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Guerrillas in Our Midst:

Underground Gardening and Knitting in the City

A Master's Thesis for the Degree Masters of Arts (Two Years) in Visual Culture

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ABSTRACT
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Guerrillas in Our Midst: Underground Gardening and Knitting in the City.
By Lucy Elvis

This thesis examines the impact of Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting (also known as Yarn Bombing) in and on the city. Examining definitions and distortions of the notions of ‘the vandal’, ‘the activist/craftivist’ and ‘guerillaisms’ that are made via these movements illustrates an expanding notion of the ‘urban dweller’. Tackled in terms of approaches, public and situationist theory, the site-specificity of these new types of activities will be proposed as ways in which the human scale can be realised amidst an environment increasingly understood on a ‘mega’ scale, dominated by capitalist simulacra. Technological developments of the ‘information age’ will be shown to be facilitators of activism, these two movements forming a bridge between increased virtual communication and human interaction, which result in city-wide and social movements that reach far beyond their physical limits in an increasingly ‘glocal’ society. Positioned against the changing backdrop of the Street Art world is an increasing beautiful vandalism or diminutive/secretive trend in street art works; the ways in which these socially altruistic yet unendorsed urban expressions can renew the dead spaces of the metropolis are explored.

This interdisciplinary study reaches beyond its roots in visual culture, touching on issues of activism, urban planning and communal creativity. Positioning both movements as vital counter discourses, from their oxymoronic definitions to their reclamation of public space, this discussion reveals a rebellion which is fuelled by that which it seeks to challenge.

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Introduction: Casting-on, sowing the seed and methodological considerations.

'Hug Me'

Read the instruction, carefully knitted and attached around the tree trunk. The soft knits and purls of the band itself hugging around the trunk; playful and colourful, yet unobtrusive.(figI.1) There was no sign of who might have placed the woolly message there, but it certainly altered the space at large. This was my first encounter with Guerrilla Knitting (also known as Yarn Bombing (USA/CAN/AUS), Street Knitting and Yarn Storming)¹ at Victoria Park, Leicester—a spot of inner city greenery in a once industrial city in the Midlands of England. Perhaps it was the brutalist backdrop provided by the architecture of the city's university that made this tongue-in-cheek hippy message so remarkable, or perhaps it was the evidence of a human hand in an environment renowned for its night time danger (figI.2). This is a place, despite its greenery, where strangers lurk in the shadows, a place from which students are warned to steer clear after the disappearance of daylight.² It might even have been the city's own history as a textile manufacturing town, or its playfulness in light of the austere reputation enjoyed by its namesake, an indication that 'we are in fact amused',³ that leant an extra element of fun to this unendorsed urban intervention. In any case, the small embellishment seemed to remain in the park for some time. For myself and most of my friends there was genuine sorrow when nature or intervention removed it from its bark-covered, temporary home. What interested me most about the piece was the way it lifted the spot where it had been erected out of the simple

¹ <<http://knitthecity.com/>> [March 16, 2010] one example of a popular street-knitting blog, based in London, similar examples can be found globally. See here, a report from the Seattle times: D Sefton: *Gnarly knitters make their point, from guts o' yarn to zombies*, Seattle Times Online, March 2006. <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/living/2002869997_knitters17.html> [March 09, 2010]

² Media reports often confirm the impression that the park is unsafe at night which has resulted in a local student campaign for better lighting on the parks pathways, one recent case saw a woman attacked while walking home from an evening out: *Woman Attacked in Victoria Park Leicester*, Wednesday 3rd February 2010. <<http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/news/Woman-attacked-Victoria-Park-Leicester/article-1799276-detail/article.html>> [April 29, 2010]

³ A commonly accepted urban legend: Queen Victoria after whom the park in question is named was commonly considered to have stated 'we are not amused' in the face of tactless and crude humour. Rappaport, states that much like Marie Antoinette's mythical 'let them eat cake' statement, the comment is "probably apocryphal", H Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion*, ABC-CLIO, New York 2003, p.401.

backdrop of the park where pedestrians might otherwise pass by. Researching this thesis, and seeking a photograph of the now lost hug revealed that well over half of the people asked remembered it. If they hadn't seen it, they'd heard of it, and as such, that small area of public space seemed renewed and changed in collective memory. Once removed, the small scale intervention left only the photographs and predominantly fond memories it had spawned.

At a similar time that same year, a book by London activist Richard Reynolds regarding Guerilla Gardening ⁴, as well as Tracy's *Guerrilla Gardening: a manual festo*⁵ were published. The previous occasion that Green Guerrillas had received large attention in the UK press was during the May Day protests at the turn of the millennium. On this occasion members of the Reclaim The Streets (RTS) movement had adopted a Guerrilla Gardening action in order to create a temporary green space in London's Parliament Square⁶. However, coverage of the event was mixed, with the movement referred to as "an absolute disgrace"⁷ and some participants charged with criminal damage⁸. By contrast now that Guerilla Gardener have re-emerged in the media, they are heralded as helpful horticulturalists rather than hooligans, with news reports following their actions with interest⁹. Like the chilly trees of Victoria Park, Guerrilla Gardening now seemed to represent a human touch in the concrete jungle. It seems that increasingly, a band of galvanized grannies, urban acrobats and green-fingered guerrillas are beginning to make their presence felt tangibly on the skin of the city. In turn, these fingerprints on the

⁴ R. Reynolds, *On Guerrilla Gardening: A Handbook for Gardening Without Boundaries* Bloomsbury USA, New York, 2008.

⁵ D.Tracy, *Guerrilla Gardening: a manual festo* New Society Publishers, New York, 2007.

⁶ Aims of the Guerrilla Gardening action based on conversations with its planners and organisers. Walters N, 'From Seattle to guerrilla gardeners on May Day, the activists are learning to do joined up protests', Saturday 22 April 2000, for *The Independent*, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/from-seattle-to-guerrilla-gardeners-on-may-day-the-activists-are-learning-to-do-joinedup-protest-721260.html>> [May 01 2010]

⁷ Blair T, quoted in: Woodward, Kelso and Vidal, 'Protests Erupt in Violence', *The Guardian*, May 2 2000, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2000/may/02/mayday.world>> [May 08, 2010]

⁸ Boggan, Buncombe and Mullins 'Guerrilla Gardeners carried the seeds of destruction', *The Independent*, Tuesday 2 May 2000.< <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/guerrilla-gardeners-carried-the-seeds-of-destruction-718603.html>> [May 04, 2010]

⁹ J. Mooalem, *Guerrilla Gardening*, New York Times Magazine- The Architecture Issue, May 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/magazine/08guerrilla-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1> [May 03 2010]

concrete are reflected in the world of visual and popular culture. Parkour¹⁰, - the art of traversing the city at speed, took centre stage in the opening of *Casino Royale* (2006)¹¹ and the absence of prolific stencil-artist Banksy from the 2010 Turner Prize was mourned by critics¹². The artist himself in turn referred to the union of RTS and Guerilla Gardening in 2000 as “the best piece of non-traditional art” he had seen.¹³ However charming these actions may be, they remain in a grey area not only between legal and illicit, but also between creativity and activism. Are they a kind of beautiful vandalism, perhaps?

To write about every small way the city is renewed by visual intervention is a subject far too extensive for a paper of this kind. Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting have been selected from the throng partly due to their oxymoronic nature, and to their connection to creativity as well as issues of activism. So what are Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting? The first Green Guerrillas operated in New York in 1973.¹⁴ The garden they created was a reaction against the lack of green space available for growing in the city. After a long battle to maintain the garden against the intervention of the municipality, the garden was given the support of the city itself and made into a public garden maintained by the mayor’s office. Although Guerrilla Gardening forms an international community, the concept has also been borrowed by other projects such as *Learning to Love You More*¹⁵, an online project that issued a series

¹⁰ Parkour (PK), or l’art du déplacement “the sport of moving through a city by running, jumping and climbing under, around and through things” - definition from Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. <<http://www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com/dictionary/parkour> > [May 14]

¹¹ *Casino Royale* (2006), Director: Martin Campbell, Writers: Neil Purvis, Robert Wade, Paul Haggis, Columbia Picture, Metro-Goldwyn Meyer, Nov 2006 (US)

¹² Jones J., ‘Should Banksy be Nominated for the Turner Prize?’ *Guardian Online*, April 15 2009. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog> and Jones J., ‘Turner Prize 2010 a shortlist that is half-baked’, for *Guardian Online*, May 4 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2010/may/04/turner-prize-shortlist-2010> [4th May 2010]

¹³ Banksy, quoted in ‘Shepherd Fairey interviews Banksy’, *Swindle Magazine*, *Banksy- The Naked Truth*, Issue 08, <http://swindlemagazine.com/issue08/banksy/> [3rd April 2010]

¹⁴ The Green guerrillas were led by artists Liz Christy, their original garden is now recognised as an official community garden. See: M. Fraser, ‘How Guerrilla Gardening took root’, *Step up Scotland*, BBC News Online, 15 March 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/8548005.stm> [April 05, 2010]

¹⁵ Collaborative Public art project, projects were posted online and participants invited to post their photographs online <<http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/>, [March 06, 2010] the project ended in May 2009.

of creative actions and then invited participants to post photographs and commentary of their work online. Guerrilla Gardening can occur on a number of different scales, from the scattering of seed bombs onto railway embankments and sadly barren flower beds to full scale occupations of land as seen in the “Pure Genius!”¹⁶ Project in Wandsworth, London and in the example of Kew Eco Village,¹⁷ among others.

Like their digging counterparts, the Guerrillas who knit also operate on a number of different scales. Arguably a slightly younger movement, although there are some scant references to revolutionary knitting in “the best [and] worst of times” that are Dicken’s classic *Tale of Two Cities*,¹⁸ Guerrilla Knitting’s birth is attributed to Magda Seyeg of Texas, USA. Following the addition of a knitted cosy to the door handle of the yarn shop where she worked, Sayeg states although she “didn’t really consider the implications of what I was doing”, her group found they had “hit a chord, and it was fun to watch it gain momentum”¹⁹. Guerrilla Knitting in a wider context can be placed within the beginning of craft as activism, or craftivism—a phrase first coined by knitter and theorist Betsy Greer in 2003. Found operating on different scales from the single touch of the knitting stated in the opening, to the vast repetitions of *The Midnight Knitter*, a New Jersey Guerilla Knitter operating at night in the town of Cape May to transform the trees in area²⁰. Or like Sayeg’s first project which sought to cover all of the nearby stop signs in her then home town of Houston.

As creative endeavours in the urban landscape, Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting seem to lie on the periphery of a rapidly changing and expanding Street Art world. Banksy, a Bristol based street- artist has received great acclaim at the

¹⁶ An eco village set up on disused land owned by Guinness in May 1996 by ‘The Land Is Ours’ (TLIO) campaigners. <<http://www.tlio.org.uk/>> [March 30, 2010]

¹⁷ This spatial occupation is still in progress and at the time of writing awaits a county court judgment on the legality of the settlement they have made on the land. F. Hamilton, ‘Squatters take over land to create an ‘eco-village’ near Kew Gardens’, *The Times*, June 27 2009. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6586481.ece> [April 15, 2010]

¹⁸ The character of Madame Defarge includes a list of nobles to be executed in her knitting. C Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*, (1859) The Living Library, Ohio, 1946.

¹⁹ Sayeg M, cited in (Anon) *Knitta Please: Interview with Magda Sayeg*, <<http://www.thedirtfloor.com/2010/03/10/knitta-please-interview-with-magda-sayeg/> [10 May 2010]

²⁰ Degener S, ‘A Good Yarn? West Cape May tries to unravel the mystery of the Midnight Knitter’, *Press of Atlantic City*, March 10 2010. <http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/press/cape_may/article_587d7e2e-2bd5-11df-8a4e-001cc4c002e0.html> [March 23, 2010]

Sundance Festival this year (2010) for his new film release *Exit Through the Gift Shop*.²¹ The growth of festivals like FAME²² and NUART²³ seem to confirm the growth of the Street Art world. Artists like Invader have made a subtle impact on cities the world over with his small tiled interventions replicating the iconic video-game forms.²⁴ Like the increased creativity of activists in the form of planting and crafting, artists in their turn are beginning to occupy a multiplicitous function in the urban landscape. The artists/activist SWOON appears to agilely occupy this space, casting herself as an activist as well as an artist.²⁵ Scandanvian duo Adam and Itso define themselves as spatial tacticians as well as street artists.

This thesis, then, seeks to explore these two new forms of unendorsed urban expressions: the problems they pose to our traditional expectations of vandalism and practitioners of craft. As practices situated in the western metropolis, the contrast between their size and materiality—soft wool, and fragile flowers—and the post industrial city itself, often cast as a bastion of steel and glass. Their intervention into public space, the imprint of the human hand which they leave in spots often dismissed as a part of a generally tedious or, as Koolhaas states: ‘generic’ city.²⁶ Investigating the meaning of public space opens a series of fascinating debates regarding ownership and, in terms of legality, the issue of defining vandalism, or criminal damage itself. The ephemeral nature of street knits of yarn bombs means they can be removed with a few snips in contrast to the usual assumptions regarding vandalism—that it would come from a spray can or entail the physical destruction of monuments, landmarks or pieces of street furniture.

