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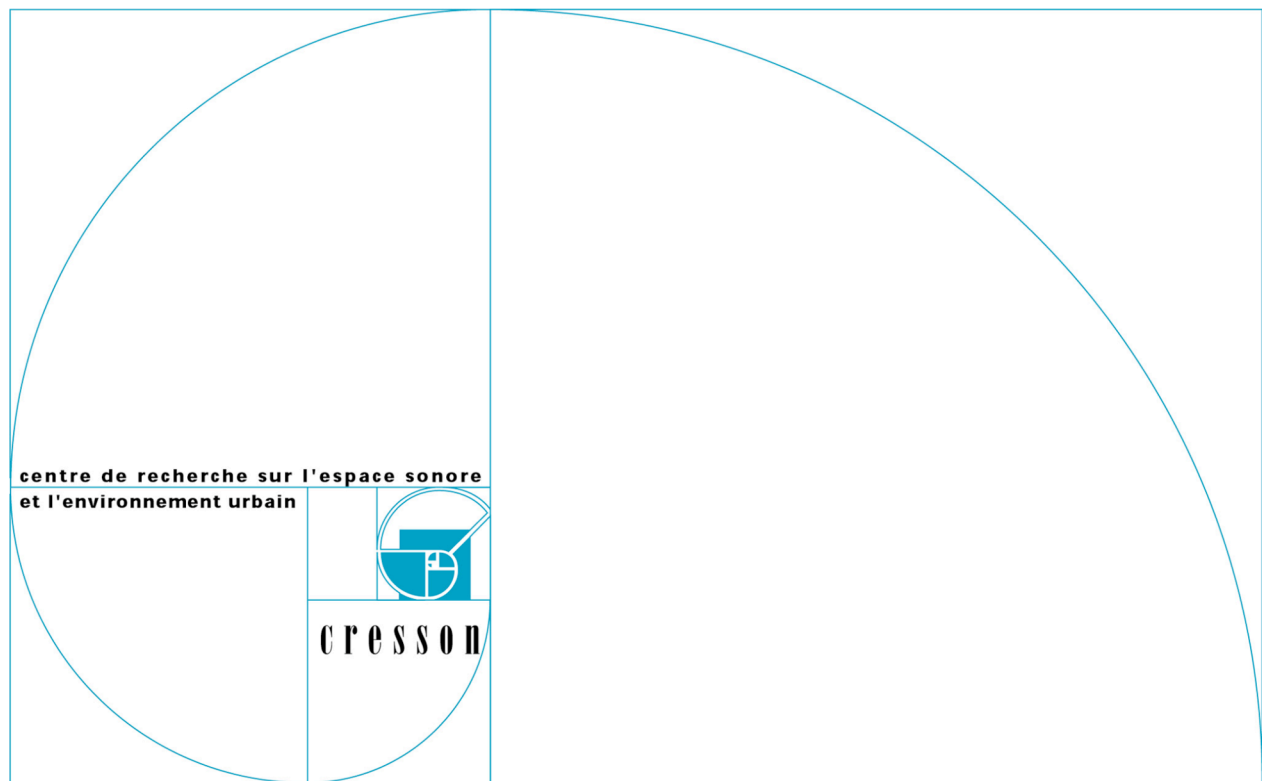
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Magali Paris - 2008



école nationale  
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## THE EXPERIENCES OF GARDENS AND GARDENING AT THE HOUSING SURROUNDINGS

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### ABSTRACT

How does gardening the housing surroundings –as done by the residents- contribute to rediscover a sense of time that could help to manage spatial proximity? Our research, conducted within the architectural and urban ambiances research center (Grenoble, France), focuses on this question. More precisely, we theorize that: Gardening a doorstep garden is an everyday life experiment in the modeling of sensorial materials with human relationships. This experiment leads to the “step-by-step” edification of home.

The small “doorstep” gardens, which we studied, are set as often on balconies as on 30m<sup>2</sup> ground spaces. We present material from a qualitative *in situ* survey based on the collection of residents’ discourse and ethnological observations. Sixty narratives have been collected through semi-structured interviews realized several times with residents during a period of 4 years. These surveys have been conducted in thirteen examples of grouped housing in two French cities (Grenoble and Paris).

Our first analysis suggests that:

A) Gardening the housing surroundings empowers the residents to create breaks in the temporal stream, to build their personal times. Doorstep gardens are “rootedness” places, where, during breaks, different stages of dwelling, residents are modeling conceptually and materially their familiar environment and the personage they would like to present to their neighbors.

