Creative Weeding and Other Everyday Experiments in the Garden

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Abstract: Weeding is a mundane activity that nonetheless affords the opportunity to reorient garden practices in a manner that is more open with regard to relations between humans and non-human beings. Based on a critical analysis of what constitutes a weed and the psychological and political significance of weeding, as well as a consideration of the agency of plants generally, I argue that a more creative or experimental approach to weeding may help to unsettle otherwise habitual and unreflective practices. Enabling individuals to become more open to new ways of doing things in the garden and new ways of thinking about non-human nature, may in turn contribute to the efficacy of collective responses to environmental change.

Consider, as a starting point, two very different gardens. In Anne Rosner's short story entitled "Prize Tomatoes", the protagonist cultivates a vegetable garden as a way of rebuilding his life after the death of his wife and his own subsequent attempt to commit suicide. In the following excerpt, he is down on his knees inspecting his lettuce plants when he encounters a weed:

It grows there among the cultivated plants. I place my fingers as close to the ground as possible. Otherwise the stem will break off from the root and the weed will put out another shoot within days. Broken off at the ground, weeds enlarge in the root to return tougher than ever. I must pull up the entire root.

I give a light tug. It remains fixed. I exert more pressure. The root begins to give. Rolling my wrist, I give it a final yank. Too hard. It comes out, the stem broken. You son of a bitch, I'll get you. I thrust my hand into the lettuce, gently pushing the leaves aside, and see the end of the weed. It has broken right at the ground. I dig with my fingers around the shaft, losing a lettuce leaf in the process. All right, now I'm angry. I'm going to get you if I have to stay out here all day. With only my fingertips, I get a sturdy hold and pull. Hah! There you are. That's the end of you.¹

In another short story, entitled "The Monkey Garden," by Sandra Cisneros, a garden once inhabited by a pet monkey is neglected after the family moves away, becoming a playground for neighbourhood children:

There were sunflowers big as flowers on Mars and thick cockscombs bleeding the deep fringe of theater curtains. There were dizzy bees and bow-tied fruit flies turning somersaults and humming in the air. Sweet sweet peach trees. Thorn roses and thistle and pears. Weeds like so many squinty-eyed stars and brush that made your ankles itch and itch until you washed with soap and water. There were big green apples hard as knees. And everywhere the sleepy smell of rotting wood, damp earth and dusty hollyhocks thick and perfumy like the blue-blond hair of the dead....This was a garden, a wonderful thing to look at in the spring. But bit by bit, after the monkey left, the garden began to take over itself. Flowers stopped obeying the little bricks that kept them from growing beyond their paths. Weeds mixed in. Dead cars appeared over night like mushrooms. First one and then another and then a pale blue pickup with the front windshield missing. Before you knew it the monkey garden became filled with sleepy cars.²

The monkey garden is a child's garden, a somewhat messy place where, good or bad, *things happen*. In contrast the vegetable garden is a grown-up place, a project, where order and hard work yield a sense of accomplishment and pride in the form of perfect tomatoes. It is the tension between the practices implied by both these gardens – vigilant weeding on the one hand, play and experimentation on the other – that I wish to explore in this paper.

While my interests are framed by a broader concern with the possibilities for personal and social change in relation to contemporary environmental issues, I will focus here on weeding as a practical way of approaching these concerns. I believe that, while gardens are often valued specifically for the sanctuary they provide, and serve as spaces of rest and relaxation (emotionally if not always physically speaking), they can also be sites of experimentation and innovation, where it is possible to work out new understandings of the non-human, and new, possibly gentler and more creative, ways of living and acting in the world. However, gardens are not necessarily productive in this way. I will argue that, however good our intentions, the practice of weeding is informed – if not exclusively characterized – by a culturally pervasive disposition toward nature that lends itself to an instrumental rather than responsive relationship. I will explore the possibility that physically engaging in a more observant, experimental weeding practice may help to turn the garden into a space of creativity and openness with regard to possible relationships between human and non-human beings. I will begin however by attempting to complicate the way we think about weeds and weeding in order to provide both impetus and direction for a reorientation of practice.