²¹ *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, (2010) Dir: Banksy, Thierry Guetta,

²² FAME festival <<http://www.famefestival.it/>> [March 24 2010]

²³ NUART festival <<http://www.nuart.no/>> [March 15 2010]

²⁴ Invader homepage <<http://www.space-invaders.com/som.html>> homepage ‘Invader’ [March 16, 2010] Invader has tiled similar 80s video games on the walls of cities worldwide, he then scores himself according to the scoring of the original videogame.

²⁵ “I feel like with my skills as an artist I have this tiny little megaphone. I want to find people who need that megaphone and make a difference in the world with them.” SWOON in Schiller M, *SWOON*, Swindle Magazine, Issue 04, <<http://swindlemagazine.com/issue04/swoon/>> [April 18 2010]

²⁶ Koolhaas R *The Generic City*, in Koolhaas, Mau, Seigler, Werleman, S,*M,L,XL*, Monacelli Press, 1998.

1.1 The Current State of Research

In light of the place these movements occupy, in a realm between creativity and protest, Guerilla Gardening and Guerilla Knitting have yet to receive extensive analysis from the Visual Culture world. Knitting and other forms of handicraft were studied by Greer who coined the term ‘craftivism’ in 2003 and proposed that these efforts were a step toward a more stimulated society, one in which people made new connections with others via the perfection of a new skill. Greer extolled the virtues of knitting in her later book *Knitting for Good!*²⁷ her own passion for the craft apparent in her unbridled joy and occasional reverence regarding its advantages. Guerilla Gardening too has been a subject often explored by its own practitioners. Prolific modern day gardener Richard Reynolds, crafted his text regarding Guerrilla Gardening around different examples of historic illicit gardeners, attempting a deeper connection between the ranks of modern green guerrillas and historical precedents of the trend. As forms of activism, both practices are identified as new subcultures. Both take place in an urban setting. Unusually, they have not been tackled in terms of their place within the changing world of urban studies, and its many approaches to the metropolis and its inhabitants. This is an area of interest that this thesis explores, thus adding a new and crucial strand to the existing discourse surrounding these two practices. Furthermore, perhaps due to their involvement of ‘ordinary folk’ they have yet to be placed within the art world of Street Art for which their creative elements surely make them a part. Often because of their non-violence and unexplosive nature, they lie outside of the field of writings on activism. As such they are perfectly positioned for analysis within the discipline of visual culture, as a discipline which allows for the analysis of visual movements that lie in the borderlands between art and social science.

This state of research represents both an opportunity to add new material and a fertile ground for research. Situating these two forms of practice against the backdrop of the city acknowledges their site specificity, and the wider effect they have on the city as

²⁷ B Greer *Knitting For Good!*, Trumpeter Books, London, 2008

a visual field, breaking the miasma of consumption and leaving the observable traces of a human touch in an increasingly technological environment.

1.2 Methodology

The approach of this study is undoubtedly interdisciplinary. As stated above, Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting lie in a grey area between activism and Street Art, the illicit and the legal, the creative and the practical. As such they form pin points among a range of different axes. In the words of Hannah Higgins in *The Grid Book*, this thesis also hopes to find itself a “welcome guest”²⁸ in a diverse range of study areas. To understand the media interest and surprise surrounding the appearance of such movements in the city, an investigation will be had into the assumptions surrounding craft as well as the assumption that gardening and knitting are both specifically domestic pursuits. Their physical presence within the city environment calls for a necessary definition of the discussion surrounding the nature of public space, its increasing privatisation and the domination of capitalist symbols and the overwhelming schema of consumption in the urban environment. Observation and analysis of pieces in contrast to these environments illustrate their interesting imprints on the city. However, as items easily removed and lost forever, the internet proves a vital communication hub for the practitioners of both Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting. As the term Zettabyte becomes added to the international lexicon,²⁹ as a means of classifying the increasing amount of digitised information, the role of the internet is relentlessly ever-present in our society. As well as providing an unprecedented opportunity toward the exchange of information, the online life of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting groups might be seen as a vital element within the formation of a speculative identity for each movement. Furthermore, the use of sites like YouTube provide a vital opportunity for the documentation of Knit-ins³⁰, night time gardening expeditions and online blogs and

²⁸ H Higgins, *The Grid Book*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2009.

²⁹ A new measurement for the amount of digital information produced, equal to one thousand exabytes. R. Wray, ‘Goodbye Petabytes, Hello Zettabytes’, *The Guardian Online*, 3rd May 2010
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/may/03/humanity-digital-output-zettabyte>> [May 3 2010]

³⁰ These are occasions at which knitting group occupy a public space in order to knit. See a well know example of knitters in a London underground carriage on the Circle line. C Higgins, ‘Political Protest

photo galleries can aid the preservation of works destroyed by nature, vandalism or the authorities. The result of such a necessarily interdisciplinary study has been the consideration of a wide range of texts and source information, from theoretical writings to YouTube video posts.

Due to limitations, the study has not been able to incorporate field work, which might have been instructive in ascertaining the motives of these urban guerrilla groups. Where possible, existing interviews have been read and researched. The limitation of interview findings in the case of pleasure based activism is explored by Jordan. In his investigation of the Rave movement of the 1990s he writes; “Pleasure-politics ... only really becomes real within that lived experience. It creates one extreme form of collective identity whose truth can never be spoken, an identity that can only be experienced”³¹. As activities primarily associated with pastimes and hobbies, the enactment of Gardening and Knitting for good, although far removed from the world of rave, might be said to contain the same level of elusive pleasure. Although interviewing and round-table discussions would certainly be included as a key element in any extension of the study, its exclusion here might be seen as illustrative of the difficulty in understanding global groups and in ascertaining the motives of movements which possess a high level of site-specificity whilst linked to international movements like anti-capitalism or opposition to globalisation. Furthermore it leaves greater room for the consideration of the effect of interventions on the passing or uninvolved viewer, something much neglected in current writing which is often by, or centered on the practitioners of underground movements like these.

1.3 Structure

The following text considers these movements from what might be termed three different angles: cerebral, physical and virtual.

Turns to the Radical act of Knitting’, *The Guardian*, Monday 31st January 2005.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/31/arts.artsnews1>> [April 28 2010]

³¹ T Jordan, *Activism! Direct action hacktivism and the future of society*, Verso, London 2002, p.93.

The opening chapter, concerned almost solely with definitions, investigates the contradiction in terms that is both of these movements and the assumptions we make regarding their practitioners. Here a consideration of ‘real’ guerrilla tactics as outlined by Che Guevara³² is ironically juxtaposed against the fate of his iconic portrait by Alberto Corda³³; an apt illustration of the elasticity of ‘guerillaism’ and its often shamelessly universal application from boardroom to burlesque.³⁴ Activism and vandalism will also be explored as well as the preconceived notions held regarding handicraft and gardening as rural and elderly pursuits. This exploration of the mixed narrative and therefore preconceptions that surround each term go some way toward explaining the media interest in each of the movements as its own ironic contradiction in terms. This chapter will also introduce a new term, first used by Bengtson³⁵, ‘Unsanctioned Urban Expressions’, as a better way to define both groups without alienating any strands of its practitioners.

From a more cerebral approach to a physical investigation, the second section of this study concerns itself with readings of public space. As expression housed firmly in the city, this chapter examines three readings of public space: Common Ground (?) illustrates public space as a contradictory forum for control of its populous by design. Battleground examines the positions these movements take in terms of the consumer society³⁶ a break in the sea of simulacra that capitalism has produced, and cites the dangers for these underground practices in the example of a catalogue of ‘zeitheists’³⁷ including the Adidas attempt to use guerrilla gardening in one of its

³² Guevara wrote several books on guerrilla warfare as well as reflections on the subject. In this study, C Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Pelican Books, Middlesex, 1961 has been used.

³³ A Corda, *Guerrillero Heroico*, Photographic Print, 1960

³⁴ In investigating the applications of the word guerrilla the study shows its application in both marketing techniques as well as spontaneous burlesque show invasions. For Guerrilla Marketing see: J Conrad Levinson *Guerrilla Marketing: easy and inexpensive strategies for making big profits from your small business*, Houghton Mifflin Books, New York, 2007. For Burlesque: ‘Empower Burlesque?’ *BBC news magazine*, Friday 29th May 2009.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8066966.stm> [May 3rd 2010]

³⁵ “Unsanctioned Urban Expressions” first used by P Bengtson, *Faile vs. Banksy - an investigation of the unsanctioned urban expression and its development in the transition from the street to the gallery*. Bachelor thesis from Lund University 2007.

³⁶ Baudrillard *The Consumer Society*, Chris Turner (trans.) London SAGE publication 2004.

³⁷ This is a term of the author’s creation used in regard to countless examples of corporate hijacking of underground cult practices or interests. F Von Borries, *Who’s Afraid of Niketown*, Episode Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004

‘originals’ commercials.³⁸ Playground proposes that urban Guerrillas might gain some encouragement from the playful aesthetic of post-modern architecture, suggesting that when such playful forms are present in the landscape users might be inspired to join the game.

From physical intervention to virtual communities, the final chapter investigates how the ‘information age’ has facilitated movements of this kind. Taking key examples from other types of activism as support, the chapter provides evidence of the online community as a crucial network of support for both subcultures and activist activities, facilitating anonymity and creating contact between members operating in different locations, transforming their local struggles for beauty and/or democratized food production to ‘glocal’ issues in the global village³⁹. In contrast to more extreme activists, who use the internet as a temporary site for organisation, Guerrilla Gardeners and Knitters, perhaps due to their more benign impacts on space, use the internet as a means of creating a more cohesive identity. Visual examinations of their online presence will illustrate the ways in which they have ‘branded’ their aspirations. A look at the comments posted to most -watched YouTube regarding Guerrilla Gardening, and the response to videos of a more violent protest in Sweden in recent times will reinforce the opening hypothesis of their role as a softer or more beautiful form of vandalism via their social acceptance.

As the paper reaches its conclusion, these seemingly mundane activities will appear transformed. As Jordan argues with respect to small observations regarding the placement of organic food products and worker’s rights, these small alterations might point toward “new definitions of the good life and society”⁴⁰. Some ideas regarding a new concept of the city dweller as more than a motivated businessperson, but a secretly engaged individual will be posed. The transformative potential of their effects in often viewed urban space will reveal the power of these playful interventions to transform our cities. A review of the findings of each chapter will

³⁸ Adidas originals presents guerrilla gardening, part of ‘world of adidas originals campaign, Press release at: < http://www.press.adidas.com/en/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-4/79_read-8621/ > [May 10, 2010]

³⁹ The concept of ‘glocality’ as explained by Meyrowircz will be defined with greater clarity in the third chapter.

⁴⁰ Jordan *Activism! Direct Action, Hacktivism and the future of society*, Reaktion Books, London, 2002. p.9.

delve into the grey area they occupy as a fruitful break between discourses. Visually and socially, they will be revealed as not only standing against, but sustained by the things they reject. Their juxtaposition of underground warfare and cosy domesticity, the traces of a human hand in the concrete jungle of urban sprawl and empowered creation in a consumer society are intrinsic to their role and as counter discourse.

One: Conservative Roots, Liberal Blooms: Defining the Movements and Their Practitioners.

The very concept of a Guerrilla Knitter or a Guerrilla Gardener suggests an oxymoron. Why should these seemingly innocent activities be carried out by a green fingered militia? Or how and why might subversive argyle become politicized? This difficulty of definition is one of the most interesting features to examine in the case of these kinds of unendorsed urban expressions. This chapter attempts to examine the dichotomy between these skills, very much rooted in the domestic realm and their relationship to ‘guerrillism’, as a rebellious and revolutionary form of direct action. At hand here is the problem between the connotations of a knitter or gardener as a geriatric, a home-bird, or woman and the assumptions of the essentially masculine, energetic, wild, young guerrilla⁴¹. Gillman points out the importance of envisioning the ‘other’ as countless reproductions of the ‘Self’⁴², but what happens when the two elements of that ‘other’ are themselves in conflict? Since it is an offence that both movements are often accused of, the term vandalism will also come under some investigation here; although the problematic nature of public space is reserved for Chapter Two. Furthermore, other forms of classification for the two movements, such as activism and concepts connected to them, craft and the domestic realm will be considered. Within this, investigation into which eras in history the two trends seem to identify themselves with will be used as a method of speculating as to some of the motives behind them. The Diggers—an active group during the political reform era of the 17th century, and the ‘Make do and Mend’ sentiments of the war period will be examined in relation to Gardeners and Knitters, respectively. Although these might not be termed as universal for the identity construction of all Guerrilla Gardening or Guerrilla Knitting groups, the focus of this thesis on the movements in

⁴¹ In *Guerrilla Warfare*, Guevara explicitly states that the ideal guerrilla fighter is essentially young: “The best age for a guerrilla fighter varies between twenty-five and thirty-five, a stage in which the life of most persons has assumed definite shape” C. Guervara, *Op. Cit*, p.51 and later, and later that women cannot have a role in the movement that strays further than providing a good meal for band of guerrilla fighters, Guevara *Op. Cit* p.91.

⁴² Gilman S, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of sexuality Race and Madness*, Cornell University Press Ithaca, (1985) cited in Frost Paul, *The Image Factory, Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual culture Industry*, Berg, Oxford, 2003 p.107.

regard to urbanity within the trope of the western metropolitan idea renders them an appropriate point of evaluation. Situating both gardening and knitting in the domestic realm and within the oft-patronised area of hobby-craft, their resurrection as a more revolutionary practice will be revealed as a reaction to its conservative or lesser respected roots. These ideas will be proposed as crucial in facilitating the subversive nature of both movements, as actions which rebel against their origins. However, these will also be seen as a crucial aspect of their identity. The residues of the fierce domesticity and connection with the rejection of ornamentation in the face of growing modernism are, in short, a part of what renders these practices so interesting—they are sustained by their role in this contradiction and their place as a counter discourse.