B) If the garden eases the presence of neighbors and facilitates relations with them, in the everyday life, in the context of adjoining gardens, user times and user spaces could overlap and thus conflicts could emerge. The residents develop specific behaviors to conceal the protection of their territory and of their personal times, and the avoidance of conflicts.

C) The garden could shelter different individual and collective times. Multimodal perception of the garden, while gardening, and informal relationships developed upon it stimulate imagination and develop the feeling of being away, alone or together, far away from the urban world.

**Keywords:** dwelling cities together, doorstep gardens, gardening, times, senses, management of spatial proximity, qualitative research

### DWELLING TOGETHER AND GARDENING IN BETWEEN

Our research questions the possibilities to dwell together in a high-density urban context. We stand on the sedentary side of the notion of dwelling first developed by Martin Heidegger (1958) [1], as the process by which people make their place of existence a home. Dwelling, as building relations with one place while staying in, appeals to the notion of place familiarity (Tuan, Yi-Fu, 1977 [2]). Being familiar with a place consists of inking the self into it (Seamon, David, 1980 [3]) while developing conceptual and material layers of familiarity: the concentric shells of the

self from insideness to foreignness (Moles, Abraham, 1992 [4]). Dwelling is concealing the integrity of the self and the development of relationships with others. According to Roland Barthes (1976-1977) [5], the way to dwell harmoniously together consists of setting up a personal time, an “idiorhythm”, that puts the others at a bearable distance and allows good relations with them. We suppose that the doorsteps of the housing are places, in between, where this idiorhythm could be as well created as destroyed.

The garden is in between the self and the others. It “allows for paradox: male vs. female, self vs. community, consumerism vs. self-reliance” (Francis, Mark and Hester Jr., Randolph T. 1990 [6]). Stated from Brunon (1999) [8], the garden is at the junction of the tensions that contribute to build our way to be in the world: “One need to find its place between the obedience to community norms and the needs for freedom and intimacy”. The garden is an arena for the mediation of conflicts (Francis, Mark and Hester Jr., Randolph T. 1990) [6]. Thus, by gardening on their doorstep, the residents are empowered to estrange the others as well as to develop gardened relations with them (Paris, Magali, 2007) [9,10,11].

Beside that, the doorstep garden and its gardening throw in temporalities closed to intimate and biological rhythms: the domestic rhythms overflow out of the housing in the garden and the evolution of the garden is daily perceived and followed by the resident-gardener. The garden underlines the processes of change and recurrence which are according to Lynch (1974; [12] “the sense of being alive”, that is, the garden could alleviate the fear of time eluding. The garden shelters a time paradox: “Anyone who has ever gardened knows that a garden represents constancy yet is ever changing” (Francis, Mark and Hester Jr., Randolph T. 1990) [6]. According to times topology (Amphoux, Pascal, 1988) [13] and a phenomenological approach of gardening, we could say that a garden shelters, conceals and articulates three different temporalities (Paris, Magali, 2007) [10,11]: first a cyclical temporality (seasons perception, gardening and routine cycles) that repeats the story but never the same way, second a linear and continuous temporality (memories held by the gardens, apprenticeship of gardening and constant care the garden needs), third a linear and discontinuous temporality (gardening expectations, forecasts and surprises). In this sense, we pointed that the experience of garden is strongly anchored at once in the past, present and future, and therefore contributing to the elaboration of the dwelling story (Paris, Magali, 2007) [10].

Moreover, “gardening is a close-at-hand form of leisure activity” (Kaplan, Rachel, 193) [14] and our doorstep gardens are miniatures, domesticated landscapes: a slice of nature compressed in space and stuck on the housing, and a pattern of information compressed in time. Thus, the residents are empowered to compose their own environment and their own story by gardening on their doorstep.

In this sense, therefore, we should wonder: How does gardening the housing surroundings –as done by the residents- contribute to rediscover a sense of time that could help to dwell together, beside each others, to manage spatial proximity?

According to Bernado Secchi’s position about time and urbanity (2006)[15], the nature in the city holds an intermediate temporality between the more and more accelerated social time and the slow time of the physical city. We suppose that gardening on a doorstep contributes to create hybrid familiar temporalities that can take it from social’s temporalities as from physical’s ones, or as much from biological’s ones. More precisely, we could theorize that: gardening a doorstep garden is an everyday life experiment in the modeling of sensorial materials with human relationships and reciprocally. This experiment leads to a “step-by-step” edification of home that produces different temporalities. The modeling of sensorial materials refers to gardening

gestures, to multimodal perception in the garden and to the imaginary process that takes place while perceiving and designing the garden. Within the scope of Jean-François Augoyard's famous work about everyday walks (1979)[16], our research proposes a new figure of the city, its familiar side, within which city dwellers have got shared competencies to organize their everydaylife by mobilizing the affordances (Gibson, James, J. 1979) [17] of the environment.

