot-holders become skilled, knowledgeable and effective veg/fruit producers. Here visceral/sensory engagement with the plot is seen as the processes by which this occurs (see [main theme 5](#)). However, learning in this study does not only occur through bodily doings; [theme 6](#), shows how learning also takes place through interactions on the plot- shared tips, observing other plot

practices and conforming to site rules, as well as through remembered learning from grandparents and parents as well as passing this knowledge down to the next generation. Such learning also charts the process of doing to becoming.

Theme 7- sourcing food/knowing food and closing the connectivities of producers and consumers here relates to the notion of the end result where the plot is transformed into produce that 'becomes' the plot-holder through theme 8's cooking and eating. However theme 8 holds complexity again with transformation and control being key themes in the process of turning raw produce into consumable meals. Cooking itself engulfs the notions of doing/being and becoming completing 'the whole process' of sourcing food, which also goes back to earlier themes of visceral/sensory engagement and learning and adapting in turning produce into meals.

### **6 Learning/Knowledge/Choice**

See main themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8

Here learning and knowledge is seen as a key process by which food is sourced for consumption (7 and 8) where choice frames materiality and growing and eating outcomes. How learning and knowledge covers themes 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 has been covered in the previous section's discussion (above) as well as in the main themes where visceral/sensory engagement with the plot/produce is the vehicle through which learning, knowledge and adaptation takes place. As discussed above this is also augmented by community and inter-generational learning which all combine to the way the plot is transformed into consumable produce, as well as the way the new plot-holder transforms into a grower with skills.

### **7 Engaging the elements/the Outside**

See Main themes 1, 3, 5 and 7

This is another subtle theme but it did come up regularly in participant interviews – the plots as a 'place to be', enjoying the outside, the fresh air. Here access to the outside/countryside is also important and challenges assumptions of the rural idyll. Constructing the plot and the self is part of this and it is being outside that forms part of this transformation. The enjoyment of being outside forms part of visceral and sensory engagement, framing the experience of the plot-holder. Here birds are heard as well as traffic from the adjoining road (in Somerton) or car-park (Lytes Cary). Both sites host panoramic views of the distant countryside that also frames the outside experience giving visual pleasure as well as a chance to watch the weather. One interviewee talked about enjoying watching a neighbouring farmer working with a combine-harvester, feeling part of the rural. At the plots the weather is directly felt on the face, hands and arms, whether it is rain, wind or sun giving a direct experience of the natural world. Of even more subtle interest is the idea that the 'outside' can be 'tasted' in the produce – freshness, vitality and authenticity. Here again notions of externality and internality are of interest – the outside is consumed? Do choices in what is added to the soil affect how the produce tastes? Do degrees of rain, sun and drainage also affect these flavours? Can you taste the place?

### **8 Familial Bonds**

See Main themes 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8

As many interviewees mentioned the memory of often a Granddad, Dad or Mum growing when they were children being part of their growing experience, the role of inter-generational learning became an interesting theme. This has notable resonance, as those mentioning grandfathers (this was the most mentioned) would be referring to a pre-2<sup>nd</sup> world war growing experience, where industrialised agriculture was not the norm. Therefore this study has touched on oral history, familial learning and history of the rural. Part of this, I feel, is a

degree of rural nostalgia which is a relevant driving force to the desire to grow your own, as it represents the perception of a good lifestyle that is aspired to, partly for its authentic engagement with life, as well as a connection with community. Celebrity chef TV programmes, notably River Cottage that was mentioned by several interviewees, reinforces this perception (3, 4 and 6).