1.1 Defining and Distorting Rebellion: Guerrillas, Activists and Vandal(ism)

Classifying the two movements as ‘guerrilla’ adds to their novel and rebellious nature. By outlining the real given meanings of the terms ‘guerrilla’, ‘vandal’ and ‘activist’ in turn, examining how these terms have been changed and manipulated in popular usage or application; it is possible to speculate as to what it is that makes them so interesting and their practitioners so difficult to define.

“Guerrilla warfare: An irregular war carried on by small bodies of men acting independently. Now somewhat *rare*.”⁴³

The term Guerrilla comes from the Spanish meaning ‘little war’. However, in an unusual twist on the dictionary definition given above; the term itself has achieved such commonality today that ‘little wars’ seem to run throughout society, from burlesque bars to war torn zones to jargon at board meetings. But how valid are the plethora of guerrilla movements, marketing, intervention and events that surround us when compared to the roots of the term? And what are the motives and meanings behind its use?

⁴³ Record for Guerrilla/Geurilla as given in the Oxford English dictionary, Second Edition 1989, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50099960?query_type=word&queryword=guerrilla&first=1&max_to_show=10&single=1&sort_type=alpha> [April 4 2010]

Outlining the key tenets of the guerrilla movement in Chile, iconic guerrilla fighter Che Guevara identified guerrilleros as “fighters...ready not to defend an ideal but to turn it into a reality”⁴⁴ in a later statement that appears even further applicable to Guerrilla Gardeners, an effective fighter is outlined as: “a social reformer, [taking] up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors.”⁴⁵ Although certainly less serious than the Chilean example, in the actions of Guerrilla Gardeners we can see that they represent action taken in favour of an ideal. In some senses, the aspects of dehumanisation in city spaces that the interruption of Guerrilla Knitting break through, via their invasion of the visual schema, the members of both movements might be argued as social reformers. However some would argue that these adoptions of the term are inappropriate. Indeed seed bombs and knitting needles are hardly bayonets and grenades.

Although Guevara explicitly cited ‘agrarian reform’⁴⁶ as one of his key aims, a statement one might use to confirm a connection to Guerrilla Gardening, his interventions stretched much further than the upkeep of flowerbeds and secret urban food production. Propriety aside, the ‘guerrilla’ concept seems to have become a vogue terminology. In business, Levinson developed marketing strategies in the mid-eighties that promised a maximizing of small businesses via the investment of time rather than money into its scheme.⁴⁷ Although the concept of attacking the unsuspecting innocent consumer stands contrary to Guevara’s social-reform movement in which the support of the people was vital⁴⁸ its use for small businesses and launching small style ambushes might be compared to the element of surprise Guevara cites as so valuable. In the music world, there is the practice of Guerrilla gigging—arriving at a venue and performing till evicted⁴⁹. For gourmets, guerrilla dining has arrived on the menu with restaurants opening for a few weeks before moving on to another secret spot⁵⁰. *Guardian* journalist Emms has definite grounds

⁴⁴ Guevara C., *Guerrilla Warfare*, Pelican Books, Middlesex, 1961, p.19.

⁴⁵ Guevara C., *Op. Cit.* 1961, p.16.

⁴⁶ Guevara C., *Op. Cit.* Middlesex, 1961, p.45.

⁴⁷ J C Levinson, *Guerrilla Marketing: secrets for making big profits from your small business*, Houghton Mifflin Press, New York, 1984.

⁴⁸ Guevara C descriptions of the guerrilla as a “parson of reform, a member of the vanguard of the people” in Guevara C. *Op. Cit* p 45

⁴⁹ Barton L, ‘Risky Thrilling and Free’, *The Guardian*, Friday 16 July 2004.

⁵⁰ Definition Guerrilla Dining: <<http://www.disassociated.com/2009/01/09/guerilla-dining-for-macquarie-dictionary-word-of-2008/>>[May 02 2010]

to complain right when she writes of being surrounded by so-called guerrilla movements that have little more than a tenuous link to the combatant origins of the concept.⁵¹

Visually, we can compare the flexible application of the ‘guerrilla’ concept to Guevara’s image itself. Guevara’s photographic portrait by Alberto Corda has become a common image on ‘alternative’ clothing and accessories⁵² devoid for the most part, of any real connection to the essence of his idealistic movement. In his recent book, Casey charts the rise to stardom and sainthood via the dissemination of the Corda image, on all manner of consumables from posters to condoms, a post-humus cult-of-personality that has resulted in Guevara’s portrait, originally of a man hoping for world revolution, staring down from the walls of students who aspire toward little more than a weak inference of rebellion⁵³: like the irony of Lauren Bush appeared sporting a Keffiyeh⁵⁴ at Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News Launch Party⁵⁵, and the uproar in response to innocuous American TV chef Rachael Ray sporting one in an online advertisement for coffee chain, ‘Dunkin Donuts’⁵⁶ following their popularization by Balenciaga’s catwalk examples in 2008; apparently these icons’ rebellion, like the terms of its identification, have become lost in mixed narrative.

Like the Keffiyeh, the idea of guerrilla actions has strayed a little far from its origins in militancy. In an age accused of widespread apathy, perhaps the convenient residue of a movement that was prepared to die for one another and the cause for which they fought goes a long way in ‘sexifying’ shrubbery. But if then Guerrilla warfare is a little strong, what other terminology for these movements might suffice?

⁵¹ S. Emms, ‘Why are we surrounded by guerrillas?’ *The Guardian*, Monday 27 November 2006.

⁵² The Cult image was originally titled *Guerrillo Heroico*. A Corda Op. Cit

⁵³ M. Casey, *Che’s afterlife: the legacy of an image*, Vintage books, Cambridge, 2009

⁵⁴ Keffiyeh, the Palestinian scarf originally recognised in the media as the headdress worn by late Palestinian president Yasser Arafat, has become a trend in highstreet fashion, worn by popular figures in the public eye including (among others): soccer star David Beckham, actress Kirsten Dunst and musician Kanye West. The scarves are now available for purchase in high street trend stores Scandinavian H&M and Urban Outfitters, although pressures later caused the US store to pull the product. K Kibum ‘Where Some See Fashion, Others see politics’, *New York Times*, Feb 11, 2007.

⁵⁵ Lauren Bush, niece of George W, then president of the United States (2007) wore a Keffiyeh to the launch party of Fox News international. Kibum Op. Cit.

⁵⁶ A storm of controversial commentary lead to the chain being accused of ‘inciting revolution’ since Ray wore on in an online advertisement for the chain’s iced coffee. J Coomarasamy, ‘US Chain Drops ‘Terror Scarf’ Ad.’ *BBC News Washington*, May 30, 2008.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7427206.stm>> [May 02, 2010]

Both Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting are classified as forms of activism albeit contrasting from more traditional definitions⁵⁷. They point to essential issues in terms of the ownership and care of public space as explored in the following chapter. However, contrary to many well known campaigning movements, it is only in their most extreme manifestations that knitting and gardening of the guerrilla variety seem to cause a controversy. The dictionary definition of activism is given as the “use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change”.⁵⁸ It is debatable how far into the realms of the ‘vigorous’ that the act of knitting and gardening might trespass. However, for some the idea of food production outside of supermarkets places Guerrilla Gardening into the camp of anti-capitalism, as well as both movements’ method of reclaiming public space in the face of the intrusion of advertising, allows the possibility for them to be cast as a part of counter cultures to consumerism.

In a recent programme by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) Mary-Jane Baxter followed the resurgence of ‘Make do and Mend’ in Britain⁵⁹. Despite the fact that the programme began with the idea of a public seeking to cut down on their consumption in the face of the recession⁶⁰, it quickly emerged that this had resulted in a consumption of a different form in the literature regarding ‘Making do’. A reprint of the wartime handbook for housewives has sold out since the beginning of the recession⁶¹. Perhaps the biggest irony in the report is that the sales of the book are from the high-street fashion retailer Topshop.

It might be key to note that the first Making-Do boom, was also one of greater women’s rights. As men fought on the western front, women in the home made great leaps forward in the campaign for suffrage, with enfranchisement for women

⁵⁷ See M Ryan Hess(Ed.) *The Ten Minute Activist, Easy Ways to Take Back the Planet*, Nation Books, 2006.

⁵⁸ Definition listed for ‘activism’ Oxford Concise Dictionary:
<http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/activism?view=uk [May 02, 2010]

⁵⁹ *Make Do And Mend Britain, Make Your Way around Britain*, series, ‘Newsnight’ BBC Television, first aired: Wednesday 7th October 2009.

⁶⁰ On reduced consumption in the recession: A Seger and M Milner, ‘Lights go out Across Britain as Recession Hits Home’, *The Guardian*, 24 January 2009.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/jan/24/recession-britain>> [May 10, 2010]

⁶¹ *Make Do and Mend: Keeping Family and Home Afloat on War Rations* (Official Wwii Info Reproductions), this book was a collection of leaflets issued by the British Government during the Second World War to advise housewives on how best to repair and recycle clothing in order to dress their family under harsh rationing measures.

achieved in the US, Britain and Sweden within the same three-year period. As such one might argue that the drive toward Making-Do today has a connection with the notion of a productive and liberating rather than repressive femininity. Further to the advancement on the political front, this was a time in which women managing their homes *en solo* would agilely tackle the acute problems of the ration book, traverse the shadows of the black market, ‘dig for victory’⁶² or ‘knit for Sammy’⁶³ in order to sustain their households and in some nations, war efforts at large. In fact, knitting’s thread to wartime appears double stitched since the names of two prominent types of knit, Raglan and Cardigan, find their namesakes amongst British army generals in the Crimean war.⁶⁴ In today’s recession scarcity perhaps the domestic scientist of the ‘30s and the ‘40s will return with a vengeance?

Guerrilla Gardeners seem to reach further back in history to find their roots. This is a hard idea to apply, given the contrasting cultural backgrounds of its practitioners. They often refer to the politics of Gerrard Winstanley, who prized the ‘true knowledge’ obtained by interaction with the earth, rather than that of the intellectual, “a parrot who speaks words but [he] knoweth not what he saith”⁶⁵. Winstanley’s slogans became a key slogan at British Guerrilla Gardening actions in 2000.⁶⁶

In their drive for change via direct action, both movements might reasonably be orientated as forms of activism. However non-vigorous, both identify themselves with previous periods of activism, although both of these seem to have narrow issue bases. These contrasts between activism and ‘activism!’ as Jordan terms it⁶⁷ will be enhanced in the third chapter as other forms of activism(s) will be discussed in relation to their facilitation via online methods. At times the definitions of vandalism

⁶² The slogan was to be found on a propaganda poster in Britain during the Second World War, when household’s were encouraged to grow their own produce in order to ease the scarcity of wartime.

Details from: S. Ross *Rationing- at home in world war two*, Evans Brothers Limited, London 2007

⁶³ This campaign in the USA encourages housewives of America to knit for the troops at the front. A L Mac Donald, *No Idle Hands, The Social History of American Knitting*, Ballantyne Books, Michigan, 1988 p.199.

⁶⁴ The Earl of Cardigan lead famously lead the charge of the light brigade at Balaclava and Lord Raglan appeared a scape-goated commander-in-chief, D Bausum *Threading time, a cultural history of threadwork*, Texas University Press, 2001, p.137.

⁶⁵ Winstanley *G Fire in the Bush*, extract featured in C Harrison P wood and J Gaiger (eds.) *Art Theory 1648-1815 an anthology of changing ideas*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 2000 p.214.

⁶⁶ ‘*The earth is a common treasury for all*’ was used in the banners of protesters at an RTS Guerrilla Gardening action in Parliament Square, London. G Winstanley, *The True Levellers’ Standard advanced*, 1649.

⁶⁷ Jordan T *Activism! Direct action hacktivism and the future of society*, Verso, London, 2002.

and activism can collide, in examining how vandals are defined; it becomes apparent that this is more than just the fulfilment of a definition but also an indication of the balance of power.

Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes a vandal as: “A person who deliberately destroys or damages property,”⁶⁸ it is somewhat awkward in its application to the covert planting and attachment of knitted pieces committed by these two underground groups. Particularly the knitting pieces which are often removed as with the example in the opening of this text. Nonetheless, the idea of trespass and intervention in a space not belonging to oneself might be termed criminal damage and as such, the perpetrator becomes a vandal.