After having drawn shortly the methodological context of this research, we are now going to present three socio-psychological facets of the doorstep garden: 1) A place of rootedness, 2) A place to be negotiated 3) A place of re-creation. These three facets are not chronological but intertwined. They reflect various ways to be in the world, they imply different temporalities sometimes linked to the self or to the foreignness or to a sense of community.

### **STUDYING EVERYDAY LIFE IN DOORSTEP GARDENS:**

We studied small gardens and, sometimes, garden pieces. They form the doorstep between a private housing and the "outside": a known or anonymous (another housing or the public space) neighborhood. We chose a variety of gardens more or less closed to the outside. Therefore we studied thirteen examples of grouped housing in two French cities (Grenoble and Paris).<sup>1</sup> The residents could have one or more gardens, set as often on balconies as on 30m<sup>2</sup> ground spaces.

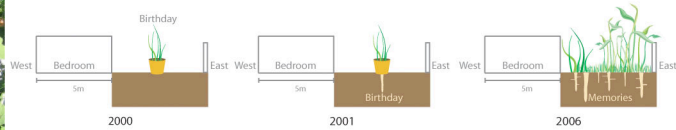
To study everyday life in these doorstep gardens, we use phenomenological perspectives. Indeed, *in situ*, we realized semi-structured interviews with the residents and ethnological observations. The interviewees have been selected according to their garden's appearance from the outside or according to their "gardened-reputation" in the neighborhood. The duration of this survey was four years. We did several interviews with residents and several ethnological observations in order to follow the evolution of gardens through seasons. Due to the difficulties of the residents in speaking about daily life, in expressing feelings and fantasies, we use some projective methods at different steps of the interview. At the beginning of the meeting, we involved the resident in a tour of his garden where he was asked for present his plants, his garden design through seasons and years and the different activities that daily take place. After that, we talked about his dwelling path and his neighborhood relationships. Then, we questioned him on the seasonal evolution of his garden. To support this stage of the interview, we asked him to describe the garden at each season through mental pictures related to senses (touch, hearing, smell, view) and feelings. Then we talked about multimodal perception of the garden, its design with senses and the different meanings that the garden could hold. Finally, we concluded the interview with drawings realized by the resident, making him imagine what he could have done if the garden space was different. This last exercise underlines the gardening practices linked to space delimitation and frustrations in relation to regretted and dreamed gardens.

The sixty "tape-recorded" interviews have been transcript and analyzed, transversely, with the collected observations through a CAQDAS<sup>2</sup> Software according to the grounded theory (Strauss, Anselm L. and Corbin, Juliet, 1990) [18]. The present paper will not focus on the comparative dimension of gardening different physical types of space. It deals with a part of our first transversal analysis: the connections between gardening, time and dwelling together.

### **A PLACE OF ROOTEDNESS**

In 1998, when Yvette -one of our gardeners- arrived in her new housing, she first put the window boxes from her last apartment along the fence. She gradually moved her plants out of her

community garden plot. In 2000, for her birthday, her son gave her a yellow rosebush. She put it in the middle of the garden waiting to find a pot to transplant it. Some days later, she felt ill for a long period. Meanwhile, the rosebush was rooting through its plastic pot. When she came back home cured, she discovered astonished the rooted rosebush and decided, carefully, to dig some little spots in the original grass. Year after year, she removed the grass, enriched the soil and transplanted the plants from pots to soil and from a place to another to find the “right” one.



**Fig.1.Left: Yvette in her garden, Right: Rooting of memories in Yvette’s garden**

The narrative of Yvette’s garden tells us that the dwelling appropriation process could be seen as a succession of events linked together. Some events, for example the 2000 Yvette’s birthday, are rooted in the garden. The garden supports a history of dwelling; it links the different events together. Indeed, the garden shelters the traces of these events. The garden is a sediment, an homogeneous entity while it is composed of conceptual and material disparate elements. Feeling a dwelling place as stable and continuous is necessary to appropriate it (Fisher, Gustave N. 1992) [19]. In this sense, Sansot & al. showed that gardening holds up a feeling of continuity by introducing a subconscious rhythm, an articulation between present, past and future that favors rooting and the establishment of the gardener’s story: “*By introducing a slow frequency and a string of gestures necessary to continuity, the gardening, this modeling of ground, give time roots. Plants hold histories, the history, they tame it*” (Sansot, Pierre and al., 1978/P.T) [20].