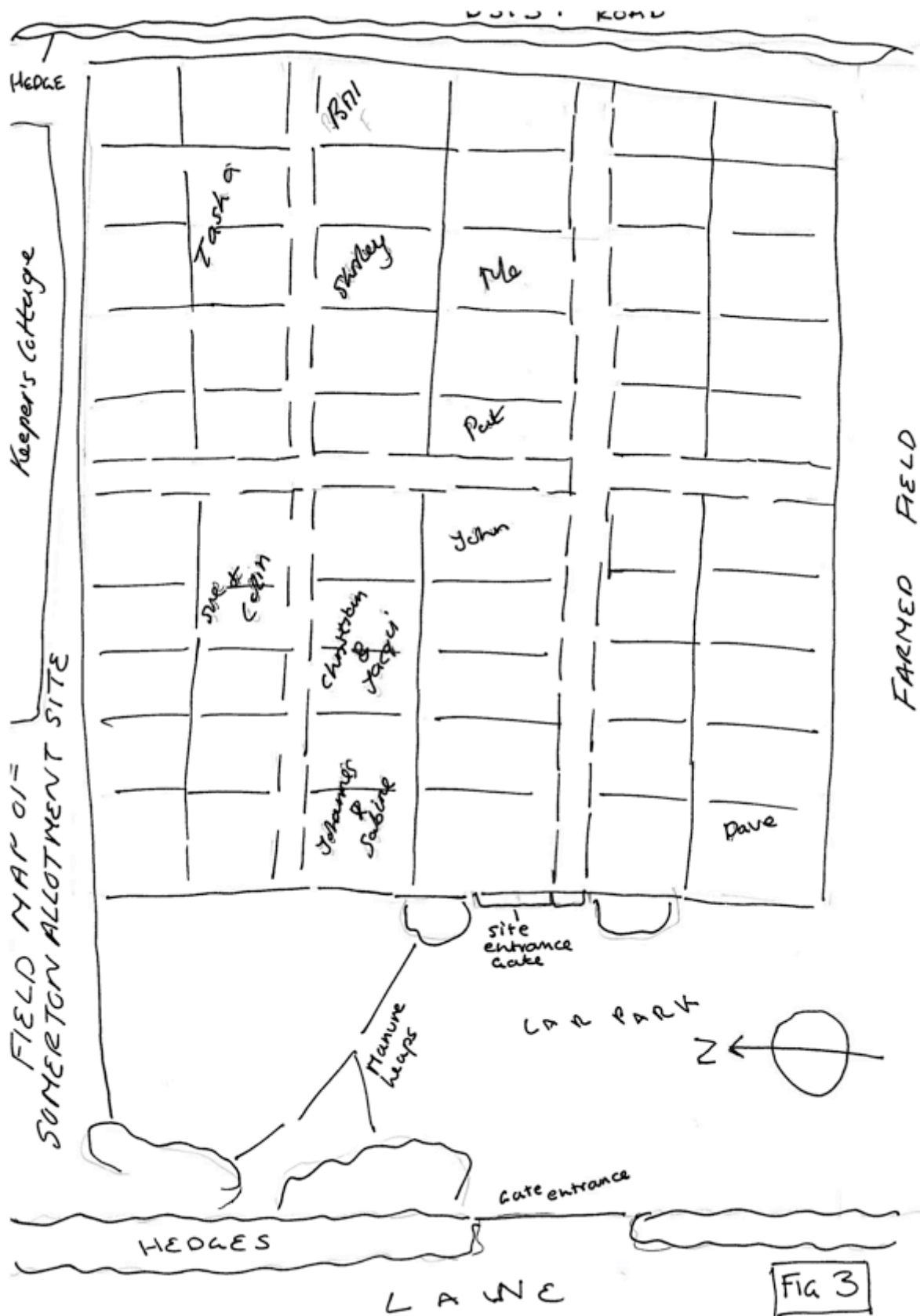
Familial bonds cover several sub-themes where inter-generational learning can work two ways with a desire to hand down growing experiences to a younger generation. This can be more subtle than a pure desire to teach as several families refer to the opportunity of giving their children the chance to just 'be' in the growing space and experience the freedom of outdoor space (7). Additionally, familial bonds also comes into themes of sourcing and cooking food (7 and 8) as many plot-holders are providing food for the family and in many cases also cooking it for them.

## 9 **Community**

See [Main themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8](#)

Community touches lightly [themes 1, 2 and 3](#) with it being a vehicle in both creating order as well as in creating chaos. In most people's experience, the site community aided their individual work on the plot with help being offered in many forms from tools/machinery loaned, to seedlings/produce swapped, chickens fed or advice given or just observed. For some just being part of a felt community was enough to receive some benefit from it. The committee rules mean that maintaining the plot is a necessary activity resulting in time spent at the site and an incentive to work on the plot. Even when working on alone there is a sense of belonging. However, if a plot-holder can only attend the plot at times no one else is there, there can be feelings of alienation and a lack of the sense of belonging, making them vulnerable to negative reactions to committee instructions. Other negative experiences of community come in when it is felt that neighbouring plot-holders are not keeping to the rules, in that their plot is poorly maintained with weeds either growing or pulled and left to blow around. Additionally, concerns have been expressed about carrots pulled and left – increasing a threat of carrot fly. Therefore, community is a complex body with varied reactions to it; however, it does encompass the growing sites and as such has an impact.

Of greater significance to this work is the observation that learning can occur through community engagements (3, 4 and 6). This has been discussed above and in [theme 4](#). Additionally, as discussed in [theme 8](#) family community is an identified theme in this work including past and present family communities. It both forms a desire to grow on a plot, as well as endowing knowledge skills from historic family members or advice from presently involved family members. It forms part of a desire to 'do' family through growing on the plot – extending family memories into present life and passing on family values.



APPENDIX 4 - SITE MAP SOMERTON ALLOTMENTS 2011