Its applications and connotations can be many and varied. For example, there is much to suggest that the definition of the term depends very much on the balance of power and the context in which this is set. For Gambodini in his study of iconoclasm, he levels the charge of vandalism at many major powers throughout European history citing vandalism as a necessary evil of regime change.⁶⁹ Cohen makes a similar claim “ideological vandalism”, and the way in which it “challenge[d] symbolically” the regular organisation of the world⁷⁰. Today the modern urban image of the vandal seems to have a close connection to miscreant youths or ‘hoodies’⁷¹ as they are often labelled. Committing vandalism, like smoking pot, has earned an image as a ‘gateway’ crime on the path to more serious offences; despite the kudos some spray-can artists are receiving for their politically aware pieces. It is the residue of such images that clash so heavily with the history of attitudes toward and the common assumptions regarding who is knitting and gardening. Could there be like the vigilante pensioner portrayed by Michael Cain in Barber’s recent film *Harry*

⁶⁸ Definition for ‘vandal’ Oxford Compact English Dictionary:
<http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/vandal?view=uk> [May 15, 2010]

⁶⁹ Gamboni D., *The destruction of art: iconoclasm and vandalism since the French Revolution*, Reaktion Books, 1997

⁷⁰ Cohen S, property destruction motives and meanings, cited in J Farrell *Tearing Down the Streets: adventures in urban anarchy*, Palgrave, New York, 2001 p18.

⁷¹ “A young person that wears a hoodie, esp. when associated with yobbish behavior”, Definition HOODIE: <<http://www.wordweonline.com/en/HOODIE>> [May 15 2010]

*Brown*⁷², or perhaps a group of blue-rinsed night stalkers hitching up their girdles and personalising the streets one stitch at a time?

Apart from creating a laughable mental image, these ideas do give some insight into the persistent tendency to generalise the ‘other’ even in our so-called modern society. And since the definition of Gardeners and Knitters is so inappropriate then a more open definition of these types of action is required.

1.2 Craft ‘Craftivism’ and the domestic realm.

Craftivism: a hybrid word combining the conflicting ideas of craft and activism, the term was spawned by Greer in her examination of the renaissance of craft in her MA thesis 2005, these ideas would later be developed in her book; ‘knitting for good’.⁷³ Guerrilla Knitting is well placed as a part of the ‘craftivist’ movement. Further to Greer’s own blog Craftivism.org,⁷⁴ there is a flood of other ‘craftivists’ that chart their small interventions online⁷⁵. A 2009 symposium at the Arncliffe in Bristol UK entitled Un-Craftivism, took on craftivism from the sublime to the ridiculous⁷⁶.

In an affectionate note, Greer recalls knitting with her Grandma and postulates on the duty for younger generations to continue practising of the skills of craft, if only to stop them dying out: “What happens when the older generations quietly pass on? Will they take their crafty tips with them?”⁷⁷ Perhaps the redefinition of practices such as knitting and gardening can have a unifying effect, it is undeniable that, given the night-time operations of these movements, and occasionally tricky nature of carrying out their actions, that they are a preserve of younger people from a practical point of view.

⁷² *Harry Brown*, (2009) Daniel Barber (Dir), Marv Films

⁷³ Greer B, *Knitting for Good!*, Trumpeter Books, (Oxford) 2008.

⁷⁴ Craftivism home page: < www.craftivism.org > [March 02 2010]

⁷⁵ See also *The Lonely Craftivist*, < <http://alonelycraftivist.blogspot.com/> > [March 01 2010], *The craftivist collective* <<http://craftivist-collective.blogspot.com/>> [March 01 2010]

⁷⁶ Un- Craftivism, exhibition:
<http://www.craftivism.net/wiki/UnCraftivism/Bristol_Knowledge_Unconference_2009>[March 20 2010]

⁷⁷ Greer B, *Knitting for Good!*, Trumpeter Books, (Oxford) 2008, p.20.

When considering knitting as a handicraft, fluctuating fortunes of craft and decorative arts seem a prudent consideration. If looking at the city as a design object as a whole, theories surrounding craft might be applied to Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting. Its decoration of the built environment might be condemned by Loos, who saw it as a sign of degeneration, claiming: “the modern man who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate.”⁷⁸ Although it was ardently defended by Ruskin who believed that good ornament could “never be overcharged”⁷⁹. In applying these debates to the idea of embellished architecture, an even wider field of debate is opened up. While Freud reminds readers in writing on the presence of flowers and other plant-life as adornment, that “what we know to be useless, but expect our civilisation to value, is beauty”⁸⁰ and whether certain spray-can artists can be charged for Criminal Damage when their vandalism adds to property value,⁸¹ the debate on beauty is widely nuanced, but cannot find sufficient space here.

Crucially for knitting and gardening, they seem very much to be the preserve of the domestic environment. This forms a further factor in our surprise at their fresh presence in the city. As a part of their annex within the home environment both skills seem closely connected with women the idea of femininity. As earlier discussed, the identification of the rise of craft to the war period arguably provides strong support for proposing a connection between craft and the finely tuned domestic realm. However, in terms of gender equality, the identification with this movement is more than a retrograde movement toward previous values regarding the frugal home.

As domestic pursuits, the activities of gardening and knitting seem sequestered in a feminine domain. In fine art, male artists have explored this gender divide. As a male artist who knits, Dave Cole exploits the gender divide in his projects juxtaposing

⁷⁸ Loos A ‘Ornament and Crime’ in Frank I (Ed.) *The Theory of Decorative Art 1750-1940 an anthology of European and American Writings*. p.288.

⁷⁹ J Ruskin ”’The Lamp of Sacrifice” and ‘The Lamp of Beauty”” in Frank I (Ed.) *Op.Cit* p266

⁸⁰ S Freud **Error! Main Document Only**.Freud S *Civilisation and its Discontents (Des Unbehagen I der kultur)* (1930) Penguin books 2004 trans. David McLintock p.37.

⁸¹ See I. Edwards ‘Banky’s graffiti: a not-so-simple case of criminal damage.’ *Journal of Criminal Law*, 2009 73 JCL 345-261pp345-361

harsh media with soft subjects to mix themes of war and craft, in works such as: *Lead Bears*⁸², and *Kevlar Baby Clothes*⁸³.

One possible explanation for the acceptance of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting and their sanctioning by most reports in the media despite their illegality, might be the connection they have to the domestic environment. Craft, often appearing as the poor relation of art or its country cousin also emerged relegated to the home environment in light of the discussions here. As such, the presence of the home in the street might not seem as large a threat as the indication of interventions of other kinds. Miller is certain about the importance of the home in terms of forming identity.⁸⁴ In Howard's development of the garden city, cultivation of the green space becomes key to preserving the beauty of the city.⁸⁵ In reference to cultivation, Rochberg-Halton et.al expand the use of the verb, extending its reaches via the concept of 'care' and that of working towards an aim.⁸⁶ Although the idea of the suburban home would begin to appear restricting in much urban theory, as an environment where inhabitants became the victims of "aimless [a] pervasive low-keyed pleasure".⁸⁷ There were those who celebrated the home. In 'Castles on the Ground' Richards advocates the wonder of the suburban home environment and distinctive "suburban style"⁸⁸ as "a paradise" from which all that enter: "return[s] touched by some of its magic."⁸⁹

1.3 The Unsanctioned Urban Expression

Already established as outside of the shadowy realms or the 'vandal', partly through their smiling presence in Sunday Supplements and morning TV shows, Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting endeavours seem far more appropriately housed within

⁸² D Cole, *Lead Bears*, (2006) Lead (lead ribbon, hand knit over lead wool armature), <<http://www.theknittingmachine.com/projects.php>> [March 30, 2010]

⁸³ D. Cole, *Kevlar Baby Clothes*, (2008) Kevlar (used Gulf War Bullet Proof Vest) cut, sewn and hand knit <<http://www.theknittingmachine.com/projects.php>> [March 30, 2010]

⁸⁴ D Miller *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*, Berg, London, 2001.

⁸⁵ E Howard *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, (1902), MIT Press, London 1965.

⁸⁶ Rochberg Halton, et.al *The Meaning of Things, Domestic Symbols and the Self*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981.

⁸⁷ See Reisman *The Suburban Sadness*, in W M Dobriner, *The Suburban Community*, G P Putnam, New York, 1958, p.377.

⁸⁸ J M Richards, *The Castles on the Ground*, The Architectural Press, London, 1946, p.14.

⁸⁹ J M Richards, *Op Cit*, p.16.

Bengtson's term, the Unsanctioned Urban Expression. The openness of this terminology is apt for the guerrilla movements at hand, since they do not sit easily within the parameters of art or activism. Although their projects involve a level of creativity in terms of both design and execution without detection, for example those who cultivate food on railway embankments or *Owel Wasn't Here's* giant cigarette knit (fig1.1)⁹⁰ for many, these actions are not art, but activism. Certainly the anti-capitalist ethos of projects such as Kew Eco village, or Have på en Natt⁹¹, would resent a link to the art industry, despite their highly visual nature. Kanten and Heubner's new text uses the classification: 'Urban Interventions', however they reserve this for personal 'Art' projects.⁹² Furthermore, particularly in the case of Guerrilla Gardening which does little to indicate its own presence as distinctive from public gardening on the part of the municipal authority, intervention is a problematic term for effectively describing these movements. Although their actions are performed by active groups intervening in public space, the verb *intervene* will appear more incongruous as the thesis progresses and the subtle, often unmarked nature of these visual expressions is explored.

1.4 Seedlings- how does your definition grow?

This chapter has principally concerned itself with definitions. These accepted definitions and the assumptions that grow from them blossom into the assumptions automatically made when one hears the term 'Guerrilla Gardener'. It is a vital conflict of violence and nurture, of sudden attacks and the patience of creation: not only the literal definitions of the words but their importance in terms of assumptions regarding practitioners, of knitting, gardening, vandalism and activism. It is the crucial juxtaposition of the conservative and discriminative discourse surrounding knitting and gardening that generates so much interest in respect of their appearance

⁹⁰ Large knitted cigarette created by Owel wasn't here, installed at Laguna Beach USA (2008)

⁹¹ 'Garden in night' (1996) action as part of 'Copenhagen city of culture', 'Greatest Works of Guerrilla Gardening': <<http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/green-living/news-greatest-works-guerrilla-gardening>> [May 10, 2010]

⁹² R. Klanten M. Huebner, *Urban Interventions, Personal Projects in Public Places*, Gestalten Books, Berlin, (2009)

in the city. The renaissance these Guerrilla Movements bring to practices is often dismissed as geriatric, although it at first glance a rebellion against their conservative traditions it is also the supporting framework that sustains their individuality. The ‘gender-bending’ of male knitters and the surprise at the emergence of fresh faced urban youth gardeners is sustained by the very assumptions they defy. In an ironic twist then, what renders these practices so interesting is in fact their strong links to boredom in the past.

As the study progresses into an examination of these movements at work in city, the entrapment of gardening and knitting in the domestic realm before their ‘guerrillarisation’ is another factor that renders their gentle blemishes on the planned landscape so interesting. They provide a way into debates surrounding public(?) space.

Two: Common Ground, Battleground, Playground, Our Guerrilla movements and thoughts on Public Space.

On the surface, public space appears a relatively simple concept: a shared space, a communal area and a place for interaction. However, in commenting on the emergence of the works of ‘the Midnight Knitter’—a guerrilla knitter who began a sudden transformation of the parks and streets of New Jersey in March 2010—one local resident argued "I don't think it's appropriate...It's a public space and people should not be able to go in and do what they want to do."⁹³

The above comment reflects the essential dichotomy of defining public space. Mitchell reflects public space history as one rich in exclusion rather than inclusion, citing the elitist application of democracy in Ancient Greece⁹⁴. Although public space is often assumed to be incumbent with ideals of freedom and interaction, a closer examination reveals a much darker debate. In terms of architecture, the history of the city is peppered with architectures of control, from the *tabula rasa* concepts of Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin*, and its rigorous control of each portion of the population's day⁹⁵, to Smithson and Law's readings regarding the disappearance of public space in both New York⁹⁶ and Hong Kong⁹⁷. In this sense, Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting present a visual rebellion to the rigid controls of spatial planning, in particular plants, with their wild aesthetic; Rothenburg's description of a Viennese Wildgarden is an appropriate case in point here⁹⁸.

In the following chapter, these varied conflicts between freedom and control, common space and capitalism, policing and protest and fear and security are

⁹³ Lukas M as quoted in, Degener R: ‘A good yarn? West Cape May tries to unravel the mystery of the midnight knitter’, *Press Of Atlantic City* <http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/breaking/article_587d7e2e-2bd5-11df-8a4e-001cc4c002e0.html> [March 20, 2010]

⁹⁴ D Mitchell, ‘The end of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public and Democracy, N Orum and P. Neal Orum and Neal (eds.), *Common Ground?: Readings and Reflections on Public Space*, Routledge (London) 2009.

⁹⁵ LeCorbusier, *The Cities of Tomorrow*, Architectural Press.London, 1971/1987.

⁹⁶ Smithson G *Dispersing the Crowd: Bonus Plazas and the Creation of Public Space*, in Orum and Neal *Op Cit*.

⁹⁷ Law L, *Defying Disappearance: Cosmopolitan Public Spaces in Hong Kong*, in Orum and Neal *Op. Cit*.

⁹⁸ Rothenburg *Landscape and Power in Metropolitan Vienna*, in Low Seth M (Ed.) *Theorizing the City: the new urban anthropology reader*, Rutgers, London, 2005 .

explored in relation to the development of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting as unendorsed urban expressions. These explorations occur via three approaches to the city, as common ground, battleground or playground. However, to exclusively cast these urban guerrillas, like the underground vigilantes that spawned their name, as an underdog champion; as the *goodies* in the battle against the pervasive ‘baddies’ of planning, control and capitalism is equally as sweeping as the concrete condemnation of the Midnight Knitter quoted at the start of this chapter. As a result, a more nuanced discursive approach which considers the idea that these creative moments might be encouraged by the playfulness of post-modernism and not immune from the influence or potential infiltration of the capitalism they criticise. Zukin’s notion of ‘authenticity’ and the revival of ‘grit’ as a positive and saleable feature will prove instrumental here⁹⁹. Finally, Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting will be shown as part of a dialectic which depends upon the forces of control, normalisation and capitalism which they criticise. For without them these kinds of creative activism become deactivated as a counter discourse and unrequited as a visual method of questioning accepted ideas and concepts surrounding public space.