Defining Weeds

A weed is a plant that grows where it is not wanted. Although some plants are more biologically disposed to do so, there is nothing essential about this definition.³ The status of a plant as a weed is entirely determined by its evaluation relative to human interests – whether those have to do with the efficiency of agricultural practices, the health of farm animals and pets, or creating a particular kind of order and visual effect in gardens. In the introduction to the field guide *Weeds of Canada*, the largely economic underpinning of the concept 'weed' is spelled out very clearly. The authors write,

Humans are intimately linked with the plant life that surrounds us. We raise crops for food, harvest fibres for our clothing, extract chemicals for our industries, and enjoy the many environmental benefits that plants give us. Yet to reap these rewards, we must favour some plants over others. The less favoured species become weeds, *something we must control*.⁴

It is interesting to note here the explicit connection between an instrumental, even economic, definition of weeds, and the imperative to control them. This connection is, predominantly, a historical one. That is, it is directly related to modern farming practices, and a scientific and legislative emphasis on chemical and mechanical weed control strategies. While practices associated with crop monoculture contribute significantly to the proliferation of weeds (principally by depleting nutrients and organic matter in the soil), there has been more interest in developing better herbicides than in promoting farming practices which improve soil quality and therefore reduce the competitive edge that weed species gain in a degraded soil.⁵ This approach to farming, in which maximum short-term yield is prioritized over long-term sustainability, has helped to shape our cultural understandings of weeds – both within and outside agricultural contexts.

Similarly, the designation and treatment of those weeds designated as “invasive species” is also often informed by economic factors.⁶ Environmental historian John Sandlos describes the manner in which campaigns to control Purple Loosestrife in Canada were in part forwarded by specific economic interests – those who profited from duck hunting for example – and complicit with broader economic assumptions about land use and conservation. He argues that the spread of Purple Loosestrife along canals and highways across Canada should be understood in the context of the way human infrastructure has created ideal habitat for this species while destroying or degrading habitat for others, rather than in terms of a voracious alien invader that must be stopped at all costs. The first way of thinking implies re-evaluating our relationship to land and environment, whereas the second rationalizes eradication measures that leave the source of the problem untouched.⁷ Thus, in both agricultural and conservation contexts, weeds have historically been constituted *as weeds* as a result of intersecting economic imperatives and broader cultural discourses, as well as ecological and evolutionary processes.

The Psychology of a Weed-Free Aesthetic

In the context of garden practices, aesthetic or practical rather than economic concerns tend to be at the forefront. Nonetheless, the assumption that weeds must be controlled, if not eradicated entirely, is similarly central. In fact, this assumption is enshrined in law in most major municipalities across Canada, where a minimum standard of weed control by property owners is enforced with fines or other measures.⁸

Even where it is not a legislated obligation, most gardeners would agree that weeding is part of what makes a given space a garden. It is implicit in the whole project – which is one not just of cultivation, but of selecting and arranging plants in a manner which is aesthetically pleasing or practical. Especially in ornamental gardens, weeding goes along with all those strategies that make the garden visible as a garden: the selection of plants, their placement in particular locations to create texture and contrast and the marking of edges.⁹ These activities, whether they serve a comprehensive design, or a more intuitive shaping of the garden’s composition over time, are all oriented to a certain extent around the potential for making distinctions – between plants, between the garden and the lawn, between intentional and ‘natural’ effects. In service of such distinctions, weeding operates according to a logic of exclusivity. Some plants are protected and nurtured while others are discouraged or removed. Even if you have environmentally-friendly intentions – to avoid introducing chemicals into the garden for example – if you want a garden to produce an overall effect of some kind, you have to “draw the line somewhere,” or so goes the conventional wisdom.

But why are such distinctions so aesthetically, even conceptually, important to the status of a garden, as a garden? Why are we not content to simply plant a given space with a variety of appropriate species, allow them to do what they will, and consider their relative success or failure an experiment? Tending a garden seems, necessarily, to imply an attitude of selectivity towards plants.¹⁰ It seems there is a psychology of weeding that has to do with exercising control and creating order –

something along the lines of what Maxine Kumin writes about her own vegetable garden: “I confess nothing looks prettier to me than a well-tended flourishing vegetable garden. Raised beds, mown or mulched walkways, and an attractive fence all around impose the discipline and order that are in short supply in my somewhat chaotic life.”¹¹

