Introduction: The Garden in the City

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This issue marks a number of new beginnings. First of all, I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to become the new editor of *The Brock Review*, a journal published by the Humanities Research Institute at Brock University. I look forward to working with my colleagues to provide a forum which reflects some of the dynamic and multi-disciplinary questions driving academic work in the Humanities today.

Secondly, this issue is the inaugural online issue of *The Brock Review*. *The Brock Review* was launched in the 1990s and, under the editorship of Mohammed Dore (Department of Economics), it was a forum for scholarly exchange on topics ranging from climate change to the films of D.W. Griffith.¹ The last issue of *The Brock Review* under Dore's editorship was published in 1998. In 2004 *The Brock Review* was revitalized under the direction of the Humanities Research Institute with Steven D. Scott serving as editor. During the 2007-08 academic year the decision was made to re-launch *The Brock Review* in an open-access, online format in order to reach a broader scholarly community.

The mandate of *The Brock Review* is two-fold. First of all, it is to be a venue showcasing some of the creative and scholarly work being done in the Faculty of Humanities at Brock University. Secondly, *The Brock Review* aims to participate in broader academic dialogues about issues shaping research and teaching in the Humanities. In keeping with this mandate each issue features contributions from scholars who have a direct affiliation with Brock University as well as contributions drawn from the broader academic community. The current issue reflects this mandate as it was inspired by a specific event that took place at Brock University, yet also participates in an ongoing academic exchange of ideas about the complex relationships that exist between humans and plant species in urban spaces.

The theme of this issue is "The Garden in the City," the same theme as the first Greenscapes conference held at Brock University in October 2007. The idea for the Greenscapes conference series arose out of the recognition that a number of Brock researchers are engaging with issues in garden and landscape history in their academic work. (That this research cluster happened to be situated in the "Garden City" was a fortunate coincidence!) The original Greenscapes conference attracted scholars and gardening enthusiasts from a wide range of academic and professional disciplines, and over the three day event papers were given on such subjects as literary representations of garden space and plant-based community activism. The current issue is not a conference proceedings *per se*, but, rather, picks up some of the threads of conversation where they were left off at the end of the conference. The momentum generated by the original Greenscapes conference continues, and we are currently planning the 2009 conference, an event dedicated to exploring the theme of "Landscapes of Myth and Imagination" (see www.brocku.ca/greenscapes for more details).

Gardens are often not the first thing to spring to mind when one thinks of urban spaces, however it is becoming increasingly apparent that gardens are – and have always been – integral to

the health and vitality of a city. Today gardens are a dominant component of an urban lifestyle; from the guerrilla gardens found on fire escapes to formal rose gardens situated in city parks, gardens can symbolize a number of cultural, social and political identities within the borders of a city. As Jenny Uglow has noted, “gardens are always unfinished, telling a long tale of immigration and connection and transformation,” and this is especially true in the context of urban gardening, where many competing ideas about the relationships between humans and plants species can converge.² In other words, gardens are not just places of respite or spaces in which fruits and vegetables are cultivated. The garden in the city is also necessarily bound by municipal bylaws, cultural norms, ideas about “the environment,” and, in some cases, peer pressure to conform to accepted aesthetic practices. As these influences change, so, too, does the space of the urban garden. The authors contributing to this volume approach this subject from a number of different angles, but all share a concern for understanding how dominant ideas of garden spaces have been shaped through cultural expression.

Renate Sander-Regier, Shelley Boyd and Rita Bode each explore how various practices of writing inform ideas about gardens and the act of gardening. In her piece, “Earthways: Opportunity, Community and Meaning in the Personal Garden,” Sander-Regier discusses the relationships that exist between gardening and non-fiction writing in the work of what she refers to as “gardener-authors.” Through her analysis of writing by such well-known gardeners as Marjorie Harris and Leon Whiteson, Sander-Regier addresses how individual acts of planting and harvesting can, in turn, prompt consideration of community and of ecology existing beyond one’s own backyard. Shelley Boyd’s contribution to this issue, a piece entitled “A Grave Garden,” offers a close reading of Aritha van Herk’s long poem, *Calgary, This Growing Graveyard*. As Boyd argues, this poem—originally published in 1987—has taken on new meanings given the multitude of changes that the city of Calgary has undergone in recent years. In her discussion Boyd focuses on the symbolic significance of the cemetery, both in terms of the cyclical rhythms of an urban centre as well as the ways in which cemeteries express ideals of public greenspace in a city. The varied meanings of garden spaces are also considered in Rita Bode’s discussion of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*. In “‘Within small compass’: Hawthorne’s Expansive Urban Garden in *The House of the Seven Gables*,” Bode explores the complexity of the garden space in Hawthorne’s writings. While the gardens in Hawthorne’s novels are fictional spaces, they reflect very real and dynamic interspecific interactions that take place in all gardens and, as such, serve as a model for negotiating relationships between human and non-human species.