Moreover, while gardening, the gardener sets back and creates a break within the temporal stream: *When I am gardening, I forgive everything around me: my family as well as my work. I forgive all my worries. I lost the sense of time. Gardening is therapeutic for me* (Excerpt from Christianne’s narrative, P.T). The routine is suspended to allow intimate and intense events to take place. According to Tuan [2], the rootedness of dwelling should not be considered through the duration of a stay but through the intensity of each break that composes this stay. Two feelings have an influence on the intensity of gardening breaks: first the feeling of intimacy, second the feeling of surprise. Gardening consists of a conceptual retreat, away from the world, during which the gardener focuses his attention on the perception and modeling of sensual materials (Laroze, Catherine, 1990; Paris, Magali and Wieczorek, Anna, 2008) [21,22]. In addition, our survey underscores that the senses most involved in gardening are the sense of smell and the sense of touch, the ones that are the closest to the self: *What does my garden mean? Birds and bugs... I design the garden for them (...) A river of flowers. Just one like that*

*(Phlox pyramidalis) could perfume the entire corner there, especially at the end of the day when it is sun-filled. The perfume of the garden changes through the day, earlier there are the perfumes of the dark blue Surfinia and of the Jasmine (...) I love to caress my lemon verbena, like that (she shows me the gesture), its perfume on my skin, its sound, its rude touch (...) I want a stifling garden, I can't prune, it's hard for me (...) I like to feel enveloped by my garden, to be closed to it (Excerpt from Yvette's narrative, P.T). Yvette does not design her garden on a plan, she designs it, day by day, through an intuitive modeling: I did not plan to make paths, it's not an aesthetic perspective. I just dug across vegetation (Excerpt of Yvette's narrative, P.T).*

Gardening is a familiar activity. However, gardening does not follow the habituation process usually assigned to familiarity. Indeed being "accustomed to" consists of being more and more "desensitized" (Fisher, Jeffrey D. & al. 1984)[23], whereas gardening and the perception of the garden hail the senses. Gardening is an original experience, each time different: from one year to another, from season to season, from day to day. The experience of gardens and gardening is a constant re-discovery. Each experience is strongly anchored in present and closed to the self.

Beside that, the experience of gardening is an apprenticeship that follows the different stages of life, that links them together. First, gardening often appeals to memories and especially one's from childhood (Francis, Mark, 1995 and Cooper M., Clare, 2005)[24, 25]: *I chose plants from my childhood, mum and dad's garden, the uncle and aunt's garden, grandmother's garden are my inspiration (...) my garden reminds me beloved places and people (Excerpt from Yvette's narrative, P.T) In summer camp, I used to bring back flowers and branches to my bedside table, it was my secret garden (...) a little bit older, I put some cut daisies in a window box (...) it withered quickly, I was unaware of gardening, but I became, then, a gardener (Excerpt from Josette's narrative, P.T) When I was a little girl, my biggest pleasure was to enter a yarn shop. All these colors, all these textures, it was a magical word for me. I rediscover the same feelings with gardening, the excitement for creating by stimulation of the senses (Excerpt from Claudine's narrative, P.T). Second, the plants hold the memory of previous gardened places as they are often transplanted from one to another. They give coherence to the dwelling path. Third, gardening could support and give sense to a transitional stage of life: *I lived in Noumea during 2 years. I was still married. I decided there to make something new, a vegetable garden with native species, I got 2000m<sup>2</sup>! When I came back here, it was inconceivable for me to live without a garden. We divorced. I set something new in this apartment (Excerpt from Françoise's narrative, P.T). With all the problems we had got, maybe if we have not got this garden (...) maybe we could not reach today. It helps us a lot (Excerpt from Yvette's narrative P.T).**

Gardening is a reciprocal relationship between the gardener and the gardens of his life. The gardener roots a part of himself in the garden. Reciprocally, the gardening practices of a resident are modeled by the different places he gardened: *I was not born gardener; this place transformed me in a gardener (excerpt from Yvette's narrative P.T).*

Gardening is not only turned in on the self. Beautifying one's doorstep with plants is a way to be in contact with neighbors. Gardening genders a time, peculiar to the self, that allows the resident to compose the character he would like to present to the others (Francis, Mark and Hester Jr., Randolph T. 1990) [6]: *I search for plants that are invading and eye-catcher. I am different (...) I'm not afraid to show my preferences (Excerpt from Yvette's narrative, P.T).*