Marc Treib argues that all gardening involves a desire to dominate as well as create – in fact the two are part of the same urge, which seeks both to make something and exercise control over it. He writes that “at the very bottom of the psychological urge to garden there also lies a sad and somewhat pathetic attempt to literally re-root oneself in a world of rapid change and rampant mobility. We grasp at the little power we have left...”¹² Such an attempt to create stability and gain control is evident as a central theme in the story “Prize Tomatoes,” where we see the protagonist struggling to regain a sense of autonomy in response to his worried daughter’s attempt to exert control over almost every aspect of his life. The climax of the story centres around her attempt to prevent him from entering his tomatoes in the fall fair since she believes his obsession with the garden to be unhealthy. In the end, he is triumphant: his obsession bears fruit in the form of prize-winning tomatoes. The garden becomes a space not only of self-expression, but also self-assertion.

Fear of Outsiders

Outside of such specifically psychological or interpersonal scenarios however, there also seems to be a more general fear underlying what is often a rather angry disposition towards weeds. In his analysis of the so-called “natural garden” of eighteenth century Britain, Simon Pugh argues that to the extent that a garden’s effects are presented as natural, they work to conceal and neutralize the messy unpredictability of an untamed nature. He writes, “The garden offers an image of nature that has been ‘internalised’ to protect against fear of the ‘outside’, a possible source of panic and fear.” For him, “The garden represents fear as much as it represents control of that fear.”¹³

Today, this fear is reflected in the hyperbole that gardeners tend to indulge in when describing the weed species in their gardens. Some good examples of this kind of talk were provided in the context of a CBC radio program that aired in August 2007, in which people were encouraged to call in and vote for “Canada’s worst weed.”¹⁴ Particular species were described as “horrible,” “awful,” “deadly” and “lethal,” and reports were made of particular species advancing across whole provinces, wiping out native species and single-handedly taking over entire ecosystems. In the context of this radio program and elsewhere, people seem to be quite disturbed by the fact that these unwanted and apparently un-useful plants reproduce, travel and adapt. There is often the sense that the weeds are on the verge of taking over, signs of a broader gathering chaos.

If we bracket this fear however, as something that may – like a fear of strangers or of difference – be overcome, then the idea of plants as animate and unruly can be seen as an interesting, if sometimes inconvenient, aspect of their presence in the world. The monkey garden, for example, is a beautiful, magical place, even though it has sinister undertones. The somewhat ominous appearance of dead cars and its creeping, unpredictable excess are part of its allure. This is what makes it a place, not of projects, but events. Which raises the question, why are gardens more usually safe places? Why is that quality important, and what makes it possible? Imagine a world where gardens are understood to be openings onto wilderness; where cultivation does not equal control but rather experimental mixtures of the wild and the artificial, human and non-human. What is hard to picture, is not so much the gardens themselves, but the society within which they would be considered normal. The safety of the garden – its exclusivity and control of intruders – speaks to social and political as well as psychological dimensions of its cultivation.

Pugh’s broader analysis of the British “natural garden” helps to demonstrate the way gardens may participate in broader social and political projects. He observes that so-called ‘natural’ or landscape gardens first appeared during the eighteenth century, roughly coinciding with the period of

legislated enclosure of common lands in England.¹⁵ He analyzes the various techniques employed in these gardens in terms of this coincidence and finds that while they were themselves highly contrived, they represented nature in such a way as to *naturalize* the otherwise systematic and even brutal reorganization of the rural economy. For example, the views from the garden onto the surrounding countryside were carefully constructed, using trees and shrubs to screen unattractive features and create a landscape that was picturesque rather than productive. In this context, weeding is part of a process which *aestheticizes* nature, distancing the viewer from the hard labour normally associated with rural life, and at the same time concealing the work required to do so, making it appear as if ‘it was always thus’. For Pugh, the natural garden is a radical political strategy.