2.1 Common Ground: Common care, Commonality, Common Access.

At first glance, the Oxfordshire road appears as it always might, a mundane and marauding black river, twisting through the city to bear vehicles to their destination (fig 2.1). But in the midst of its roll of progress appears a brightly coloured intervention. Like magma bursting through the earth’s crust, a few small flowers and a hardy shrub form a Lilliputian green space. Against the relentlessly grey backdrop of the road, the colours seem even more vibrant, their interruption of the packed gravel cheerful, if a little incongruous. These observations of Pete Dungey’s work illustrate one aspect of the common ground debate.

Created with the aim of transforming pot holes in the road surface as well as highlighting a need for their repair and maintenance these interventions, a technique

⁹⁹ S. Zukin, *The Naked City, The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010.

also practiced by Spanhake in Mexico,¹⁰⁰ seem to connect the idea of shared space implicitly with that of caring¹⁰¹. Margolin discusses the idea of user care in design in terms of who is a user/designer¹⁰², and Thackara takes design as a human attribute stating it is simply: “what human beings do.”¹⁰³ In the uses of disorder, Sennet cites “the act of caring about something them, of reaching outside oneself to explore something unknown” as “a way of reaffirming and strengthening the sense of being a full personality.”¹⁰⁴ In this sense then, the aims of Guerrilla Gardeners to take up the slack of the municipal power, and improve the space (Dugey’s attempts to repair the road surface) can be viewed as active care for the city as a whole. The critique present in these two guerrilla movements can also be applied to the investment and care applied to public space by their relevant governing bodies. Examinations of well-known Guerrilla Gardener Richard Reynolds’s first gardening actions in Elephant and Castle, a run-down London Borough seem illustrative of Zukin’s ideas, proposed in relation to Williamsburg and Harlem: that a lack of investment in a certain area can, in fact, cause it to become one of creative incubation due to the low rents and calls for action it poses to the populous.¹⁰⁵ However, common ground can often become a denominator, shaping or seeking to shape behaviours of those who enter its boundaries.

Foucaultian notions of normalisation can be applied to the history of public space behaviours. Even a concept as simple as the promenade, as documented by Damosh, in her analysis of 19th century street-life images, was subject to strict laws of propriety and conduct¹⁰⁶. In this sense, Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting seem to represent an incongruous presence in the street due to their domestic connotations as discussed in relation to gender, craft and identity in the preceding chapter. Even in

¹⁰⁰ Geneva Gamez interviews Shannon Spanhake: <<http://laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/august26-05/gap.htm>> [May 17, 2010]

¹⁰¹ S. Greenwood, ‘Cyclist’s flower power spreads the love after potholes bloom in icy weather’, for *Guardian.co.uk*, Wed 10 February <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/green-living-blog/2010/feb/10/potholes-cycling>> [March 15, 2010]

¹⁰² V. Margolin, ‘The Product Milieu and Social Action, in R Buchanan and V Margolin, *Discoveriing Design, Explorations in Design Studies*, The University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1995.

¹⁰³ J. Thackara *In the Bubble designing in a Complex World*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2006.

¹⁰⁴ R. Sennet, *The Uses of Disorder, Personal Identity and City Life*, Yale University Press, London, 2008, p.133.

¹⁰⁵ Zukin S, *Op Cit*

¹⁰⁶ Damosh Those “Gorgeous Incongruities”: Polite Politics and Public Space on the Streets of Nineteenth Century New York, in M Orum and O Neal, (Eds.) *Common Ground, Readings and Reflections on Public Space*, Routledge, New York 2010.

terms of a norm of protest actions, Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting seem to question common conceptions. Although Guerrilla Gardening has transgressed its subtle approach to intervening in the city in a more extreme fashion this is commonly in collaboration with other movements, for example RTS, The Land is Ours, Cast in this light, Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting provide a subtle questioning of the nature of public space, and unlike more common forms of vandalism might be proposed as even more subversive in their subtle style, an ironic embodiment of Van Der Rohe's 'less is more' sentiment¹⁰⁷, rather than the 'fighting fire with fire' approach that might arguably be applied to spray can-based personalisation of the city. Like 'green graffiti'¹⁰⁸ which forms a message by cleaning into the surface, the extent to which Guerrilla Gardeners and Knitters actually damage the city is debatable. This diminutive feature is not isolated to Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting. Projects like the tiny protest banners erected by *The Craftivist Collective*(fig2.2),¹⁰⁹ *Dispatchworks*¹¹⁰ and even Invader seem to support them as part of a trend toward more subtle Unendorsed Urban Expressions in the city in recent times. In breaking free from the domestic realm that is traditionally their keeper (see chapter one), these movements challenge behavioural norms in the city, although often setting up their pieces at night, Knit-ins in public spaces, like the London Tube line, challenge normativity in relation to public behaviours and divisions between public and private space.

The night-time operations of these Knitting and Gardening groups, as well as illustrating their position in the grey area legally has some potential in redeeming the sometimes threatening nature of the city by night. Condemned by official regulation but seemingly legitimised by common public approval as in the case of the Midnight Knitter, they represent the presence of non-threatening individuals at work in the city after dark. Alternatively they might become an official gardening space, as with the first Green Guerrilla garden of '70s New York—might also provide some reassurance

¹⁰⁷ This was a key tenet of Van Der Rohe's modernist aesthetic, for a more detailed exploration of the term: Gössel and Lethäuser, Vachon, Atherton and Williams (trans.) *Architecture in the Twentieth Century*, Taschen, Köln, 2001. pp. 225-238.

¹⁰⁸ Green Graffiti Homepage, <<http://www.greengraffiti.com/>> [March 25, 2010]

¹⁰⁹ "The concept is to make a small unthreatening protest banner on a global justice or poverty issue that you care about. Then you put it up (with cable ties) in a relevant public space."
<<http://www.craftivist-collective.com/page4.htm>>[March 25, 2010]

¹¹⁰ Jan Vormann, International Lego Street Art Project, *Dispatchworks*,
<<http://www.janvormann.com/dispatchwork.php>> [April 29, 2010]

in the face of widespread suspicion with which popular opinion can treat public space.

To identify Unendorsed Urban Expressions as a rebellion only against the city planners and architects would be, in a sense, to fall foul of the same error Zukin identifies in Jacob's rather romantic reflection on Hudson Street.¹¹¹ To do so, like Jacob's channelling of responsibility to the designers of space, is to ignore the crucial issue of ownership. Returning to the simple assumptions posed at the opening of this chapter, the notion of a public space, like the Hobbesian illustration of the body politic might suggest collective ownership and responsibility for such spaces¹¹². Like graffiti artists' claims to enter 'negative' spaces of the city¹¹³, Guerilla Gardening and Knitting seem to manifest themselves in the unkempt and ignored places of the city such as the application of furniture cosies like the telephone-booth-cosy by Knit the City (Fig 2.3).

In the face of public spaces increasingly inhabited by fear after dark, the choice of both Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting go some way to casting light into the dangerous darkness. Perhaps because of the increasing design of public space that discourages its own use and as Warpole and Greehalgh observe the increasing use of technological measures as a means of securing safety, city users have become reluctant to use public space¹¹⁴. Areas originally designed for fresh air and recreation become wastelands filled with risk and vulnerability to those who would stray into their shadows. Lately it has been the transgression of such crimes into the day-to-day which has proven most shocking. Cases of daylight robbery, rape and murder seem to have reinforced the need for greater surveillance whilst at the same time devaluing its effectiveness. Against such a sinister backdrop, the erection of street knitting pieces and planting of seeds may lay out more than just the literal roots and ties involved in their construction. The visible evidence of human presence in places otherwise forbidding might have an effect of re-humanizing forbidding public spaces, making them not just public space but people's space. Due to the literal

¹¹¹ J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Penguin Books, London, 1961.

¹¹² Abraham Bosse, Frontispiece to T Hobbes *Leviathan*, etching, 1651.

¹¹³ Comments from Australian graffiti artists regarding blank and 'negative spaces' Halsey and Young, 'Our desires our ungovernable Writing graffiti and urban space', *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 10(3): 275–306; 1362–4806, SAGE Publication, 2006.

¹¹⁴ K. Warpole and L. Greenhalgh, *The Freedom of the City*, Demos, London, 1996.

implication that a person must have been there to plant, prune and knot the interventions of Guerilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting and as a result of the gender assumptions made in relation to craft as discussed in the previous chapter the soft and reassuring nature re-echoes an indication of the home and the human across what can be forbidding and inhumane environs.

2.2 Battleground: Battling Boredom, Breaking Schemas and the Zeitheist

Speaking against the “explosion of beige”¹¹⁵ that he characterised as ‘The Generic City’ Koolhaas described cities devoid of individuality, places which forget their histories, “first unlamented”, and then with “relief turned into regret”¹¹⁶. Although he concedes that some attempts toward the preservation of the past have been made, he dismisses them as ‘lip-service’¹¹⁷. In the face of this growing urban boredom, the exuberance of wool and petals might be argued as an attack on the schema of sameness. Across the ‘troops digs’ page of *guerrillagardening.org*¹¹⁸, appear pictures of places lifted from tedium via illicit planting. The garden planted along Sherbourne Street, Montreal shows the grey ribbon of pavement revitalised with the addition of a riot of colour. (fig.2.4) The cheeky intrusion of knitted pieces, primarily to street furniture such as signposts, symbols of standardisation in the visuals of the city, bring these ordinary features of the streetscape to life in the public conscious. As a remedy to the tedium of the city, Venturi and Scott Brown, advocated a celebration of consumption, as embodied in Las Vegas. On closer inspection, in today’s urban landscape, where city dwellers are surrounded by lifestyles of consumption, the homespun nature of the movements of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting might represent a break from a second kind of schema, which was decried by the situationists in the late sixties.

Although seemingly obvious, a note regarding the battle language of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting seems appropriate here. When originally created at the

¹¹⁵ Koolhaas R, ‘The Generic City’ in Koolhaas et al. ‘*S, M, L, XL*’, Monacelli Press, 1998 p.1260.

¹¹⁶ Koolhaas *Op. Cit* p.1256.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Guerrilla Gardening ‘Troop Digs’ <<http://www.guerrillagardening.org/ggtroopdigs.html>> [May 04, 2010]

Knitta Please store in Texas by Magda Seyeg, Guerrilla Knitting was known as Yarn Bombing and was a method of disposing of old knitting pieces but also a: “response to the dehumanizing qualities of an urban environment”¹¹⁹. This weaponised language is common to Guerrilla Gardening too as well as also creating ‘seed bombs’¹²⁰, the guerrillagardening.org homepage proclaims: ‘*let’s fight the filth with forks and flowers*’¹²¹. The change in definition regarding ‘street people’ appears reflective of the division of city users: once a term that might have described creative wanderers like Degas, imbued by Baudelaire with an exclusive gift of insight into the city, the role of the flâneur¹²². By contrast, the term street-person is now almost exclusively reserved for the homeless. This linguistic suspicion is applied to the ‘man in the crowd’, and it is this increased isolation in the street which assists in creating an imperative for movements like Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting, as a way of reclaiming space for the marginalised users of the city.

Marx characterised the experience of a post capitalist society as one in which “all that is solid melts into air”¹²³. This theme would later be taken up by Berman in his text of the same name¹²⁴. In a sense Guerrilla Gardeners and Knitters can be proposed as physical evidence of a search for permanence in an age where for many thinkers, reality has become devalued and subservient to the insignia of capitalism. Writing on the explosion of the department stores in nineteenth century Paris, Zola wrote of windows that “developed symphonies with their displays”. Whereas in Zola’s Paris the stores had “the joys of the street” within them, it might be argued that today these joys of consumption, no longer so novel have transgressed into the streets themselves, the city inhabitant forced to “feast his eyes”¹²⁵ daily. Debord decried this in ‘The Society of the Spectacle’; taking up Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism, he described the post-modern condition as a decline from “being to

¹¹⁹ From ‘about’ section for ‘Knitta Please’ homepage:

<http://www.magdasayeg.com/about_knitta_please_magda_sayeg.html [March 30, 2010]

¹²⁰ Guerrilla Gardening Seed Bomb Guide <<http://www.guerrillagardening.org/ggseedbombs.html>> [February 18, 2010]

¹²¹ R. Reynolds, <<http://www.guerrillagardening.org/>> [March 01,2010]

¹²² Beaudelaire *The Painter of Modern Life*, in C Beaudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Phiadon, London, 1964.

¹²³ K. Marx in Marx K. and Engels F., *The Communist Manifesto*, Samuel Moore (Trans.) Penguin Classics, London 2002, p.223.

¹²⁴ M. Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Verso, 1983.

¹²⁵ E. Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, Brian Nelson (Trans.) Oxford University Press, New York, 1995. p86.

having” an environment in which all reality is reduced to representation¹²⁶. In this sense, the small acts of human intervention represented by Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting can be proposed as a break in this schema of consumptive dominance.