## **A PLACE TO BE NEGOCIATED**

The doorstep gardens- placed side by side, piled up or opposite- are not sealed up from each

other's. They could be closed with a hedge, which is permeable to looks, sounds and smells. The circulation of the different familiar worlds eases the contacts between neighbors and also can contribute to the neighborhood relationships. However, the times developed are very different from one dweller to another according to their lifestyle (age, profession, social and racial origins, children, animals...etc.). Familiar times, personal times, friendship times and public times could jostle together and could lead to conflicts. In this context, how could the residents develop their idio-rhythm if this one may be endangered at each moment? Before coming into conflicts with each other, the residents set up time adjustments as given different degrees of receptiveness to their garden. In reference to Thibault (2002) [26], the receptiveness of a place depends on a double movement between closing and opening. The processes of closing and opening are embodied in material and conceptual limits of the garden, in relationship behaviors and in the similarity from a garden to another. Daily, dwelling together consists of matching own times to the neighbors' ones. The garden's composition and its limits and relationship behaviors are tools employed by neighbors to match their times. Thus, in each grouped housing, a noiseless –as often avoiding verbal exchanges- neighborhood language is developed. We underscore four receptiveness patterns adopted by the residents according to their needs for privacy and the nature of their neighborhood relationships: the struggle, the avoidance, the tolerance and the imitation. Each pattern implies different temporalities.

The struggle pattern is a first answer to the feeling of being invaded by neighbors or by strangers. Strangers, Children and animals are not often aware of property lines. As a consequence, the struggle could be incarnated in the reinforcement of the garden limits. We observed this strategy of “materially keeping away” in gardens located next to the public space: some open but also others closed with opaque limits. The reinforcement of the limits is processed in order to repulse and to last. Thus, the plants use to design these limits are often evergreen and at least perennial and sometimes thorny: *We were burgled, so I planted a line of firethorns along the outside wall, in order to dissuade from climbing* (excerpt from Charles's narrative, P.T); *The children were biking very fast toward the wall. The dogs were pooping. I set thorny plants and flowers in between. It is repulsing while it's respected, since it's a nice place* (excerpt from Bernadette's narrative, P.T). In addition to these unchanging plants, we observed the use of annual invading plants, the ones that re-sow them automatically each year: *I use plants that re-sow themselves, this garden has to be filled in order to be respected, and sometimes I haven't enough time to garden, the ones that re-sow are useful* (excerpt from Josette's narrative, P.T). We also observed that gardeners use colors of flowers to delimit their territory, this kind of delimitation is less lasting than the previous ones: *I plant this line of primulas, different colors of primulas. I hope people understand they are not free to get over* (excerpt from Michel's narrative, P.T). These repulsive limits involve the senses of touch and sight. Secondly, the struggle could be incarnated in surveillance behaviors: *Why don't I set the arch at the beginning of the passage? People would damage it. I find my arch lying on ground 5 or 6 times a year. I always find garbage and dogs' poo within my plants. I clean immediately. You have to pay attention every minute. You have to check. I try to set a garden that is saying I am here!* (excerpt from Josette's narrative, P.T); *Yesterday, I put here a small amount of soil in order to garden today. Someone helps himself (...) Some flowers were picked up before Saint Valentine or Mother's day. People are incredible! So I attached my window boxes with wire cable and I screw in the concrete my pots. When I see people damaging my place I go out and I stop them, but I can't be here every minute!* (excerpt from Michel's narrative, P.T). Third and last, the struggle could be incarnated in the gathering of residents against another one, since this one does not respect the implicit social rules



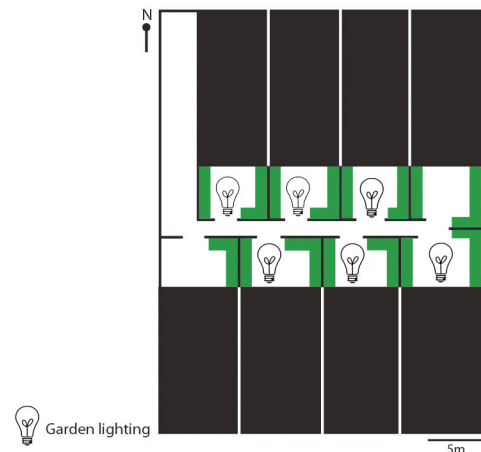
that concern people's property, tranquility and sharing: *Brice was listening to music too loud and was making parties too often, he was putting his stuffs on our places. This kind of behavior: "you have enough place, so I put my stuffs on your territory". It could come to a bad end! We were all against him. Hopefully, he's gone!* (excerpt from Arnaud's narrative, P.T). *He destroyed our beautiful community garden, it becomes ugly, it's just a mess! (The windows of the invading Cambodian family living on the ground floor were opened. She was talking to me this way, since she knew they could not understand French) They are here every time. They monopolize all our space! We talk about it together. We plan to make something. We would like the garden to be like it was before: beautiful and common* (excerpt from Delphine's narrative, P.T).