While North American gardens have been significantly influenced by this tradition of garden and landscape design, the contemporary social and political significance of garden practices such as weeding remains, to some degree, an open question. However, public discourses about weeds suggest that weeding may be, among other things, a way of policing borders. In these discourses, the garden often seems to be a territory that must be defended, mirroring social and political anxieties associated with racial, ethnic and cultural mixing in society at large. Especially when it comes to invasive species, talk about weeds – those plants that ‘don’t belong here’, that aren’t ‘native’ – often comes uncomfortably close to xenophobic discourses around immigration policy and the integrity of cultural identities.¹⁶

For example, a plant which has been the subject of much concern for gardeners and naturalists alike in the Pacific Northwest is the Himalayan blackberry.¹⁷ An entry on one ecologically-oriented gardening site reads like a police bulletin: “Himalayan Blackberry. Wanted for: trespassing on private property, overrunning desired plants.” This “intense criminal” is listed as having aliases (botanical names) and accomplices (birds) and is considered “extremely aggressive.” Gardeners are advised to “patrol the area,” “make a positive i.d.,” “do a background check,” “send in the S.W.A.T. team,” and so on.¹⁸ Even a newsletter from the more serious Native Plant Society of British Columbia (NPSBC), advocates “zero tolerance” towards the plant, despite acknowledging that it provides songbird habitat, calling it “an engulfing pernicious weed.”¹⁹

While the style of presentation of such discourse is sometimes tongue-in-cheek (as above), I do not think a public safety, or law-and-order discourse is accidental. There is both a widespread sense of urgency amongst gardeners and activists alike, and a general fear, or desire for order, to be exploited in public awareness campaigns. As the NPSBC newsletter asserts, public awareness of the impact of invasive species is crucial to dealing with them and, consequently, naturalists should focus on communicating the seriousness of that impact: “To suggest potential benefits of their presence [such as the provision of bird habitat] is to dilute the message.”²⁰ As a result, public discussion about these weeds tends to be dramatic and fear-based, filled with references to invaders, intrusions, attacks and so on, overlapping in a striking manner with other anti-outsider discourses. To the extent that it draws on the urgency and language of such discourse, talk about weeds, and the weeding practices or eradication measures thereby rationalized, is consistent with practices of policing and exclusion that operate at a societal level.

My intention here is not to mount a campaign for “weed rights,” or even to develop a comprehensive “ethics of weeding,” but to suggest that the way we describe unwanted plants, and how this resonates with cultural discourses outside the garden, is worth thinking about. At the very least, it provides a means of questioning what is really going on in the garden, and of taking a more critical perspective on the assumptions we make about what is desirable there. Engaging with the political and psychological complexities of weeding can also provide the impetus to develop new practices and perspectives in relation to the garden, and non-human nature more generally.

The Agency of Weeds

In *The Politics of Nature*, Bruno Latour defines an actor as “one who acts.” In his account, action is constituted in the production of unpredictable effects or events.²¹ Therefore, to acknowledge agency in plants, we need only think of how surprising they can be – growing faster and larger than we expect, appearing in locations where we did not plant them, presenting an unusual growth habit or producing blooms of a different colour than advertised. While on a different time scale, and according to different influences, plants act, and can be considered actors of a kind. This is perhaps most obviously the case with weeds, which grow fast, adapt quickly to changing conditions, cause problems and induce emotional reactions.

Similarly, in her work on the ethics and politics of natural science, Donna Haraway argues, that rather than assuming nature to be a mute object of study or manipulation, researchers should work to engage in a conversation with non-human beings. In order to facilitate this rather radical change in approach, Haraway suggests that there is a certain amount of imaginative work to be done – we must be able to *conceive* of non-human beings as agents if we are to treat them as such. She suggests that nature might be understood as *coyote*, or trickster. She writes,

This potent trickster can show us that historically specific human relations with ‘nature’ must somehow – linguistically, ethically, scientifically, politically, technologically, and epistemologically – be imagined as genuinely social and actively relational...²²

Further, she asserts that the non-human partners in the conversation will never settle down to be the same thing forever, rather they “remain utterly inhomogeneous.”²³ The idea of being able to predict or control nature by knowing it is, on this account, both ethically problematic and epistemologically flawed.

Building on Haraway’s critique, I’d like to explore a new orientation to weeds and weeding that acknowledges this fundamental unpredictability as a source of creativity or an invitation to experiment, rather than something to be feared and controlled. Specifically, I propose that thinking about weeds as so many different tricksters might be a productive way of changing practices and awareness. After all, weeds can certainly be tricky, and it often seems they are not without a sense of humour – turning up exactly in the locations where they are both highly visible and difficult to reach, and requiring serious contortions on behalf of the gardener determined to remove them. Most importantly however, they stir things up by trespassing across otherwise carefully tended edges and boundaries. They do not know their place, and they disregard human design.