The material nature of both movements -recycled wool and swapped seeds- counters the stream of consumption that seems to run through city life. Compared to other unendorsed urban expressions like SWOON’s *Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea*¹²⁷ and *Miss rockaway Armada*¹²⁸ certain socially altruistic ideals present in street knitting will be set into a wider shift between simple definitions of artists and activist. Their diminutive nature finds counterparts in the work of Slinkachu’s *Little People In The City* project¹²⁹, as well as Jan Vormann’s *Dispatchworks*¹³⁰ or *Bumblebee*’s transformations of abandoned phone booths in L.A.¹³¹—their non obvious nature a direct subversion of the ‘spectacle’ society. Street Knitting or Yarn Bombing originated as an innovative way for knitters to use their unfinished projects, and Guerrilla Gardening often seeks to grow food for gardeners or simply other members of the public in order to escape the industrialised food production process which so alienates consumers from the origins of what has reached their tables.

However easy it might be to see these charming groups as a guileful objection against some invisible, but rightfully disdained controlling power, there is most certainly more to the debate than this. In our consumerist society, with the widespread nature of billboard advertising that everywhere points to the lack in our lives there might be little surprise at the quirky actions of the ‘craftivist’ movement or the space reclaimed by the Guerrilla Gardening movement. Nevertheless, as Von Borries reminds us in relation to Niketown¹³², it is not so easy to isolate the influence of advertising when it is dressed in the visual guise of underground culture. Saatchi

¹²⁶ G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle, (La societe, du spectacle)(1967)* Donald NicholsonSmith. (trans.)Rebel Press, London 1994, p.10.

¹²⁷Swimming cities of Switchback sea, September 7- October 18th 2008, SWOON, Collaborative project, Long Island city. Swimming cities of Switchback Sea: <<http://www.switchbacksea.org/>> [March 25 2010]

¹²⁸ *Miss rockaway Armada*, SWOON, plus various artists, recycled rafts project, Mississippi, 2006/2007, more information <<http://www.missrockaway.org/>> [March 25 2010]

¹²⁹ Slinkachu *Op. Cit.*

¹³⁰ J. Vormann *Op. Cit.*

¹³¹ Unurth Street art, ‘The bumblebee Interview’ <<http://unurth.com/filter/Phone-booth/>> [May 17, 2010]

¹³² F Von Borries, *Op. Cit.*

and Saatchi's incredibly successful *life's for sharing* advertisement for T-Mobile¹³³, a UK Mobile network, is another example of what Von Borries documents and this thesis terms a 'zeitgeist'. A 'zeitgeist' is presented here as a shorter terminology for a growing trend by which advertising, steals or mimics subcultures, oftentimes that have begun in a spirit of anti-capitalism, as a means of infiltrating a popular zeitgeist or youth culture. In the advertising stunt, 130 dancers mimicked a flash mob in London's Liverpool Street Station the music playing over the station loudspeakers rather than in the private headphones of each participant—as is the classic Silent Disco Flash Mob technique. Having exhausted the possibilities of regular billboard schema instead using underground techniques to create something that both breaks up the schema of stayed advertising strategy whilst also extends the product into a new territory. A real flash mob, implemented in reaction the following week, was shut down by police who feared for public safety in the light of overcrowding.¹³⁴ A prudent question for Guerrilla Gardening and Street Knitting is whether, like the flash mob, might fall foul of 'zeitgeist' techniques. For Guerrilla Gardening interventions, some questions might remain as to whether a garden can still considered 'guerrilla' once it is accepted by the local government or governing body. Just as corporate capitals might descend into the underground; these grass roots movements do not escape the capitalist grasp. Both Guerrilla Gardening and Street Knitting have successful books in print on the subject¹³⁵, and even the concept of the seed bomb commonly swapped freely has become a best selling product for VisualLingual¹³⁶ featured in several high-end style magazines. In perhaps the most obvious misuse of the concept, Adidas used Guerrilla Gardening as a basis for a short film as a part of their 'Adidas Originals' campaign. Where the film has been posted on YouTube, a response of widespread disgust has been voiced in the commentary left behind identifying the efforts as 'contrived', stating 'Adidas are corporate fools jumping on' and alleging that "The gardeners here are actors and

¹³³ Saatchi & Saatchi, *Life's for Sharing*, T Mobile advertisement performed London Liverpool Street Station, 07:30 gmt, aired Channel 4, 2009

¹³⁴ M. Wardrop, 'Flash mob mimics T Mobile advert - and closes train station', Feb 7th 2009, Telegraph.co.uk <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/4542840/Flash-mob-mimics-T-Mobile-advert-and-closes-train-station.html>> [March 4 2010]

¹³⁵ Reynolds R *Op. Cit.*

¹³⁶ West Coast Seed Bombs <<http://www.etsy.com/listing/43974618/west-coast-seed-bombs> [April 15 2010]

some of the plants are plastic.”¹³⁷ Herein, perhaps lies the largest danger for the guerrilla movements: Not simply the sale of the product but the sale of the idea of soft rebellion, and the stylish underground.

Adidas provoked further rage in their underground party advertisement, featuring celebrities taking part in an illicit warehouse party attempting to poach some authenticity by connecting the brand to this underground practice.¹³⁸ Zukin takes up the idea of ‘authenticity’ in her examination of *The Naked City*. Citing the *Time* magazine evaluation of the concept as key in 2007, she examines authenticity as a selling point in the renaissance of Harlem and Williamsburg. In Zukin’s observations, the development of authenticity is a direct consequence of under investment in the areas on which she writes. For the ghetto of Harlem and for Williamsburg, this lack of investment becomes the reason that creativity blooms in these areas. “No longer was seediness ugly, it was a sign of authenticity.”¹³⁹ In the case of Guerrilla Gardener Richard Reynolds this is undoubtedly why his illicit green fingerprints began to appear on the London estate where he lived. Prominent craftivits also claim to fight the neglect and boredom of the city with their interventions. However, for Zukin this flourishing of creativity can plant a seed of interest that is less than desirable. The danger in a sense is that the actions of Guerrilla Gardening and Street Knitting in some areas might lead to the exclusion of their practitioners as a result of the media taking up the torch of interest causing in effect a death by over-exposure—a fate Banksy mourns on behalf of Melbourne Street Artists. Writing on the fate of graffiti prior to the Olympic Games, he decries the loss of “the skewed human touch that can bring a little sparkle into the drudgery of public space”¹⁴⁰. As this thesis takes many of its examples from London, one might wonder what effect preparations for the 2012 games might have for these flourishing forms of Unendorsed Urban Expressions.

¹³⁷ 2ndfretage and goodatmagic commenting on *Guerilla Gardening - adidas gruen*, posted by elgreco66, 17 April 2008. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=SE&v=ECG4YfgY9jI>> [May 17 2010]

¹³⁸ adidas commercial, agency: Sid Lee, Montreal; creatives: Laura Kim, Ron Wilfred Macdonald; director: Nima Nourizadeh; production company: Partizan LA. Review ‘Adidas House Party’ E. Williams, 25 November 2008 <<http://www.creativereview.co.uk/cr-blog/2008/november/adidas-house-party>> [May 12, 2010]

¹³⁹ S. Zukin, ‘Consuming Authenticity, From outposts of difference to means of exclusion’, *The Culture Reader*, Vol:22, Issue 5 Sept 2008, pp724-748, Routledge, London.

¹⁴⁰ Banksy, ‘The Writing on The Wall’, *The Guardian*, March 24, 2006.

2.3 Playground: Post-Modern Playfulness, Monkey See Monkey Do.

The work of the Guerrillas has been explored thus far as a reaction to aspirations toward control present in the construction of the city, and a break or diversion from the capitalist schema of the city. Koolhaas critiques the general sense of ennui now present in the Western idea of the metropolis, and, as such, the wild, colourful and playful threads and flowers of gardening and knitting guerrillas present a personalised touch to the concrete jungle breaking the boredom of repeated logos, concrete, steel and glass.

Although the case set by Koolhaas is strong regarding the generic nature of many cities, examinations of some of the endeavours of post-modern architecture and the ideas proposed by its theorists shows an increasing trend toward similar whimsical or playful architectural forms. As the backdrop to the creative activities of city populations, they might be argued as a sign of user participation in the urban playground, rather than an onslaught in wars of the battleground city. In their text *Learning from Las Vegas* Venturi and Scott Brown advocated the virtues of learning from the place of the sign and the low space organization of the strip¹⁴¹. Like the leisure environment described here city skylines might be argued to have undergone a certain ‘tivolisation.’ The Ferris wheel has become a feature of city skylines, and in examining a few examples in London we can identify a definite whimsy to the construction of the city. Foster and co’s Gherkin-shaped, 30 St. Mary Axe¹⁴², often called the ‘Crystal Phallus’ or simply ‘the gherkin’ presides over the British capital’s business district, and despite being dwarfed by the nearby Tower 42, has become an iconic mark on the London skyline¹⁴³. Although one might argue that part of the reason for the building’s planning approval was its avoidance of the key sightlines

¹⁴¹ R Venturi and D Sciott Brown, ‘A significance for A&P parking lots or learning from Las Vegas’, in K Nesbitt(Ed.), *Theorising a new agenda for architecture: an anthology of architectural theory, 1965-1995*, pp.310-321.

¹⁴² Foster+Partners Swiss Re, 30 St Mary Axe :

<<http://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/1004/default.aspx>> [March 10, 2010]

¹⁴³ B. Le Vey, *Eccentric London*, 2nd Edition, Guthenburg Press, Malta, 2007.

from St. Paul's across London¹⁴⁴, the building itself has become a key feature of the city skyline. While a short while away the Millenium Bridge snakes over the Thames, a playful take on the rope bridge links both sides of the river. Also on the Thames, Terry Farrel's SIS building or 'Legoland' as it is known by the British secret service who use it, stands surrounded by myths around its construction including rumors of a tunnel from the building to Whitehall¹⁴⁵. This is a small example—a greater survey would require a space much larger than that afforded by this thesis. In the light of these and other more playful designs that are emerging in our cities, a population that lives in the same space and has, as such, begun to experiment within it is not a surprise.

2.4 Public Space- Refreshing, Renewing, Rebellng

In conclusion, there is a strong case for reading Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting as simultaneously a reflection of the city as a battleground, a playground and common ground. Conflicting in its homely aesthetic against the cool glass and sculptural metal forms of the post industrial city, they indicate a population exuberantly rebelling against the disciplining forces of special design. Their guileful styles show a willingness to create and rediscover public space as a conceptual whole and collective endeavours create a new form of social cohesion and a method of activism in the face of tighter controls over the right to protest. There is a danger in discussing the work of social movements such as Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting to cast them in a sort of David and Goliath scenario, small inhabitants rebelling against a higher authority. Crucially however, just as in the previous chapter, both movements appear intrinsically tied to the assumptions and preconceptions they challenge Both movements in focus here are necessitated by the schema of consumption, architecture or discipline, or dichotomy of public space as the justification for and

¹⁴⁴R. Rogers, 'In Practice', *The Architects Journal*, Volume 221, The Architectural Press Limited 2005, p.24.

¹⁴⁵ SIS Building, designed by Terry Farrel, in Klimzuck and Warner *Secret Places, Hidden Sanctuaries, Uncovering Mysterious sights symbols and societies*, Sterling Publishing, New York, 2009, p.22.

means of rendering both methods of practice in the urban environment original and refreshing.

Three: Real Roots, Virtual Threads- Glocality and the Guerrillas' Online Community.

“I feel as if the mountains and forests of all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea's breakers are rolling against my door.”¹⁴⁶

Commenting here on the advancing developments of the trans-European railway network, Heine notes the increased proximity between locations. This perspective regarding the burgeoning 19th century rail network seems comparable for notions of spatial manipulation regarding the internet as an international network. In today's 'information society', networking is almost a necessary evil of existence. 'Social networking', once a term synonymous with business meetings, has become an important key, or even inescapable, aspect of social life for many, since the concept became translated into online formats via communities such as *MySpace*, *Facebook Bebo* and, perhaps the newest phenomenon *Twitter*¹⁴⁷. *Facebook* 'refusenicks' have been identified as 'increasingly out of the loop' one such non-user complaining: "I felt like a complete stranger after my fresher's week"¹⁴⁸. But what of the two guerrilla movements at hand here? Although the high-tech world of the internet might seem at odds with the softer domesticity suggested by Guerrilla Gardening, as discussed in the first chapter, the groups seem to have a rich online presence, their forum boasting a membership of 25,530 enlisted to its collection of online troops¹⁴⁹. Revisiting the assumptions between craft and identity, femininity and a 'softer' form of activism the combination of such manual domestic skills as knitting and nurturing with the scientific, information community of the internet seem to make an awkward marriage. Both Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting are supported by a strong forum network that allows for the connection and support of practitioners that might

¹⁴⁶ Henrich Heine, as quoted in Schivelbusch W., *The Railway Journey The Industrialisation of Space and time in the 19th Century*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1986 p.37.