The avoidance pattern is the second answer to the feeling of being invaded by neighbors. Avoidance behaviors prevent from invade feelings and from invading oneself. They refer to the implicit social rule according to which intimate times should be respected daily and nightly. Each resident has in mind a neighborhood timetable. These avoidance behaviors could first consist of dodging the contact with others. Indeed we could observed, in doorstep gardens, residents escaping detection by hiding them or by keeping in silence, and avoiding contact by evading to look or by turning in on oneself with sound insulation: *Sometimes I don't feel in the mood for speaking. So I hide behind these little walls. I have no shame to avoid that!* (excerpt from Sandra's narrative, P.T); *When I am listening to my iPod in the garden, it's a sort of code: "I am not ready now to exchange with you"* (excerpt from Arnaud's narrative, P.T). Secondly, the avoiding behaviors could consist of eluding to invade the neighbors' intimacy with noises: *I avoid to make noise with my friends in the garden, we always stay inside, I don't want to annoy by displaying my private stuffs* (excerpt from Véronique's narrative, P.T); *Sometimes we get some friends same time. It's so quiet this side that we hear each other. It is an unpleasant feeling. The only solution I found for the moment is to set these opaque panels, at least we can not see each others!* (excerpt from Nathalie's narrative, P.T); and with undesirable looks: *when I pass on the footbridge, I always restrain myself to look down, especially when I hear laughs, they could be with friends and I don't want to disturb them* (excerpt from Nathalie's narrative, P.T); *When I walk in the path while neighbors are with friends, I just say: "hello, how are you"? -Something polite- and I take my way. But if they engage the conversation, I may stay a while* (Excerpt from Nadine's narrative, P.T).

Usually, avoidance behaviors are much used during the week. During weekends or holidays, especially in Summer, neighbors adopt more open-oriented and lax behaviors: *In summer, the homes are more opened, the children move from a house to another, they play in the passage. It's really nice. But in winter, it's good that everybody's at home, it balances. It's like we dwell 6 months in Seville and 6 months in Paris* (Excerpt from Laurent's narrative, P.T). Therefore, tolerance is the third receptiveness pattern we underscored. More tolerant attitudes could be observed during certain seasons and certain times of the week as we previously point to, nevertheless a general tolerant attitude could be observed all along the year. Dwelling together in high-density context requires being enough tolerant until civility limits. In this way, the residents develop threshold of tolerance toward noises produced by children games and by dwelling merrymakings: *The children shoot with balloons in our wood fence, it's such an horrible noise for old tired people like us (...) however I react simply: I go out and I joke with them. As for my wife, they used to ring at the doorbells when they came back from school, she goes out and tames them with candies (...) we are not alone, that's the way things are* (Excerpt from Roger's narrative, P.T); *Everything goes off smoothly here, each one could do its own mess, it's the interplay, in the limit of...* (Excerpt from Jean-Marc's narrative, P.T). The tolerance pattern is a

mutual agreement, which is much easier to set between fellow neighbors, neighbors from similar social sphere and with similar lifestyle.

In addition, as neighbors get to know each other, they could develop imitation processes. Imitation is our fourth and last receptiveness pattern. According to Sansot (1983)[27], neighborhood practices, especially gardening's, show diffusions: during a gardening time, a resident might give ideas to, might influence another resident. "Which pair of pruning shears alerted the others?"[27](P.T). Then, the senses of hearing and of sight are the most involved. On long term, the residents could match their gardening practices and preferences. Indeed, we detected that resident-gardeners are often linked together in a gardening hierarchy. The ones "that know how to garden" are often consulted for advices, scrupulously followed. They give cuttings and seeds, disseminating this way their plants in other gardens. They often make their contributions to the neighborhood daily life organization. Finally, we perceived that diffusions could be one feature of a place. Similar layouts could be set up from a garden to another. These layouts could become neighborhood links which tell the story of the different domestic times and the story of dwelling together: *Most of the residents here have chosen the same lighting for their garden. A famous designer has conceived this lighting. We hung it in the bamboos. It creates a sort of community, a sort of homogeneity between homes. When we invite people, we lighten the terrace. It becomes a sort of language, when it's lightened at Nadine's and Arnaud's home, we know that they are inviting friends* (Excerpt from Laurent's narrative P.T).