Jakub Zdebik and Melanie Nakaue both focus on the relationships that exist between gardens and contemporary art. Zdebik considers abstract issues of garden space as found in the artwork of Janice Kerbel. Kerbel’s black and white prints use the familiar visual codes of architectural plans, however these plans were not created for the purpose of creating buildings or landscaping projects. Rather, the spaces represented in Kerbel’s artwork exist entirely in the realm of the conceptual. These “gardens on paper,” then, serve as a starting point for Zdebik’s theoretical considerations of spatial representation. In a similar manner Nakaue’s essay, “Of Other Places: The Garden as a Heterotopic Site in Contemporary Art,” looks to the writings of Michel Foucault in her analysis of artwork produced by Stan Douglas, Hew Locke and Shirin Neshat. As Nakaue argues, the symbolic concept of “the garden” is used by each of these artists as a means of interrogating spatial and temporal conventions.

Nina Gerlach’s contribution to this issue, “Greenscape as Screenscape: The Cinematic Urban Garden,” explores the ways in which relationships between gardens and urban spaces are negotiated in filmic terms. Specifically, she considers the physical boundaries of a garden to be a significant symbolic device in such films as Vittorio De Sica’s 1970 film, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* and Jacques Tati’s 1958 film, *Mon Oncle*.

While most of the contributions in this issue of *The Brock Review* explore creative and cultural representations of gardening, Erin Despard's essay, "Creative Weeding and Other Everyday Experiments in the Garden," looks to the practice of gardening itself as a form of creative expression. In particular, Despard argues for both the need for a more imaginative way of thinking about and dealing with plants that get classified as "weeds" and for the increased recognition of plant-based agency in garden spaces. As Despard points out, the act of labelling a particular plant a "weed" is necessarily shaped by dominant cultural ideals, and that if we are open to the possibility of alternate ways of engaging with these plants we may arrive at new ways of negotiating relationships with non-human species in the garden.

The essays in this issue are complemented by Kristine Thoreson's photo essay, "Imaging the Urban Park" and a video presentation of the 2007 Greenscapes conference opening keynote address, an address given by the well-known author of many garden publications, Lorraine Johnson. Like the written texts in this volume, both Thoreson's photography and Johnson's lecture force us to critically re-examine ideas we may hold about "the garden in the city."

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who helped make this issue of *The Brock Review* possible. I would like, in particular, to express my thanks to Dean Rosemary Hale (Dean, Faculty of Humanities), Dr. Jane Koustas (Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Director of the Humanities Research Institute) and the members of the HRI Advisory Board for their ongoing support of *The Brock Review*. I would also like to thank the members of the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Brock Review*, a group of dedicated colleagues from Universities and Colleges across Canada who have generously shared with me their advice and expertise. This issue could not have come together without the assistance of Julia Babos (Centre for Digital Humanities), Greg Roberts (Information Technology Services), Andy Morgan (Information Technology Services) and Duncan MacDonald (Department of Visual Arts), and I am grateful to each of them for their help with the technical aspects of launching *The Brock Review* in an online format. I would also like to extend my thanks to Erin Napier for her copyediting work and to the many scholars who generously volunteered their time as peer reviewers for this issue.

¹ Timothy Mount, "Climate Change, Sustainable Economic Systems and Welfare," *The Brock Review* 2 (1993): 2-21; Barry Keith Grant, "Pistils and Stamens: Gender and Genre in D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*," *The Brock Review* 6 (1997): 27-44.

² Jenny Uglow, *A Little History of British Gardening* (London: Pimlico, 2005).

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