¹⁴⁷ <www.myspace.com>[April 12 2010], <www.facebook.com>[April 12 2010], www.bebo.com[April 12, 2010], <www.twitter.com> [April 12 2010]

¹⁴⁸ Natasha McEwan, british student quoted: Budak B., The Anti-Facebook Movement, for *Times Online*, January 29th 2008.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/student/student_life/article3152120.ece [Feb 06, 2010]

¹⁴⁹ Figure as stated on 'community' page:

<<http://www.guerrillagardening.org/community/index.php>> [May 15, 2010]

otherwise operate in isolation, possibly not even realising their involvement in a global network. In the following chapter the role of the internet in nurturing activist groups will be investigated, as well as the term ‘information society’. Explored initially as socially stimulating, through its ease of contact and communication; the darker side of post-industrial, or information society will be examined; one in which technologically mediated social lives leave people increasingly isolated. Some direct analysis of online comments regarding videos posted of Guerrilla Knitting and Gardening actions will be analysed in comparison with Askanius’ examination of YouTube in relation to Swedish RTS (Reclaim the Streets) actions in August 2008.¹⁵⁰ In the following chapter the online life of Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting will be explored in terms of their unifying potential, the stimulation of new social connections and a sense of urban geographies, virtual networks extending the city and lending new emphasis to otherwise forgotten or lost moments in the history of the city.

Given the interesting place that Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting occupies in negative spaces of the city, and in practice, between an old people’s afternoon activity and a funky new youth trend, and between fierce resistance to capitalism and a softer sign of humanism in the city; there is no single ideal point of comparison to investigate their online presence. Therefore, a combination of approaches is utilised. Writing on activism will be used to illustrate observations on the internet’s crucial powers of organisation. Developments in the music industry regarding the instant stardom achieved via MySpace, form a supportive observation in regard to the internet’s power in terms of accelerating budding popular trends. Just as Zukin takes online commentary from blog users and online communities as important evidentiary sources¹⁵¹, this chapter will consider not only the responses in forums, but also to the most watched Guerrilla Gardening videos. Some efforts toward an analysis of this online commentary will seek to point to some of the motives behind Guerrilla Gardening, and to confirm the thesis’ hypothesis of their role as ‘softer’ forms of Unendorsed Urban Expression.

¹⁵⁰ Askanius T, *Space, Place and Geographies of Responsibility in Online Video Activism*, Erik Hedling, Olof Hedling and Mats Jönsson Eds *Regional Aesthetics: Swedish Imagery, Images of Sweden*,. Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm (in print 2010)

¹⁵¹ S Zukin *The Naked City, Op Cit.*

3.1 Networks and grids, backgrounds and considerations.

It might seem that the speed of the internet, the instantaneous connections facilitated by the internet, and movements that have such geriatric connotations as discussed in chapter one, are an odd mix. In contrast to the time it takes for gardens to germinate and take hold or the effort involved in producing knitting pieces information transfer on the internet is relatively instantaneous. Both gardening and knitting have a direct connection to an older generation, with Guerrilla Gardening closely associating itself with the Diggers movement and Guerrilla Knitting with the ‘Make Do And Mend’ habits of wartime women, whereas the internet is seen as a indispensable source for young people today¹⁵². Just as in the previous chapters, it is partially the assumptions surrounding the practitioners of gardening and knitting that render Guerrilla Gardeners and Knitters surprising in some senses as a strong force online. Despite the unlikely combination that laptops, knitting needles and potting sheds make for some, on a basic level the formulation of craft and computers themselves are not so far removed. From a practical point of view, Willis illustrates how the internet assisted the growth of knitting’s popularity in the US via its provision of speedy transfers of information, patterns, tips and hints¹⁵³. Rajaraman identifies explicit links between the development of the Jacquard weaving process and the composition of a knitting pattern, and computer programming algorithms. In his *Computer Programming in C*, he links the production process of a jumper with that of a computer program.¹⁵⁴ This link between binary code and the Knit and Purl combinations of knitting piece construction lends some emphasis to the counter-debates against regarding the radically new nature of the ‘information’ or ‘post-industrial’ society. It might in fact be argued that this is just another form of network transformation, like that of the rail system Heine describes at the start of this chapter. In her text *The Grid Book*, Higgins describes how the development of different grid

¹⁵² A. Hermida *Young Challenge mainstream media* BBC News Website: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4962794.stm>> [May 10 2010]

¹⁵³ K. Willis, *The Close Knit Circle: American Knitters today*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, 2007.

¹⁵⁴ Rajaraman *Computer programming in C*, Prentice Hall, New Delhi, 1994.

systems changed the world. Freeing the concept of the grid from the annex of modernism she investigates the influence of the cardboard box, the brick wall, and the grid iron city plan amongst others, extending the influence of the grid across a wider expanse of time¹⁵⁵. The same debates are introduced when society is conceptualised as a revolutionary new 'network' society.

The Network Society as a concept came as a result of widening the Information Society idea that was popularised by Machlup in 1962¹⁵⁶. Van Dijk develops the Network Society by taking a holistic, societal approach. He identifies greater proximity between individuals, stating the distance between people might be even shorter than the 'six stages of separation' theory formulated by Milgram in the '60s. Citing enlarged usage of telecommunication and the internet, the instant access of mailing lists and greater mobility and connectivity, he proposes that this distance may have decreased.¹⁵⁷ Al Gore is equally as optimistic speaking on the verge of the online boom, in 1993: "our new ways of communicating will entertain as well as inform. More importantly, they will educate, promote democracy, and save lives."¹⁵⁸ However, just as Schivelbusch places the rail network into a net of consequences that are both positive and negative¹⁵⁹, the networking facilitated by the internet has its own dark side. For Fukuyama, despite the ease of connection that occurs between people in the information society their ties tend to be less permanent, looser and involving smaller groups of people¹⁶⁰. He identifies an 'intimate' connection between negative social trends and the shift to an information dominated society. He marks an explicit difference between the developments and values of society and technological progression. Later in this chapter his identification of the development of community in waves will be used to examine the interest groups surrounding Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting.

¹⁵⁵ H. Higgins, *The Grid Book*, MIT Press, Chicago, 2009.

¹⁵⁶ This concept of the Information society was popularized in Marchup's text: *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States*, Princeton University Press, 1972, in which he identified the increasing value of knowledge, its production, creation and distribution. The widespread use of the 'information society' concept as a way of describing the post modern situation occurred as a result.

¹⁵⁷ J. Van Dijk, *The Network Society: social aspects of New Media*, SAGE, London, 2006.

¹⁵⁸ A. Gore, Speech at the Superhighways Summit Royce Hall, Jan 11 1993, UCLA cited in M. A Smith and P Kollock (Eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace*, Routledge, London, 1999, p.3

¹⁵⁹ Schivelbusch *Op. Cit*

¹⁶⁰ Fukuyama F, *Human Nature and The Reconstitution of Social Order*, in: *The Great Disruption*, The Atlantic Monthly, May 1999, Volume 283, No. 5; pp.55-80

3.2 Glocality and glocality at work

One of the reasons for the success and growth of online activism is the increasing impact of ‘Glocality’ which stemming from a Japanese business term for successful networking that was both international but location sensitive. In itself, this might be seen as telling in relation to the views on widespread capitalism expressed in relation to urban space in the previous chapter. The idea of glocality has been applied by social science to explain the effect our increasing instant access to communication and virtually extended social networks have on our sense of place. Writing on this subject Meyrowitz clearly places bodily experience as central since, “all our experience is local”¹⁶¹ despite our daily interactions across continents and our ability to multitask as embodied beings it is our bodily experiences of space and time that remain constant in our experience of the world. However, he highlights the way in which our interpretations of those embodied experiences are heavily influenced by the increasing sense of glocality—the growth of the Global Village.

Just as the internet appears to have had a reductive impact on the conception of geographical distances, when it comes to the size and impact of trends or gauging the levels of popularity they have obtained, the opposite might well be true. Via the social networking site MySpace, several artists have been propelled to fame far faster than the growth of their musical career or stage experience. Webber seems to predict some of these developments in his *Non-place and the urban Realm*. However, for Webber the idea of communicating across long distances seems to be reserved for a privileged and knowledgeable few—people who develop a specialist range of knowledge.¹⁶² Webber writes this in relation to the western metropolis. However given the heightened accessibility to the internet today it seems that a far larger than the “specialized professionals” have the opportunity to join “Interest

¹⁶¹ J Meyrowitz, ‘The Rise of Glocality, New Sense of Place and Identity in the Global Village’, Prepared for the Conference on “The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication: Places, Images, People, Connections” <http://www.socialscience.t-mobile.hu/dok/8_Meyrowitz.pdf> [March 15, 2010]

¹⁶² M Webber ‘The Urban Place and the Non-Place Urban Realm’ in M Webber *Explorations into Urban Structure*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964.

Communities”¹⁶³. An examination of the Guerrilla Gardening website shows a number of people for whom gardening is a simple hobby or pastime exchanging information and experience on its forums. When one user asks for soil advice replies form Holland, the U.S. and Canada¹⁶⁴. Similarly on the ‘Knit the City’ blog responses from far flung Yarn Stormers can be seen throughout the site.

The most viewed Guerilla Gardening film at YouTube begins in ‘mockumentary’ style, following the exploits of Guerrilla Gardener Richard Reynolds as he plans and plants a new garden in long-empty planters in the Arden Estate in Hackney¹⁶⁵. The combination of black and white filming, edgy dance music as a soundtrack and ironic voice over, document the serious nature of Reynolds’s: ‘secret life of crime and grime’. Although the Arden Estate itself is relatively small area of the Hackney borough, the film itself has been viewed 27,092 times since it was posted in 2007. The comments posted in reaction to the film indicate that, despite the minor location, observers relate the action to much wider debates. Admiralcrash1 urges: “Put up some foliage and block some of those 5 million cameras. Police state, disarmed Britain. :- (“¹⁶⁶ Commenting on, CCTV surveillance an issue much wider, and relatively removed from the cause of brightening up the small geographical location in question, another user urges for “more flowers, less Bush” a glib comment against the then US leader¹⁶⁷. Other comments are equally as benign, voicing support, a stark contrast to the negative reactions to the Adidas film in the previous chapter and the outraged responses Askanius registers following the Swedish RTS unrest.¹⁶⁸

3.3 Organised Chaos and Online Identity

¹⁶³ M. Webber, *Op. Cit.*, p.109.

¹⁶⁴ Comments from: Discussion forum for Guerrilla Gardening Facebook Group
<<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2341197575&ref=ts#!/topic.php?uid=2341197575&topic=13536>> [May 15, 2010]

¹⁶⁵ Guerrilla Gardener, Posted by LVSlacker 99, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssz8AvCrqoM> [March 11, 2010]

¹⁶⁶ Admiralcrash1 2009, comment to video: Guerrilla Gardener, Posted by LVSlacker 99, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssz8AvCrqoM>> [March 11, 2010]

¹⁶⁷ AisforAdorable, 2008, comment to video comment to video: Guerrilla Gardener, Posted by LVSlacker 99, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssz8AvCrqoM> [March 11, 2010]

¹⁶⁸ Arkansius *Op Cit.*

Whatever negative effect may have been identified in the working of the internet for sociability, the effectiveness of astute use of the internet as an organisational and anti-establishment tool is undeniable. Heralded by many as the beginning of these new organisational habits, the demonstrations outside the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) 1999 summit in Seattle is a case in point. Mittleman comments on the role of the internet in creating and sustaining the imagery surrounding the 'battle of Seattle': "Information technologies spread the meaning making and knowledge producing power of the metaphor to constitute the events surrounding the ministerial meeting."¹⁶⁹ Unlike the more illicit activities of extremists like the anarchistic Black Bloc¹⁷⁰, Guerrilla Gardeners and Knitters have less need for temporary web pages, and as such their online presence acts as a deeper archive as well as its organizational properties. Given the sometimes ephemeral nature of knitted pieces and gardening interventions, the internet provides an opportunity for a constantly developing archive of images.

In their move to occupy the neglected land that had belonged to the Guinness corporation George Monbiot, and members of environmental commentator/activist and his group The Land is Ours (TLO), used the internet as a key tool in coordinating the action, which aimed to highlight the misuse of the area in the face of increased crowding in Britain¹⁷¹. Although the occupation was dispersed after a few days, the internet footage and documentation remains as a memorial to it.

Castells reminds us that: "...on the Internet you better make sure that everyone knows that you are a dog, and not a cat... on the Internet, you are what you say you are, as it is on the basis of this expectation that a network of social interaction is constructed over time."¹⁷² Although in the opening chapter the way in which preconceptions regarding social practices were challenged in the 'other' of the guerilla gardener was discussed. For Castells, the internet is a place of self-definition, where one must be

¹⁶⁹ J Mittleman *Hyperconflict: Globalization and insecurity*, Stamford University Press (Stamford) 2010, p 122

¹⁷⁰ A more militant form of protest: participants wear all black teamed with ski-masks or motorcycle helmets in order to avoid identification and give the appearance of solidarity. Starr articulates the movement in detail, as temporary collaboration, and distinct from anarchism. In: Starr, *Global Revolt: A guide to movements against Globalization*, Palgrave MacMillan, (New York) 2005pp226-232

¹⁷¹ TLO Pure Genius Campaign < <http://www.tlio.org.uk/campaigns/wandsworth/> > [March 31, 2010]

¹⁷² M Castells *The Internet Galaxy, Reflections on the Internet Business and Society*, Oxford University Press 2001, p.130.

clear of who they are in order to identify with others similar to them. Meyrowitz takes a slightly bleaker approach “the price we pay for being able to become who we want to be is uncertainty about who anyone else is”¹⁷³. Although the anonymity of the internet is often propounded as threatening, the preserve of perverts and deceivers, the insulating concept of anonymity on the internet these mean that operators might have a double life, which like that of Chand in his secret garden in India proves invaluable to the success of these kind of projects. Although of course anonymity might be achieved simply by conducting actions in secret.