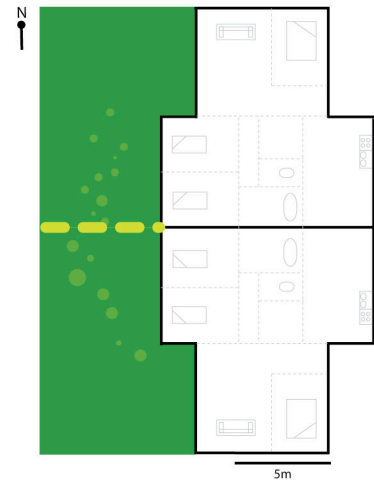


**Fig.2.**Left: Neighbors chatting in the passage; Right: Plan of the 8 lofts community, Imitation pattern through garden lighting

### A PLACE OF RE-CREATION

We illustrate with our previous examples that creating a garden consists in modeling sensorial materials with human relationships and reciprocally. This modeling is not unchanging. Indeed, gardening is an endless double movement between building and dismantling. The gardening contributes in the continual updating of our links with the environment; gardening is a place of continual re-creation. One of our interviewees, Steven, revealed us that, for him, the garden is a place in contrast with modern temporalities, garden allows human times to be developed, times in which relationships could be forged. Dwelling together through the agency of gardens is a social shared experience that lay on changing way of seeing things by rebuilding it together. We

observed that each social experience supported by the garden depends on the choices of life adopted by the residents: bringing up children, looking after its little-children, developing socio-professional relationships while working and relationships more oriented on family, friendship, neighborhood and leisure during retirement, surrounding oneself with animals and nature... These choices evolve during the different stages of life; therefore a re-creative social experience is delimited by a stage of the dwelling path. Crosswise, the combination children-garden is often a trigger factor of social experiences. Relationships between adults could be developed upon children games and services related to picking up from school and day-care after school and during holidays: *We did not know each other before. We got our first child in the same time. When they were little, they were seeing each other through the hedge... we passed them over the hedge to let them play together. One day, we decided to make holes in the hedge and to share the gardens. The games are common. The garden is a friendship story. So precious memories related to childhood friendship! It's important for us too (the adults), it's so reliable for me... This experience transformed us* (Excerpt from Fabienne's narrative, P.T).



**Fig.3.**Left: View of the new “pierced” hedge (a piece of the previous hedge remains on left) from Fabienne’s garden; right: plan of the 2 housings and their connected gardens

However, a shared social experience is not a social utopia. Each housing always presents a relative closeness: *To have developed such relationships requires a more awareness behavior. We planted tiny and different plants in order to create an open hedge, to let the children pass. We did not know if we would stay for long or not. Beside that, each one of us behaves in order to respect the intimacy of the other. But if we hear or see each other in the garden, the conversation goes on easily* (excerpt from Fabienne’s narrative, P.T); *I don’t really like the children staying in a “no-exit” place, sometimes I feel right to escape from here and go to the Buttes-Chaumont Park* (Excerpt from Steven’s wife narrative, P.T). Indeed, as we saw in introduction, garden allow for paradox and shelters same time social and personal experiences. In this way, gardening supports personal escaping times. The resident can turn on to himself in order to invent his own world, to give sense to his place, and to forgive, for a while, the spatial proximity. According to Kaplan (1973, 1989)[13,28], gardening is a restorative experiment, since it convoques indirect attention. While gardening, the sight is less stimulated than such senses as touch and smell, the gestures are intimate, the gardener is isolated from the “outside”, away for a while. Thus, While gardening, the routine is suspended to allow a time for self-re-creation: *When I’m gardening, I*