The poet Lisa Robertson writes about the spread of the Himalayan blackberry in Vancouver, describing it in terms that identify it as a trickster, rather than a criminal. She writes,

...what we have come to appreciate most about *Rubus*, apart from the steady supply of jam, is the bracingly peri-modern tendency to garnish and swag and garland any built surface it encounters. In fact, the Himalayan blackberry insistently makes new hybrid architectures, weighing the ridgepoles of previously sturdy home garages and sheds into sway-backed grottoes, transforming chain link and barbed wire to undulant green fruiting walls, and sculpting from abandoned cement pilings Wordsworthian abbeys.²⁴

What I am proposing here is, in the first place, an imaginative practice. If invasive species, weeds and self-seeders can be seen as ‘tricksters’ then maybe they will present new possibilities, rather than an aggravation or threat. The idea here is not to pretend to be innocent of any desire for creating overall effect, or to give design of the garden over to nature, but to treat plants with more respect – of the kind that we would normally reserve for more obviously autonomous beings.

Creative Weeding Practices

What might weeding look like for a gardener who recognizes the agency of plants – tricksters and heroes alike? I think the cooperative approach of Gilles Clément, a French landscape designer who seeks to realize certain ecological principles in his gardens, is a good place to start. In his notion of *'le jardin en mouvement'* he

...assumes that the garden and the gardener are totally interdependent, with the gardener keeping an attentive eye on the wanderings of the plants and animals and insects that enter into the garden. He follows the 'movement' of 'traveling' plants like *Digitalis*, the Mulleins, Spurges and Hogweed, instead of confining them to 'beds', which are traditionally employed to highlight flowering. This approach relativises the notions of plants and weeds, allowing everything present in the garden to play an equal role in producing a dense and richly overlapping whole in which each development is treated as an evolutionary 'event.'²⁵

For Clément, traditional gardening activities such as weeding and deadheading are replaced with careful observation of plants, finding ways to support their flourishing, and enhancing the effects which their 'movements' create. Thus, for example, the arrival of a new "weed" in the garden, might be met first with interest and observation – how will this plant interact with others? Does it provide food for garden insects? How does it affect the overall appearance and experiential qualities of the garden? Does it have any other uses? Many plants designated as weeds are edible, or have herbal applications. Perhaps an uninvited trickster plant has an amusing or destabilizing effect that is of value in the context of a looser, more humorous garden aesthetic. Maybe a story can be told about it.

The point is not necessarily to stop weeding entirely, but to do it differently. If the emphasis is on creatively responding to or experimenting with plants in a garden, weeding can become a multi-faceted activity with a variety of outcomes. For example, in the case of an overgrown garden, weeding can be a way of reading the garden's history: what kind of gardener has come before me, what did they desire of the garden and how did the garden respond? To put this somewhat differently, in ecosemiotic terms: "Not only do overgrown gardens with a bit of a wild appearance invite other living creatures besides humans, but they also contain much semiotic heterogeneity – more signs in a passive state, waiting for an interpreter to discover them."²⁶ Weeding here becomes a way of discerning the garden's potential, which may or may not have something to do with its original design or intention.

Weeding can also be a form of harvesting, where edible, attractive or otherwise useful weeds are identified and put to use outside the garden. It might involve thinning a particular species to highlight or shape its effects, rather than removing it entirely. The point is to learn to perceive weeds differently so that the emphasis moves from the habitual removal of foreign species to the observation of plants and a more imaginative or explicitly creative attitude with regard to their potential. In this, the classification of plants can shift to a certain degree, becoming more open. Or perhaps a new, more subtle, less controlled aesthetic can be cultivated, such that a wider variety of effects are considered interesting and attractive within the garden.

I want to note that, if Clément's approach is successfully cooperative as well as aesthetically interesting, allowing him to *work with* the plants, animals and insects in the garden, it is because he is open with regard to the end result. The composition and appearance of his garden changes over time; the result of an ongoing experiment in which not just the gardener, but also the plants and other non-humans, can at any time, make a move, or create effects. The appearance of a weed in this context is an event, and the role of the gardener is not just to make decisions about which plants are desirable and which should be removed, but also to appreciate what is happening on a smaller scale,

where beauty is not defined by visual impact alone, and where the force and efficacy of *growth* itself is enough to produce a sense of wonder and respect.

Conclusion

Besides reflecting a less controlling, perhaps more ethical approach to weeding and gardening more generally, what does this reorientation have to do with broader environmental issues? I believe that the threat of large-scale environmental change is a call to develop our personal, social and cultural capacities to change in response, not just to that threat, but also to non-human nature more generally. My interest in weeding, a mundane practice that nonetheless reflects culturally complex attitudes toward the non-human, has to do with how we might creatively rather than coercively change our ways of living. Practice is a particularly powerful site for change, in part because of how it is informed by habit and tied to perception. Wherever we are comfortable and “in place” we tend to see and think in a manner which takes a whole range of ideas and practices as given – they “make sense” without requiring conscious attention. In order to make changes in those places where we feel comfortable and knowledgeable, it is often necessary to physically try something new, thereby unsettling the well-worn connections between particular practices and ways of seeing and thinking. In this way, a relatively small, though not necessarily easy, change in practice, can lead to a lasting change in awareness.²⁷

My specific hope for weeding is that re-imagining our relationship to plants and other non-humans is part of what can turn gardening into a site for personal and political change, as well as retreat and relaxation. Trying out new garden practices – of observation and experimentation, for example – may be a way of becoming more flexible and responsive to other forms of life. This requires, not so much a reversal of tendencies, or the imposition of absolute equality between species, but a critical re-visitation of different practices and their implications, as well as our intentions.

For example, while the protagonist in “Prize Tomatoes” is very engaged with the plants in his garden, the fact that his devotion is tied to his desire for a specific outcome, inflects that relationship with an element of domination. “Everyone at attention,” he commands his plants, “you must work very hard.”²⁸ His careful weeding is part of a bigger project to elicit a specific form of performance in his plants. At the same time, the child protagonist of “The Monkey Garden”, who is not a gardener and does not weed, is to some degree at the mercy of the garden and its events. When something happens there that upsets her, she seems to lose her place in it entirely. The monkey garden is “a good place to play”, but it is not necessarily conducive to learning in a positive sense: once the magic is gone, it’s gone. Thus, it should not be a question of choosing between the two gardens, or between weeding and playing, but of finding ways to make our well-intentioned projects in the garden open to the events that occur there.

In the future, an openness to experimentation and unpredictability may be part of what enables broader societal changes in response to large-scale environmental change. It may also enable the development of strategies for coping with associated difficulties on an everyday level. More practically speaking, perhaps a changed disposition toward weeds can provide the impetus to challenge municipal bylaws that require weed control and therefore constrain the development of a looser, more experimental garden aesthetic.

In her *Companion Species Manifesto* Donna Haraway writes about the benefits to be gained in what she calls “on-the-ground work” with “companion species.” Although she focuses on dogs, Haraway asserts that many other forms of life, including plants and even landscapes, can also be considered companion species, because they have co-evolved with human beings, and help to make our world what it is to us. It is through attention to our relationships with non-human others that she sees potential for a more ethical and vibrant life together in the future. She asserts that, “[e]arth’s

beings are prehensile, opportunistic, ready to yoke unlikely partners into something new, something symbiogenetic.”²⁹ For her, further co-evolution in the future depends largely on our openness, and a commitment to keep working on our relationships with other species over time.

I will conclude, then, by suggesting that perhaps weeds, especially those species which have become “invasive” by virtue of our willingness to transport them around the world and provide them with hospitable habitats, should be considered companion species of a sort. Rather than focusing on the demonization and control of weeds, we should start working on our relationship with them. Precisely because we cannot say ahead of time where that might lead us.

¹ Rosner. “Prize Tomatoes,” 45-69.

² Cisneros. “The Monkey Garden,” 113.

³ Quammen, D. “Planet of Weeds,” 67. Biologically speaking, weeds “reproduce quickly, disperse widely when given a chance, tolerate a fairly broad range of habitat conditions, take hold in strange places, succeed especially in disturbed ecosystems, and resist eradication once they’re established.”

⁴ Royer and Dickinson. *Weeds of Canada*, xiii-xiv (emphasis added).

⁵ Evans, *The War on Weeds*; and Radosevich, “Weed Ecology and Ethics”. Evans gives a historical treatment of the Canadian ‘war on weeds’ and the different roles played by farmers, scientists, bureaucrats and the weeds themselves. Radosevich presents a survey of the progress of American weed science in the twentieth century, and the connections between intensive farming, weed control strategies and the overall increase in the abundance of weeds during this time period.

⁶ ‘Invasive species’ are plants transported from one ecosystem to another and which tend smother or ‘out-compete’ native species, thereby threatening the stability of existing plant populations.

⁷ Sandlos, “Purple Loosestrife”, <http://www.sociology.org/archive.html>.

⁸ This may be changing in some municipalities. For example, bylaws in Toronto have recently been amended to allow for the cultivation of ‘natural gardens’ – i.e. including plants that might otherwise be mistaken for weeds.

⁹ Although vegetable gardens are often weeded with practical considerations in mind – such as reducing the competition for nutrients in the soil – this does not mean that visual effects are not also relevant. See Kumin, M. “Beans,” 155-62.

¹⁰ Where it doesn’t, the status of the garden will itself always be in question. For example, instances of Gilles Clément’s *jardin en mouvement* (discussed below) have been the subject of much controversy among garden critics. See St-Denis, B. “Just What is a Garden?”

¹¹ Kumin, M. “Beans,” 162.

¹² Treib, “Power Plays: The Garden as Pet,” 93.

¹³ Pugh, *Garden-Nature-Language*, 62.

¹⁴ “Canada Weeds” was a segment that appeared twice during August 2007 on CBC Radio’s “Sounds Like Canada,” soliciting listener participation by telephone and via the CBC website. <http://www.cbc.ca/soundslikecanada/>

¹⁵ Pugh, *Garden-Nature-Language*, 57. Although it began in the thirteenth and peaked in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after 1725, the creation of a parliamentary procedure for acts of enclosure gave landowners the ability to enclose common lands through an official public process. This was part of what enabled the expansion of country estates and the construction of large natural or landscape gardens by landowners.

¹⁶ Although contentious, it is worth noting that explicit connections have been made between native plant discourse and racist ideologies. While these connections seem for the most part to be historical in nature – i.e. being largely limited to debates among landscape professionals in Germany preceding and coincidental with the rise of National Socialism – the question of whether a preference for native plants is connected in a significant sense with racist or xenophobic social undercurrents has not been resolved. For example, see the following exchange: Gert Groening and Joachim Wolschke-Buhlman, “Some Notes on the Mania for Native Plants in Germany” *Landscape Journal*, 11 no. 1 (1992): 116-126; Kim Sorvig, “Natives and Nazis: An Imaginary Conspiracy in Ecological Design” *Landscape Journal*, 12 vol. 2 (1993): 58-61; Gert Groening and Joachim Wolschke-Buhlman, “Response: If the Shoe Fits, Wear It!” *Landscape Journal*, 12 vol. 2 (1993): 62-3. My thanks to Elen Deming for directing my attention to this exchange.

¹⁷ The species of blackberry covered by the common name Himalayan blackberry, include *Rubus discolor* or *Rubus armeniacus*, and *Rubus procerus* – neither of which originated in the Himalayas.

¹⁸ <http://www.lakewhatcom.wsu.edu/GARDENKIT/UnWantedPests/Blackberry.htm> Accessed Aug. 23, 2008. This 'lake-friendly' gardening site is the product of a collaboration between a variety of conservation organizations in Washington State. I thank one of the reviewers of this article for directing me to this site.

¹⁹ Griffith, H. "Editorial: Zero Tolerance," p. 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Latour. *The Politics of Nature*.

²² Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 3.

²³ Ibid, 3.

²⁴ Robertson, "Rubus Armeniacus," 127.

²⁵ Clément. "Working with (and never against) nature," 93.

²⁶ Maran, T. "Gardens and Gardening," p.126.

²⁷ I base my comments here on a rather optimistic interpretation of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*: a durable set of dispositions toward action and perception in the world that is structured by bodily participation in different social 'fields' and is difficult to change, requiring physical retraining.

²⁸ Rosner, A. "Prize Tomatoes," 45.

²⁹ Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 32.

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