3.4 Virtual realities, Geographical Actualities

Streuer defines ‘telepresence’ as: “the experience of presence in an environment by means of a communication medium”¹⁷⁴, indicates how online users can achieve a conception of a place vicariously in the experience they have of it online. Although this is often applied to purely virtual realms, in the case of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting, the place conception achieved by users has a real possibility of colliding with the real. In this sense, there is a speculative possibility that this will change geographical conceptions of sites in the city. Will this redefine the wasteland, as a place of possibility rather than a site to be avoided for its barren nature and potential for (daylight) robbery? Guerilla Gardening and Knitting are movements which instigate a cross over between presence and telepresence.

Like the mixed narratives that combined with Corda’s ‘guerrillero heroico’ image, the fate of issues surrounding Guerrilla Gardening can be lost when they enter the online realm. Ripped from their specific sites, and the nuances of local knowledge that spawned their creation, they become part of wider, global issues, a struggle between the ‘regular people’ and the authoritative power, those that care and a faceless mass army of trampling youths that would squash their fresh bed and tear down their woollen additions. Or many single people the same against the dogmatic

¹⁷³ Meyrowitz *Op. Cit* p.134

¹⁷⁴ R Steuer, ‘Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions defining presence and telepresence’, in: F Biocca MR Levy, *Communication in the age of Virtual reality*, Lawrence Earlbaum Associates Inc., New Jersey, 1995, p.38.

enforcement of criminal damage and trespass legislation. Therefore like the many other paradoxical elements earlier discussed, the role of these movements online can have both an expansive and reductive effect.

3.5 The Internet and New Life for Negative Space

There is arguably some similarity between the findings of this chapter and those of the previous two. In light of the conservative and geriatric connotations of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting, their presence online might be surprising for some. Like many forms of activism it provides a very practical arena for both organisation and the formations of a cohesive movement image. The clear logos and colour schemes can be compared to other marketing techniques picked up by Guerrilla movements and described in chapter one. Members are organized by screen name and number, and in the case of guerrillagardening.org, placed into national groups. Efficient galleries monitor their interventions into public space regardless of its success level.

In terms of our knowledge of the city, the exposure of Guerrilla Gardened ‘dead space’ and Knitte-cosy coddled street furniture help to shift our perceptual tendencies in the city environment. In an age where things often appear on a mega-scale, the metropolis now referred to as the megalopolis by some theorists, the new mapping allowed by Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting that is documented online has a potential to transform busy city users into new urban detectives. To: ‘re awaken the old stories of the cities past’ as *Knit the city* claim¹⁷⁵. Areas of neglect and those that might have been dismissed are given a new interest, reintroducing users to a micro vision of the areas to which they have become so well accustomed. However these new virtual networks that exist in tandem with the physical environments we inhabit can also have a reductive effect. Overwhelming glocality might risk a loss of local nuances that created the need for interventions like Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting in the first instance.

¹⁷⁵ *The footsore tale of the Oranges and Lemons Odyssey* September 06, 2009, <<http://knitthecity.com/page/2/>> [May 04, 2010]

Conclusion

This thesis has followed the guerrilla movements at hand from definition to their online manifestations. Throughout they appear a counter discourse to dominant thoughts and behavioral patterns. In their self-definition, the collision of the idea of the guerilla and the domesticity of the skills of knitting and gardening represents a kind of fruitful juxtaposition of ideas which recurs throughout the rest of the study. Just as the movements rebel against the conservative attitudes and cultural histories around their development, by breaking accepted pattern regarding the locations of their practice and the notions of who those practitioners might be, they are equally sustained by this conservatism. Without a foundation like this for them to form a counter-discourse against, one might speculate that the movements themselves would not be so intriguing. In the built environment, their impact is also sustained by a plethora of juxtapositions. In an increasingly technological environment, they represent a “skewed human touch”¹⁷⁶ that counters the sleek aesthetic of the contemporary metropolis. In the city itself, an environment increasingly understood on a ‘mega’ scale, the size of these often small interventions reorganize space on a more relatable scale, a type of reassurance in an a world where the human is—according to many—often subject to technology and informatic flows. The implication of greater care for environments, and thus for other inhabitants, contrast with commonly held views that the city, whilst densely populated is an environment filled with isolated inhabitants. As a form of activism, they challenge the assumptions of activist actions as destructive and intrusive in daily life. Following a short exploration of suggested futures of this research, in respect of practitioners’ viewers, art and activism; this conclusive section then brings together strands from all three chapters, exploring what the findings of the study might infer in terms of activism and what the small touches of the human hand analysed here might mean in terms of the experience of the city.

C.1 Futures

¹⁷⁶ Banksy ‘The Writing on the Wall’, *The Guardian*, Friday 24 March 2006

This thesis takes up a trend which is current and occupies a space between a range of developments in the worlds of street art and activism. As a result, a number of different pathways for future research appear to stretch out before it as a means of expansion. In the immediate future, interviews and round table discussions would go a long way in obtaining a better insight into the motives of Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting practitioners. Advocates promote the social value of the practice of each activity, the opportunities for meeting new people, sharing common interests and learning new skills. Could the zeitgeist currently surrounding guerrilla practices have created a fashion for the underground? And how long could these practices continue? The development of guerrilla dining, guerrilla gigs, book exchanges¹⁷⁷ and ‘craftivism’ illustrated in the popularity of publications not only on the movements in focus here, but collections like Keri Smith’s *Guerilla Art* guide¹⁷⁸, the extensive membership at guerrillagardening.org or projects like *change the world for a fiver*¹⁷⁹ demonstrate its rising popularity. These claims would be substantiated or questioned effectively by primary source commentary. Longer term research methods might add a further element of investigation. In order to ascertain the real impact of these interventions—which by their subtlety risk being overlooked—and see the extent to which they obtain attention or stop the traffic of the street, observation over time of certain pieces or gardening projects would create another key field within this heavily textured area of interest. In terms of debating the potential fleeting enthusiasm toward Guerilla Gardening and Knitting and indeed the widespread popularity of ‘guerrillaisms’ as a whole, as purely a zeitgeist or a permanent trend will only be confirmed or disproved in retrospective looks at their continuance or demise in the future.

C.2 Apathy ? Activism!

¹⁷⁷See: Book Crossing- the world’s biggest free books club <<http://www.bookcrossing.com/>> [May 12, 2010]

¹⁷⁸ K Smith *The Guerilla Art Kit*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2007.

¹⁷⁹ (Anon)*Change the World for a Fiver: We Are What We Do*, Short Books, 2004.

A number of the key theorists used in this study created theories against a backdrop of the “greatest revolutionary moment in France since the Paris Commune”¹⁸⁰. De Bord was a key writer of the Paris uprisings, and the issues of the stream of consumption would form a key theme in the slogans of the worker/student uprisings. In his preface to the 2nd edition of *The Uses of Disorder*, Sennet explicitly places the roots of his texts in this time of unrest.¹⁸¹ Perhaps this is telling that theories from such a time of activism are applied to our understanding of the city today despite commonly held views that our society today is more apathetic than previous generations. For many it the revolutionary events of 1968 in Paris would never occur in this epoch since people do not possess this kind of drive for change. However what might also be argued in the light of Guerilla Gardening and Knitting and their other niche activism counterparts is that widespread apathy is far from the case. Rather, activism, like the site-specificity of Unendorsed Urban Expressions, now possesses a high level of specificity and specialization. As Jordan reminds us in his example of the malleable nature of the RTS flag, which members personalize as a visualization of which of the three strands of the movement they identify most,¹⁸² activism appears as far more flexible. In *A Movement of Movements*, Klein describes activism today as a ‘coalition of coalitions’¹⁸³, rather than largely united groups, indicating a possible swing toward issue-based activism, rather than the left/right divisions present in situationist Paris. In the light of innovative movements like, Guerrilla movements and the potentials for cooperation as exemplified at Seattle, one might say that activism has reached its most exciting stage yet. Breaking free of the tested methods of mass gatherings, placards and petitions; today’s activists emerge with a new notion that however diminutive, or unorthodox, activism can be issue based rather than a case of warring political polarities. Most of all engagement in activism itself can be a pleasurable pursuit. Although the investigations here point toward this hopeful hypothesis regarding new directions of

¹⁸⁰ K Knabb (trans.) Situationist International, 2nd Edition, 1968

¹⁸¹ R Sennet, *Op Cit.*

¹⁸² T. Jordan, *op Cit.*,

¹⁸³ N. Klein, ‘Reclaiming the Commons’ in T. Mertes (Ed.) *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* Verso, London, 2004, p.220.

activism and social movements, deeper investigation of these factors would be needed for a more conclusive argument.

C.3 Every Little Helps

Visually, and creatively this thesis has found the small interventions of Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting in the company of a number of other small and secretive interventions into city space. They seem to be part of a number of growing trends within which, their role as counter discourse is vital. As a challenge to common perceptual schemas, conservative roots and commodity culture, they represent a break with expectations, evidenced by the surprised registered in the media around the arrival of Guerrilla Knitting as it embellishes the furniture of the street. But what do these practices mean for the idea of the city dweller? As a generalized being established in literature and other forms of visual culture, the city dweller often appears erudite, busy and business orientated. Like the spaces they inhabit, they are sleek and isolated moving like Poe's "man in the crowd" with ease and speed through "continuous tides of population"¹⁸⁴. As such, the idea of gardeners and knitters in the city widens the notion of the urban dweller to an extent. Placement is crucial in the interpretation of these small interventions, their discovery amidst the superstructures of the post-industrial city has the potential to renew often overlooked or run down zones in the urban environment. Like the playground city of the second chapter, these interventions invite the viewer into a game of hide-and-seek.

Scale too is key to the understanding these small touches. Koolhaas wrote of the size and expansion of the generic city, which towered over its inhabitants as a shell devoid of meaning. Debord wrote of a sacrifice of the reality of being at the hands of commodity culture. Simultaneously the internet expands, digitizing more and more aspects of life, stretching before and dwarfing the individual. Levi-Strauss stated that: "the intrinsic value of the small scale model is that it compensates for the

¹⁸⁴ Poe E A 'The Man of The Crowd' in E A Poe *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, Michael O'Mara Books Ltd, London, 1987 p.141.

renunciation of sensible dimensions by the acquisition of intelligible dimensions.”¹⁸⁵ As the metropolis grows onward enshrouded by an ever-extending web of communications, with its incumbent positives of ease and stress of image bombardment, as our society of spectacle reaches even into the shadows of underground culture to make a statement, perhaps these new creative movements make the loudest cry by speaking an almost unheard whisper. Is it possible that interventions like Guerrilla Gardening and Guerrilla Knitting represent a; “revitalising the value of little things if done in the right manner and in the right spirit”¹⁸⁶ as Howard called for? The altruism and accessibility of communities created by Guerrilla Gardening and Knitting seem to render them an example of the small actions that. In post-modern metropolises filled with mega shapes and superstructures and in a language of the city where things seem to ever increase in both size and scale away from our field of conception, perhaps the most interesting thing about these small efforts of protest and intervention is their shy emergence from the shadows, like the hug proffered by the knitting piece that began this study, a small colourful flag of humanity amongst the brick, glass steel and dust. Although seemingly every day, potentially overlooked or missed, for those who unexpectedly happen upon the careful planting and playful stitches of the unknown Guerrilla negative space is transformed into place. Despite the negativity explored in many of the theories here, the confusion between the legalities of Guerrilla actions, for the users of urban space they can be; “the glitter that illuminates the rubble, and illuminates the dark lives of the people at whose expense the bright lights shine.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ C Levi Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1966 p.24

¹⁸⁶ E Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*.1902 p.159

¹⁸⁷ Balzac, cited in Berman *All That is Solid melts into air-the Experience of modernity*, Verso, London, 1983, p.153

Illustrations:



Fig I.1 'Hug me' Knitted banner, Leicester, UK, May 2007, photographed by 'Dawkey'

This knitting piece in a city centre park reintroduced the human hand to an environment with a chequered reputation.

Fig I.2 Victoria Park, Leicester, picture from bbc.co.uk

The park at night. The marks of brutalism can be seen in the buildings in the background and lighting added to the pathways to create a safer environment, form a visual indication of the park's potential danger after nightfall.



Fig 1.1 Giant Cigarette Knit, by Owel Wasn't There. Photography by Owel Wasn't There. Laguna Beach CA, 2008

A tongue approach to smoking? Cigarette on a giant scale installed at night.





Fig 2.1: Peter Dungey, Pothole Guerrilla Garden, Photograph by Peter Dungey.

Dungey;s gardens are diminutive even by the unassuming standards of Guerrilla Gardening appearing here isolated in a sea of stony grey.

Fig 2.2 Tiny Protest Banner, by The Craftivist Collective.

Subtle messages of social justice left in an appropriate place. London UK



Fig 2.2: Telephone booth cosy, by Knit the City

Prank calling: cheerful against the austere backdrop of Whitehall this cosy lifts the furniture to which it has been added into a talking point.





Fig 2.3: CG: 158, Luc, Before (left) and after (right) Guerrilla Gardening action, the corner of Sherbrooke East and Hogan, Montreal, Canada.

The relentless repetition of the pavement is broken by the variation of sprouting flowers and shrubs.

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