*forgive all my problems, I recharge my batteries (...) I often forget the time, I said to me “ok it will just take me 10 minutes” and I stop gardening 3 hours latter* (Excerpt from Christianne’s narrative, P.T). Moreover, while gardening, the time is diluted, temporal marks are muddled, and according to imaginary processes -often linked to stimulation of the senses- the gardener travels through time and space: *The smelling of this plant reminds me my mother’s and grand-mother’s gardens* (Excerpt from Yvette’s narrative, P.T); *My son died 2 years ago, he was 15 (...) I often bring plants to his grave, and sometimes I bring them back home. It’s insignificant but I think it helps me* (Excerpt from Françoise’s narrative, P.T); *Look this is my Spanish daisies, my piece of Spain! (she is Spanish)* (Excerpt from Amparo’s narrative, P.T) *Here is my very organized vegetables gardens, it’s both an experimental place to see stuffs growing and my little “Versailles”* (Excerpt from Pierre’s narrative, P.T). In Foucault’s opinion (1967, [29]), the garden is an “heterotope”: that means that it has the property to shelter many virtual places in a material one. Gardening allows the gardener to reach lost and dreamed garden places and to commute from one place to another. Its property empowers the resident to create his own familiar environment where urban pollution disappeared for a while: *Today, the buildings are too much concrete, it’s sad, dirty (...) the garden, the plants, the flowers could help to fight against concrete, to bring a touch of happiness* (Excerpt from Michel’s narrative, P.T).

#### **GARDENING AS AN EMPOWERMENT TO FIGHT AGAINST SUBMISSION TO TIME**

All along this paper we wondered how sustainable could be a “green place” through a human filter. We questioned how the gardens close to home, the doorstep gardens, take part in the individual and collective dwelling welfare. Our research rests on the idea that gardening allows to distance oneself from the others while searching its own autonomy and identity without cutting all ties with the others for all that. We stressed the fact that the experience of gardening empowers the residents to fight against submission to time. Indeed, firstly, gardening permits to the resident to root his own story in a place, which holds consequently personal rhythms. Secondly, the residents develop in their garden different degree of receptiveness in order to be able to distance from the others or to get approaches of them. We stressed four different patterns of receptiveness: the struggle, the avoidance, the tolerance and the imitation. These patterns contribute for different strategies to escape of the conflicts by matching own time to the others. Thirdly, the garden is a place where stories could be constructed together and alone through a perpetual updating of the self and of the environment. Crosswise, the resident-gardener is empowered to model time through the delimitation of its garden, its composition and the behaviors he adopts within it.

To return to our first stand, the sedentary side of gardening, we observed that an important part of our interviewees were not dwelling in the perspective to stay forever, despite this they were involved in gardening. Rooting in one place while gardening refers to the memories of previous gardens and sometimes memories that go back to childhood. We also discovered that some gardeners were gardening simultaneously different -and sometimes numerous- places: community plot, neighbor’s garden, family or friend’s garden, public space. Finally, they garden sometimes in order to give sense to a transitional stay. Therefore beyond our first position, we could say that gardening empowers the residents to give sense to a period of their life through rooting processes characterized by space and time continuity and spatial slipping.

A dwelling place is all the more rich as it is a collection of stories, to which the residents could make reference to build their own. Moreover, a grouped-housing, which doorsteps could be

gardened, is adorned with particular ambiances in reference to these stories and their sharing which contribute to feel those dwelling places as homogeneous while they are composed of various heterogeneity. Therefore, a dwelling place which doorstep is gardened has got particular properties, a *genius loci*, which made that one dwelling place is never similar to another. However, today, plants in the city are not seen through a human filter but through a green system that must be controlled. Vegetation is almost considered as a lifeless element, unchanging, always beautiful, a smart object that is capable of auto-management. Vegetation becomes “the opium of the people” in this senseless context. Our urban society lost its relation with nature, since we didn’t depend on it to live. Garden could be a way to remind this bound, as its “meaning power” lay on the synchronized existence of idea, place experience and action (Francis, Mark and Hester Jr. Randolph T. 1990) [6]. The residents develop competencies upon gardening to build their everyday life. By modeling sensorial materials with human relationships and reciprocally in order to organize their dwelling times, the residents synchronize the existence of idea, place experience and action. These competencies are of an intuitive nature. The residents develop upon gardens sensitive intuitions first about how improving sensorially their daily life, second about how to dwell the most harmoniously together. In this way and according to Stein’s concept of “ungardening” (1993) [30] which stated that a good garden is almost unfinished to allow projects to take place in it, could we designed a city in which undefined spaces, in between, could become potential gardens that empower the residents to create their own times, their own story? Isn’t it possible to believe in Jacques Benoit-Méchin (1998) [31] when he is saying that: “gardening fit, in some civilizations, with the desire to express, not by a conceptual way but by borrowing to nature some of its elements, their highest conception of happiness”?

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**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> As this research is realized within a French context, most of the references are French and the interviews have been realized and transcribed in French. All the translation we give here are ours, we use the acronym P.T to mean “Personal Translation”.

<sup>2</sup> Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis