Simultaneous Natures: A Gardening Triptych in Montreal

Allison Peacock

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By: Allison Peacock

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_____Chair
Dr. Lorrie Blair

_____External Examiner
Dr. Sally Ann Ness

_____Arms-Length Examiner
Dr. Cynthia Hammond

_____Examiner
Dr. Angelique Willkie

_____Examiner
Dr. Shauna Janssen

_____Thesis Supervisor
Dr. MJ Thompson

Approved by _____
Dr. Jesse Arseneault, Graduate Program Director

11/26/2025 _____
Dr. Annie Gérin, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

Abstract:

Simultaneous Natures: A Gardening Triptych in Montreal

Allison Peacock, Ph.D.

Concordia University, 2025

Simultaneous Natures: A Gardening Triptych in Montreal uses an interdisciplinary combination of Performance Studies, Ethnography, Geography, and Research-Creation to examine current practices and performances of gardening in Montreal, Canada. The research is composed of three fieldwork case studies and accompanying choreographies based in Montreal, a city of social, cultural, linguistic, and deindustrializing frictions (Tsing). The introduction describes the project, methodology, and establishes a selective history of recent site-specific dance/performance conventions in urban gardens. The first fieldwork study concentrates on the Japanese Garden designed by Ken Nakajima at *Espace pour la vie* and the interplay of the garden's key elements: rocks, water, and plants, challenging the conventions of international Japanese Gardens through the agential histories of the elements. The second fieldwork study concentrates on the physical technicity of gardening through an ethnographic portrait of a professional gardener in Montreal West, comparing the technicity and respective practices of a gardener to a contemporary dancer and documenting gardening tasks to experientially map the details of place. The third fieldwork study considers a local Home Depot Parking Lot (2019-2024) as a place to speculate and admire the remnants of capitalist excess amidst a broad definition of a garden. A final section describes the process for the site-related choreographic companions of the fieldwork case studies. These corresponding artistic works analyze and disseminate the research to reveal the contributions of embodied knowledge, dedicated dance practice, and long-term observation to the environmental exchange between human and non-human worlds facilitated through the dynamic practice of gardening.

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Introduction

The title of this dissertation is *Simultaneous Natures: A Gardening Triptych in Montreal*. Historically, a triptych is a three panelled painting with hinged folding panels on either side, unified by material, style, technique, colour, theme, and narrative depiction. A triptych can apply generally to a three-part artwork, and in this instance, it applies to three fieldwork studies of gardening in Montreal and accompanying choreographic works: the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, head gardener Bruce Thicke tending to a cluster of public gardens in the municipality of Montreal West, and the parking lot garden of the Home Depot at 100 Beaubien West. Garden*ing* is foregrounded through its present continuous tense, asserting the necessary combination of action, practice, and place embedded in gardens, an idea that uses interdisciplinarity to critically inform and transform field research and site history into choreographic proposals in the dissertation's closing. The fieldwork studies compose a temporal triptych with Montreal as the container, the garden past -- emphasizing the physical construction and material symbology of the Japanese garden, the garden present – through the work and practice of gardener Bruce Thicke, and the garden future – the local dystopian beauty of the Home Depot's parking lot garden. The analysis of the Japanese Garden concentrates on what is in the garden, the section on Thicke looks at who is doing what in the garden, the Home Depot section looks critically at what can be a garden, and the choreography reperforms aspects of what's happening in these three studies. Different aesthetics, agendas, timelines, and problematics are moving throughout these gardens in the same city – hence the simultaneity – confronting the bucolic notion of the garden with complicated and challenging local realities. One of the most referenced triptychs with a garden thematic is Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1500), its panels corresponding to the Adam and Eve scene in The Garden of Eden on the left, a Dionysian scene playing out in centre, and a depiction of Hell on the right.

The impact of this triptych in the Judeo-Christian context has led many theorists to muse about its connections to conceptualizations of Western gardens as a place of fantasy and ideality (Giesecke and Jacobs; Stappmanns et al.), but the troubling promise of the garden is the more relevant contribution to this dissertation. The city of Montreal is the triptych's binder, with its unique characteristics and histories, the place where conceptual emergences create a picture of distinct urban natures. Montreal's legacies of industrialization, toxicity, cultural and linguistic division, and colonial and capitalist driven land use are embedded in the aesthetically disparate gardens that compose the following studies.

The key research questions changed, deepened, and became more specific during the fieldwork, artistic research, and writing processes of this dissertation. The central questions that track this process include: What can gardens and the practice of gardening in Montreal reveal about how people see themselves as part of their urban environment during the climate crisis? What styles of gardens represent Montreal in its current moment? How do local gardens perform and produce different ideas about nature? How are gardeners and the physical actions of garden maintenance implicated in the ideological underpinnings of local gardens? How does agency circulate amongst the garden's actors (i.e. plants, gardeners, managers)? Is there a relationship between gardeners' techniques identified as manual labour and technique as it is applied to dance movement? What political implications are involved in the gardener's movements, techniques, and embodied approaches to the botanical? How can choreographic investigations advance research on embodied action and site-specific art? The answers to these questions resist dominant narratives of gardens as solely harmonious places dedicated to urban beautification. The term garden is synonymous with the optimism of growth and fertility, but the pressures of the urban environment express gardens in unexpected ways. This thesis starts by looking at the material components of the formal and meticulously maintained Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*.

Built in the mid-1980s as an international co-operation mega-project for the Montreal Botanical Garden, it remains a high-profile tourist attraction, recognizable for its intricate stroll garden, waterfall, photogenic quality, and hosting Japanese cultural events. The Japanese Garden contrasts most sharply with the Home Depot Parking Lot (the loci of the third chapter), which is characterized by suburban nostalgia evoked by its environmentally dubious asphalt sprawl surrounded by garden beds that are integrated into the parking layout. The overlooked garden at the Home Depot Parking Lot became the main site for in-situ dance research, where my colleague Mairead Filgate and I spent warm Sunday evenings during the pandemic in choreographic sessions amongst other people working on impromptu activities at the lot. The second chapter follows a season with Bruce Thicke, head gardener with the municipality of Montreal West, observing the main tasks in his 2023 gardening season to gain more insight in the techniques of large-scale public urban gardening, and the embodied technicity of the gardener's occupation. Cumulatively, these studies became the foundation for the artistic research section, where choreography is an extension of the observational techniques involved in fieldwork, a necessary and alternative mode of contemplating place, presence, and the human environment. By comparing embodied action in dancing and gardening, and the characteristics of site typical of the stage and garden, choreography becomes a critical modality to explore emergent questions of physicality, spatial relations, and dynamic change of the urban garden as a politically charged site of contemporary "friction" (Tsing) expressing incongruous phenomena of globalized culture.

The triplicate, or triangulation, of case studies is intentional – an attempt to entangle a conventional comparison that highlights contrasts and similarities within a productive scope of study. The interdisciplinary project was framed throughout my PhD studies as possible through the synergy of combining three disciplines, although the reality is that those boundaries are continually shifting and subdividing. The triangulation points to my ongoing inquiries into

Peircean semiotics, an analytical method that uses a triadic sign and classification system to build the interconnected analysis of meaning. (Peacock, "The Cultural Garden as Semiotic Labyrinth: A Case Study of Montreal's Japanese Garden"; Peacock, "Parking Lot Semiotics") Although not directly part of this analysis, I used a Peircean approach throughout my fieldwork process as a tool to recognize visual details and signs as interpretants throughout gardens themselves, the practice of gardening, and the act of visiting gardens. I was influenced by the experiential research of Sally Ann Ness in her book *Choreographies of Landscape* (2016), where she uses Peircean analysis to identify the semiosis generated from specific interactions with the landscape of Yosemite National Park such as bouldering, hiking, and climbing. In my research the Peircean model was key to experience and identify the main signs and semiosis operating in the Japanese Garden, the Home Depot parking lot garden and in Bruce Thicke's gardening, revealing how these signs implicate and connect to what is happening on site politically, botanically, ecologically, spatially, and ideologically. Furthermore, Anthropologist Anna Tsing's concept of "friction" appears in many ways throughout this dissertation: a concept that developed out of the uneasiness produced by the simultaneous benefits and drawbacks characteristic of globalization in her research on environmental issues in Indonesia. (Tsing 2004) Friction exists between and within the three studies, the three choreographies, the three disciplines, the gardens and the people that tend them, the academic and artistic methodologies, and the choreographic connections to the lived experience of local gardens in a post-colonial and globalized world.

Rooting this dissertation in Montreal was a political, personal, ecological, and practical decision, and there are undertones of autoethnography throughout. I went through two cycles of proposals in my doctoral process, eventually focusing on a combination of artistic research, site-specific choreography, manual labour, horticulture, and outdoor research, informed by my experience as a dance artist with parallel employment as an urban gardener. I grew up dancing in

the 1980s and 90s as a competitive jazz dancer in the suburbs of Toronto (I was part of an award-winning dance team named Pizzazz), and went to university promptly after high school, as was expected of a suburbanite with good grades in the late 1990s. Professionally entering dance came after studying Political Science and Visual Studies at the University of Toronto, where I was frustrated by the lack of practical learning and sense of disconnection during my studies, a feeling further complicated by intense physical and social experiences working in the bush as a tree planter during the summers to pay for tuition. In 2001, it was a radical choice in my social sphere to train professionally in the field of contemporary dance, and I spent the next three years constantly training at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre conservatory for eight hours a day. I grew up in a white protestant culture that valued dance as a hobby and an expression of social privilege but was vehemently shocked by its possibility for professional, let alone intellectual, pursuit. After studying I tried many part-time jobs to accompany my project-to-project dance work and ended up settling as an ornamental gardener for seven years with a crew working on residential properties and rooftop gardens in Toronto. When I began this employment, it was like a glove fitting for the first time, and my mom was quick to remind me that my father's family ran a major greenhouse in Saint John, New Brunswick for over fifty years – Peacocks Garden Centre. The movement and strength required for horticulture was the only way that wage labour made sense after dance training and being outside meant there was space to move around and focus my physical energy. I was delighted to be learning about plants and maintenance practices daily, often executing major landscaping tasks with a crew of 10. I became specialized in hedge and boxwood trimming, which took a specific skill set of visual and physical acuity, physical stamina, and an ability to identify hedges and corresponding clipping patterns. Towards the end of my employment as a residential gardener, I started to experience a level of political discomfort spending my time perfecting the private outdoor space of the super-wealthy and was imagining

other alternatives including starting a dance farm with my dancer colleague Aimee Dawn Robinson from the gardening crew (a plan which intensified upon her return from a Canada Council supported research period at Min Tanaka's *Body/Weather Farm*). Eventually, I was pulled away from this occupation by attending graduate school at the Universität der Künste's HZT program in Solo/Dance/Authorship. In Germany, it is almost impossible to work professionally as a gardener without official training – my European colleagues from contemporary dance were baffled that such employment had ever been part of my life. But gardening continues to be present in my life, as a horticultural labourer in the 2024 and 2025 seasons in Montreal, and as I continue to experiment with container gardens at the rental properties where I have lived throughout writing this dissertation – hauling bags of soil from the Home Depot, experimenting with container perennials, and lugging ceramic planters during moves. Exploring the connection between gardens and dance is an experiential part of my life that surpasses this document, but it is a culmination of my experiences and interests in practice, labour, embodiment, spatial awareness, place, and the broad subject of nature.

This dissertation asserts the importance of lived experience in academic and artistic research. It also acts as a personal record of discovering Montreal, where I had relocated for my doctoral studies in 2017. Threads of pending ecological crisis circle this thesis, and it pressed me to conduct my research at sites accessible by walking, bicycle, or public transport. This ensured that visiting research sites on an ongoing basis was possible and relatively easy, allowing me to include multi-year and seasonal observations. It was both lucky and unlucky that I had revamped my research proposal by the end of 2019, because the global pandemic was declared between my last comprehensive exam and proposal defence in 2020. The fieldwork and creation of corresponding artistic works became a way to cope with isolation and keep connection through the pandemic period, although it necessitated other adjustments to the research methods. This

comparative study of gardens and gardening developed from a combination of proximity, contrast, permissions, and interest, to develop critical interdisciplinary research on local gardens, site-specific dance, and the technicity of gardening.

My thinking around interdisciplinary is strongly influenced by Mieke Bal's work on *Travelling Concepts* (2002), Raymond Williams influential *Keywords*: *A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976/2015), and the early discussions with my HUMA cohort and instructor Viviane Namaste in the mandatory methodologies class for this degree. Bal's text very literally describes the ways that concepts rather than methodologies move through disciplines, and use concepts like the gaze, subjectivity, and signification to help understand how concepts transform between disciplinary boundaries and what this "transformation" can add to humanities discourse. (Bal and Marx-MacDonald 39) Raymond Williams, from the field of Cultural Studies, similarly considers the quality of keywords through a glossary to historically, socially, linguistically, and culturally evaluate the meaning and signification of keywords that ultimately supports "interconnection." (Williams 19) Discussions in the early part of Namaste's 2017 HUMA methods class grappled with interdisciplinarity using a key article for common reference: Julie Thompson Klein's 'The Rhetoric of Interdisciplinarity: Boundary Work in the Construction of New Knowledge.'(Klein) Klein writes about the ways that interdisciplinarity is distinct from multi and trans-disciplinarity, stating that interdisciplinarity offers ways of linking the subfields of different disciplines, and that the "…underlying concept evolved over the course of a century to serve multiple and conflicting purposes, pluralizing the discourse and introducing new thematics of critique, complexity, collaboration, and problem solving." (Klein 279) Klein highlights the need for contemporary problem solving to address the multiplicity of contemporary problems, which is built into critical contemporary challenges lurking in the background of this dissertation like the climate crisis, the need for decolonization, urban gentrification, the rise of nationalism, and economic disparity.

I officially declared three disciplines: Performance Studies, Anthropology, and Dance (Studio Practice). However, because of the fieldwork process, circumstances beyond my control (the global pandemic), and the interdisciplinary nature of the disciplines themselves, the distinctions between disciplines during the process of my degree were never perfectly clear cut and created many points of critical reflection. Performance and Dance Studies are deeply informed by Anthropology, both in terms of the development of the fields and the analytical methods that substantially examine dance and performance. (V. W. Turner; Goffman; Royce; Conquergood and Johnson; Williams and Farnell; S. A. Ness) Dance practice is bound to the social, cultural, and geographical connections between people, and through the linkage of place is where the parallels with the practice of gardening start to emerge. After this introduction is a short history of contemporary dance and performance in the garden, offering a lineage of how dance and gardens intertwine through both practice and formal construction. Interdisciplinarity appears in the chapter on the Japanese Garden by bringing together observational fieldwork in the realm of geography, visual analysis of current and archival photography of the garden, and a critical conceptualization of the institutional history of the garden. The chapter on Montreal West's head gardener is an ethnographically informed observation of the gardener's technical work, following the tasks proposed by the gardener throughout a season of planting, maintenance, and winter preparations. Thicke's working situation is unique because of the short season characteristic of Montreal, his significant experience, the low-maintenance perennial gardens, and the geographically small municipality, which means he often works alone and has organizational responsibilities – a situation that is not universally representative of other working conditions for gardeners. The research on the Home Depot Garden/lot brings together auto-ethnography, geography, and research creation. Ultimately, the two chapters on the Japanese Garden and Home Depot parking lot drifted towards Human and Cultural Geography because of

a concentration on the observation, public use, and history of the sites. The boundaries of Human/ Cultural Geography and Anthropology are particularly generative for the observational practice of a choreographer, looking at where, how, and why the boundaries of space and place overlap with the patterns and activities of the people that inhabit them. The interdisciplinarity of this thesis extends beyond staking a claim to three disciplines: it works with the overlap of experiential encounter and suggests that the research dissemination can also have an interdisciplinary outcome that includes performance.

The interdisciplinarity of this thesis further takes shape through the research methodologies adapted to each fieldwork study, responding to the unique constellation of qualitative data available for each site. In the case of the Japanese Garden, the methodology includes visual ethnography, historical study, observational and experiential fieldwork. The culmination of these methodologies respond to the key emergent themes of the research: reconstructing the ephemeral narrative of the garden's construction and maintenance through the slide library archive of the Montreal Botanical Garden, distinguishing the experience of visiting the garden from the institutional branding of the garden's qualities as tranquil oasis, and observing and interpreting the maintenance practices discreetly and intensively happening onsite. The chapter dedicated to the physical practice of Bruce Thicke in Montreal West combines methods of participant action research, where the researcher works with the people in the study to define the research problem, supported by the observation of physical movements and working situations of the gardener. Participant action research in this chapter is used to highlight the complex embodied relationship that a professional gardener has with both the gardens they tend and the civic responsibilities of working for a local municipality. The Home Depot parking lot garden chapter combines observational data informed by geography and artistic research (experiencing the site through dance practice) and available historical research. The use of these

methodologies at the Home Depot site counter the marginalization of the site's garden, emphasizing a physical relationship with site by walking the site and creating a choreographic plan. The final chapter details the artistic research projects corresponding to each of the fieldwork studies, using practice as research methodology. The artistic research became a critical and exploratory modality for emergent questions of physical technicity, spatial relations, dynamic change, and embodiment that were expressed in the fieldwork. The methodologies incorporated into this research reflect the complexities of the gardens and gardening, respond to the available data, and prioritize the necessity for research on gardens to develop through the researcher's experiential and embodied encounters. My training as a dancer/choreographer and formation as a gardener enabled a sharp sense of the garden as a site of performance: full of unexpected action and actors shaping the collective experience of the garden.

Photography, both as part of the fieldwork and archival research, became an important part of this dissertation. During the fieldwork period, photography was crucial to track changes in the gardens, capture unusual events and details, and create visual alternatives to institutional narratives of the gardens. Sarah Pink argues in *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2007) that photography expands the possibility for ethnographic representation beyond the "subjective understandings" of ethnographer's text, and the "negotiated version of reality" that is a product of the encounter between ethnographer and informant. (Pink 24) The photographic archival research was a surprising experience when I started in 2023 during the post-pandemic re-opening period. I spent several months reviewing primarily the slide library holdings on the Japanese Garden's construction at the *Bibliothèque du Jardin botanique* with the assistance of Yoko Wakiyama, head of the Mediathèque. Archival photographs and maps also feature in the Home Depot chapter. The archival photographs of the Japanese Garden's construction and the trainyard at the site of the Home Depot are products of institutional documentation, which give a sense of institutional

priorities for the sites: for the Japanese Garden it tracked the institutional investment and construction achievement while the Home Depot is a contrast in obfuscation because of the site's minor role in industrial history.

The garden is a discretely political entity, distracting admirers with beauty, sensorial lustre, and changing spatial propositions. Recent scholarship interrogates garden sites as layered with colonial histories, decolonial futures, environmental panic and control. In their article 'The Wretched Earth: Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions,' authors Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh point directly at the garden as a source of colonial and imperial demarcation of land, that exploits human and non-human in its actualization of an ideal space, pointing at the botanical conflict rooted in taxonomic systems "that underpins the vampiric logic of capitalism towards plants." (Gray and Sheikh 165) In the Canadian context, public parks are sites that directly invite reflection on the modern colonial project of incorporating "natural" space into the urban landscape using planned parks. Authors Daisy Couture, Sadie Couture, Selena Couture, and Matt Hern, offer an intensive study of Victoria or 'Bocce Ball' Park in Vancouver in their book *On this Patch of Grass: City Parks on Occupied Land* (2018), which frames the park's existence as a form of urban occupation. Urban Canadian public parks have complicated dynamics, and these authors consider historical and experiential context, personal anecdotes, profiles of people that live-by and use the park, and a visual essay of snapshots, to suggest a radical decolonization of public parks returning the land to the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations (Couture et al. 45). The urgency to confront Canadian colonialism and continue discussions about reconciliation regarding land use and ownership make gardens deceptively fraught sites. Gardens host beauty and recreation, often the result of efforts and knowledge by gardeners, but gardens are also places where territorial history reveals erasure and disenfranchisement. For example, Concordia University's territorial acknowledgement recognizes Montreal or Tiohtià:ke as

unceded territory, a historical gathering place for many peoples, and where the "Kanien'kahá:ka Nation are recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters…." (Concordia University Indigenous Directions Leadership Group (2017)) Part of my commitment to decolonization and reconciliation is to respect Indigenous communities leading the reconciliation process, including as knowledge keepers related to the land and practices of First Nations. As a Canadian person whose family arrived in Canada largely before 1850 (I never met a blood relation that was not born in Canada), I feel it an obligation to be a listener and ally when it comes issues surrounding Canadian First Nations. It's crucial for me to acknowledge that the land that makes up Canada as part of Turtle Island, has a distinct cosmology. And the decolonial project is related to power, including the power to guide how this cosmology enters institutional frameworks like the university. Furthermore, I acknowledge that Canadian First Nations have a long history of dance with a relationship to land, the non-human, and spirituality that exists in parallel to this research. I hope that what I can add to the discussion of local and embodied relationships with local urban gardens, offers ways to express responsibility, respect, enthusiasm, and necessity towards our intertwined connection to the environment and non-human worlds that are vital parts of life in cities like Montreal.

A note about the use of French language in the text: Throughout the thesis I have italicized French words, mainly to maintain the integrity of local language usage throughout the dissertation. It is common in Montreal for places such as *Espace pour la vie* to be referred to with its French name by French and English speakers, although it was referred to as the *Montreal Botanical Garden* by English locals before the institutional amalgamation. For consistency, I continued to include French language in italics instead of directly translating the words. This flexibility and inclusion of French into an English text represents the fluidity and shared comprehension between the two languages that I experience as a Montreal resident.

Performing the Garden: A Recent History

A major thematic driver of this thesis is the overlap of gardens and performance in the domains of embodied practice, dance and spatial composition, and contemporary environmentalism. Although impossible to be exhaustive, this section situates a constellation of artistic works that have distinct references to performing (in) a garden through key concepts from visual arts, dance, and performance from the late 20th Century onwards. Gardens are expressions *of* and experiments *with* human agency and the environment, defined places cultivated by human labour and imagination, sites of dominance over the environment, repositories of aesthetic desire, places of botanical co-operation, and living documents of changing environmental perceptions. Performance, as both a conceptual tool and a live act, has the capacity to engage with a myriad of concerns embedded in a garden, and dance offers an embodied modality to reflect on ways that humans perform their physical entanglement with the environment. This section will consider in detail the examples of Merce Cunningham's *Event in the Garden* (1998), Theaster Gates' *Lumber Song* (2017), Pierre Huyghe's *Untilled* (2011-2012), and Min Tanaka's performance at La Borde (1987), as works that are intertwined with garden-related practices and sites. Identifiable approaches to performing a garden emerge, such as transplanting a stage work to an outdoor public space; performing, transmitting, and facilitating ecologically informed artistic encounters with natural processes; and embodying symbolic characteristics of a garden. By concentrating on artistic works that could be categorized as site-specific performance, a range of critical underpinnings cluster around environmental awareness, expanded performance practices, cyclical systems, confronting historical narratives of site, and building visual associations with outdoor scenography. These works use a fluid category of dance and performance to confront and reflexively critique the human influence and agency acting on the cultivated place of the garden,

acknowledging the ways performers and audience are influenced by, embedded in, and changing the environment around us.

Site-specificity developed in visual art to push back against the rarified and isolated art object, integrating critical artistic practice with the experiential part of a specific environment. There are increased pressures on and critiques of site-specific art and performance in the context of decolonization (Tuck and Yang; Smith; Bush Gallery; Kloetzel 2023) and ongoing discussions surrounding the Anthropocene proposing that human agency has marked a new geological epoch. (Crutzen and Stoermer; Davis and Turpin; Chua and Fair) Site-specific art as a critique of the static art gallery was happening alongside expansions in Land art, outdoor sculpture, and community-based art projects where physical, geological, geographical, cultural, transformational, and social characteristics of location were considered integral to the realization of the artwork. 20th Century Land art could be a starting point for the overlap of site-specific art, performance, and gardens, especially in its epic rejection of the white cube and connection to landscaping. I would argue that Land art's development in scale is related to the modernization of outdoor construction equipment, equipment that is familiar on a largescale landscaping site. Works by artists such as Joesph Beuys (*7000 Oaks* 1982-present), Walter de Maria (*The Lightening Field* and *The Earth Room* 1977), Nancy Holt (*Sun Tunnels* 1973-6), Robert Smithson (*Spiral Jetty* 1970), are key pieces of Land art that cross artistic intention with elemental materials and reflexive use of outdoor sites. Gilles Tiberghien writes in his book *Land Art* (1995) that the semantics of the term Land art are synonymous with earthworks, environmental art, total art, and ecological art. Tiberghien writes extensively about Micheal Heizer's massive land work *Double Negative* (1969-70), which is formed by two linear trenches following the same line, dug into the escarpment of the Mormon Mesa in Moapa Valley Nevada. "Earth and rocks totalling 240 000 tons in weight, were moved with the help of bulldozers that excavated from two sides,

banking up the earth in from of them to form two horizontal ramps." (Tiberghien 70) Documentation of the work includes aerial photographs (Tiberghien 88-93) revealing the enormity of the project that dug these gapping linear negative spaces into the escarpment. Heizer's work is a form of extreme landscaping, that used mechanized equipment to imprint an aesthetic plan on a specific landscape. Tiberghein includes Robert Smithson's essay *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape* (February 1973) at the end of the book, recognizing Olmstead's influence Land artists. Smithson writes that Olmsted:

> …considered nature, in its relationship with humankind, as well as in its dynamic relationship to itself, as a constant and uncertain process of transformation….(he) knew how to compose with the hazards of nature, taking into account the result of fate to which nature had been subject, the destructions that it had suffered, and the industrial and urban environment by which it had been transformed. (Smithson via Tiberghien 216)

Smithson's acknowledgment of Olmsted's designs for public parks and theories of nature's operators, reflects a confluence of ideas from landscape architecture, urbanism, and environmentalism, that emphasize transformation within nature and ultimately influenced the development of the Land art genre. *Land Art* (1995) falls prey to an obvious trope of highlighting the work of white male artists engaged in an institutional critique of the art gallery system, although they were a product of that system, during a period of modernist and industrialized territorial expansion that interfered with ecosystems and natural landmarks. Tiberghein's book has a notable lack of analysis and context regarding the history of colonial and pre-colonial land practices in the USA, and the ways that major pieces of Land art impacted ecosystems. The absence of history for the landscapes of the featured works (opting to highlight primarily European architectural and artistic histories) is a major oversight, one that overemphasizes the creative capabilities of the artists while inaccurately representing areas that host Land art works, such as the American desert, as blank landscapes in dialogue with the art centres of major cities.

Phaidon's *Land and Environmental Art* (2010) by Jeffery Kastner and Brian Wallis, echoes a similar grouping of artists to Tiberghein's book including Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Christo and Jeanne Claude, Walter De Maria, Joesph Beuys, and Richard Serra. Kastner states in the preface:

> …Land Artists – working the resources of antiquity, with the tools of mechanized modernity, exporting the cool cultural discourse of the city to industrial wastelands or the unaccultured desert- embodied the dissonance of the contemporary age…..An awakening of ecological and feminist consciousness: the rapid integration of technology with everyday life and the resultant nostalgia for a simpler, more natural existence; a recognition of the personal and political power for the individual to intervene, for good or ill, within natural systems–all of these demonstrate an ambivalence about the direction of socio-cultural progress. (Kastner and Wallis 12)

This book, which was updated in 2010, attempts to acknowledge repetitive critiques and shortcomings in the Land art approach. The introduction essay addresses a development in the conceptualization of Land art practices linked to second wave feminism. Wallis writes:

> Three strategies in particular governed many works of the early 1970s: feminist-inspired ritual activity that regarded the earth as an intimate extension of the human body; simple gestural works that involved walking, pointing or the gentle and temporary displacements of some natural elements; and finally, what might be called organizational projects that utilized or studied large social groups or political formations while creating works that emphasized the land or environmentally conscious actions. (Kastner and Wallis 34)

Acknowledging an influence of feminism and feminine stereotypes, the book references female artists and their diverse projects such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Ana Mendieta, Mary Beth Edelson, Agnes Denes, and Mary Miss. This group of female identified artists are far from homogenous in their artistic concerns, spanning from Ukeles' *Flow City* (1983-96) which aimed to demystify and expose New York City's waste cycles through a long standing Artist-in-Residence position at the sanitation department, to Ana Mendieta's *Silueta* (1979) a series of photographic documentations of physical "inscriptions" of female bodies in places such as swamps, sand, snow, earth piles, where the body is insinuated by imprints or piles of natural materials. Agnes Denes' project *Wheat Field – a Confrontation* (1982) is also included in the

book, showing three photographs that depict the lifecycle of a wheat field planted in Lower Manhattan, which transitioned a landfill two blocks from Wall Street into an irrigated and harvestable wheat field (Kastner and Wallis 160). Denes' project is notable as it works with urban growing conditions and conventions, linking Land art with urban food activism and agrarian nostalgia. *Land and Environmental Art* (2010) offers a survey approach to the oeuvre of Land art, acknowledging a narrative of art history that highlights major environmental and Land art projects with an updated, but still incomplete, critique.

In 2012, scholar Miwon Kwon and curator Philipp Kaiser co-organized an exhibition entitled *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, which produced an extensive exhibition catalogue that includes essays by many stakeholders in Land art (artists, curators, funders, etc.). In the introductory essay Kwon and Kaiser write:

> The belief that Land art is a dematerialized or anti-object practice and, as such, a turn away from the art system as a rejection of the commercial market and the ideology of art institutions is inaccurate….Actually, it would be more accurate to say that Land art encouraged a hyperawareness of the conditions of production, presentation, and distribution among those who engaged with it directly. (Kaiser et al. 22)

Kwon and Kaiser acknowledge the inputs and support from the conventional art world that perpetuated the development of Land art, revising its status as a critique-based form. The authors go on to acknowledge the influence of intermedia practices such as video and photography as equally important to the Land art movement. The images generated during the production of Land art works allowed the development of artistic proposals in varied landscapes, sometimes large distances from urban centres of the art market, to re-enter the gallery space. Furthermore, the essay points to several mainstream publications, such as *Time* and *Life* Magazines, which found substantial readership and interest in the details and images of Land art projects that fed into "the rising environmental movement on the one hand and the Cold War race to space on the other." (Kaiser et al. 27) Notable in this text is the 65-page "Annotated Checklist of the

Exhibition" that includes images and citations of works included in the exhibition. This annotated checklist includes a subtle black and white photo of two blurry human figures with one collapsing on the other, depicting Joan Jonas' piece *Wind* (1968). (Kaiser et al. 210) Described as "…a performance conceived to be filmed, involving dancers improvising movements determined by the direction of the wind in a snowy winter landscape." (Kaiser et al. 210) Jonas' piece, and notably its inclusion in this extensive exhibition, starts to acknowledge a connection between Land art and embodied performance, where outdoor experiences are interpreted and embodied in performance.

Miwon Kwon critically interrogates site-specificity in the visual arts in her book *One place after another: site-specific art and locational identity* (2002). Kwon argues that site-specificity has reached its limit of implied criticality and is often conceptually imprecise in its use of the term *site* referring to any combination of urban details, physical territory, spatial relations, social communities, institutional critique of museums, and the animation of public space. She highlights "…three paradigms of site-specificity – phenomenological or experiential; social/institutional; and discursive…" (Kwon 3), and maps a trajectory of site-specific works from location-based interventions to nomadic models of production and display that cater to the international art market. (Kwon 4) Kwon connects works such as Richard Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks*, *Maintenance Inside/Outside* (1973), and Richard Serra's *Splashing* (1968) as examples of early art works that express the specifics and necessity of site. Smithson's work was often categorized as Land art because of its scale, outdoor setting, natural materials, and in the case of *Partially Buried Woodshed*, the woodshed structure is partially and indefinitely submerged in a large dirt mound to accelerate the natural decomposition of the shed. In the example of Ukeles's work, site is used as a place to perform and confront labour visibility, maintenance, and gender in the

museum, by cleaning the museum's indoor and outdoor floors as a performance action. *Hartford Wash* is a pivotal feminist work for the field of performance, as it's medium offers institutional critiques of site and gendered labour through the live actions of the artist in the gallery. Richard Serra's works offer another perspective on site-specific approaches, and his pieces are known for their modernist orientation and use of industrial materials. *Splashing* (1969) highlighted by Kwon, is a work designed for a conventional art gallery with lead splashed and hardened against the bottom portion of gallery wall, the lead is more heavily distributed along the juncture of the floor and wall to emphasize gravity. This early work by Serra precedes his recognizable later works – large, curved steel standalone walls that warp vertically and horizontally. These three site-specific works highlighted by Kwon give a sense of the different "…phenomenological, social/institutional, and discursive" (Kwon 30) interests of site artists. *One place after another* explores dominant themes and influential projects in site-specific art; noting the critique implicit in its initial development, high profile projects that have failed due to public reception, and the term's overuse by the contemporary art market.

The Canadian context for environmental and site-specific art, is in dialogue with American and European art, but operates with different relationships to Indigenous histories, landscapes, and themes of resource extraction. For example, high-profile Canadian artists currently associated with environmental art include prolific Anishnaabe performance artist Rebecca Belmore, who has created works such as *Wave Sound* (2017), a series of site-specific installations of large scale speaking/listening cones on the shores of Canadian national parks, and *House of Wayward Spirits* (2012) where Belmore creates and dedicates a monument to a 150 year old tree in Queens Park countering various colonial monuments that share the park with the tree (Belmore; Belmore et al.; Phillips-Amos). Belmore's works often put her body on the line in confronting environmental and Indigenous injustices, and in the work *Wave Sound,* drawing

attention to places whose implication in the conflicted relationship of land and colonial legacy is overlooked. In a contrasting perspective on the artist's presence and scale of environmental impact, the photographs of Edward Burtynsky are known for depicting disconcertingly beautiful industrial sites related to extraction processes of mines, petroleum wells, and industrial agriculture. (Burtynsky et al.) Burtynsky's photographs reveal the scale of extractive networks typically hidden in the specialized networks of production, in both Canada and internationally. Newfoundland artist Marlene Creates works ephemerally with photography, language, the quotidian encounter, and natural phenomena including within the boreal forest of her Portugal Cove residence. Creates' documents and contrasts language and text in the Canadian landscape, creating juxtapositions of photographic collections and writing in her exhibition *Language and Land Use, Newfoundland 1994* (1994) and reflecting on the quotidian impact of local signage on boundaries in her photographic series *Looking at the City of Ottawa from Ten Paces Outside the Municipal Boundaries, Ottawa Pre-Amalgamation 2000* (2000). Toronto-based artist Bill Burns is known for his inter-species works in art galleries such as *The Great Goat Milking* (2016) where goats were milked, the milk was mixed with honey, and songs about the goats and other animals were sung; and he has been continuously working on the piece *Safety Gear for Small Animals* from 1994-2024, which features miniature human safety gear designed to protect animals from deteriorating habitats. (Burns; Morrell and Borsato) These four artists represent a cross-section of contemporary Canadian artists working with subjects of site and the environment to confront colonial injustice, environmental degradation, and human impact on the non-human world.

Other projects exist in the Canadian context that reimagine the institutions that support the production of artistic work critically rethinking relationships with land and environment. For example, BUSH gallery members Peter Morin and Tania Willard edited the winter 2018 issue of C Magazine entitled *Site/ation.* C magazine is Canadian magazine dedicated to contemporary art

practices, and this edition highlights writing, research, and artistic projects from Indigenous Canadian artists and concentrating on artistic process, land-based practices, and current issues in Indigenous culture – especially regarding Bush Gallery's Indigenous-led emphasis on site as decolonial space, offering an Indigenous perspective on artistic production and the urgency of reconsidering the spaces, structures, and communities involved. The issue opens with the gallery's manifesto, stating:

> Bush gallery is a space for dialogue, experimental practice and community engaged work that contributes to an understanding of how gallery systems and art mediums might be transfigured, translated and transformed by Indigenous knowledges, traditions, aesthetics, performance and land use systems….This gallery is out on the land, it is outside of or at the margins of monetary systems and away from the colonized space of art institutions. This gallery is a gallery of the land, of Indigenous culture(s) and language(s); this gallery can show new media with basketry, beading with installation art, performance art and storytelling. (Bush Gallery 6)

The Bush Gallery manifesto includes numerous tenets that articulate the land-based, Indigenous led project of an art gallery on the lands of the Secwepemc Nation in British Columbia, that is by necessity rethinking the way that site functions in the Canadian arts milieux by articulating ways that land and site has different cultural, monetary, and spiritual meanings in the era of reconciliation. Other contributions are included in the magazine, each considering the formulation of site in action and land as a constant protagonist in the political implications of Indigenous art. Professors at York University Marlis Schweitzer and Laura Levin survey complicated Canadian contexts for performance studies, including several chapters in their volume under the category of "Performative Geographies," where Canadian-specific concerns like the vastness of space, Indigenous reconciliation and protest, "proximity" to the United States, and urban ambition influence performance culture. (Schweitzer and Levin, 29-30) Several analyses are part of the book, looking at ways that Canadian political culture draws on performance as a tool for public attention and "make

believe" settings for political conflicts to play out. (Schweitzer and Levin) The Canadian context for site-specific art and performance is infused with the challenges of critically engaging with site in a place with deep entanglements of environment and colonial legacies.

The categories of site-specific, environmental, and Land art, as well as international outdoor/site-based performance traditions, offer context for current site-specific performance practices. The recent *Routledge Companion to Site Specific Performance* (2025) makes a case for the interdisciplinarity of the field, coming out of the late 20th Century where artistic:

> …work in which questions of space and place were the drivers of performance, explored phenomenologically, analytically, historically and imaginatively. The relationships between performance and place offered a range of formal provocations and stimuli while also drawing attention the disparities of past and present locations and the regulation of environments. (Hunter and Turner 1)

The book points to the influence of digital culture in the realm of site-specific performance, stating that: "site-specific performance and scholarship have evolved to encompass contemporary lived experiences involving diffractive encounters with the world in which we find ourselves simultaneously situated in many sites and spaces." (Hunter and Turner 2) The tension arising around site in a digitized world divides both the literature and content/perception of site-specific art works into the relation to site pre- and post-internet. One of the earliest pre-internet articles about site-specific dance I found in my research is Camille Lefevre's article in the April 1996 issue of *Dance Magazine* 'Site-specific: Dance as big as all outdoors.' *Dance Magazine* is a mass-published North American magazine which includes articles on dance training, trends in performance, dancer profiles, features on concerns for young dancers, and extensive classifieds. Lefevre was a dance critic in Minneapolis from the mid-1990s, and the article outlines some of the details and challenges that choreographers face when they were setting work in-situ including expanded administrative communications and specific characteristics of selected sites (public pools, a ravine in Prospect Park, river barges, a wastewater treatment plant, etc.). However, the

obvious critique of the article is that by current standards it is highly appropriative – Lefevre's main thesis is that site-specific dance has the possibility to invoke a sense of ritual in the landscape that replicates an idealized Indigenous relationship to the land. She writes:

> Site-specific dances of such choreographers…may never duplicate the total communal unity once achieved by indigenous dances and ritual that were rooted in landscape and had the capacity to bear tribal memory. But in our contemporary society, these dances at least approach the fulfillment of that fundamental need for interaction among people, performance, and place.... For a moment, perhaps, we sense a devotion to place that is similar to what the ancient indigenous people felt for their landscapes. The result is a balance and a harmony, not only within ourselves and with the natural world but with each other. (Lefevre 71)

The imaginative assumption of what was taking place in Indigenous dances that were not specifically referenced or even described in a basic way shows a profound oversight by the author that was generally accepted at the time. The points that Lefevre raises about assumed connections to Indigenous ritual or tradition, lack of specificity for Indigenous dance practices, and an assumption of the past tense for these dance practices, reveals the assumptions and aspirations for site-specific dance made by both the author and the culture at large during that period.

One of the most prolific scholars on site-specific dance in the Canadian context is University of Calgary's Melanie Kloetzel, whose twenty-year publication history spans an analysis of site-specific dance as outdoor modern dances to more recent expressions of positionality and decolonization related to the broader Canadian context. The book *Site Dance* (2009) edited by Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik defines site dance as "…dances (that) use alternative spaces from drainage ditches to hotel lobbies to shape and inform the movement, spacing, theme, costuming, music, etc. for a given performance." (Kloetzel and Pavlik 1–2) The authors foreground "attending place" as a common strategy which combines attention to place with a sense of tending, and create four thematic sub-categories of site-dance: the exploration of historical sites, sensing and dialoging with environmental features of the site, emphasis on beauty

"as a universal trait of place," and projects in co-operation with communities. (Kloetzel and Pavlik 19–20) They include artist interviews, beginning with American experimental vocalist Meredith Monk, where she recounts her motivations for developing site-specific performance:

> I wanted to make art that was useful, experiential, rather than presentational. At that time, theatrical conventions such as the frontal orientation of the proscenium, the one- to three-hour duration, the fact that performances had given times (matinee or evening performances) seemed limiting to me. (Kloetzel and Pavlik 40)

Monk's desire to expand the boundaries of performance events beyond the confines of the theatrical stage is a common motivator for site-specific dance works, which increase the scope of aesthetic, conceptual, and relational performance possibilities. The book goes on to acknowledge culturally subjective perceptions of public space and performance, often in contrast to the context surrounding the New York City-centered work of artists such as Meredith Monk in the 1960s and 70s. The interview with New York-based artistic director Tamar Rogoff, details her encounters with the performance of the Ram Lila in India during the 1970s:

> Outdoor performance was not a by-product of inside theatre. I lived in Varanasi, and they perform the Ram Lila, or Festival of the Ram, every year and have done so for thousands of years. It's community-based and takes place in and around the grounds of the Maharaja's Palace. It goes on for about a month…. Life seemed to be one big piece of theatre. Every year, the towns people would participate in the event, so you could see your milkman or your tailor performing roles in it. This was my orientation into site work. It is the least elitist form of art. (Kloetzel and Pavlik 253–54)

The critique gently offered by Rogoff considers the embeddedness of performance in Varanasi's community at large, which uses an annual occasion for the entire town to participate in a performance. In the article 'Site-specific dance in a Corporate Landscape,' Kloetzel offers an analysis of the way the terms space and place are used in site specific performance and charts the development of her work *The Sanitastics* (2011) – a site-specific video dance project set in the enclosed pedestrian bridges of downtown Calgary. She quotes choreographer Ann Carlson stating that choreography first starts with the body as site; moves to considering a phenomenological

perspective via Edward Casey's insistence that "body and place are inextricably connected;" notes Miwon Kwon's reference of site specific art's desire to focus "…on the lived bodily experience of place;" and discusses Michel de Certeau's distinction between space and place in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). (Kloetzel 134–36) The article closes with an assessment of the possibility for site-specific performance to be an investigative tool for the ways that space, place, and Marc Augé's non-place function in our environment. In a similar pairing of theoretical and artistic research, Kloetzel published 'Site dance as activist methodology: Creating performance/protest in sites of assembly' (2019), where she details the creation of a "site-adaptive" performance project of climate protest actions for public assembly sites in Edmonton and Glasgow. Solos and movement phrases based on specific climate crisis fears of the performers were performed by two casts in the different cities and had different receptions – particularly negative in Edmonton. Ultimately, Kloetzel proposes "tactics" to publicly confront the climate crisis: empowerment of participants, inclusion of diverse audiences, and physical placement of the work. (Kloetzel "Site Dance as Activist Methodology" 19) In one of Kloetzel's more recent articles, 'Ecological Performance and 'Settler Creep': making space to resist invasion' (2024), she confronts a lack of foregrounding positionality in her previous publications, the "white supremacist" Canadian context, and "modernity/coloniality's hegemonic narrative (which) undermines our efforts to create ecological performance practices that could bolster a meaningful decolonial narrative." (Kloetzel 'Ecological Performance and 'Settler Creep'' 44) In this article Kloetzel begins to directly confront some of the contradicting histories and ideas that permeate the artistic site and the history of dance performance in the Canadian context, where lands are still contested and there is history of repression of dance events in the Indigenous context.

Kloetzel co-authored book on site-dance practices entitled *(Re)Positioning Site Dance: Local acts, Global Perspectives* (2019), with British practitioner-researcher Victoria Hunter and New Zealand professor of studio arts Karen Barbour, which expressly discusses colonialism and marginalized histories through the site-dance practices happening in Canada, New Zealand, and the UK. The introductory chapter outlines the possibility for site-dance to critically challenge neo-liberal assumptions for the use of public space, bring ecological awareness to designated sites, emphasize feminist practices, and highlight the local (Barbour et al. 1–20). Karen Barbour notably includes a chapter entitled: *Dancing Gardens: Phenomenology and affective practices* (107-131), describing affect as:

> …a transpersonal capacity by which a person is affected through or within their embodiment in relationships with [people, sites and place, objects sensations and activities, ideals and institutions, and other affects. This transpersonal capacity allows that affect may also flow between individuals and others such as between and within performers, audience members and gardens. (Barbour et al. 128)

Barbour describes affective information moving between performer and performance site, and in this chapter, she goes on to reveal how this strategy informed the process for a series of performances set in the cultural gardens (The Chinese Scholar Garden, The Japanese Garden of Contemplation, and Indian Char Bagh Garden) of the Hamilton Gardens in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Early research strategies for this project included dancers spending time in the gardens "mapping"– observing visitors, landmarks, animals, and workers to establish sightlines for the performance and "initial objects of interest." (Barbour et al) The physical movement experiments responding to various ground covers, developing responses to each of the gardens to address their "embedded meaning" and ultimately ending up with a sense of "how to bring embodied awareness to relationships with sites and places, and further, how this functions as a way of knowing." (Barbour et al. 113–14, 130) Kloetzel offers context for North American site-dance practices, building a link to post-modern dance through mention of works by Steve Paxton and

Yvonne Rainer, and establishing a connection to disruptive activist practices in public space. There is a substantial description of choreographic "…tactics that disrupt perception, highlight unconventional behavior and/or encourage democratic participation, site-specific choreography may seem to veer into the arena of political action and even activism." (Barbour et al. 41) The author acknowledges the importance of these tactical shifts in terms of place and attention, but also the absence of tangible political goals embedded in this form. Overall, this text provides details into site-based performance projects including accounts of artistic research and activist aspirations embedded in site work. A particular strength of the book is the mapping of relevant literature in the fields of urbanism, performance practice and concepts of performativity, critiquing the overuse and vagueness of site-specificity, and elaborating on choreographic concepts as it relates to public space, many elaborations of which can be found in Victoria Hunter's chapter 'Performing Parks and Squares.' (Barbour et al. 187–215) However, the actual outcomes of the works created by the authors beyond the engagement with embodied awareness and enlivening public space, seems to avoid critical engagement with the performance execution itself – favoring work that is socially and aesthetically pleasing.

Co-author of *Repositioning Site Dance* (2019) Victoria Hunter has made several contributions to dance methodologies and site-specific practice. In the 2021 book *Site, Dance and Body*, Hunter positions her research in conversation with several site-dance texts covered in this literature review (Barbour et al.; Kloetzel and Pavlik; Levin; Olsen). Hunter asserts in her 2021 text that site dance:

> …is an illustrative practice, an exploratory tool or method of inquiry defined as 'site-based body practice,' and a conceptual lens through which human engagement with real-world locations (as opposed to the imaginary or fictional world of the theatre) might be perceived from mobile and corporeal perspectives. (Hunter 3)

The distinction here between the fictional production and reality of location for dance performance embeds a political and environmental point of view on dance, one that is corporeally responsive to the environment. Hunter "positions" the body "as a corporeal, porous and fleshy entity that houses and encompasses the self that, through its intra-actions and immersions within the world, forges a sense of relational identity." (Hunter 9) The encounter of this fleshy body and the world it's part of is a critical part of Hunter's established practice. Environment influences the chapters and structure of the book including titles such as 'Home: Interiority and Intimacy,' 'Arterial routes: Cityscapes and Urban flows,' 'Subterranean spaces: Embodiment, Excavation, and Deep Time,' and 'Watery Bodies and Watery Sites: Immersion and Porosity.' Each chapter contains illustrated examples of experiential investigations and performances orchestrated by Hunter (and occasionally performances by other artists), with a series of subdivisions in the chapter related to key tenets for interpreting specific environmental elements and an analysis to connect the embodied research to socially conscious concepts. For example, the chapter entitled 'Wide Open Spaces: Expansion, Projection and Slow Progress' applies Tim Ingold's concept of "taskscape" – interdependent actions by inhabitants of a cultural landscape such as playing music together or farming work (Ingold 'The Temporality of the Landscape') – to the practice of site dance. The chapter continues to synthesize concepts from geography, explore multi-disciplinary definitions of landscapes, apply studies of "taskscapes" for distance runners, and list movement scores and explorations for "wide-open spaces" used in previous workshops. It is challenging to flip through these modalities, as the academic research is specific, layered, and well researched, while the scores outline very basic activities in sensing and embodied mapping of the environment. Hunter's *Site Dance and Body* (2021) is a major text in the site dance literature, combining the form of outdoor workshop documentation with extensive research, and synthesis

of previous writings on site dance that frame encounters and offer embodied activities in specific environments.

As acknowledged by *Site, Dance and Body* (2021), the field of contemporary dance literature includes a sub-culture dedicated to environmentally influenced somatic movement exploration. Andrea Olsen's workbook *Body and Earth: An Experiential Guide* (2002) is the exemplary text for this subculture and can often be found in dance specific libraries in North America and Europe. It is designed to be a step-by-step framework for people seeking to experiment with movement practice and their senses in the outdoors. In the table of contents, the goal of the text is clearly stated:

> This text is about relationship. We are part of, rather than separate from, the intricate world we live in….*Body and Earth* is a book to be done as well as to be read. (Olsen v)

Body and Earth (2002) outlines a 30-day program of investigation that starts with and expands on somatic awareness exercises set outdoors such as imaginative and somatic explorations of soil, animal movement, trees, and identifying place. These exercises expand on a different concept daily, include a time frame for execution ranging from 15 minutes-2 hours, and reflective writing exercises suggested to take place after the somatic explorations. Olsen draws from somatic practices of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Authentic Movement, and Contact Improvisation, while noting the influences of collaborative research with colleagues based in the discipline of Environmental Studies. Overall, the book emphasizes an experiential approach to moving and sensing the environment, while seeking to hybridize the embodied approach of dance methodologies with environmental and physiological concepts.

Theatre-based research offers additional insights on site-specific performance, and strategies are used in both research and the creative process to develop works in-situ. Notably, Performance Studies scholar Richard Schechner contributes to the discussion with numerous

texts, including the 1973 book *Environmental Theatre*. The book is an early Performance Studies text which details the experimental creation concept of "environmental theatre" developed through the practice of *The Performance Group* (TPG: a "performance association" founded by Schechner in 1967). The book is divided into chapters that compose the Environmental Theatre approach: "Space, Participation, Nakedness, Performer, Shaman, Therapy, Playwright, Groups, and Director." Each chapter uses photographs, diagrams, examples and analysis of TPG's workshops, and draws from an international selection of performance practice examples to give precedent for their work. Although Schechner tries to avoid a succinct definition of "environmental theatre" in the foreword because the entire text provides an overview, in the chapter on "Participation" he lists five central principles of *Environmental Theatre*:

1. For each production the whole space is designed.
2. The design takes into account space-senses and space-fields.
3. Every part of the environment is functional.
4. The environment evolves along with the play it embodies.
5. The performer is included in all phases of planning and building.
(Schechner *Environmental Theater* 39)

Schechner describes performance practices and tenets that eventually take hold in the performing arts, recognizing a more playful and incorporated role of the performance environment into the staging. The emphasis on space and the redesign of the audience's position from conventional proscenium settings, starts to shift the emphasis in performance from a strictly text-focussed realization of theatre – although they are performing variations of classic English works such as *MacBeth* (performed by TPG as *Makbeth*). Images of the TPG production *Dionysus* which shows the cast walking out of a theatre and onto the city street, includes a caption that describes them as "exploding the space of the theater." (Schechner *Environmental Theater* 34) Although many critiques of the TPG's practices exist, the gesture depicted in these photos describes a sense of urgency that the group was working with, and a belief in the potentiality of theatre.

Mike Pearson, Professor Emeritus of Performance Studies at Aberystwyth University and Welsh theatre director, has written several books on performance methodology and site including *Site-specific Performance* (2010). This book introduces a lineage of site-specific performance theory including theoretic distinctions defining how the site is accessed; an acknowledgement of site's use in historical and identity-based performance; Miwon Kwon's emphasis on contemporary art's shift of site from physical to virtual (Pearson 12); a recognition of artists and theorists working on the "complexities of dwelling" in colonial contexts of Australia and Canada (Pearson 9-10); a short nod to Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2009) that produces site "*through* and *in* interaction" (Pearson 13); several concepts from geography such as "new mobilities paradigm" – looking at the rapidly increasing flow and travel of people and information; and concepts from geographers Yi-fu Tuan, Doreen Massey, Nigel Thrift, and anthropologist Tim Ingold. The introduction closes with a comparative graph that contrasts elements, qualities, and constraints of conventional theatre production with site-specific production, for example: "the auditorium is dark and quiet vs. site is only dark or quiet if chosen for such qualities or rendered so." (Pearson 16) The comparative graph emphasizes the flexibility and unpredictability of working with sites outside of the controlled environment of the theatre's proscenium stage. Pearson goes on to offer a site specific methodological model that involves "an *activity*, an *audience* and a *place*, suggesting that creative opportunities then reside in the multiple creative articulations of *us*, *them* and *there*." (Pearson 19) This model proposes several methods with which to approach a site for the purpose of performance: modes of site visitation, phenomenological experience, a choreographic process that creates a "deep map" of a specific place – suggesting that this mode of conceptualizing place is synonymous with Clifford Geertz's "thick description" of architecture, mobility, and archeology. (Pearson 32) The remainder of the book considers Wales-based theatre productions, including Pearson's own works, through the

application of the theoretical and methodological map he sets up in the first two chapters. The works are based in the Welsh cultural context and physical landscapes, often interrogating historical events and narratives through both place and site. Pearson's book uniquely sets up a theoretical structure for site-specific performance and includes a substantial documentation and discussion of its artistic application.

Another contribution to the discussion of theatre's relation to the environment is the collection of essays edited by Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri entitled *Land/Scape/Theatre* (2002). The editors write in the introduction that the book is "…a step toward the restoration of the natural and built environment, and of the non-human order, to appropriate presence in considerations of dramatic form and meaning." (Fuchs and Chaudhri 4) The collection frames landscape as "a new spatial paradigm," (2) that situates itself in between Michael de Certeau's polarity of space and place. The collection of essays address theatre's absence in landscape studies, largely through dramatic texts (as opposed to stage performances) from the 20th Century. Examples include Joseph Roach's essay on landscapes of the Irish potato famine eluded to in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*; Natalie Crohn Schmitt's analysis of landscapes used in the plays of William Butler Yeats; a whole section of the book dedicated to Gertrude Stein's use of landscapes including her concept of "langscapes" where "Stein uses language to immobilize action;" (Fuchs and Chaudhri 140) Julie Stone Peter's essay on 'Artaud in the Sierra Madre' which charts the colonial implication on modernist theatre of Antonine Artaud's 1936 journey on horseback withdrawing from heroin, encountering members of the Tarahumana tribe, and the corresponding production of ritual theatre; and the digital transformations informing contemporary perceptions of performance spaces discussed in Alice Rayner's 'E-scapes: Performance in the time of Cyberspace.' *Land/Scape/Theatre* has an evocative title, and the text

considers multiple forms of representing and researching landscapes that have influenced primarily contemporary Western theatre.

Eco-thematic material is appearing on stages and in the literature about dance and theatre, with an urgency related to international discussions around climate change and environmental degradation. The book *Choreographing Dirt* (2024) by Angenette Spalink begins with a description of the dirt processing controversy in the Fukushima prefecture, where piles of contaminated soil after the nuclear disaster in 2011 have been put into large plastic bags waiting more than ten years for a destination. Spalink goes on to consider the ways that dirt is moving, composting, and hosting non-human forms in choreographic performances including Pina Bausch's *Rite of Spring* (1975) and the Butoh performance with fungi *Messanger Divinos* (2018), arguing that stage performance has the capacity to confront critical and immediate ecological issues by using the example of dirt and soil. Julie Hudson's 2020 book *The Environment on Stage: Scenery or Shapeshifter?* examines current modes of dramatic representations of the environment in the context of the climate crisis, specifically analyzing examples of the environment appearing as an agent of change on stage. Hudson describes the portrayal of transformational environmental disasters on stage, including storms that appear in Shakespearean plays (eg. The Tempest, King Lear) and several contemporary examples including fringe festival plays such as Daniel McCabe's response to 2012's Hurricane Sandy *The Flood* (2014). She analyzes the portrayal of famine, death and power (dearth) in several different productions of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1623), *King Lear* (1608) and *Pericles* (1609). The third transformation Hudson calls "stage invasion" which "…tends to denote the unexpected and unwanted crossing of the fourth wall by members of the audience, in the form of shoes and other objects thrown in protest or indeed people themselves entering the stage to make their feelings felt." (Hudson 87) Hudson uses several examples to illustrate "stage invasion" by both human

and non-human actors including a focus on art installations created for ArtCOP21 in Paris that coincided with the climate talks of COP21, offering the example of Olafur Eliasson's 2015 version of *Ice Watch* where 12 icebergs from Greenland were left to melt at Place du Panthéon during the talks. (Hudson 90) Environmental change and catastrophe appear as transformational agents in historical and contemporary performance, and these books highlight an urgency for the agential quality of the environment to be on the stages of the Anthropocene.

Literature on site specific performance vis-à-vis Land art, visual art, dance, performance, and theatre, maps contemporary concerns of environment, conditions of live performance, public accessibility to performance, and the extension of chance-based performance practices. From my perspective, the proscenium stage or the black box is a choice of performance site as much as an elaborate outdoor location. The current popularity of site-specific practices influences the choice of performance makers to use traditional stages, where the acknowledgement of both the stage and its conventions are integrated into the performances. Dance performance outside of the controlled setting of the theatre requires different skills and strategies from dancers, performers, and production teams, including a patience, awareness, and knowledge of the surroundings both in terms of the immediate environment and how it used. From my own experience performing and choreographing outdoors, there is an alertness that is part of performing in an open site where you must maintain a readiness of physicality and social responsiveness – chatting with strangers while performing is common. Working outdoors in public spaces is an extension of chance in dance composition. Merce Cunningham's "chance procedures" put together different movement sequences to create a randomness in the composition, typically in a highly controlled performance space. In certain settings, things like rain or uneven surfaces (which are part of working on lawns or in gardens) effect the conditions for dance, and in settings where there is a high volume of people using the public space (typical of works set in high visibility urban

locations) many chance encounters can take place. Working in outdoor sites creates new physical risks due to changing weather. Site-specific performance demands exposure to the elements and whatever else happens at the site in the moment. When I began working in unconventional sites for dance, there were practical and spontaneous components to the choice, but it was also a way to assert dance as part of the environment. Dance is practice, linked to the experience of being in the world, and site-specific dance remains a radical expression of being alive in and responsible to the world.

I will highlight four contemporary works that work with the garden as a performance site, examining a range of content, structure, and implications of site-specific performances in gardens. The first example is Merce Cunningham's *Event in the Garden* (1998), which transplants an existing choreography into a garden. In the same garden – the Sculpture Garden at the Walker Arts Centre – Theaster Gates' performance *Lumber Song* (2017) which accompanied the installation of a permanent sculpture in the garden is the second work considered. The third work is Pierre Huyghe's piece *Untilled* (2011-2012), a performance and landscaping intervention for the compost area in the Karlsaue park during Documenta 13. The final example is the widely available online documentation of Min Tanaka's performance at La Borde – the psychiatric facility run by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari – I will refer both to the performance itself, but also Tanaka's farming and outdoor workshop practices to give a glimpse at Tanaka's broader artistic practice. Together these four works offer a constellation of thematic and methodological approaches to performances in gardens.

In 1998, the Merce Cunningham Company performed the work *Event in the Garden* at the Walker Art Centre's sculpture garden. This free public garden houses modern and contemporary artworks including large scale sculptures by Claes Oldenburg, James Turrell, Alexander Calder, Theaster Gates, and Katharina Fritsch, representing a range of Western artistic approaches from

pop art to social practice. The work performed by the Cunningham Company in this garden was an *Event*, a choreographic composition that assembles works at a specific location from segments of Cunningham's repertory. New York Times dance critic Jack Anderson wrote in 1985:

> As Mr. Cunningham defines the term, an "Event" is a performance lasting about 90 minutes and consisting of bits and pieces from dances in the company's repertory. But instead of being presented as a set of obvious excerpts from longer works, these fragments are so intermingled as to constitute a new entity that is satisfying on its own terms. (Anderson 13)

This quotation echoes the content of the Cunningham Foundations "dance capsule" dedicated to the *Events* series. "Dance capsules" are digital archival tools designed by the Merce Cunningham Trust to catalogue and document the extensive works of Cunningham and the company, intended to be accessed by researchers and groups/educational institutions seeking to reproduce Cunningham's work, and are developed around the creation and performance history of a repertory piece. *Event in the Garden* (1998) is a footnote amongst 800 *Event* variations that were performed between 1964-2011 in many unique locations including custom built stages in museums, Grand Central Station, and a beach in Australia. *Events,* in general, adapted solos, duets, and excerpts of other works, to re-block, reposition, and re-design a unique performance for a specific location. *Events* layers Cunningham's signature "chance procedures" using established solo/duet/group segments, compiling sequences of movement amongst dancers to create a typically 90-minute dance performance.

Event in the Garden (1998) was orchestrated for the 10-year anniversary of the Walker sculpture garden, affectionately referred to as its "Cherry Jubilee" because the performance took place on a stage in front of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's work *Spoonbridge and Cherry* (1985-88). (Vaughan 26) The performance featured the current company dancers, used the stage design of Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds* which was originally designed for Cunningham's work *Rainforest* (1968), and was accompanied by the musicians Takehisa Kosugi,

Jim O'Rourke, and Christian Marclay. (Vaughan 26) The dancers were costumed with dyed cherry red unitards for the event, complimenting the event's overall theme. (Vaughan 26) The performance followed the *Events* formula, restructuring sections from other repertory works for the outdoor stage at the sculpture garden, viewed by an outdoor audience treated to a highway overpass and a massive Alexander Calder sculpture in the background. There are two crucial takeaways from this performance to be considered in relation to an overall survey on performance and the garden. The first is that the Cunningham Company deployed an ongoing choreographic strategy for adapting works to non-theatrical spaces, essentially transposing its choreographic method into a garden. In the case of the Walker Center Sculpture Garden, it is a garden dedicated to primarily American visual art projects of the post-1950 period, not necessarily a garden that emphasises botanical interventions. The garden's website describes the garden as "showcasing works from the Walker Art Centre's renowned collections of modern and contemporary art in the setting of an urban park" and mentions its work with landscape architects and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization to sustainably manage the flora and fauna onsite in the former marshland. (*Minneapolis Sculpture Garden*) The second key element to consider regarding *Event in the Garden* (1998) is that the work uniquely has the official designation of the site in its title, evoking a reference to the confluence of elements of a garden and Cunningham's own research and influences from the natural world. Cunningham was a prolific choreographer with numerous works with nature-inflected titles such as: *The Seasons* (1947), *Rainforest* (1968), *Coast Zone* (1983), and *Ocean* (1994), which suggests the presence or emergence of natural phenomena by using chance procedures in the choreography. Inside of Cunningham's massive catalogue, are subtle suggestions that a dance performance has the capacity to imitate environmental interactions or scenarios, and the work *Event in the Garden*

(1998) offers an example of a choreographic procedure transposed into a garden, a site that hosts many different environmental and artistic interactions.

The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden at the Walker Art Centre continues to commission site-specific installations and public sculptures from high-profile artists. In 2017, Chicago-based artist Theaster Gates installed a work entitled *Black Vessel for a Saint*. This sculpture is an open-roofed, black-coated brick tempietto, a cylindrical temple from Italian Renaissance architecture, that houses a reclaimed statue of Saint Laurence the patron saint of librarians. Gates' work generally involves reclamation, archives, archival process, and social practice, and this statue was reclaimed from a historical church close to his studio in Chicago that was demolished despite local organizing efforts. Throughout his artistic projects he is working to find ways to preserve and archive Black urban heritage, countering divestment in Black neighbourhoods of mid-western American cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Omaha. (McGraw; Wikipedia) Although the local community in Chicago advocated for the church's preservation, the church was eventually demolished. Gates saved several architectural features from the church, including the statue of Saint Laurence, which became part of Gates' touring international art projects, functioning as a relic of Black American urban history. (Gates) Gates created the temple in the Minneapolis sculpture garden as a permanent place for the statue, covering the statue and the bricks in a protective and symbolic layer of tar to create a sacred space for reflection on the nature of Blackness.

In concert with the period of development for *Black Vessel for a Saint* (2017) was a "moving image commission" by the Walker Art Centre which became Theaster Gates' work *Lumber Song* (2017). Set in Loring Park, a residential park across the adjacent highway from Walker's Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Gates co-operated with the Minneapolis parks department to identify a tree set to be felled. He created a performance for video of himself

taking down the tree with intermittent moments of rest and reflection. The event is accompanied by a trumpet eulogy by Ben LaMar Gay. Gates dawns coveralls, a hardhat, and ear protection, and manually takes down an ash tree using an axe. After the tree is downed, a procession leaves the site over the highway via a pedestrian bridge, travelling back to the Walker Sculpture Garden, specifically to the location of *Black Vessel for a Saint* (2017). Gates' performance uses the masquerade and performance action of garden maintenance to connect the landscape to the spiritually reflective space of *Black Vessel.* Continually taking moments to be physically still in positions of kneeling and gazing over the landscape, the tree and the act of its removal is imbued with a reverence by Gates. This performance extends the installation of a permanent sculpture work into a performance gesture, building a connection between the sculpture and the gestures of work happening in the public space, and the resonance of trees in public space. Ultimately ending up as a video documentation of the performance, *Lumber Song* (2017) is a unique work, part of Gates' overarching project to reconsider urban public spaces and the preservation of Black American culture, and the removal of the tree is infused with an emotional performance of labour and spiritual lamentation.

Another site-specific project challenging the innerworkings of a public garden is Pierre Huyghe's contribution to Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany, entitled *Untilled* (2011-12). The work was set in the highly manicured and strictly planned Karlsaue park, nestled behind the trees and bushes that disguise the compost area. This discreet location made encountering the artwork a shock, a loosely organized space seemingly under construction and under-constructed, hosted by a young man and two dogs. The visitor is greeted by piles of soil, sheet rock, wood, and gravel approximately organized to recall a construction site. The materials seem prepared, but stationary. Worn dirt paths carve through the compost area, working around and through a small dirt hill covered with young marijuana and psychoactive plants. Along a muddy plateau behind the hill

sits a sculpture of a reclining nude with a living beehive covering the head. A young male host offers visitors marijuana leaves as a souvenir when he pushes past people on the trails, followed closely by an emaciated white dog named *Human* with a painted pink leg. Entering the installation is like entering a miniature ecosystem, a sense of chaos amplified by the young man who acts as facilitator, gardener, and canine caretaker. The performance element is subtle amongst the visual amplitude of the space – appearing to be on the edge of a planned landscape, with the piles of material in standby to be placed and ordered into something recognizable. In the text about *Untilled* by Huyghe included in the Documenta 13 catalogue he writes:

> The place is enclosed. Elements and spaces from different times in history lie next to each other with no chronological order or sign of origin. What is present are either physical adaptations of fiction and factual documents or existing things. In the compost of the Karlsaue park, artifacts, inanimate elements, and living organisms…plants, animals, humans, bacteria are left without culture. The set of operations that occurs has no script…. There are circumstances and deviations that allow the emergence of complexities. There are rhythms, automatisms and accidents, invisible and continuous transformations, movements and processes but no choreography; sonorities and resonances but no polyphony. (Pierre Huyghe/documenta (13) 262)

Untilled (2011-12) offers a dynamic and chaotic space for inter-species interactions, transformations, and regeneration that Huyghe describes in the text above. Notably he refuses the presence of choreography – a planned set of movements in a defined space, favouring an emphasis on the natural processes operating amongst the compost. The space is simultaneously growing and decomposing at the same time, while accompanied by dogs, a human caretaker, bees, plants, soil, and inert materials hinting at landscaping.

In her talk about *Untilled* in 2019, PhD student Flora Katz uses her access and analysis of Pierre Huyghe's process notes to highlight his simultaneous use of elemental separation with a series of three layers composed of "the place of the dead/compost/the cemetery of culture," "body/organs/plants are affecting their parts," and "rhythm/life/relation." (Katz, 33:29-39:06) The artist is quoted stating that the work "…is not a dump," (Katz, 38:00) a crucial distinction based

on the precise elements set in place to allow the chance collision of events that could be understood as a general heap of waste. Katz draws attention to the radical choice in the second layer that the botanical component of the work is composed of plants connected to different parts of the body (brain - psychotropic, heart - Valerian, sex – aphrodisiac). The plant's active compounds are designed to break the repetitive pattern of the characters of the novel *Locus Solus* (1914) by Raymond Roussel, the narrative of which was a major inspiration for *Untilled*. Katz's talk reveals subtle references built into *Untilled*, from both art and literature -- Roussel's novel was a key inspiration for the work, one of the trees from Joseph Beuys installation in Kassel *7000 Oaks* (1982) is decomposing on site, and Katz compares one of Huyghe's personal documentation photographs with Marcel Duchamp's *Etait donnés* (1946-1966). Pierre Huyghe's *Untilled* is massive and subtle undertaking that pushes the question of site to its conceptual edge through the construction of a functioning multi-species ecosystem in the context of a major international art fair.

Another significant approach that overlaps practices of tending plants and dance, is the practice and oeuvre of Min Tanaka via Body Weather Farm. Tanaka is a performer typically linked to the Japanese dance form Butoh. In the 1986 interview Tanaka gave to Bonnie Sue Stern in *The Drama Review*, Tanaka explains his beginnings in dance as young child in traditional Japanese dance, moving to basketball, then American modern dance as a university student, although he was simultaneously attending and influenced by performances by Butoh's founders Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata. (Stein and Tanaka) Butoh developed in the post-World War II period in Japan, still grappling with the aftereffects of the atomic bombs and marked by civil unrest that resulted a rise of street performance and protest. (*Butoh: Body on the Edge of Crisis*) Butoh is visually distinguished by dancers performing excruciating physicality, uncanny costuming including nudity – occasionally covered in white body paint, and performers who

physicalize imagined inner landscapes through facial and bodily expressions. Many performers and creators continue to develop and be influenced by Butoh including Mari Osani, Vangeline and the New York Institute of Butoh, Yumiko Yoshioka, and Sanki-juku. Tanaka's work and approach to practice is distinct for several reasons, including his determination, emphasis, and incorporation of the physical act of farming as part of movement research and performance development. His performance work was transforming in the 1970s and 80s primarily in Japan with an assembly of dancers named *Maijuku* exploring the concept of *Body Weather/Shintai-Kishokenkyo-Jo.* (Stein and Tanaka) In the interview with Stein, Tanaka traces a history of Body Weather Farm which began in 1985 for the people in the dance company "to be able to train half of the week and work on the farm the rest." (Stein and Tanaka 149–50) Author Tess de Quincey describes Body Weather as "…an experimental, investigative, dance-performance practice which fuses ancient as well as contemporary Japanese and Western practice and thought so as to question the body and the imagination." (de Quincey 317) Zack Fuller, who wrote a PhD as a participant observer on Body Weather Farm, describes Tanaka's approach as such:

> For Tanaka, Body Weather is not a training method, but an ideology that informs training, dance, and daily life. Conceived in the late 1970s through his collaborations with the art critic Seigo Matsuoka, Body Weather envisions the body as a force of nature: ever-changing, omni-centered, and completely open to external stimuli. Entirely opposed to hierarchisation or formalisation, it sees no part of the body as more important than another. (Fuller 198)

Dance researcher Joa Hug describes a version of Body Weather that now exists as a training form in the European dance context as:

> …a comprehensive training and performance practice that investigates the intersections between body and environment. It evolved in the early 1980s in Japan from a longstanding and intensive collaboration between dancer/choreographer Min Tanaka and an international group of dancers, actors and performers. The group lived and worked on the Body Weather farm, based in the small town of Hakushu on the Japanese countryside, and toured worldwide under the name of Maijuku Dance Company, directed by Tanaka. (Hug 170)

The development of Body Weather as a technique born out of both practice and place, is one of the unique characteristics that has a continued impact in the dance field. Zack Fuller's study into Tanaka's work and approach, includes a detailed description of farming at Body Weather Farm and the impact it has on how people use the body:

> The daily life of the full-time residents of Body Weather Farm consisted largely of agricultural labour. Farming work was their primary form of training. The workshop members participated in daily farming work as well, generally beginning the day at 5:30 a.m. with morning farming work such as weeding and harvesting vegetables. Working with each different crop engaged the body in a different type of physical action. Harvesting potatoes, for example, required a very different use of the body than harvesting peppers. Weeding a carrot patch involved a very different use of the body than weeding a rice field. A key element in both the practice of farming as training and the workshop exercises themselves was the importance of consciously receiving physical stimulation from the physical environment. Tanaka often complained that the workshop members (myself included) did not have the proper attitude towards farming. In retrospect, it seems clear that in order for farming to become training one must treat it as such – that is, engage in it with conscious awareness of the space itself, including the stimulations received by the body from the environment. This practice of farming as dance training is anti-hierarchic in that it does not privilege training over everyday life or human bodies over physical space. Rather than a training environment where the place is subservient to the needs of the people, the place functions as a teacher. (Fuller 199)

The distinction that Fuller makes in the last sentence, that "the place functions as a teacher" is one of the radical proposals that Tanaka brings to dance research. That not only can a dancer inhabit the double role of working with land in the capacity of a farmer to stimulate their movement and performance research, but the traditional structure of dance mastery following an experienced teacher is replaced by limits and demands of the place. This proposal has crucial importance for how people, and dancers especially, perceive their own bodies as sensory and environmentally empathetic sites.

Videos available on the internet of Tanaka's solo works and group performances with *Maijuku* span performances from the 1980s to the current day (he continues to perform in 2025). One of the most popular video documentations, hosted by multiple users and continually reposted on YouTube, is the documentation of Tanaka's 1987 performance in the garden of the *Clinique*

Psychiatrique de la Borde institute in France. (*Min à La Borde*) This performance took place at the invitation of theorist and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, who had established a relationship with Tanaka during visits to Japan in the 1980s. There is an interview between Guattari and Tanaka in the compilation of writings by Guattari based on his encounters and interviews with artists and intellectuals in Japan entitled *Machinic Eros.* (2015) The interview with Tanaka took place in 1985, the content of which features Guattari offering many analytical and theoretical inroads into understanding Tanaka's performance process and outlook. There are five sections to this interview: (i) threshold phenomena, (ii) on horizontality, (iii) on the materials of dance, (iv) assemblage, and (v) on improvisation. (Guattari 45–53) At times Tanaka rebuffs Guattari's theoretical applications, including the concept of assemblage, elaborating:

> I'm living for myself but I am nothing, for I wish to be thoroughly more myself than anyone else. For example, nature had originally been dancing. Through observing its dance, our senses themselves dance; then they are raised to the level of intelligence. A long continuation of the human/inhuman process, I think, arranges our dancing. My point is to return to the outside and surface of the body. (Tanaka quoted in Guattari 50–51)

By the time that Tanaka performed at La Borde, he had been having substantial conversations with Guattari and there was an effort from both men to understand each other's approaches and oeuvres.

The documentation of Tanaka's dancing at La Borde has been edited, so the sequence is not necessarily an exact sequence of what took place. (*Min à La Borde*) The video is an approximate representation of the performance's trajectory and form for the purpose of this analysis. In the video we first see Tanaka in plain clothes walking alone on a path, seemingly warming up and getting to know the space, then he is depicted in plain clothes with a group exploring the garden and encountering two men riding horses through a pond. A quick survey of people throughout the garden and assembling at the main house, cuts to Tanaka performing in costume. He wears a brown, muddy coloured overcoat (which even has a textural effect of dried

mud on areas of the fabric), with a hood pulled over his head. His hair is messy and three colourful strands of paper pour out of his hair. His skin is covered in a brown substance, the same colour as the overcoat, and his eyes are painted with an orange shadow that recalls the colour of the paper. He begins against the entry way with his hands contracted closely to the body and eyes closed. He slowly begins to contort his upper body and carefully steps down the entrance with a wobbly gait. The shot fixes on his feet, which do not lay flat on the ground, the foot is contorted, and he walks on the outer edge of the foot. He is then pictured on a pathway, gesticulates his arms rapidly and falls to the ground, where he writhes slowly with his eyes closed, moving in a way that appears internally focussed. There is no direct offer or communication to the audience besides the world that Tanaka conjures, and he continues to move slowly writhing on the gravel path, while his face and tongue explore a range of expressions that convey a sense of agony. His boots have been removed and his bare feet hover above the gravel, with the limbs contracting and gesticulating with tension. He crawls and tries to hide his face, then stands while his hands maintain the same tension and slowly raise above his head. At this point Tanaka is pictured in front of trees and bushes, we cannot see the path, just a close shot of his hands and face. The video then cuts to a close-up of his feet walking barefoot on the gravel pathway, with the same wobbly steps where the weight is placed mainly on the outside of the foot. The next section cuts to Tanaka moving spastically and dynamically, with the same tense form that has more speed and intensity, while still barefoot on the gravel. The final shots return to Tanaka closer to the main house, moving in the centre of the audience, running barefoot again on the path, and until there are applause from inside the main house.

During this performance, Tanaka presents a human form on the edge of recognizability. It's as if he performs a creature emerged from the dirt, twisted in an inner narrative, expressing pain through the contracted and tense movements. There is a sense of otherworldliness shown in

his lack of recognition of the world he is performing for. The garden is a latent feature of this highly expressive performance; it acts as a sort of container to break the viewers gaze of the intense solo unfolding in front of them – you can escape the intensity by gazing to the trees or the rose bushes. The creature or state of being that Tanaka performs is disoriented by the outdoors, but also part of it. He is not lost in a forest or a city, he is in the protection of a garden, which offers a container to the scattered audience. The space hosts the audience and offers sightlines to take in the performance, although people are in different areas essentially surrounding Tanaka as he performs. The close-ups on Tanaka's feet are striking, especially as they move on the gravel. The gravel pathway, a feature of the garden, becomes the surface where the performer's state is revealed to the audience – so concentrated that the sensation of the gravel on the skin is being absorbed and dramatized by the body. The performance draws from the garden's multiplicity of function: a formal outdoor space which allows for people to gather and watch both the performance and each other, the availability of landscaping features such as the pathway which Tanaka uses as a key spatial tool in his performance, and of course the symbolic outdoor space of the psychiatric clinic that Tanaka's character inhabits as an othered human, expressing a psychological and physical state in concert. Tanaka's performance has a familiar intensity, and his lifetime of experience improvising and performing in outdoor locations is evident by the way he plays with proximity to the audience and reads the features of the garden.

These four works reveal different performance approaches to presence and physical technicity, as well as a range of concerns about what is at stake for choreography and performance taking place in the many possible configurations of a garden. From Min Tanaka's transformation to Cunningham's chance procedures surrounded by a garden, Theaster Gates' undercover performance as the city's horticulture maintenance staff to the eco-performance emerging from a compost heap credited to Pierre Huyghe, these works centre the garden as a

critical site of performative inquiry and play. The specific place and gardens play a central role in the works, and in the case of Tanaka, the shape of his performance is informed by his physical sensations of the place. The garden insinuates a subtle transformation for materials, performers, and audiences. The works of Gates, Huyghe, and Tanaka play with the quotidian nature of the garden, the performers appear as workers, apparitions, and agents of change, while Cunningham makes a formal dance proposal in the garden, using the cherry colour of a central sculpture to visually orient the intricacy of the dancer's movements. These works and their distinctions demonstrate the potency of the garden as performance site, where the agential role of the human is situated amongst other botanical and non-human agents engaged in cyclical and ecological transformations.

Figure 1. Japanese Garden from the top of the waterfall, *Espace pour la vie*, October 6th, 2022.

Materializing the Garden
Fieldwork Study #1: The Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*

Espace pour la vie's Japanese Garden in Montreal is a site of landscape performance (Ness *Choreographies of Landscape*) where carefully positioned elements of stones, plants, and water, reveal a critical tension between the binary of natural and artificial in the production of what the research institute has categorized as a "Cultural Garden." Landscape performance builds from established scholarship in performance studies (Roach; Schechner, *Environmental Theater.*; Schechner, *Performance Theory*; Turner and Schechner) and is defined by anthropologist Sally Ann Ness in two parts: "…kinds of performance that may take landscape as their primary subject matter….(And/or) identif(ying) landscape itself as something that is a kind of performance, something that itself is capable of performing." (Ness *Choreographies of Landscape* 18) In the case of the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, I apply landscape performance at the elemental scale of a garden, where the agency of the Garden's rocks, water, and plants, and how they are highlighted and subdivided in the English language holdings of the Botanical Garden's library on Japanese gardens, shift the garden from strictly representing Japanese authenticity to performing and circulating the messy contradictions of a garden. Using an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates observations and photographs from fieldwork site visits from 2019-2023, a visual analysis of selections from the photographic archives of the *Médiatèque Jardin Botanique*, and reflecting on selections from the *Bibliothèque du jardin botanique's* holdings on Japanese gardens, this research follows how and why this expansive Japanese garden designed by the internationally recognized landscape architect "Ken" Takeshi Nakajima functions in the culturally complex city of Montreal. Montreal is a unique Canadian city, defined by its island geography, its colonial history, and its ongoing political and cultural negotiation between French, English, First Nations, and immigrant communities. Furthermore, this chapter is written from my positionality as a white female Canadian Anglophone recently relocated to Montreal, originally from New Brunswick/Ontario, at the research's outset a novice in my knowledge about Japanese

gardens and culture, and an experienced professional ornamental gardener. This positionality offers a unique vantage point on how the Japanese Garden is constructed, experienced, disseminated, marketed, and accessible to a person living in Montreal, receptive to the promotion of DIY horticulture.

The Japanese Garden in Montreal is currently marketed by *Espace pour la vie* as a quasi-spiritual garden for visitors to meditatively reflect on nature through its beauty and material composition. (Espace pour la vie Montréal) However, focussing on the Garden's material elements reveal the thoughtful contributions of Nakajima's design set against the uncanny existence of an elaborate Japanese garden in Montreal. It's a design that folds local controversies and appropriative gestures into its continuance as a high-profile formal garden in the city, and it was important to include a formal, state-supported garden as a field site for this thesis. After several years of research and observation, I assert that Nakajima's Japanese Garden in Montreal is a complicated contemporary masterpiece of landscape architecture. It is an unusually beautiful urban site to critically engage the concept of nature and the ways that people draw a boundary between themselves and the botanical world, while reflecting on complex concepts coming from the friction of Japanese conceptualizations of nature in Montreal. Controversies have emerged from this garden including a mono-green colouration in its ongoing maintenance and replanting of certain beds (Desranleau and Jacobs), as well as the institutional production and control of cultural narratives. The Japanese Garden in Montreal complicates perceptions and representations of nature and culture, performing its material presence for many audiences.

I regularly visited the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* starting in the winter of 2019, throughout the pandemic, following its cycles of growth and dormancy until the completion of my fieldwork in July 2023. My conception of fieldwork relates to the disciplines of anthropology and human geography (Watson; Faubion and Marcus; Cloke), and the precedent set

by Sally Ann Ness using site visits in Yosemite National Park as a key part of developing landscape performance. (Ness *Choreographies of Landscape*) In the winter months, my visits to the Japanese Garden were limited to once a season as the garden was fairly static once it was covered in snow, but during the spring, summer, and fall I observed substantial differences in the garden visiting every two to three weeks (two weeks in the fast-growing part of the spring, three weeks when the growth would slow). During my visits I would walk through the garden, observing what was growing in the beds, the amount of people there (the garden is open all-year round, although the water feature 'closes' in the fall), people's behavior in the garden, the maintenance tasks being executed by staff, and a visit to the exhibition pavilion. The photos from my regular visits to the garden counter two visual narratives of the Japanese Garden's online marketing promoted by *Espace pour la vie* – that the garden is monochromatically green and that the garden exists without human presence or intervention (Espace pour la vie Montréal). The selected photographs in this dissertation frame the garden as a colourful place full of visitors, maintenance staff, and animateurs (see Figure 1).

The history of the garden's construction is primarily compiled from the documents, photographic archives, and slide library in the *Bibliothèque du Jardin botanique*, the original issue of *Quatre-temps* (the periodical distributed by the patron organization of the garden *Les Amis du Jardin*) released for the inauguration of the Japanese Garden in 1988 which features short essays by the people directly involved in the garden's construction, and the in-depth 2009 article by scholars Josée Desranleau and Peter Jacobs that details the garden's construction and changes after 1988. Furthermore, several general books about Japanese gardens including: the 1958 pamphlet by Landscape Architect Takuma Tono entitled *A Secret of Japanese Gardens*, a translation of the *Sakuteiki* – the oldest text on Japanese gardens written in the Heian period (794-1185 AD), and a compilation of contemporary DIY guides on Japanese Gardens written for

a North American audience, contribute to an understanding and problematization of what is happening in and extracted from Japanese garden design within the Montreal garden.

The Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la Vie* is a nuanced garden designed and built in the urban context of late 20th Century Montreal. It was an outgrowth of the global, modernist, and cosmopolitan ambitions of Expo ’67 (Kenneally and Sloan), and landscape architect Ken Nakajima was the original designer of the annual garden adjacent planted beside the Japan Pavilion at Expo ’67. (Figure 2) After Expo ’67, members of Montreal’s Japanese community sought a way to establish a permanent Japanese garden in the city.

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Figure 2. ‘Japanese Garden’ designed by Ken Nakajima beside the Expo 67 Japanese Pavillion. Library and Archives Canada / Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition/ e011181392. Copyright: Government of Canada.

The project was initiated in cooperation with Nakajima, who was a highly respected landscape architect in Japan and abroad, but funding and the commitment for a place to develop the garden was initially unsuccessful. A number of historians have established the connection between Japanese gardens appearing at World's Fairs and the eventual installation of permanent Japanese Gardens in host cities, noting that this was also responsible for a wave of migration of Japanese garden workers who continued to work on the permanent gardens (Tagsold; Brown and Cobb). This was the case for the Japanese Garden in Montreal, which selected Nakajima as the designer based on his Expo '67 design and included the notable immigration to Canada of Nakajima's assistant Tom Torizuka who eventually started his own landscaping company in Toronto. The Japanese Garden at the Montreal Botanical Garden was initiated following Expo'67, where the small Japanese Garden that accompanied the Japanese Pavilion started to gather interest amongst the Japanese diaspora in Montreal. Although the initial proposal for a Japanese garden in Montreal was not successful, in 1984 the Montreal Botanical Garden (MBG, now part of *Espace pour la vie*) agreed to develop a Japanese garden after continued fundraising and organizing by members of Montreal's Japanese community, spearheaded by Buddhist Monk Takamishi Takahatake. (Bourque) As of 2023, Takahatake's portrait continues to be displayed at the entrance of the Japanese Garden's Pavilion, which attests to his commitment and involvement in the garden's realization.

The installation of the Japanese Garden in Montreal was part of the MBG's ambitions to raise its profile amongst other international botanical gardens by installing a "world-class" Japanese garden. Pierre Bourque, MBG's director from 1980-1994, who went on to be Mayor of Montreal, writes in his essay for the botanical garden's members magazine *Quatre-temp*s that:

> …the Botanical Garden through this project, would continue the noblest of its vocations, namely, to reach human beings with the universal language of nature. The planned

> Japanese garden would be even larger and have a greater impact than the precedent setting bonsai exhibition which was such a success with Quebec visitors. (Bourque 9)

Bourque describes the importance that the MBG attached to visitor interest and attendance by his comparison with a well-attended Bonsai exhibit in 1985 and offers an easily critiqued vision of nature as universal. The institutional promotion of universality and desire to broaden the MBG site as a civic attraction had an ongoing influence on the maintenance style and implementation of several significant changes in the Japanese Garden that occurred after the initial construction period. The MBG's institutional goals play out in the history of the garden's maintenance described later in the chapter, often in ways that were at odds with original intention for the garden's design.

Ken Nakajima was a prolific garden designer, and his designs were considered contemporary visions of Japanese gardens that referenced the traditional gardens of Japan. Nakajima both studied and taught at the Tokyo University of Agriculture. He spent time studying the traditional gardens of Kyoto and after establishing his landscape architecture firm *Consolidated Garden Research Inc* in 1957, spent a period in Europe studying Western gardens. (Hosono and Hoshi) Following this period in Europe, Nakajima started to incorporate flowers into his designs (Hosono and Hoshi), with flowers becoming a distinct characteristic of his oeuvre. (Desranleau and Jacobs) During his prolific career, Nakajima designed prominent gardens internationally including: the memorial garden for Japanese internment in Cowra, Australia (constructed in two phases: 1978-79 and 1984-86), the Japanese Garden within the Moscow Scientific Academy Botanical Garden (1987), and the Japanese Friendship Garden within Balboa Park in San Diego (1989). The scale of the garden by Nakajima at *Espace pour la vie* is significant enough to regularly be referenced in surveys of Nakajima's major works and surveys of important international Japanese gardens. (Hosono and Hoshi; "Takeshi Nakajima

(1914-2000)"; Suzuki et al.) Nakajima was a prolific garden designer within Japan, credited with numerous gardens including the Japan Art Academy Garden (1957), National Theatre Garden in Kyoto (1965), and the Ibaragi Flower Garden (1982). Members of The Garden Society of Japan's International Activities Committee, Hosono Tatsuya and Hoshi Hiromi, detail three main characteristics and then three overall concepts that are the foundation of Nakajima's designs and approach:

(Characteristics)
- Bright and colorful, incorporating flowers like a western garden.
- Flat and wide, having a horizontal spread and continuity.
-Intended randomness, to expresses the pristine nature's depth and true beauty.

(Concepts)
-To search for a new Japanese garden style suitable for that present age.
-To respect for the natural scenery of the country and its place.
-To fulfill the longing of people worldwide for Japanese culture. (Hosono and Hoshi 4)

These visual characteristics are expressed in the Montreal Garden, which in its original design seen in archival photos include flowers and horizontality as visually distinctive components of the garden. (Figure 3) Furthermore, the three meta-concepts embedded in Nakajima's approach appear in the Montreal Garden referring to local forests, the incorporation of the trees already growing where the Japanese Garden was set, and the overall desire from the city and the institution to establish a permanent Japanese garden in Montreal.

Espace pour la vie's Japanese Garden remains distinct because of Nakajima's design, it's large size at 2.5 hectares, intensive maintenance requirements, and location within a botanical garden. Inclusion in a botanical garden inevitably links the garden with its institutional objectives, which are subject to the political, social, cultural, and now climactic change that the institution is beholden to. Anthropologist Katja Neves considers the political dimension of institutional conservation efforts in her book *Post-Normal Conservation* (2019).

Figure 3. The original planting of the waterfall area in the Japanese Garden at the Montreal Botanical Garden, 31.05.1988. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference code: VM094-J0652-077)

In the introduction she summarizes the institutional functions of the botanical garden:

> Botanic gardens are, quintessentially, institutions of modernity. Their rise and proliferation is associated with the establishment of science, the secularization of knowledge, the emergence of the nation-state, and colonial processes of empire building that operated as antecedents to the development of capitalism. (Neves 41)

This early connection with capitalism and presence of empire is part of the foundation of the MBG as a depression-era work project and facility committed to developing civic horticultural knowledge. It was spearheaded by the monk-botanist Brother Marie-Victorin under the mayor Camillien Houde and was designed by Henry Teuscher (names that appear in the literal fabric of Montreal through street names, school names, and memorials). The Depression-era project appealed to the political period aiding the establishment of the massive botanical garden at 75

hectares, now advertising 20 000 taxa, and continuing to influence public discussions around the social and civic benefit of horticulture for Montreal citizens.

Scholar Erin Despard's PhD dissertation on the urban beautification projects of the City of Montreal includes substantial research on the MBG and its promotional pamphlets produced from the mid-20th Century to 2001. These guides reinforce the MBG's institutional objectives of tourism, scientific research, horticultural education, and uniquely for a botanical garden, social benefit. Despard argues that the MBG developed a particular kind of coded appreciation for horticulture:

> …the activities and comportments of visitors portrayed in the 1951 guide not only demonstrated how a garden was to be appreciated, but also conveyed the valuation of a more general civility towards other people, as well as an acceptance of the logic according to which access to different forms of space was allocated in the city. (Despard and Concordia University 175)

Despard quantifies the visual disappearance of human figures in the guide's photographs throughout the 20th Century, contrasting the 1951 guide's rate of two-thirds of images featuring people enjoying the garden with the 2001 guide that only includes three images with people. (Despard and Concordia University 212–13) Despard suggests that this disappearance of people in the guides tracks a shift of institutional objectives from public education of how to be in the garden to a more contemporary proposal of how to be a photographer in the garden. Furthermore, Despard points to designer Teuscher's desire to develop the garden as a place for a broader civic horticultural education, tracing developments and animation events to stimulate new communities of homeowners. The garden continues this mission of horticultural education with an expanded social media presence that represents the collections and gardens on site, it hosts annual sales of plants and seeds, maintains a substantial public library collection, and hosts live and recorded how-to workshops for active Montreal horticulturalists. The MBG, now housed by *Espace pour la vie*, maintains a strong educational presence in the city, which is a main

institutional goal alongside conducting scientific research, acting as a tourist destination, and executing a social mandate of employment and the public dissemination of scientific research.

The Japanese Garden is categorized by *Espace pour la vie* as a "Cultural Garden," highlighted in the Botanical Garden's mission statement as one of the gardens where visitors can "discover different cultures." ("Mission of the Jardin Botanique de Montréal") It was officially inaugurated in 1988 as the first of three "Cultural Gardens" at the MBG, followed by the Chinese Garden's completion in 1991, and the First Nations Garden's completion in 2001. The Japanese Garden is presented in promotional literature as a place to initiate cultural understanding and reflect deeply on nature, often visually represented by its central waterfall and pond lined by large peridotite stones. (Espace pour la vie Montréal) Many other details appear in the landscaping, such as gravel pathways that wind through stands of large coniferous and deciduous trees, perennial beds, streams that trail throughout the garden, amongst an astute topographical design that allows a photographic tableau from almost any angle within the garden. The garden's design brings attention to its elements such as large boulders, the rushing sound of the waterfall, and stands of trees and perennials. Didactic panels that describe the symbolic meanings of the elements such as *La Pierre* (Stone), *L'eau* (Water), *Les végétaux* (Plants) are placed throughout the garden along the paths as a mechanism to encourage visitors' recognition and reflection on the garden's features. (Figure 4 & 5) The Japanese Garden continues to play a role for Montreal's Japanese community through its cultural visibility, hosting clubs and events such as the Ikebana club and the O-Hanami Spring Picnic, providing a formal greeting site for Japanese dignitaries, and presenting Japan-related exhibitions in the garden's Pavilion. Overall, the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* remains a well-maintained and high-profile garden, a complicated site to consider how a formal public garden produces simultaneous displays of contradictory expressions of nature and artificiality.

Figure 4 and 5. Didactic panels for *Les végétaux* (Plants) 06.10.2022 and *La pierre* (Stone) 20.04.2019, Japanese Garden *Espace pour la vie*, Montreal.

Figure 6. Large peridotite boulder on the right side of frame, at the top of the waterfall, Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, Montreal, 17.05.2021.

Figures 7 and 8. Close up and grouping of wet peridotite boulders, Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, Montreal, 20.04.2019.

Stones

In the Japanese garden, the waterfall is bordered by clusters of peridotite boulders with a particularly large solitary stone located at the top, close to the didactic panel for "La pierre/Stone." (Figure 6) Beyond the waterfall, the stones with their soft angular shapes reminiscent of miniature mountains, are firmly set throughout the garden grounds in the horizontal style typical of Nakajima's designs. On dry days the stones appear as dark grey with lighter patches that look almost like a coating of lichen. The rocks have a rough surface, where thin grooves run vertically through the rocks. When the rocks are wet from the waterfall or after a rainfall, a contrasting pattern of brilliant white and green vertical stripes and patches are revealed on the dark stone. (Figures 7 & 8) The rocks' presence throughout the garden gives an impression of a permanent landscape, where geological time is represented by the weight and positions of the stones.

Stones are considered the foundational element in traditional Japanese garden design. They express the natural and artificial binary through the elaborate installation process required to signal the presence of ancient geological forces. Traditions of garden construction in Japan trained designers and technicians in the art and practice of setting stones, resulting in variations

of visual composition and scale. In the construction of the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, the local search for the ideal stone was a substantial endeavor for both Ken Nakajima and the Botanical Garden staff supporting the construction, that resulted in the selection of peridotite stones from an abandoned asbestos mine in Thetford Mines Quebec. The massive installation effort of the Garden converted a nondescript flat field into a forested hill with a rocky flowing waterfall. The Japanese Garden in its current phase at *Espace pour la vie* is unified by the placement of the peridotite stones, a visual cue for a naturally formed garden – a place where the forces of nature seem to have revealed ancient bedrock. The traditions of stone setting that underpin Japanese garden design, help grasp the elaborate construction and installation of the stones at the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*. However, the history of asbestos mining in Quebec is part of this underpinning, pointing to how this garden performs a troubling part of nature geologically and regionally by using debris from an abandoned mine of a highly carcinogenic natural material.

Texts that outline principles of Japanese gardens often emphasize and distinguish the material components of a garden: stones, water, and plants. Stones are continually named as a foundational element in the garden's construction, creating what Takuma Tono, designer of the Portland Japanese Garden (1963) and former head of Landscape Architecture at Tokyo Agricultural University, refers to as "the skeleton of the garden." (Tono 58) In Tono's compact pamphlet *The Secret of Japanese Gardens* (1958), two succinct paragraphs follow the heading 'Stones' which highlight the importance of stone as a material in the garden amongst: water, streams, steppingstones, paved paths, garden gates and bridges, hedges and fences, garden houses, stone ornaments and lanterns, water basins, wells, and finally trees and shrubs. Tono's pamphlet, and its succinct structure, is a mass-produced mid-20th Century pocket guide explaining both the styles and elements of Japanese gardens to an English language audience,

contributing a bodily metaphor that facilitates a cross-cultural understanding of the function of stones.

Historical texts on Japanese gardens reinforce stones as the primary material for the garden, even giving stones material agency in the construction. Stones are referenced in the opening of the 2001 translated edition of the *Sakuteiki*, an 11th Century historical Japanese text the editors cite as the oldest text addressing the aesthetic dimension of gardens. (Takei and Keane 3) The translators highlight that in the original book the act of gardening is synonymous with setting stones. The first sentence: "When creating a garden, first be aware of the basic concepts,…" *garden* is footnoted as directly translated from "*ishi wo taten koto"* as "setting stones" or "the act of setting stones upright." (Takei and Keane 153) In the translator's introduction to the *Sakuteiki*, they highlight this interplay between gardening and stone setting, as well as the phrase in the original text that translates to "follow the request of the stone" (*ishi no kowon ni shitagahite*), indicating a perception of stones as animate, particularly as it applies to the process of positioning a stone in a garden. (Takei and Keane 4) By reiterating the importance of stones, texts on Japanese gardens translated into English contrast the emphasis on plants found in the conventions of European and Western gardening.

The symbolic meaning and practical details of stones in Japanese garden construction continues to be relevant in the present. Gardener, philosophy of aesthetics scholar, and Japanese blogger Tomoki Yamauchi has been writing reflection series of his 2021-2023 fieldwork with a crew building and restoring the Daishoin Garden in the Kannon-ji Temple in Kyoto. A central feature of his blog, now book, titled: *When the Shape of the Garden is Born* (2023) details the positioning and techniques of setting stones in gardens, including numerical detail that follows the changes and decision-making that are part of the process. (Note that the blog is originally written in Japanese, and the texts have been translated through the internet browser plug-in.) He

documents the communications between gardeners to accomplish specific tasks such as identifying, moving, and laying garden stones, using diagrams and photographs to determine where stones will be laid before the physically intensive moving of large stones. (Yamauchi) In the early stages of the series he writes about the reclamation of stones from a former garden, noting that the old garden is so neglected that the stones have changed from "scenic" to "natural" because of the overgrowth of the surroundings bushes and grasses. (Yamauchi) This distinction emphasizes the role of maintenance, which includes clearing away botanical growth that crowds the rocks, to distinguish traditional Japanese gardens from a field or forest where plants are less controlled. This is a subtle illusion produced by gardeners, an illusion that runs through Montreal's Japanese Garden, where the stones appear to be arranged by natural forces like wind, rain, and erosion. In actuality, the gardener creates a theatre of environmental history, moving and shifting impossibly heavy rocks to be set for aesthetic appreciation. Setting stones continues to be a preliminary step in building and renewing gardens in contemporary Japan, and Yamauchi's blog uniquely gives voice to gardeners responsible for setting stones.

As part of *Espace pour la vie*'s educational and community mandate is an extensive public library in the main Botanical Garden building that includes sections corresponding to its cultural gardens. Within the Japanese gardens section is a sub-collection of Do-it-yourself (DIY) guides which are general texts for home gardeners to build their own Japanese garden, exoticizing and rebuilding the mystique at home. Titles include *Creating a Japanese Garden* (1989), *Zen in your Garden: Creating Sacred Spaces* (2001), and *Oriental Gardening* (1996). *Creating a Japanese Garden* (1989) starts with a 'Garden Components' chapter: "Stone, with its endlessly variable forms, serves as a building material, as a symbol for mountains and islands, and as stone itself, to give the garden its most enduring element." (Crocker 41) The guide recognizes the visual cue of permanence that the stone evokes in a garden, offering tips on both

the meaning and utility of stones, and instructions on stone groupings, arrangements, shapes, and path construction. In the book *Zen in your Garden*, the author sprinkles inspirational quotes amongst how-to gardening details. Stones appear in several sections discussing gardening styles and approaches, including a section entitled 'Symbolic Rock.' Here the author proposes the symbolism of "islands" or "mountains poking up out the clouds" or even "as individual thoughts or emotions disturbing the calm sea that is mind, the raking of the gravel indication, the ripples and refractions that such thoughts create." (Hendy 30) The Japanese Gardening Society of Oregon's book *Oriental Gardening* (1996) opens with a short history of gardens in Japan, an introduction to "Eastern Religions," and sections about qualities of "oriental garden design" including: abstraction, contrast, perspective, change and motion, simplicity and quiet, the use of plants, and borrowed landscape style gardens. The introduction states: "The work of the human hand is disguised—perfect, contrived, symmetrical landscapes are not desired—and the garden designer strives to sublimate himself in nature….The result is an abstraction or idealization of nature, a refinement of its wildness." (The Japanese Garden Society of Oregon 18) The idealization of nature is why the stones are placed, treasured, and imbued with a non-human force; the theatrical illusion in the garden is constructed by the human hand. One of the final chapters is dedicated to garden design, including a section on stones. It states:

> Stone is an essential ingredient in an oriental garden. Large rocks add drama to the garden. Take care to change the shape of the ground when setting a stone so that it looks natural….Remember, once they are placed, they are almost impossible to move. (The Japanese Garden Society of Oregon 172)

The metaphoric consideration of a stone as a recipe ingredient adds dramatic intention and mimics the subdivision of elements found in English language literature on Japanese gardens (including this thesis). The texts from the library reinforce a preference for text-based (as opposed to experiential) knowledge in the garden, in this case geared towards DIY

reconstructions of Japanese gardens on private property. These books support the MBG's mandate of developing civic horticultural education, curating a connection between the experience of visiting the Japanese Garden and being able to recreate or restage the exotic 'drama' of Nakajima's design in your private home.

The process of selecting stones was central to the Garden's construction and it remains a critical feature. Ken Nakajima was based in Tokyo with his company Consolidated Garden Research, and he took several trips with company employees to Montreal during the garden's design, preparation, and installation periods preceding the 1988 inauguration. In November 1986, Nakajima visited Montreal to select the site at the Botanical Garden that would suit his design, and a field north of the rose garden was officially designated for the Japanese Garden. (Bourque 10) (Figures 9 & 10) During this visit, Nakajima began to discuss the importance of finding the right stones required for the garden's layout with the MBG staff. He returned to Tokyo for the winter and continued to write letters to the garden's staff emphasizing the importance of finding the "perfect kind of stone." (Bourque 11) As stones are the foundational element in Japanese garden design, they contribute to the "natural" appearance of the garden often denoted by the bodily metaphor of the garden's skeleton (Tono) in terms of visual and spatial support. The skeleton concept explains the importance of what Nakajima was looking for in his search, it was not a decorative boulder, it was an entire body of stones that would show geological unity in the large garden. When Nakajima returned to Montreal in July 1987, the selection process for the stones intensified with the MBG offering local samples and taking Nakajima on many tours of local quarries and mines around Montreal.

Figures 9 and 10. Two views of the field selected as the site of the Japanese Garden. Figure 10 looks south towards Olympic stadium; Figure 9 looks north in the opposite direction. Notably in Nakajima's designs he incorporated trees that were already present on the site, these trees are recognizable throughout the garden's installation process and in the current garden. 08.05.1987 (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Émile Jacqmain, MBG superintendent at the time, dramatically details Nakajima's meticulous process of stone selection in his essay 'Choosing Stones to Build the Japanese Garden' in the same 1988 issue of *Quatre-temps*. To emphasize the dramatic retelling, I have included substantial excerpts from his short essay that recounts the major steps of selection and installation of the peridotite stones that now anchor the garden. He recounts:

> Mr. Nakajima's visit last August was devoted to looking for the stones needed to build cascades, streams, bridges, banks and walls in the new Japanese Garden. A first visit to quarries around Montreal soon convinced Mr. Nakajima that the Montreal area had nothing interesting to offer: the stones are too eroded, too crumbly (limestone) or of the wrong shape for his purpose. Mr. Nakajima had hoped to find more recent formations of hard spiked stones or of a regular shape like basalt or other volcanic rock colonnades…. In the hope that he can find what he is looking for, we invited Mr. Nakajima on a tour of the Montreal Botanical Garden's mineral garden in order to introduce him to the geological resources of the region. Mr. Nakajima immediately settles on serpentine and particularly on chrysotile ores which display an interesting polymorphism. So we are on the way to the asbestos mining region. (26)

Jacqmain continues to dramatically describe several tours of local mines, and the eventual excitement of Nakajima when he finds a deposit of stones at a disused asbestos mine at Lac d'amiante in Thetford Mines appropriate for the garden:

> All of a sudden Mr. Nakajima shouts "STOP!" After the noise has died down and the dust settled, Mr. Verreault (Engineer and VP of LAB Chrysotile) explains to Mr. Nakajima that we are surrounded by scattered blocks of peridotite, or hydrated magnesium silicate…. Mr. Nakajima stoically listens to Tom Torizuka's translation of Mr. Verreault's words. He then examines a few specimens of the ore, coming and going on the huge piles with ever greater urgency. Suddenly, he comes rushing back towards the truck and, after shaking the gray dust from his hands, he solemnly declares: "That's good". What joy! Obviously happy for us, Mr. Verreault answers as a joke: "I could even sell you a lot of asbestos if you want!" (27)

In the late 1980s, asbestos was internationally acknowledged to cause lung cancer and had been widely mined and used in Quebec during the 20th Century as building insulation. Demand for asbestos had plummeted as it was banned across Canada – the Engineer is making a joke that nudges at the toxicity of what was extracted at this mine and his loss of mining fortunes. Asbestos is a fibrous mineral inside peridotite, which act as the "host stone," and the large peridotite rocks

in the garden are a by-product of the extraction process and likely still host asbestos fibres (which are not a human health risk bound in the stone). (Anthony) The article continues to describe Nakajima and his assistant Tom Torizuka selecting additional flat stones from the Hemmingford Ducharme quarry in the Kamouraska region for building materials, and then returning to Thetford Mines to precisely select "500 tones of stone and ore." (Jacqmain 27) From mid-September to mid-October, Nakajima, his son, another employee, and Torizuka arranged the rocks in the garden using cranes and tractors. In the final excerpt, Jacqmain continues with his dramatic retelling of the installation process:

> Using a 100 ton crane and high powered loading tractors, the construction moves quickly. I am amazed to see the ease and dexterity with which Mr. Nakajima supervises the work. I realize that all the carefully chosen stones fit together and can be perfectly superimposed. I still don't understand how they did it. As they work, team members discuss what they are doing and Mr. Nakajima sums up the situation at the end of each day. The way the team functions reminds me of the French "companions", a trade guild structured along the same line: in the center, an experienced and respected master round whom the companions rally. On the 14th of October, the fire department voluntarily answers our call and arrives at the site with its ultra-sophisticated water pumps to try priming the system. The water flow is progressively raised and recorded while everyone anxiously awaits to see the first overflow. Slowly the water oozes in the different interstices and its flow swells to create a beautiful scene that sparkles with hundreds of colours. It is an almost complete success. Thunderous applause greets this grandiose masterpiece and we are all extremely grateful to Mr. Nakajima and his dynamic team. (28)

Jacqman's account of the waterfall's installation imbues the event with drama, recounting how Nakajima and his crew intuitively transposed the rocks to the new garden and constructed the still functioning waterfall. The stones not only held importance for Nakajima's vision of the garden, but the substantial technical considerations and labour involved in the installation was a massive undertaking for the botanical garden. Retelling this installation as a dramatic feat of intuitive engineering, builds the performance and scenographic quality of the waterfall, it's the happy ending of a frustrating period between the institution and landscape architect retold by Desranleau and Jacobs. The area surrounding Montreal is full of scenic waterfalls, so one of the

ironies of this major installation is that the waterfall performs a local landscape, becoming even more believable and recognizable for the local visitor.

The *Bibliothèque du Jardin botanique de Montréal* maintains a substantial visual record of the Japanese Garden's construction and opening years (1987-1991) in its slide library, including many images of the elaborate installation process of the peridotite stones. These photographs show the ground preparations for the waterfall installation (Figure 11), transportation of the stones (Figures 12-16), the installation process featuring cranes (Figures 13-21), on the spot adjustments by Nakajima's assistants (Figures 22-25), and the small bricks in the pond that support the large stones (Figure 25)[1] eventually hidden by water in the completed garden (Figure 26). Figure 28 shows the layout of the stones in the garden without the additional plantings arranged during the fall of 1987; this image essentially shows the "skeleton" of the garden. Collectively, these photographs preserved by the *Bibliothèque* and City of Montreal show the scale of the installation process – which is easily overlooked by the garden's current presentation to the public as a lush and harmonious landscape. There are no photographs of the garden's construction are currently exhibited onsite; these photographs are only available in the archives and a selection published in the *Quatretemps* Spring 1988 magazine celebrating the garden's opening.

[1] The credit for finding this picture goes to Jin Motohashi, a Japanese researcher doing a year of research at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in 2023. (Motohashi) Jardin Botanique's head librarian Yoko Wakiyama introduced me to Motohashi's research, surprised to see me inquiring about Nakajima because he had been there weeks before doing the same thing. Motohashi published his blog towards the end of his Montreal stay and posted one of the photos of the rock holding structure inside the pond in his retelling of the garden's construction. Motohashi's blog series also features his trip to Thetford Mines, re-experiencing Nakajima's trail in Montreal. https://www.kaminotane.com/2023/02/03/22588/ Accessed: 28.09.2025.

Figure 11. Ground preparation for the installation of waterfall and garden, Jardin botanique de Montréal, 20.08.1987. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figure 12. Transportation of the peridotite stones, Jardin botanique de Montréal, 28.08.87. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figures 13 and 14. Transportation and unloading of the peridotite stones, Jardin botanique de Montréal, 28.08.87. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figures 15 and 16. Moving stones into the garden via crane, Jardin botanique de Montréal, 28.08.87. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figure 17. 03.09.1987, Figure 18. 09.09.1987, Moving stones into the garden via crane, Jardin botanique de Montréal. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figures 19 and 20. Moving stones into the garden via crane. In figure 20 Ken Nakajima is overseeing the positioning, Jardin botanique de Montréal, 25.09.87. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figure 21. Nakajima's assistants assessing the stones during the garden's installation, Jardin botanique du Montréal, 12.05.1988. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference Code: VM94-J0644-013)

Figures 22, 23, 24. Adjustments of the rocks by Nakajima's assistant during the construction of the Japanese Garden's waterfall, Jardin botanique de Montréal, October 1987. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference code: VM094-JC568-027, VM094-JC568-020, VM094-JC568-024)

Figure 25. Support structures for large stones placed in the pond at the top of the waterfall, 06.10.1987. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figure 26. The same pond at the top of the waterfall with the structures hidden by the water and the greenery filled out in the garden, *Espace pour la vie* Montréal, 19.09.2020.

Figure 27. Placed stones in the Japanese Garden before planting, overview of the Garden's 'skeleton', 14.10.87. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference code: VM094-JC568-034)

The stones continue to be a main feature in the Japanese Garden: accentuating the topography, serving as the structure for the waterfall, and providing visual and geological cohesion. The scale of the stone's installation shown in Figure 27 without the addition of plants, is the skeleton arranged by Nakajima, his assistants, and the MBG's engineers that set the stage for the cultural performance to come. *Espace pour la vie* no longer include the photographs of the stones' installation in the garden or pavilion, or on their current website. Architectural historian Jin Motohashi's blog series details parts of the garden's construction, and his research blog shows a growing international interest in the Garden's construction details and narrative. (Motohashi) Photos of the installation are publicly available by direct link only on an old MBG website version history that details the construction as part of the overall picture of the garden. (*Espace de*

la vie, “Fenêtres ouvertes sur le Jardins…”) My hunch is that the changing public access to images of the Garden’s construction shows an institutional change to the public promotion of the Garden, favouring its potential as calm and “Zen-like” to attract visitor as opposed to its excitement a public works project. The opening line of text on the current Japanese Garden’s website reads: “A Japanese garden is a special place, where harmony and tranquility invite contemplation.” (Espace pour la vie) The institution promotes a specific affect for visitors of the garden, who are invited to take on a tranquil emotional state during their visit. However, burying the enthusiastic narrative of the stone installation buries the specialized craft and labour that contributed to the foundation of the garden, and the part of the garden that will outlive the plants and people involved without massive intervention. The rocks and their installation are a vital part of the garden’s illusion, and almost forty years after the garden’s opening, the institution has shifted away from endorsing the ‘mega-project’ and into promoting an affected lifestyle experience lexically connected to spas, meditation retreats, and leisure culture.

Water

The sound of rushing water fills the garden, a dull roar amongst the winding paths. The waterfall is the source of the sound, gleaming in the sunlight of the warmer seasons. When visiting Montreal’s Japanese Garden, the central resting spot in the stroll garden is the sheltered gazebo directly in front of the pond and waterfall. The large gazebo, as opposed to the small gazebo on the north path, is surrounded by benches to allow visitors to take in the view and sound of the waterfall. The design of the waterfall looks like an ideal forest scene, with two cascading paths for the water flowing between a hillside of trees and plants, glimmering in the sunshine. The trees and plants move with the winds, but the water is always rushing downwards. The water circulates throughout the garden, creating small streams with miniature marshes, and ponds that collect the water. The surface of the main pond responds to the weather, patterning with rains, rippling with winds, and reflecting the sky and trees when the weather is calm.

The element of water in Japanese gardens expresses movement, it reveals traces of natural forces such as gravity, rain, and wind. Water and corresponding water features are focal points in gardens of different traditions, for example fountains, waterfalls, and ponds that are found in European and Islamic gardens. This is also the case in Nakajima’s Garden for the MBG; the

waterfall and large pond are the focal point of the stroll garden, which has a seating area designed to accommodate visitors pausing to take in the view. The waterfall, which combines the stone and water elements, is heavily promoted by *Espace pour la vie* as the garden's focal point and adds an audible sense of liveness, activity, and flow.

The pond and waterfall were critical parts of the Japanese Garden's design from the inception of the project. The *Bibliothèque du jardin botanique* has slides of three different plans depicting different visualizations of the garden centred around water features.[2] Two slides have architectural stamps of Nakajima's *Consolidated Garden Research*, the first of which depicts a naturalistic scene reminiscent of a swamp or boreal forest with a misty perimeter (Figure 28). Although the two other slides show more recognizable aerial plans for the garden (Figures 29 and 30), marked *1er plan* and *2eme plan*. Figure 28 came first in the archive's files, and I am deducing that it is an early design that works with the surrounding trees, integrating the water feature into the landscape, and replicating a field and forest scene that could be anywhere in Quebec. This subtle evidence of a planning process that incorporates familiar features of local landscapes challenges conventions of international Japanese gardens that export copies of traditional gardens of Kyoto. In this instance, the early version of Montreal's Japanese Garden blends into local landscapes by replicating a familiar natural attraction--a forest trail to discover and admire a waterfall deep in the woods.

[2] Due to the images being preserved on slides, the images appear blurry. The current images are the highest resolution achieved by the archivist at the Mediathèque and suffice to make the point of the subtle shifts in the design's development. In particular, the first plan is a rare initial vision of the garden critical for this research.

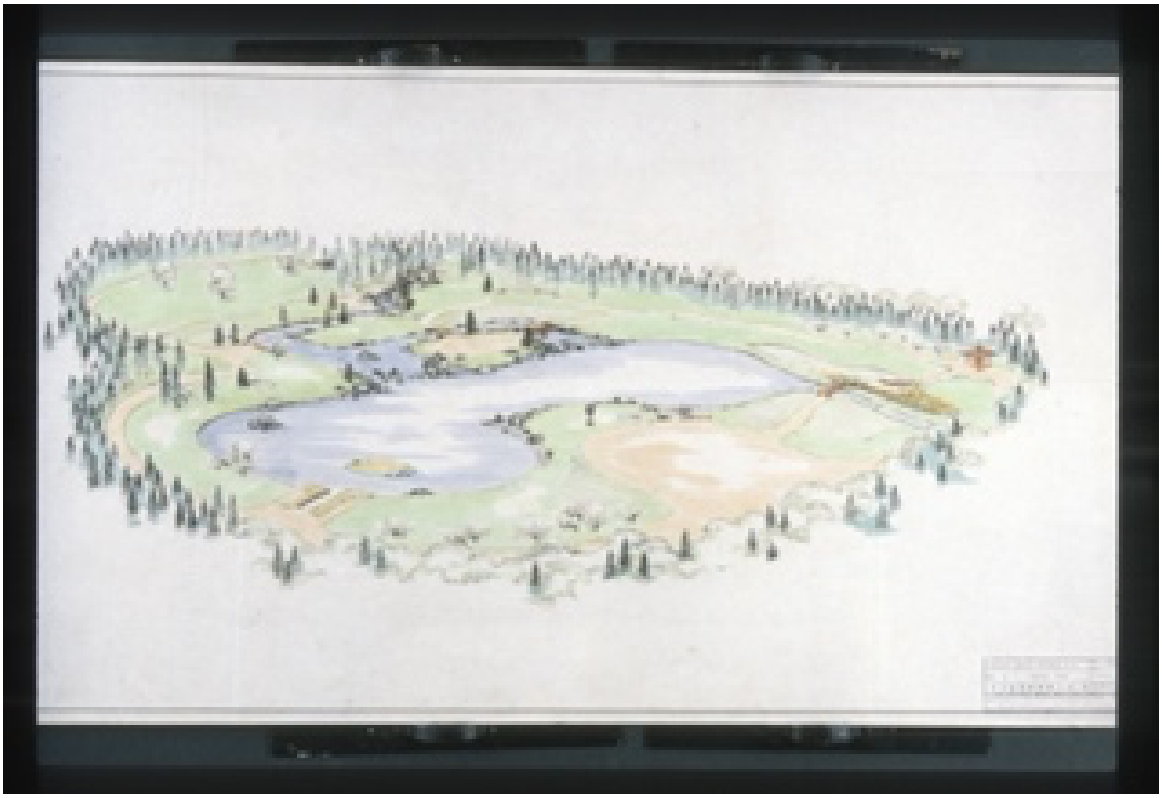

Figure 28. The first of three plans for the Montreal Botanical Garden's Japanese Garden. The stamp in the right corner has the insignia of Consolidated Garden Research, Ken Nakajima's company. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figure 29. The second of three design plans for Montreal's Japanese Garden, it is marked *1er Plan*. This map is stamped by Consolidated Garden Research showing an aerial view of the garden and a progression of the planning. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figure 30. The third map of the Japanese Garden in the slide library, it is marked 2eme PLAN. This map is a conventional aerial map that most closely resembles the current configuration of the garden. There is no stamp in the corner to attribute author. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

The presence of water is acknowledged in many books on Japanese Gardens as another critical element of Japanese Gardens. Takuma Tono's pamphlet *A Secret of Japanese Gardens* (1958) includes a section on water as garden material and lists several garden styles based on different functions of ponds (viewing, stroll, and boating). Tono states that water "…constitutes the chief ornament because it enlivens and revives the garden….Water receives its highest regard when it moves or make a sound." (Tono 34, grammatical error in the original) Tono highlights water's flowing characteristic in the garden, transcending the elemental function into sound. The Brooklyn Botanical Garden's *Japanese-Inspired Gardens: Adapting Japan's Design Traditions for Your Garden* (2001) contains several easy to read and unreferenced essays written for home gardeners on Japanese garden design concepts. One of these essays is entitled 'Water in the

Japanese Garden Style' (44-53) by Judy Glattstein, author of popular gardening books including *Flowering Bulbs for Dummies* (1998). Glattstein's essay offers solutions for bringing the water element into gardening projects in the "American home garden," including container gardens, larger suburban gardens, and even tips for constructing a dry rock garden. *Creating Japanese Gardens* (1989) diagrams and describes installation techniques for water features in Japanese gardens, providing tips to recreate the features including the positioning of stones for waterfalls, constructing streams and ponds, and an overview of popular pump systems. In terms of the water element, these DIY projects become more ambitious, encouraging people to construct ornamental water features which takes more skill and interference with plumbing. The home waterfall then becomes its own repository of skill, experience, and aspiration, a miniature homage to both its natural occurrence in local forests and its feat of technical construction in the Japanese Garden.

Water is a primary element in Japanese gardens and is symbolically linked with the stone element through its presence and absence. The material presence of the rock-lined waterfall and rippling pond and the illusion of waves in the dry garden courtyard of the Japanese Garden Pavillion, are examples of this elemental duality. The link between water and stone is further heightened by the selection and setting of stones for the purpose of waterfalls. Ponds, waterfalls, and streams are common in Japanese Gardens, with the *Sakuteiki* devoting significant passages to the function and styles of waterfalls and streams. (Takei and Keane 169–183) The opening sentence of the Waterfalls section states: "First, one must choose the Waterfall Stone. A smooth stone that appears to have been cut is uninteresting….it should be made of mountain stones with rough surfaces." (Takei and Keane 169) The section then goes on to describe how the "Waterfall Stone" must be fit with "Bracketing Stones," then clay and soil firmly packed around the junction, and the particular style of falling water left to the preference of the builder. (Takei and Keane 169) *Creating Japanese Gardens* names and diagrams the stones that make up a waterfall

construction (the mirror stone, flanking stones, base stones, and water-dividing stones), and emphasizes the possibility of patterns and sounds in waterfall constructions. (Crocker 43) The relation of stones and water in Japanese garden design is emphasized and explained in both traditional texts on Japanese gardens and recent DIY manuals, mixing symbolic representation, sound features, and visual movement.

Ken Nakajima echoes Takuma Tono's description of water as a source of movement in the Montreal Garden's design in his essay for *Quatre-temps* magazine. He writes:

> Because rainfall is an important element in Japanese scenery, water plays a great role in the landscaping of a Japanese garden. Water is very useful in depicting nature. It can be stored in ponds, released in streams and dropped as in a waterfall. Natural beauty can be expressed by the wind making ripples on the sunlit surface of the water; streams can be enjoyed as the water changes and takes on various forms. A waterfall with its constant noise, spray and water variations expresses natural form, movement and changes. When water and rocks are combined, the viewer is fascinated by the unending expression of beauty. (Nakajima, "Les Jardins Japonais" 17)

Nakajima completes this paragraph acknowledging that the combination of water and rocks in the waterfall that is vital to the aesthetics and elements of the Montreal Garden. Furthermore, Nakajima points to water as a crucial element in the representation of nature. The essay continues to discuss the role of the trees already present in the garden to decide the height of the hill and waterfall, the small hill's height and the shape of the waterfall were set to respect the limitations of the trees in the final design. (Figure 31) Nakajima expresses his commitment to beauty in the garden's installation, using water as a key element to achieve constant movement using the water element.

Figure 31. Waterfalls and small hill at the start of the summer season, Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* Montréal, 19.06.2023.

The same issue of *Quatretemps* features an essay by *Jardin Botanique* landscape architect Gaétan Bilodeau, that references the general function of the water element in Japanese gardens. In this essay, Bilodeau expresses a dated orientalist attitude supported by the institution. The opening sentence of the essay asks: "Who has never dreamt of seeing the oriental sun rising against a calm pond encased in the harmonious composition of a natural landscape?" (Bilodeau 30) In this essay, Bilodeau points to main components of the garden being made up of "light, water and space." (Bilodeau 31) In regards to water, he notes that the falls and pond are central to the spatial design complimented by the two buildings positioned on the edges of the pond, and he emphasizes the importance of the streams carrying water throughout the garden. (Bilodeau 31) This issue of *Quatretemps* continually acknowledges the importance of water in traditional Japanese garden design in essays by different authors titled 'Harmonious Encounter Between Man and Nature,' 'The Influence of Japanese Style on Residential Gardening,' and an overview

of ‘Traditional and Contemporary Japanese Gardens,’ which repeatedly refer to water’s mystical and flowing characteristics. (La Société d’animation du Jardin et de l’Institut botaniques de Montréal (SAJIB)) The exotic appeal and undefined spiritual promise of Japanese gardens appear in the essays of the Spring 1988 *Quatretemps*, most pointedly in reference to the water element.

During my fieldwork, the most significant maintenance task related to the water element that I accidentally observed was the draining of the pond in November 2021, as the nightly temperatures in Montreal were rapidly declining. (Figures 32-35) As I walked to the Garden that afternoon, a massive humming like a power generator was echoing throughout the *Jardin botanique,* and I was surprised to find the Japanese Garden as the source. The main water feature, which includes both the waterfall and the pond, functions by use of a pump mechanism and piping which requires draining for the winter to limit damage due to freezing. The empty pond and exposed membrane can be seen in Figure 32. This maintenance task seems relatively banal in terms of preparation for Montreal’s extreme winter temperatures, sometimes below -30ºC, but this task reveals a key part of the staging and signification of the garden’s “natural beauty.” Water is implicated in the Japanese Garden’s “artificiality,” and its water system exposes the contradictions embedded in the garden – that its natural beauty is fake on an industrial scale. The waterfall and pond require continuous seasonal maintenance to the point of completely emptying the pond by massive pumps before the winter, in contrast to the sublime presence of the waterfall and pond during the warmer months. The peaceful calm transmitted by the “natural beauty” of the waterfall relies on the industrial capabilities of pump trucks and outdoor plumbing systems, which disturbs the central piece of scenography in the Japanese Garden’s performance of beauty.

Figures 32, 33, and 34. Draining of the ponds for the winter, Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie Montréal*, 03.11.2021.

Figure 35. Trucks draining of the Japanese Garden's pond. The large metallic tanker to contain the water is attached to the pick-up truck trailer. Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* Montréal, 03.11.2021.

Plants

Trees, shrubs, and perennials change shape and colour throughout the growing season in Montreal (approximately April to October). The season begins with the browns and greens of the wet early spring and shifts into the accented colours of rhododendrons and flowering trees of spring and early summer. The early summer sees the blooming of perennial stands including Japanese irises, hydrangeas, peonies, day lilies, and various ground covers. The garden's colour scheme shifts to a dominantly green garden over the high summer months. Then, the fall features a major display of colour in the trees before the leaves drop and the garden goes into a period of dormancy during winter. The winter is characterized by a blanket of snow, broken up by evergreens and spindly bare trees. The seasonal changes in the Japanese Garden transform the garden on an almost weekly basis and reveal the dramatic shifts of Montreal's climate.

The botanical features of Ken Nakajima's Montreal Garden have been a visual highlight and a point of controversy since its installation in 1988. Nakajima organized the garden's layout to respect the trees already on site, and after arranging the stones and installing the water features, added many flowering perennial plants for the garden's inauguration as a homage to the Botanical Garden. The quantity of flowering plants in Nakajima's garden was unconventional from the perspective of the Montreal Botanical Garden, which anticipated a more traditional Japanese garden design replicating a temple garden and was concerned about the popular perception of the garden as recognizably Japanese (Desranleau and Jacobs). In comparison with conventions of Western horticulture, which emphasizes geometric designs with plants and arranges garden beds to show-off flower varietals and unique cultivars, plants in traditional Japanese gardens tend to be subdued in colour to create a 'natural harmony' with other elements in the garden. The subdued colour scheme of Japanese gardens is reinforced by representations of Japanese gardens in popular literature and do-it-yourself guides in the *Biblioteque du jardin botanique*, except for a series of flower guides in the Japanese language. Scholars Josée Desranleau and Peter Jacobs wrote an article in 2009 on the "Conception and Reception" of the Montreal Japanese Garden, contrasting Nakajima's original design with the changes and replanting that took place after 1988 and altered the garden to a more monochromatically green

Zen-style garden that conformed to the MBG's expectations (Desranleau and Jacobs). This article informed my observations of the garden, where I tracked the seasonal changes and blooming patterns of both trees and perennial plants. (Figures 36 and 37) Because of its location in a botanical garden and the significance of plants in Western horticulture, the plants in the garden beds of the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* became a subject of scrutiny and debate around cultural authenticity. (Desranleau and Jacobs)

General texts on Japanese gardens downplay the botanical element of the garden, a contrast with principles of conventional Western and European gardens that focus designs on plants and architecture. In these texts, trees are often identified as the main botanical element, as opposed to perennial or annual plants. The *Sakuteiki* in translation mentions very little about plants but includes a small section on trees which detail the significance of a tree's orientation in relation to other landscape features such as hills, trees, and features of a house such as gates and property shape. (Takei and Keane 199–200) The book's translators wrote an extensive introduction that briefly mentions the importance of plantings in Heian period gardens which included "a variety of perennial grasses and flowers." (Takei and Keane 21) Former head of the Japanese Garden Research Association Isao Yoshikawa starts his Japanese and English language book *Elements of Japanese Gardens* (1990) with the category "Planting" and a short section on "Autumn Foliage." This section highlights maple trees for their changing colours and unique shape, making a distinction between seasonal aesthetics of coniferous and deciduous trees in the urban environment. Yoshikawa argues that "…nothing surpasses verdant trees in making us feel close to nature…" claiming that conifers are generally increasing in cities and deciduous trees

Figures 36 & 37. Comparison photos of view from inside the main gazebo in the Japanese garden. Figure 36 looks out onto the early spring garden 20.04.2019, while Figure 37 shows the garden on 07.07.2022 with visitors at the start of the summer season. Note that the garden is open to visitors throughout the year. Both photographs taken at the Japanese Garden, *Espace pour la vie*, Montréal.

are decreasing due to their sensitivity to air pollutants. (Yoshikawa 12) Trees and hedges are named as key parts of "urban afforestation," their planting is increasingly supported by government initiatives, (Yoshikawa 13) and the section goes on to highlight mosses, undergrowth, bamboo, lawns, and trimming practices for small bushes. Takuma Tono's pamphlet references plants in the final pages, after numerous garden styles, details on fences, stone lanterns, and pathways. He writes that coniferous trees are the main botanical material in Japanese gardens, embellished by deciduous trees, and that plants are generally used to "bring out a natural representation of forest and woodland." (Tono 62) Representation is an important component of Japanese garden design as seen in the use of illusion and perspective, and in the extreme use of representation in a dry garden where stones are a visual metaphor for water. In the case of the Montreal Garden, representation is expressed in several ways, including the intent of Nakajima's design to more closely resemble a local forest scene while celebrating the diversity of plants in a botanical garden. General texts on Japanese gardens typically downplay the presence of plants, instead these texts favour substantial passages about stones, water, and lanterns.

The DIY books in the *Biblioteque de jardin botanique* dedicate more substantial sections to plants, offering aesthetic guidelines and even short encyclopedias of Japanese plants and suitable alternatives. The Japanese Garden Society of Oregon's *Oriental Gardening* (1996) devotes the majority of a 224-page book to a "Plant Selector" which lists different plants and their functionality, grouped by plant type. The Plant Selector opens with a section on "Evergreen Trees and Shrubs," describing their functions in the garden as blocking unwanted structures and views, positioning trees to be reflected in the water feature, and as a means to retain colour in the garden during the winter. (The Japanese Garden Society of Oregon 40) This book also contains sidebars entitled "Viewpoints" composed of direct quotes from American horticulturalists,

including a sidebar on “Flowers in Oriental Gardens” (The Japanese Garden Society of Oregon 128) The American horticulturalists quoted in this section represent gardens in Texas, California, Minnesota, Denver and Missouri, and consistently acknowledge the presence of flowering trees but err on the side of subtly using flowers in the garden. Henry Painter from the Fort Worth Botanic Garden is quoted:

> In the Fort Worth Japanese Garden, crabapples, iris, redbuds, cherries, Mexican plum, hawthorns, irises, and peonies signal the arrival of spring, a time of renewal. We avoid summer flowers and annuals at any time. We use chrysanthemums for a festival in the fall. Flowers detract from a restful feeling that is so important in a Japanese Garden. (The Japanese Garden Society of Oregon 128)

This quotation and the several others grouped with it reinforce a perception of flowers as a constrained and minimal component of Japanese gardens, although this sidebar is situated in an extensive reference chapter on plants, reinforcing a view with the authority of Western horticulturalists that flowers in Japanese gardens are visual distraction. In Chevron’s comprehensive guide to Japanese Gardens, there are guidelines for “appropriate plant use” that offer tips on “random” planting (e.g. planting in threes and fives, instead of even groupings) to achieve a sense of naturalism. (Crocker 74) This guide also emphasizes the use of plants to create illusions in the garden, using bushes and shrubs to recall the shape of hills and mountains, and experimenting with illusions of depth by placing taller plants in the foreground and shorter in the background as a way of creating a “forced diminished perspective.” (Crocker 75-79) These techniques build illusion and depth in the garden, expressing the concept of representation highlighted by Tono–the garden performs natural phenomena. The book entitled *A Japanese Touch For Your Garden* (1980), by authors Kiyoshi Seike, Masanobu Kudō, and David H. Engel, gives detailed technical instructions on how to build elements of Japanese gardens such as waterfalls, bridges, bamboo fences (including knotting techniques), and an example aerial map for laying out plants and trees in a garden. (Seike et al. 70–71) The book includes a page that lists

plants such as bamboo, low shrubs, and mosses as the ideal plantings for Japanese gardens, which are notably monochromatically green. (Seike et al. 69) The book also offers succinct techniques for pruning and shape training trees to replicate trees weathered by climactic conditions on mountaintops or shorelines, which "…gets to the very heart of Japanese gardening, for it is these "artificial" human methods – like shaping – that develop the garden's primaeval naturalism and air of permanence." (Seike et al. 72) Here natural phenomena are performed in the garden by trees that represent aged examples of trees' growth patterns in adverse weather. These DIY guides appeal to North American audiences by emphasizing botanical elements of Japanese gardens, often including encyclopedic-style entries on specific plants for home garden projects, reinforcing the perception of Japanese gardens as limited for flowers and bright colours, while outlining techniques to replicate the construction and maintenance of Japanese gardens.

In the case of the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* in 2023, the garden contains a series of distinct areas, complemented by different plantings of trees and perennials. The didactic panel for 'Plants' reads:

> Plants are the garden's third treasure after stone and water. But the Japanese Garden is by no means a collection of Japanese plants. The ones here were chosen for their hardiness and resemblance to those used in Japan.
>
> Each season has its own special charms. In spring, the magnolias, flowering crabapples, rhododendrons, cherry trees and other beauties burst into bloom. Summer is more sober, a time of contrasts obtained by careful pruning and the use of plants with different types of foliage. In the trees, shrubs and perennials are ablaze with colour. Winter highlights the elegant silhouettes of the bare trees and the striking contrast of the snow on the conifers. (Text from panel onsite, Figure 38)

This text acknowledges both the botanical diversity and question of cultural authenticity embedded in the garden's plant collection. *Espace pour la vie* promotes the garden's narrative of seasonal change and casts the desire for a resemblance to Japan – which has been reinforced by subsequent maintenance choices. (Desranleau and Jacobs) On the eastern edge of the garden is a

Figure 38. Didactic panel for *Les vegetaux*/Plants, *Espace pour la vie* Montreal, 06.10.2022.

substantial stand of tall pine trees with dry needles covering the ground. Beside and running under the pine trees, are swathes of late summer flowering perennial hydrangeas and black cohosh, and another swath of Japanese irises that runs along one of the streams. The Japanese Garden Pavilion on the south border of the garden is surrounded by several different gardens: the tea garden with trees and low-lying green perennials, the bonsai garden set in a courtyard open in the summer months to display bonsais on pedestals, the entrance of the Pavilion with highly pruned and definitively shaped trees, and the Kare Sansui style garden added in 1995. The strolling garden, which connects the pathway from the back of the pavilion, takes visitors through the perennial stands of Japanese irises and hydrangeas into a small orchard of crab-apple trees. Short shrubs such as Japanese flowering quince can be found along the pathway towards the waterfall, nestled in amongst trees that flower in the spring, more Japanese iris stands, and the occasionally peony. A pathway leads behind the waterfall along the tree-lined border shared with a forested edge of the First Nations Garden. Within the borders of the Japanese Garden, the path behind the waterfall during the late spring has flowering plants such as the yellow flowering perennial creeping Oregon grape, red and white flowered bishop's hat, a spattering of purple flowered grape hyacinth, red baneberry, Canadian serviceberry trees, pink flowering magnolia trees, and rhododendrons. The greenery along this pathway also includes shaped boxwoods, maple trees, Schwerin pine, grey birch, and eastern hemlock trees. Many low-lying perennials are planted around the waterfall, pond, and streams trailing out of the pond. Japanese primrose can be found there, as well as a Japanese plant hairy toad lily, and a stand of bright red and yellow daylilies at the foot of the large bridge. A Katsura tree, a tree species native to Japan, also grows at the low-lying edge of the pond, surrounded by daylilies and columbines. The plants in the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* are diverse and include hearty varieties of trees and perennials native to North America. The original planting included "71 taxa of flowering

perennials, of which only 23 bloomed in the spring; the remaining 48 taxa were summer-flowering perennials,…which are not particularly typical or redolent of Japan." (Desranleau and Jacobs 203–04) The list of plants included in my description for the garden in 2023 is not exhaustive, but it gives an impression of the breadth of planting currently maintained in the garden.

Ken Nakajima's design for the Montreal Botanical Garden exemplified his approach to gardens and landscape architecture, during a period in the 20th Century where public interest in Japanese Gardens was matched by the available capital to build them. Nakajima is recognized for his experimental approach to Japanese Gardens, which was informed by a traditional training, but sought a new style that simultaneously recognized and referenced the "natural scenery" of a garden's location. (Hosono and Hoshi 4) In Montreal, Nakajima recognized the location of the garden within a Quebec/Canadian botanical garden as integral to the construction and design. Desranleau and Jacobs point to Nakajima's description of his use of flowers in the Montreal Garden in his essay for *Quatretemps* 'The Japanese Garden of the Montreal Botanical Garden.' He subtly defends his choice to include flowers in the Montreal Garden:

> Because I had been working of the City of Moscow's Japanese Garden until last year, I was able to accumulate considerable experience both in the design of gardens in cold regions and as to the types of plants that can be used. The flowering trees and plants are planted in sunny places protected from the wind. Although I would have liked to use as many Japanese plants as I could to convey a Japanese feeling, the possibilities were limited owing to climactic conditions.
>
> The gardens one may visit when in Japan particularly in Tokyo, have very few flowers. This is because they are mostly temple gardens, and flowers are considered a distraction from meditation. However, the Japanese Garden in Montreal is located with the Botanical Garden so it is proper for it to have many flowers. I have therefore actively used flowers and have incorporated their colours in the design, in such a way as to bring out a serene Japanese feeling.
>
> The earliest Japanese literature, called "Manyoshu", is an anthology of poems that had been handed down orally and was first recorded in the early 8th century. Many of these poems are related to flowers. The flowers that appeared in these poems are planted here, so please enjoy them as you stroll through the garden. (Nakajima, 'The Japanese Garden of the Montreal Botanical Garden' 18)

Nakajima's garden was a sophisticated confluence of botanical references, which selected plants to favor the climactic conditions over an exact reproduction of Japanese plantings and drew inspiration from early Japanese poetry. Desranleau and Jacobs identify Nakajima's use of flowers as "reminiscent of the prototypes of the Edo Garden, although they also recall the prototypes of the aristocratic era that included many flowering taxa in their design." (201) The article further acknowledges the history of change, addition, and adaptation in Japanese gardens, citing Günter Nitschke who details on-going contributions of generations of master gardeners in the Edo period, and the responsive changes to "cultural forces" that played out in Japanese garden design

Figure 39. Unpacking of rare Japanese plants shipped to Montreal for the planting of the Japanese garden, Montreal Botanical Garden, 07.04.1988. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference code: VM094-J0631-0030)

between historical periods or eras. (215) The MBG did not maintain the original garden's design due to a combination of natural changes that occurred in the young and growing garden and the institutional direction that the MBG supported.

A detailed history of the Japanese Garden's construction can be found in Desranleau and Jacobs article entitled: 'From conception to reception: transforming the Japanese garden in the Montreal Botanical Garden.' The authors substantiate their claim that the MBG, through a combination of problems attributed to a tight construction schedule, cultural misunderstandings, and institutional desire for a Japanese garden to more closely resemble a traditional temple garden, substantially changed Nakajima's design. Desranleau and Jacobs track several steps in the construction phase of the Montreal Garden that compromised conditions. First, the time allotted for construction was reduced. Nakajima requested four years to complete the construction and the MBG granted two years within the limited Montreal season, which resulted in some rapid planting in spots with poor drainage and the eventual loss of rare plants (205). Images of importing and planting rare plants exist in the archive of the *Biblioteque du Jardin botanique*, and Figure 39 shows the unpacking of some of the plants that had been shipped to Montreal from Japan. Second, the budget for the pond was restricted. Originally designed with concrete, the pond was eventually lined with a "waterproof membrane" at a shallower depth which had both a visual impact and a reduction in the longevity of the pond (205). Third, Desranleau and Jacobs cite conversations with the original MBG horticulturalist of the Japanese Garden Jean-Maurice Lévesque (1986-1992), who describes an almost "improvisational" approach by Nakajima to the construction. (205) This created a source of frustration for the MBG workers who typically transpose a design directly onto the landscape from plans. (205) And finally, the authors also recount discussions with David Easterbrooke, head horticulturalist of the bonsai collection, who indicated there was miscommunication about access to available trees for planting in the garden.

(205) Nakajima was familiar with a system in Japan where botanical gardens maintain tree nurseries, and when this wasn't available, he expressed a desire to take trees from the wilderness. (205) The MBG responded that it was not possible to extract trees from other places, which was a source of confusion for Nakajima and his team. (205) These challenges during the installation process were frustrations for the people involved and set the conditions for some of the changes in the garden to take place.

Although the Japanese Garden maintains colourful pockets of flowering perennials, the replanting that took place after the 1988 inauguration reduced the number of flowering plants and subsequent impact of this part of the design. These changes began with the removal of all the annual plants and many 'summer-flowering perennials' that began in the early 1990s. (206) Figure 40 shows a view of the original planting looking towards the waterfall in 1989 (the year

Figure 40. View towards the waterfall with original planting, Japanese Garden at the Montreal Botanical Garden, 20.06.1989. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference code: VM094-J0823-087)

after the garden's opening), that includes vividly coloured flowering perennials. Desranleau and Jacobs include a quotation from a personal communication with Jean-Maurice Lévesque, where he states:

> After a few years, I think that the MBG Direction wanted to return the garden to traditionalism. People started to read, and said, "How come this doesn't look like a traditional garden?" So we started to remove colours, to make it a little more monochromatic. (206)

Louis Rinfret, the subsequent and recently retired horticulturalist of the garden, is also credited with some of the botanical changes, including temporarily replacing an infested stand of Japanese irises (*Iris ensata*) with Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum*) which was positively received for its monochromatic appearance and became permanent (206). It is important to note that significant areas of Japanese iris's remain in the garden, as can be seen in Figure 41, a photograph taken in the summer of 2023. Rinfret can be seen in a 2018 YouTube video produced by *Espace pour la vie* introducing the Japanese Garden and recounting two major changes: an area of Oriental spruces frozen over the course of a winter replanted with Pachysandra (a green perennial ground cover) (*Portrait of a Horticulturalist….,* 2:43); and the replanting of the pond islands in the early 2000s from low-lying junipers and daylilies to a group of trained pine trees that look wind battered and were "…symbolic of longevity." (3:15) In Figures 42 and 43, Rinfret and other Japanese gardeners who were not regular employees of the MBG, are photographed replanting the islands. The addition of the pines is a significant change in the garden's aesthetic as they became a vertical focal point in the pond island, in contrast with Nakajima's original design that emphasizes horizontality. These changes, some out of necessity to deal with damage from weather and infestation and some out of aesthetic desire, altered the original design to conform with the institutional expectation that the garden appear more like a mono-chromatic temple garden that performs as recognizably Japanese.

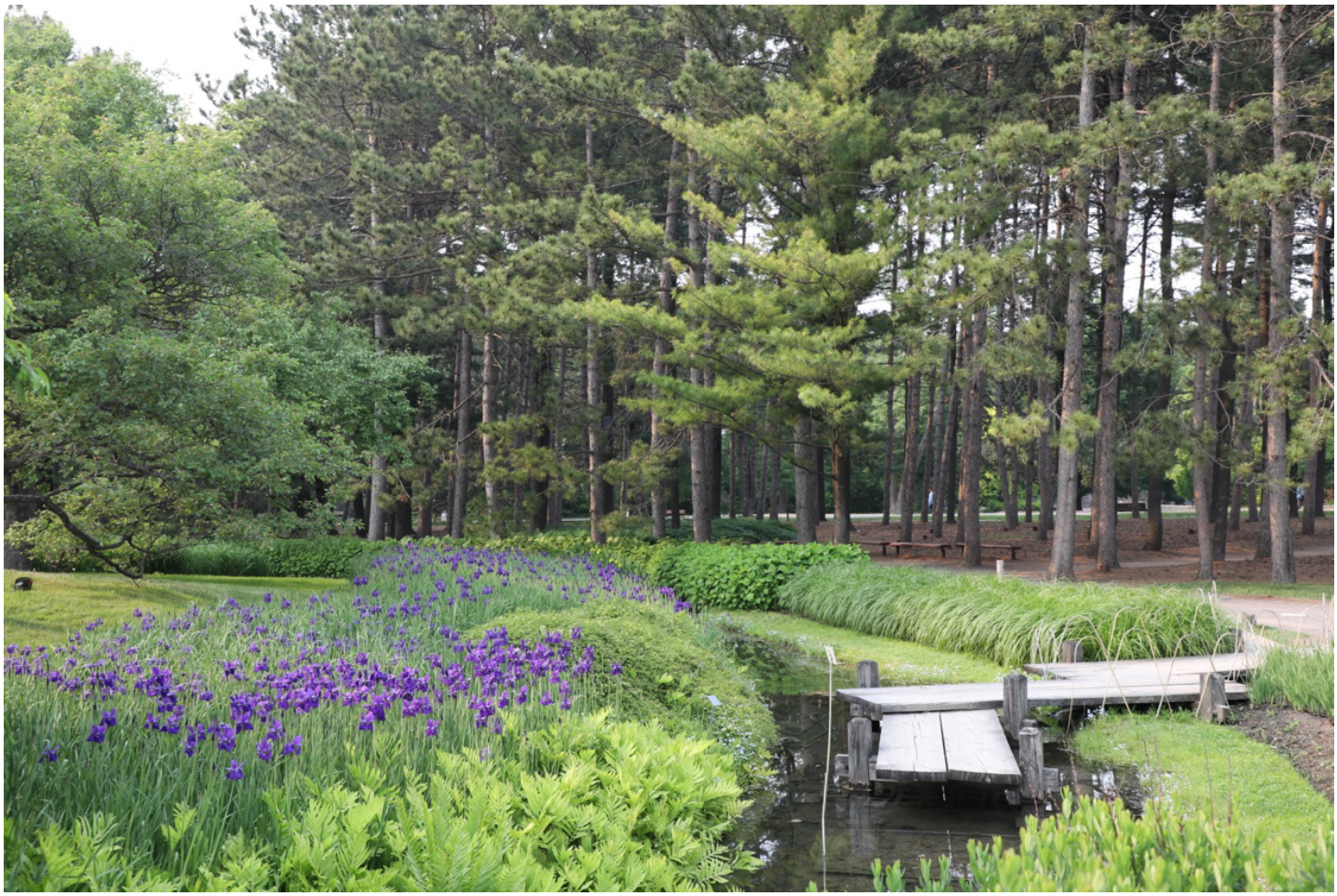

Figure 41. Irises in bloom in the Japanese Garden, *Espace pour la vie* Montreal, 05.06.2023.

Figures 42 and 43. Louis Renfret and visiting crew replanting the pond's central island with trained pine trees, Japanese Garden at the Montreal Botanical Garden, 1991. (Photo credit: Archives – Jardin botanique de Montréal)

Figures 44 and 45. The Kare Sansui style garden at the pathway to the pavilion in the Japanese Garden, which was added to the garden in 1995. (Desranleau and Jacobs) Figure 45 shows the garden atypically in-bloom during the 2023 season, Japanese Garden, *Espace pour la vie* Montreal, 18.08.2021 and 22.06.2023.

Further additions include the 1995 redesign of the main entrance path with the installation of a Kare Sansui style dry garden, surrounded by benches, a redesign led by Claude Gagné the volunteer head of the Japanese Garden and Pavilion Foundation. (Desranleau and Jacobs 209) The Kare Sansui garden is pictured in Figures 44 and 45, taken at two different periods of the season in different years. In the early summer of 2023, for the only time during four-years of observations, the moss in the garden bloomed a pink flower that turned the moss carpet completely pink, countering the institutional plan for a monochromatically green garden. A Peace Bell Monument offered by the city of Hiroshima to commemorate the 1945 bombing was added to a central position in the garden in 1998. (209) Desranleau and Jacobs point to the change in ambiance brought by the additions of the Kare Sansui garden and Peace Memorial that

altered Nakajima's vision of a celebratory contemporary Japanese garden filled with the plants and flowers of a botanical garden to a more sombre and contemplative space. (210) The authors point to the quasi-spirituality written into the promotional materials and didactic panels of the garden, that again reinforce the spiritual and symbolic encounters for the visitors. (211) They also highlight the outright revisions in these didactic panels to the garden's intent, finding a quotation that states: "Summer brings a more sober landscape, all dressed in shades of green. Flowers are used sparingly, so as not to distract visitors and disturb meditation." (211) Although this directly contradicts Nakajima's intention, I could not find this exact text in the garden, which means that the text has been updated or was incorrectly quoted by the authors. The text from the 'Plants' panel states: "Summer is more somber, a time of contrasts obtained by careful pruning and the use of plants with different types of foliage." Ultimately, the replanting of areas of the garden with green groundcovers and cloud pruned pine trees, accompanied by what Desranleau and Jacobs describe as a change in ambiance of the garden from celebratory to somberly contemplative, demonstrates how plants in the frame of the botanical garden are informed by institutional directives.

Espace pour la vie supports the continued maintenance of the garden through the continual appointment of head horticulturalists for the Japanese Garden, as well as added staff for tasks that require more labour. During the early part of the season (May-June) I saw several of the critical pruning tasks taking place including yearly maintenance on the pines planted on the pond's central island (Figure 46), the pruning of maples in the main entrance, and extended periods of weed removal in the beds and lawns. In these cases, the work was done by either a pair or a team, incorporated ladder work, and pruning trees three-dimensionally. From late June and throughout the summer there is a substantial effort dedicated to weeding, often assembling groups of 6-8 gardeners to assist in larger lawn areas.

Figure 46. Maintenance of the pines planted in the central island of the pond, Japanese Garden Espace pour la vie Montreal, 26.05.2022.

Tree and bush maintenance take places throughout the summer, and arborists assist with maintenance of the pine tree stand. The garden promotes the specialized horticultural maintenance that takes place within its boundaries, including images of working gardeners shown by on-site animateurs. Figure 47 shows one of the garden's animateurs holding a photo on a paddle of two gloved hands breaking off the tips of new growth on a pine tree – a maintenance task specific to pine trees in the Japanese Garden. The photo was shown as part of a series of photos of different happenings within the garden, including a demonstration using an empty picture frame to highlight the tableaux quality of the garden. Both the well-staffed maintenance at the garden and the animateur's demonstration demonstrate a continued institutional production of the garden. The labour of the staff is primarily directed at the garden's botanical component, and it is an important part of mythologizing the garden.

Figure 47. Animateur of the Japanese garden holding a detailed photograph of tree pruning by gardeners, Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, 18.08.2021.

Desranleau and Jacobs map out institutional disagreements surrounding the authenticity of the Montreal Japanese Garden and questions regarding maintenance practices that prioritize the botanical element of the Garden. Japanese Gardens around the world face similar challenges regarding public "reception" and cohesive maintenance. In 2007, the Japan Institute of Landscape Architecture published a report on Japanese Gardens outside of Japan and compiled a list of gardens constructed with private or public Japanese financial and technical support. (Suzuki et al.) The authors and committees highlight some of the central concerns of garden construction and maintenance outside of Japan, including divergence from the original design. There are distinct traditions and protocols of garden maintenance in Japan that don't exist in other countries and cultural situations. Many gardeners responsible for the maintenance of traditional gardens in Japan inherit the position, people even inherit the responsibility for pruning specific trees, and this is distinct from the North American context where people train as gardeners and horticulturists through combinations of education, employment, and experience. Although the Japan Institute of Landscape Architecture's report does not directly address questions of maintenance in the Montreal Garden, it surveys common challenges and cultural misinterpretations happening in international Japanese gardens. Shigeo Fukuhara's report 'The Japanese Garden outside of Japan' is informed by his experience with Kew Garden's Japanese Garden construction, the restoration of a Japanese garden in National Trust Tatton Park, UK, the Rothschild Museum in France, and general maintenance on Japanese Gardens in the UK, Germany, and South America. (Suzuki 39) Fukuhara names the central challenges for maintenance as the upkeep of facilities (fences, information signs, paths, gates, lanterns, etc.), tree care, and the alteration of Japanese gardens that can happen as a result of local tastes. (Suzuki 39) Fukuhara advocates for Japanese involvement in the maintenance of Japanese gardens abroad to consider the working conditions of the gardens and general acceptance of

overseas gardeners, acknowledging the enthusiasm for maintenance by local staff, the preparation of a text or video manual, an annual maintenance schedule for each garden, and general and internet-based support centres for Japanese gardens. Takuhiro Yamada's following report on the same subject 'The Japanese Garden Outside of Japan' makes recommendations for maintenance in Japanese gardens in two forms: daily maintenance such as watering plants, and yearly maintenance such as pruning and tree care—often a challenge for local staff, which risks the loss of original shape and design of the trees. (Suzuki et al. 42) Yamada gives examples of maintenance practices occurring in Japanese gardens that exist within urban parks and diplomatic facilities, including a park in London that originally employed Japanese gardeners for the construction of a commemorative garden with maintenance performed by local staff and visits from Japanese gardeners every five years. (Suzuki et al. 42) The garden faced several maintenance challenges including: the misplacement of a concise maintenance manual in the first five years, turnover of local staff, and plant growth differing from original predictions which led to a change in species. (Suzuki et al. 42) The recommendation of the report was to establish a general association available to assist with the maintenance of Japanese gardens abroad, more readily available training in Japanese pruning techniques, dispatching Japanese gardeners for collaborations with local gardeners, and preparation and commitment to long-term maintenance when Japanese gardens are constructed. (Suzuki et al. 43–44) These action points aim to update and revise maintenance practices in Japanese gardens and generates questions about the living reality of a Japanese garden – it is not a static construction project and requires long-term maintenance of intricate landscapes.

The cross-cultural misunderstandings combined with the ownership and responsibility of continued maintenance required by *Espace pour la vie*, makes the Japanese Garden a complicated landscape performance. Desranleau and Jacobs emphasize that MBG essentially functioned as a

client of Nakajima's Consolidated Garden Research company and made changes in the Garden to achieve its ambition of drawing visitors and tourists to a quasi-exotic location. In its goal to serve and draw the Montreal public to the garden, the MBG ultimately underestimated the capacity for the public to critically engage with Nakajima's innovative and celebratory Japanese garden that challenged conventional expectations. The maintenance support in the Montreal Garden remains consistent and visible, showing institutional support for the Garden as a major attraction in the botanical garden. But both the emphasis on exoticism and the assertion of ownership mean that the garden is ultimately beholden to the institutional direction of *Espace pour la vie*. The choices to remodel and replant areas of the garden start to replicate acts of what Edward Said would define as *Orientalism*, notably the description of the way that landscapes are controlled and maintained as part of colonial enterprises:

> It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographic distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, but by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world …. (Said 12)

As plants require the most consistent maintenance in the Montreal Garden, it is possible to acknowledge that generating a "different or alternative and novel world" (12) is happening through garden maintenance, projecting a hybridization of Japanese and Canadian ideas of gardens. During the pandemic, the garden was extremely busy, full of people taking selfies. (Figures 48 and 49) And although the activities of visitors are infused with leisure, in effect, the 21st Century visitors to the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* become the cultural producers of the garden. The ubiquity of the smartphone camera to share images and geolocation, becomes part of the public performance of the Japanese Garden that reinforces the conformity of a

monochromatically green garden to the conventional and recognizable reproduction of a Japanese Garden.

Figures 48 and 49. Two pictures of people photographing each other while visiting the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, Montreal, 18.08.2021 and 10.08.2021.

Montreal's Japanese Garden is performing. Through an analysis of the Garden's elements, the veneer of a meditative place of pristine natural beauty is revealed to require substantial maintenance and labour subject to institutional control and messaging. Nakajima's original design and the tensions around the Garden's construction process open a critical space to consider international practices in landscape architecture, the politics of living plant collections, and cross-cultural conceptions of the natural world. The construction and early years of maintenance in the Japanese Garden counter the current illusion of the garden as a "Zen oasis," as the elements of stone, water, and plants have become potent agents of resistance to an institutional restaging of a Japanese temple garden. Ken Nakajima offered a "site-specific" gift to the MBG, designing a garden dedicated to a botanical garden, recognizing the aesthetic value and incorporating debris of the local asbestos mining industry gone bust – a gift that was ultimately rejected in favour of the institution's desire to project its global ambitions as a public attraction.

Nakajima (Figure 50) sought to create an outdoor garden that deployed traditional Japanese methods in its construction and approach but recognized the (post-?) modern context of a North American botanical garden. The Garden was part of Nakajima's ongoing pursuit to expand ways that people understood the natural world they are part of by including many flowering plants to challenge popularized perceptions of Japanese gardens and encourage people to make the connection to flowers in historical Japanese poetry. He recognized the agential potential in the garden's elements, that the roles of rocks, water, and plants together become something dynamic and harmonious. Scholars Josee Desranleau and Peter Jacobs detail the changes that the MBG made to the Garden following Nakajima's initial construction and installation period, which included augmenting the original design with green plants to resemble Japanese temple gardens, adding text, memorials, and even extra gardens, to create a sombre ambiance. (Desranleau and Jacobs) The Japanese Garden in Montreal continues as a spectacle of

the elements; it is well-staffed, supported, and visited, unlike other international Japanese gardens, including ones designed by Ken Nakajima, but the site promotes a narrative of authentic "Japanese-ness" that has embraced and concealed major design changes.

Botanical gardens are complex territory, established as colonial institutions that profoundly influenced the modern-West's relationship between the human and botanical, and continue to be institutions with important stakes in botanical research and conservation. State-run botanical gardens have mandates committed to goals of scientific dissemination and public service – including *Espace pour la vie* which aims to educate and connect with the local population around horticulture, support botanically oriented research, operate as a francophone institution, and function as a leisure attraction. The active scientific, political, and globalized space of the botanical garden is the backdrop for the Japanese Garden, which is currently marketed to visitors as a transformative experience, fulfilling the promise of a rarified nature, infused with a quasi-animism. The Garden acts a set for visitor's photographs (Figure 48 and 49), a natural scenography for photographs used on social media where the visitors become promotional agents, buying into the institutionally generated exotic illusion of Japan. The mission of horticultural education and public accessibility is further endorsed by the *Bibliothèque du Jardin botanique*, which includes general interest books elucidating the history and symbolism of Japanese gardens as well as a subsection of "do-it-yourself" guides for homeowners to construct Japanese gardens. These texts extend the landscape performance, encouraging visitors return to their homes and recreate their experience at the Garden. *Espace pour la vie* continues to have a vested interest in the Montreal public's positive perception of the Japanese Garden, including as active agents promoting the scenographic illusion of the dynamic garden. However, the agential elements of the garden continue to push back on this institutional narrative of the garden as a site of tranquil representation, something that Nakajima reinforced from the outset.

Figure 50. Ken Nakajima in front of the waterfall at the inauguration of the Japanese Garden at the Montreal Botanical Garden 1988. Note the tent in the background, which stands in for the pavilion that was eventually added to the garden. 28.06.1988. (Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Reference code: VM94-J0663-179)

Figure 51. Bruce Thicke planting traffic extensions in Montreal West. 20.06.2023.

Working the Garden
Fieldwork Study #2: The Civic Gardener, Bruce Thicke in Montreal West

This chapter moves from observing the controlled site of the garden to observing how the garden is built in practice by following Montreal West's head gardener Bruce Thicke during the 2023 gardening season, concentrating on how he co-constructs the garden amidst seasonal plant cycles and expectations of the municipality. Bruce Thicke is a professional urban gardener with decades of municipal work experience whose professional garden practice exemplifies skill, agency, and embodied action within the garden. Through his practice, the urban garden reveals itself as a speculative and performative site in the built environment because of the relationship between planning, action, and outcomes. Urban gardens are key city sites where the non-human worlds of plants and animals are in exchange with the human world vis-à-vis the gardener's facilitation. By incorporating participatory-action research and direct observation methodologies, as well as research-creation addressed further on in the dissertation, this ethnographically oriented chapter aims to break down labour-based hierarchies to increase the visibility of the gardener's embodied knowledge and the techniques, practices, politics, and social life of public garden production. In the current moment where the threat of automation is lurking, I would suggest that the working body starts to be a source of fetishization, alienation, invisibilization, and devaluation. Thicke's work, and its immediate impact on the urban environment, creates a counternarrative to the pending automation of labour that traces ways dynamic embodied actions create dynamic interactions with the environment. Gardening requires technical knowledge and skill based on seasonal planning, a commitment to maintenance, attunement to the plants and surrounding environment, and a team of people combining experiential knowledge with manual labour. In the case of Montreal West, the environment encompasses social community, gardens, pedestrian culture, car culture, a commuter trainline, and even the garbage receptacles at the Montreal's suburban border – not only the calm and bucolic place for repose stereotypically evoked by gardens. Over the course of the 2023 season, I observed Thicke executing what he

defined as key tasks in the gardens: planting, watering, perennial garden maintenance, and leaf blowing. These tasks act as reflection points to compare the physical skill and creativity of the gardener with that of a dancer, and a corresponding choreography derived from Thicke's working movements is detailed in the final chapter. Thicke's working practice in Montreal West is critical to the co-creation and maintenance of public gardens in the municipality, emphasizing how the collaboration of complex physical and phenomenological interactions between human and botanical worlds produces both gardens and gardeners.

Gardens are sites of collaboration between humans and plants, and both the gardener and garden are transformed in the exchange. To seasonally maintain a garden, the gardener thinks with their body – making embodied choices about how to approach the plants and facilitate changes that occur in a garden. For example, when removing the stalks and leaves of a perennial garden at the end of the season, Thicke moves from the exterior edge of the garden between the plants in a direction that covers the area of the garden bed. He does not make a formal plan of how to approach this, rather through a combination of body memory, experience, and sensory input (both visual and tactile) he cooperates with the plants to reinforce the spacing in the garden. In turn, his movements adapt and respond to the plants and their requirements in terms of pruning, seasonal maintenance, and clearing the organic debris to the compost area. Thicke's physical work impacts the way that he moves in the set area of the garden, including his ability to sustain long periods of crouching and integrating the precise use of various tools. Anthropologist and archeologist Barbara Bender writes:

> Landscapes are created out of people's understanding and engagement with the world around them. They are always in process of being shaped and reshaped. Being of the moment and in process, they are always temporal. They are not a record but a recording, and this recording is much more than a reflection of human agency and action; it is creative of them. (Bender S103)

From Bender's point of view, landscapes' perpetual changes are a creative record of human agency and action (which has implications from the garden to the Anthropocene). And the garden is not only the agential project of the gardeners but a creative and dynamic collaboration with plants. The creative expression can be limited by the expectation and function of the garden's location, such is the case at a place like the Montreal West Town Hall, the active recording of time and landscape persist through the blooming flowers, the changing plantings, the felling of trees – which are all interventions on the landscape.

Practices of professional urban gardeners offer insights on current conditions for embodied practice vis-à-vis manual labour. The distinction of employed gardeners is key for this research, as gardeners span a range of relations with the garden that make the working gardener's labour more comparable to other manual work in the city's public spaces like construction workers, window cleaners, and traffic light repair – employment that has less monetary reward and lower social status compared to white collar jobs like lawyers, librarians, and tech workers. Current conditions in Canada for physically laborious jobs include many underpaid and invisible roles, often hidden in the warehouses and migrant labour camps on the outskirts and outside of cities. (McLaughlin; Read et al.) In Montreal, gardeners employed by the municipalities and the Botanical Garden are visibly working in public and have strong employment protections and pensions. These protections were part of why conventional participant-observer research was not possible for the state associated research sites in this dissertation (Montreal West and *Espace pour la vie*) – unpaid workers are restricted at government sites in Quebec. During the observation period with Bruce Thicke, his employment conditions were stable, and he was retiring at the end of the season after a forty-plus year career with the municipality, which meant that these observations took place without the sense degradation that can exist in labour intensive workplaces. Thicke's working conditions were comparatively good; he was well-respected by his

colleagues and compensated for his labour, but his skill was often overlooked in the context of the municipality's workforce. By the use of the word skill, I am referring to Anthropologist Tim Ingold's five part definition that "…intentionality and functionality are immanent in the practice," skill is an attribute of the body *and environment*, it "…involves qualities of care, judgement, and dexterity," is learned by "hands-on experience," and it generates, not just replicates, the form of artifacts. (Ingold *The Perception of the Environment* 291) Ingold's framework for skill describes the skill development that gardeners require for daily work with plants and gardens. Thicke's work reveals an intentional and functional practice, moments of learning through hands-on experience, judgement and dexterity in physical practice, and generating gardens through planning and repetition. These elements accumulate in a gardener's practice to create recognizable skill and responsive facility while working in the urban garden.

In his entry 'Gardens and Gardening' for the *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, geographer David Crouch describes the confluence of creativity, visual acuity, and embodied practice integral to gardening, concluding that "Gardening is thus a bodily process of active reflexivity." (Crouch 292) Active reflexivity which physically responds to the garden through tasks like weeding, pruning, and soil cultivating, is an extension of what phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone calls "thinking in movement." (Sheets-Johnstone) Sheets-Johnstone argues that phenomenology and embodied cognition are integral parts of human experience – connecting philosophy with embodied practices such as dance that overlap processes of thought and physical action. (Welch; Sheets-Johnstone) Embodied cognition and "thinking in movement" frame the accomplishment and orientation of the gardener in dialogue with their working environment. Perception, spatial interpretation, and projection are intimately involved in the gardener's immediate and longer-term decisions, as well as their movement

patterns. Sheets-Johnstone describes a similar process in dance improvisation that challenges conventional theories of thinking bound to language and rational thought. She writes:

> Thinking in movement is obviously a bodily phenomenon. The body inhabits movement in the literal sense of living in it. Yet not only is movement the very medium of a body's transactions with the world, but movement is a natural mode of being a body, a perpetual susceptibility, as it were, of animate life. (Sheets-Johnstone "Thinking in Movement" 402)

Sheets-Johnstone describes movement as part of, not just an indicator of, being alive and claims that movement's dynamic process is critical to environmental interaction. Although Western stage dance is a specialized form of movement, dance can be a model for movement complexity to project imagination, gestural signification, and alternative physical pathways outside of conventional movements of walking, sitting, and signaling (like waving or turning away from something). Sheets-Johnstone's description of dance's implications at the cusp of physiology and aesthetics has implications for gardeners unconcerned with the signification or stage performance of movement. The gardener is preoccupied with the utility of physical actions that immediately alter the landscape through tasks like clearing leaves, planting annuals, or cutting back perennials – tasks that are connected to both the immediate and future outcomes of the garden as opposed to the immediate transmission and reception of the performing dancer. "Thinking in movement" is critical for the gardener and is a key comparative element between the gardener and dancer.

Embodied cognition, in which the physical body is an active cognitive agent, is informed and altered by the perception and patterns of the surrounding environment. In *The Embodied Mind* (1991), a key text in the literature about embodied cognition, authors Elenor Rosch, Evan Thompson, and Francisco Varela use the term *embodied action*, embodied…

> …to highlight two points: first, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context. By using the term *action* we mean to emphasize once again that sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are

> fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition. Indeed the two are not merely contingently linked in individuals; they have also evolved together. (Varela et al. 172–73)

The authors point to the interaction of physical actions in the environment, that have profound effects on behaviours, perceptions, and ways of being. For the urban gardener, embodied action is fundamental to accomplish the ongoing tasks, actions, and movement direction shaped by the specific compositional details of gardens. One of Thicke's seasonal responsibilities described in the observations is the mosaic planting in the front garden beds of the Montreal West Town Hall, which requires organizational *and* physical tasks: organizationally he plans and orders plants months in advance; physically the planting requires almost a full day working on his hands and knees moving from left to right along the rectangular shaped bed. Thicke's mosaic produces a readable bilingual Montreal West and *Montréal Ouest* in the plant patterning of the two beds on either side of the Town Hall entrance. *The Embodied Mind* (1991) emphasizes perception and the phenomenological writings of Merleau-Ponty, and perception is crucial for a gardener moving through their maintenance tasks in the garden. Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2012) grapples with perception, experience, subjectivity, and the body. He writes:

> …since the genesis of the objective body is but a moment in the constitution of the object, the body, by withdrawing from the objective world, will carry with it the intentional threads that unite it to the surroundings and that, in the end, will reveal to us the perceiving subject as well as the perceived world. (Merleau-Ponty and Landes 74)

Merleau-Ponty describes the human body as connected to its surroundings, because of its intentionality and perceptive abilities. Thicke's work preparing perennial gardens for the winter season is an example of merging with the surroundings, he systematically moves through a small garden rapidly assessing each plant's growth pattern and aesthetic contribution for the season (an example is a tall grass that is selected to remain over winter for its shape, colour, and privacy function), before cutting them back and clearing the garden bed of debris. He uses his objective body to space the desired distance between the plants, ensuring passage between them, which in

the end gives more visual definition to the surroundings of the garden. In less than two hours, the maintenance task is accomplished by combining visual and tactile perception through series of skilled movements such as clipping and clearing, which expresses the exchange and actual change of the physical environment.

Anthropologist Brenda Farnell emphasizes dynamic embodied action, to counter Cartesian mind-body dualism. For Farnell, movement is being alive. (Farnell *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory*) In her 1999 article 'Moving Bodies, Active Selves' Farnell points to the habits, skills, "mundane techniques," and choreographed "action-sign systems" (attributed to Drid Williams' research on performance traditions, martial arts, sports, and ceremonies) that are integral parts of human life in different stages and cultural contexts. (343) These movements influence and are present in craftsmanship, agricultural tasks, verbal and bodily expression that serve discursive exchange. Farnell points to the subjectivity of cultural signification and its necessity to express dynamic embodied action, as a key part of challenging conventional dualism that limits the understanding of embodied knowledge's implications in the anthropological frame. She points to the early 20th Century studies of universalists/evolutionists in the origin of language that stimulated interest in bodily gesture and movement in anthropology, but cites Franz Boas' choice to exclude "gesture-language" from the introduction of his *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (1911) as setting a precedent for overlooking the body as part of expression in 20th Century linguistic anthropology. (Farnell "Moving Bodies" 349-350) Farnell's article is advocating for the importance and impacts of dynamic embodied action in anthropological research, accounting for why the discipline has previously overlooked bodily gesture and movement. For this dissertation, bodily movement is crucial to reveal the intricacy of a gardener's skill and facility with garden, showing the thinking that incorporates physicality, spatial awareness, temporal planning, and botanical knowledge.

Throughout the article Farnell references Marcel Mauss' *Techniques of the Body* (1935), and how it was ahead of early 20th Century anthropological trends by emphasizing the transformative capacity of the body. The body's link to the cultural specificities both within and between societies is paramount in *Techniques of the Body*. Mauss opens with the question of how "men" know how to use their bodies in specific situations, using examples of gestures, tasks, and challenges with both what he observed during the war (digging, marching) and quotidian movements (walking, swimming, hand gestures). He introduces the concept of *habitus* – a combination of habit and acquired ability that:

> …(does) not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties. (Mauss and Schlanger 80)

Mauss describes someone performing an "imitative action" of a person with "prestige" combined with a person's "psychological element and biological element" as the impetus for social function and continuation of habitus. (Mauss and Schlanger 81) Mauss defines technique as "an action which is effective and traditional," claiming that that necessity for transmitting tradition is a distinguishing human characteristic. (Mauss and Schlanger 82) Applying ideas from *Techniques of the Body* implies that there is a social specificity for tasks and movements that gardeners undertake and there is evidence of this in the techniques passed between people who are working together on the same tasks, such as planting and digging. In my experience as a gardener, there are ways of performing tasks characteristic of a crew or group of people working together. Crew members regularly suggest ways to improve the efficiency of movement, and different techniques permeate different companies and work environments. Mass-produced tools like trowels and shovels indicate tradition, standardization, and the means of transmission. Shovels are standardized for working with soil and ground materials like gravel, they require the gardener's

dexterity and control to increase speed and efficiency. The shovel has a miniature version, the trowel, for precision planting, and a mechanized version, the excavator, for digging larger holes in the case of planting trees or digging ditches. These variations in size and capacity show the need for the shovel's adaptation related to the limits of the body. A gardener deploys a range of techniques over a season to address the uncertain outcome of the garden – this largely takes the form of maintenance. In the examples of raking and cultivating a garden bed, a gardener's pushing and pulling are assisted by the tools, and the gardener's familiar motions with the tool as evidence that the process of training has already taken place. The act of cultivating is in preparation for the garden's growth, and raking cleans the garden after the life cycle of leaves (which is a more ecologically constructive clean-up action in the spring). Techniques and technology are discretely woven through the work of the gardener, through their relationships with training, tools, and their surroundings. Raymond Williams helps give relevant context for the keyword of work. He writes:

> As our most general word for doing something, and for something done, its range of applications has of course been enormous. What is now most interesting is its predominant specialization to regular paid employment. This is not exclusive; we speak naturally of working in the garden…. The basic sense of the word, to indicate activity and effort or achievement, has thus been modified, though unevenly and incompletely, by a definition of its imposed conditions, such 'steady' or timed work, or working for a wage or salary: being hired. (Williams ebook 325)

Gardening appears in Williams' speculation on work and is a demonstrable example of the on-going practice that gardening requires. Work is used to describe both the active engagement of continuous effort and the contemporary domain of paid employment. The keywords of technique, tools, and work ricochet through the gardener's practice, developed from the traditions of movements required to work with plants.

Dances that incorporate physical gestures derived from agricultural tasks appear in records by 20th Century Anthropologists, largely within the context of analyzing active historical

rituals, and I propose a relation between the tasks of what is loosely defined as agricultural process and urban gardening. Similar (but not identical) tasks exist within the domains of agriculture and gardening like planting seedlings, weeding, cutting back plants, and clearing landscapes of various debris, although the outcome for agriculture is distinctly oriented to food production. Dance and Anthropology scholar Drid Williams writes about what is at stake in the anthropological research, methodologies, and semiotics of human movement and action, particularly from the complex physicality and signification of dance movement across global cultures. Agricultural activity's relation to dance movement and culture appears in her book *Anthropology and Dance: Ten Lectures* (2004), expressed in a direct critique of Anthropology's mid-20th Century functionalists that supported the emergence and development of Alan Lomax's *Choreometrics*. *Choreometrics* is part of Lomax's *Cantometric* project which was mainly focussed on documenting, recording, and quantifying music's expressive qualities and common characteristics across cultures to create computerized data sets of common attributes. Through his research on world music, Lomax began researching dances that accompanied traditional songs and musical events. During the mid-sixties, he began creating similar data sets for dance movements in collaboration with Laban notation specialists Irmgard Bartenieff (who was only part of the initial project from 1966-68) and Forrestine Paulay with filmed footage of performances. Drid Williams maps Lomax's research and assumption of "causality" of the "motor complexity" expressed in dance and agricultural technology, critiquing Lomax's conclusion that societies with limited agricultural technology have simplistic dances co-related to technological limitation. (Williams and Farnell 123) Williams counters Lomax's claim by citing scholars who noted the complexity of dances in societies with limited technological means for agriculture (McPhee; Wirz) and makes an argument that many of the labour saving innovations in the field of agriculture, such as tractors, reduce the physical demand on the working body.

(Williams and Farnell 123–24) The literature that questions and establishes linkages in both the function and meaning of human movement in dance and agricultural work, offers insights into what is at stake in the movements connected to tending to plant life. Although there is a proliferation of urban farming in major Canadian cities (for example, Lufa Farms in Montreal), the 21st Century urban gardener does not have to completely rely on their efforts for food production, and this impacts the significance of the movement involved. By referencing Drid Williams' energetic rebut of *Choreometrics*, I am aiming to demonstrate that there is a history of academic research and speculation on the linkages between dance and the physical actions involved in growing plants which emerged out of the need for sustenance, dependence on the environment, and the spiritual, physical, and community-based relationships between these things.

One of the often-cited works that connects physical labour to the movements and analytical structures of dance is *Effort*, written in 1947 by established dance practitioner Rudolf Laban in collaboration with "industrialist" F.C. Lawrence. Laban had previously developed a notation for dance movement, later expanded and applied to a modern industrial work movement. The seminal text in Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), a system that divides, classifies, illustrates, and describes common movements of the human body, *Effort* applies Labanotation to physical working tasks like plucking weeds and hammering nails to improve the bodily awareness and efficiency of the worker. The authors write:

> Effort study is a very valuable asset to the most important practical issues. But there is something deeper behind it. Movement in itself is the language in which our highest most fundamental inspirations are expressed. We have forgotten too much of this language. Movement fills our whole working time, no matter in what kind of work we are engaged. It seems quite an unimportant subordinate if our work consists mainly of thinking, writing, speaking, or any other so-called mental activity. But dealing with such a subordinate may be quite a tricky business. Its drive towards the inherent flow in nature must not be too frustrated. (Laban and Lawrence 73–74)

Laban advocated for the body's role, capabilities, and intricacies of movement in the frame of working life and sought to use the analytical models of Labanotation to improve the ease of work, increase the cultural value of the body's efforts, and maintain a system of classification to record the body's movement. Laban was an established dance artist at the time of the original publication in 1947, and the second edition of *Effort* (1974) includes a long biographical note about the artistic accomplishments of Laban. He was the creator of Labanotation, an established European choreographer, and Director of Movement for the Berlin State Opera who eventually relocated to England after disagreements during the *later* phase of the Nazi regime (which means he was late to condemn it), where he established centers aiming to analyze and improve the efficacy of every day and work-specific movement. (Laban and Lawrence) F.C. Lawrence is mentioned in the biographical notes as an industry management consultant who was collaborating with Laban in England during World War II on the 'Laban-Lawrence Industrial Rhythm' to improve "selection, training, placing, investigation of working processes and assessing job capacities based on Laban's research into the natural rhythm of man's movements." (Laban and Lawrence Xii) Throughout the book there is reference to a fluid application of Laban's method to the connection between working and dancing:

> As a worker — and one should include here all the people in any activities from, say, labouring to dancing—a person indulging in all motion factors will be able to deal with all tasks demanding free flow of motion, fine touch, flexibility and sustainment, such as delicate repair or assembly work. (67)

Effort sought to isolate and improve the execution of what Laban recognized as eight basic actions (dabbing, flicking, floating, gliding, pressing, punching, slashing, wringing), movements common in work tasks and everyday life, organized and diagrammed to demonstrate movement actions that facilitate the acquisition of skill (25). Laban writes that skill "…is acquired through the gradual refinement of the feel of the movement, and any training must promote this feel,

which is basically the awakening of the sense for the proportions of motion factors." (14) Skill appears in this text as a refinement of movement, something akin to body memory that workers who use their body in repetitive and specialized capacities can identify. Theorizing and observing skill, effort, and movement analysis are enduring contributions of the Laban method that are vital in contextualizing this chapter and considering the work of Bruce Thicke. However, Labanotation's current state of proprietary knowledge (students of LMA pay thousands of dollars for certification), the isolation of movement analysis from the social and cultural context of bodies (Skylar 96), and its reductive tendency makes the notation method less viable in the frame of this thesis.

The working body does not operate in isolation; it is part of economic, social, and environmental ecosystems. Anthropologist Tim Ingold integrates ongoing questions of human skill and embodied knowledge in relation with the environment. In his essay 'Culture and the Perception of the Environment,' Ingold challenges the perception that humans are the sole entities that bring meaning and significance to a landscape, asserting that the environment also brings meaning and humans are continually affected by their interactions with the environment. (Ingold "Culture and the Perception of the Environment" 40) In the book *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and description* (2011), Ingold asserts the transformative capacity and "activity within a relational field" of the environment, countering the conventions of landscape as "one scheme of mental representations after another, each reshaping covering over or obliterating the one before." (47) Ingold theorizes that humans act as transformational agents embedded in the environment, who through a range of actions, such as walking, create trails and impressions on the landscape. I would add that direct interventions on the landscape like gardening, significantly impact and alter the botanical and aesthetic dimension of the environment. In the same book, Ingold includes a chapter entitled 'Walking the Plank: Meditations on a Process of Skill' which

describes his physical experience constructing a wooden bookshelf. Using this example, Ingold concentrates on three main themes to present an embodied account of practice: " (i) the processional quality of tool use, (ii) the synergy of practitioner, tool and material, and (iii) the coupling of perception and action." (Ingold 53) In the closing, Ingold addresses technology's impact on human skill, concluding that human skill will continue despite technological innovations because:

> …the project of technology chases a target that recedes as fast as it is approached…. The essence of skill, then, comes to lie in the improvisational ability with which practitioners are able to disassemble the constructions of technology, and creatively to reincorporate the pieces into their own walks of life. (Ingold *Being Alive* 62)

The practitioner's skill is key to adapting and integrating technology, and this is a bind for the contemporary gardener because technological innovation is largely mechanical. An example could be a machine like a digger which accelerates the speed and increases the volume of digging a hole in the ground, or a leaf blower which accelerates the clearing of leaves. In both examples, the skill shifts from embodied skill (the physical techniques that dig a hole/the raking of leaves) to managing an expanded scale (planting larger and more trees in a day/corralling a larger area of leaf fall). Technological innovations in gardening exist in the updated design of new tools, but also in a recent experience for me, the globalization of tools like the Hori Hori: a Japanese multi-tool for splitting perennials, digging, and weeding. The Hori Hori is a tool increasingly integrated into local gardeners' repertoire in Montreal (demonstrated by availability in local tool supply shops and increasing use amongst professionals), because of its versatility and utility, increasing the range of movements to include scraping, cutting, and digging with a single tool.

Skill is a critical point of discussion in the frame of practice, work, and labour, especially in discussions of its future. Currently in 2025, it remains unviable to use machines to replace gardeners as accelerations in artificial intelligence are outpacing robotics technology, and the

level of sensorial detail and dexterity to perform basic garden tasks eludes current technology. But external pressures to "optimize labour," which will reduce gardening to numeric values in profit-making calculations especially in terms of private companies, puts gardening at risk of replacement with more advanced technology in the future. This chapter offers a snapshot of manual labour in Canada preceding and amid rapid technological changes in workplaces. As Ingold highlights, improvisation has a relationship with skill. A major responsibility of a gardener is improvisational: when they approach a garden they analyze and act on what is happening in the garden based on experience and to encourage/alter the growth patterns of plants. Gardening is constantly troubleshooting, both with and without technological assistance, visually and tactically interpreting an immediate environment to determine the next actions. Furthermore, the gardener's extensive understanding of the seasons, especially in an extreme climate like Montreal and the way that these seasons are intertwined with changes in plants, preparing plants for these changes, reading plant's signification (responses to moisture, light, and growth), adeptness with tools, and management of detailed places, reveals the extensive skillsets that are part of the gardener's responsibility. In my own experience this is one of the most interesting parts of horticulture, having to work with these signals in the garden to support the growth of the plants and the overall success of the garden. Improvisation is another practice that overlaps gardening and dance, the practitioners in both fields physically and instantly respond to a situation. It is part of what Min Tanaka was pointing to in terms of agricultural work being a form of training (Fuller 199): practicing the physical *and* improvisational work with and within the environment.

Accounts of gardeners and gardening use the place of the garden to expand on subjects like community practices, post-colonial land use, migrant labour, life stories, and urban reclamation. (Baraton and Murray; Hammond; Gandy and Jasper; Despard; Gray and Sheikh;

Chance; Didur; Webster) There are several examples that directly speculate on the gardener's practice, including first person accounts. Gardener Gilles Clément is an example of a gardener-theorist, who balances his experiential and practice-based knowledge with theorizing and creating gardens – demonstrated by realizing public garden projects throughout France. Developed from his hands-on experience, Clément argues for a method of gardening that follows the agency of plants in his text *Jardin en mouvement*. (Clément *Le jardin en mouvement*) Clément's designs, such as Parc André-Citroën which has a *Jardin en mouvement* section, are radical proposals for civic spaces allowing the reproductive drift of plants to dictate the garden's changing composition. This approach to gardening is in a sharp contrast to the approach in Montreal West which aims to control and delimit plant growth to project a sense of organization, control, and prosperity. In Montreal, Clément and landscape architect Nicolas Gilsoul proposed a temporary redesign of the grounds of the Center for Canadian Architecture in 2007 entitled: *Le Jardin des Eulalies: la savane du CCA sans les éléphants*. In the back of the building, the Shaughnessy House, they proposed the lot be temporarily planted with miscanthus, growing approximately two meters high to envelope the base of the building, using a friche to an obscure the distinction between building and terrain. (Clément, *Manifesto for the "Environment"*) When I discussed Clément's designs with Thicke he definitively scoffed at the notion of intentional weeds moving through the gardens in Montreal West, as it wouldn't meet the expectations of the people in the municipality. However, Clément's proposal for the CCA demonstrates there is a local interest in reenvisioning familiar Montreal landscapes and experimenting with alternatives for land use and urban reclamation.

Toby Musgrave's 2007 book *The Head Gardeners*, historically contextualizes the development of the head gardener role in England, charting career accounts of gardeners from medieval England until the more detailed records from the late 19th Century. Musgrave describes

the importance of kitchen gardens and food-based horticulture for head gardeners connected to royal gardens and royalty throughout the 16th Century, as well as the premium on the inclusion of rare plants from colonial exploits like yucca, passionflower, and the initial ornamental planting of the potato from Mexico. (Musgrave 11) The work of head gardeners continued to relate to Britain's colonial ambitions, as many horticulturists of the 17th Century led nurseries close to ports and became involved as traders to make up the difference for the low wages of gardeners. Gardeners such as John Abercrombie rose to prominence during this period with early publications on gardening, including his *Every Man his own Gardener* (1769) which offered instructions for successful practices supporting kitchen, flower, and nursery gardens throughout the year. Musgrave details a wave of publications by head gardeners and horticulturalists following Abercrombie (John Fleming's *Spring and Winter Gardening* (1864); Edward Kemp's *How to Lay Out a Garden* (1850); Charles McIntosh's *The Practical Gardener and Modern Horticulturalist* (1836); Joesph Paxton's *A Pocket Botanical Dictionary* (1868); David Thomson's *Handy Book of the Flower Garden* (1868)), which reflect on methods, materials, botanical information, and tools for gardeners, corresponding with new professional heights for head gardeners at the peak of British colonialism in the 1800s where the desires of the "nouveau riche" needed gardeners to create displays of wealth through their gardens. (52) *The Head Gardeners* describes a period of prolific development of British horticulture, and the physical technicity of the gardener is a minor note amongst the rapid development of botanical techniques, as England's prosperity at its colonial peak was expanding and industrializing botanical production for food and ornamental aims. A more contemporary survey of Britain's head gardeners can be found in Ambra Edward's book *Head Gardeners* (2017), which features and compiles the recent stories of head gardeners, their careers, and their gardens throughout the UK. A notable shift exists in the garden's purpose for these head gardeners, people are working for

artistic, historical, and social projects, not solely for patrons with large estates. The current vocation of the head gardener in the UK is incorporating trends in food growing, knowledge about land art, and the historical experiments in topiary and greenhouses, which speaks to the growing knowledge base needed to be working as a horticulturalist and gardener.

In *The Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, Sutti Oritz's article entitled 'Work, The Division of Labour and Co-operation' describes the "weekend gardener" character as a hobbyist, distinct from the farmer who is responsible for surplus product destined for the market. The chapter expands on the Marxist relationship of work to productivity and nature:

> Work involves the transformation of nature into objects which then become identified with the people who produced them. As Marx long ago observed, it is through labour, through the transformation of nature into commodities, that human beings define themselves. (Oritz 895)

Oritz connects self-identification and the process of production from a state of "nature" – the Marxist principle that people are defined by their modern era professions which "transformed nature into commodities." (895) The professional gardener supports this assumption, the work and their labour distinguishes and commodifies the plants and garden by adding aesthetic appeal through their experience. The question of identity related to the garden sites is subjective to the conditions and status of their employ. In the case of Bruce Thicke and his approach to gardening, he became a specialist in designing, planting, and maintaining perennial gardens because of the municipal government's imperative to be appearing to reduce expenditures. The austerity-oriented pushback against municipal government spending favours the quiet and practical flowering patterns of perennials in contrast to the costly yearly planting of vibrant flowering annuals. The perennial garden is a compromise in this sense, still flowering throughout the season, but at a slower pace that peaks in June. Thicke was well known within his community as the local gardener and a former resident, often having impromptu conversations with locals

during the workday. Thicke's close ties as a community member meant that his gardening work was not limited to the production of surplus labour but was in service of the gardens which are a living and symbolic representative of local policy and sentiment – the Marxist view is incomplete in the context of Bruce Thicke's professional work.

This constellation of literature offers context for the observational research of Thicke in Montreal West. There is a confluence of ideas to reflect on the condition of contemporary work and labour, an argument for the thinking body in the practice of gardening, and the possibility that a linkage forms between dance and manual labour – a connection through practice, repetition, and outcomes beyond the kinesphere. In turn, the practice of gardening, a collaboration between gardener and plants, is a dynamic relationship between the embodied action of the gardener and the dynamic patterns and changes of plants. In the municipal setting where Bruce Thicke works, there is an obligation and decision-making process to direct the priorities of the gardener according to the perennial plant's cycles in combination with the skill, experience, and embodied knowledge of the head gardener maintaining these spaces through physical practice.

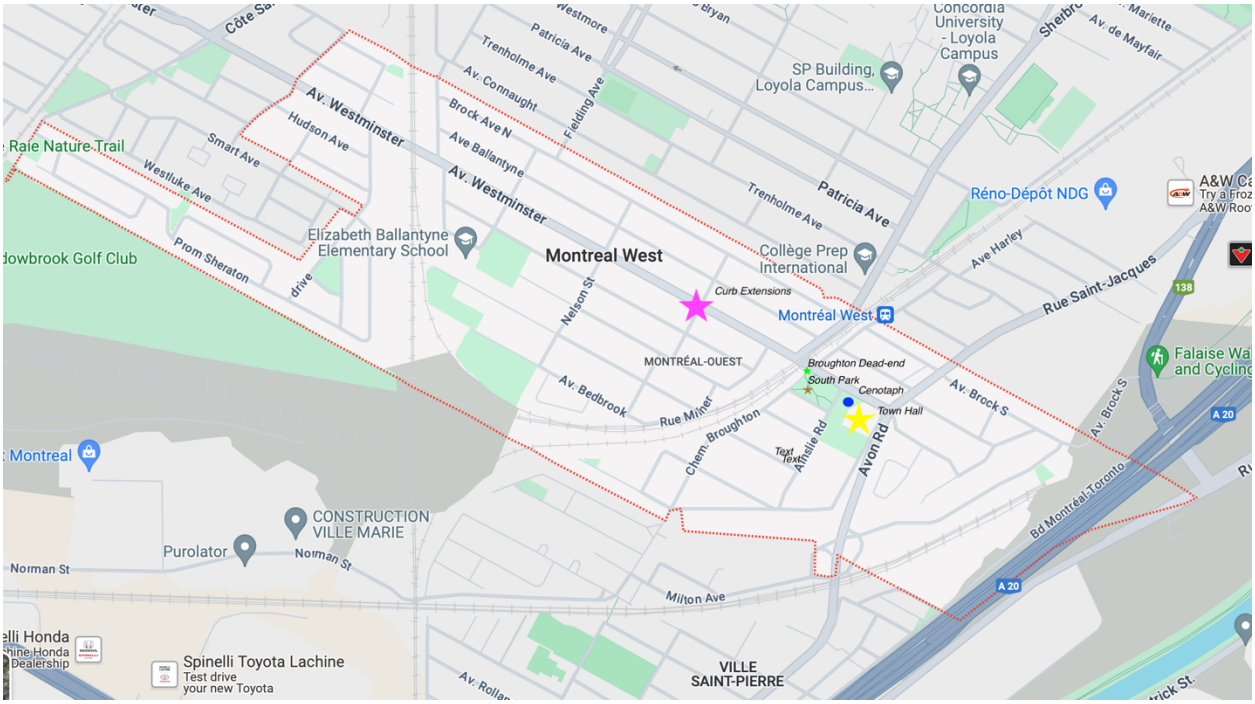

Figure 52: Screenshot of Montreal West on Google Maps with field sites added. Accessed: 24.06. 2024.

West Montreal, Methodology, and Bruce Thicke

Montreal West is a unique borough in Montreal for several reasons. It was established in 1897 as a 400 acre area, ("Town History") relatively small compared to other boroughs on the island of Montreal. It is an affluent majority Anglophone community with mainly single-family dwellings, and the major east-west thoroughfare of Sherbrooke Street's western end is a main intersection for the borough. Montreal West was historically a summering community for people in denser parts of the city, facilitated by the train station which continues to function as part of the EXO commuter line. There are several community spaces maintained by the municipality such as the Town Hall and surrounding park, the arena, and the sports field. Montreal West functions autonomously as a municipality after an unsuccessful amalgamation with the Cote St. Luc and Hampstead boroughs as part of a 2002 Montreal-wide reorganization of borough administrations. Montreal West held a successful referendum to demerge from the two other boroughs in 2004 and

was re-established as an independent city in 2006. (“Montreal West”) Westminster Avenue is the main street in the municipality, the location of most commercial businesses, the town hall, the western end of Sherbrooke Street, and the Montreal West train station. The municipal gardens considered in this chapter are the greenhouse attached to the Town Hall, the gardens adjacent to and north of the Town Hall Building, the traffic extensions on Westminster Avenue, the Broughton dead-end, and ‘South Park’ located in the neighbourhood west of Westminster Avenue. (Figure 52)

Bruce Thicke grew up in Montreal West, and his 43-year career trajectory with the Municipality of Montreal West began with his initial employment as an attendant at the Montreal West Arena. 2023 was scheduled as Thicke’s final full season with the city, and in 2024 he transitioned to a sub-contractor in his retirement. He became a gardener after the 2006 demerger from Cote-St-Luc and Hampstead, beginning “on the job training” when he took over the position. In 2006, the Montreal West gardens were largely annual gardens, but with community and council support he transitioned many of the gardens to perennial beds. During the transition he had to confront the tension between perennial and annual gardens within the context of municipal governance – which balances both the beautification of parks and public spaces and its financial responsibility for the expenditures from the town’s budget. Annuals are planted and removed yearly, displaying vibrant colourful flowers that are in bloom for an intensive period during the summer months. Perennials become dormant during the winter and come back in the spring, typically blooming once a season. One of the main concerns for the municipality’s administration during the transition was the high upfront cost of a perennial garden, which can be expensive to plant but offers savings in ongoing annual costs – the gardens do not need to be completely replanted yearly. Thicke maintained a few strategic annual beds in visibly important sites for the municipality including the entry to the Town Hall, the Cenotaph war memorial for

members of the community that died in World War II northeast of the Town Hall, and the traffic extensions on Westminster Avenue. During the 2023 season, Thicke undertook seasonal tasks of perennial maintenance, annual plantings and removals, general cleaning of debris and watering of beds, and continued greenhouse maintenance throughout the season.[3] Bruce's mainly solo position (although other municipal workers joined him for larger tasks) is an unusual feature of his position, as many landscapers and horticulturalists work in teams. This shows a combination of high competence by Thicke, a short growing season in Montreal, and the result of the municipality's decision to shift to less labour-intensive perennial gardens. The observations track specific tasks selected by Thicke as the major events of the 2023 season, as well as the tasks and movements that he performs in the public gardens that give insights into the embodied practices of a local garden worker.

In this chapter, the focus shifts from site to the gardener, their seasonal tasks and embodied knowledge set within the politics of the municipal gardens. The professional gardener is distinct from the hobby gardener, because the position demands more physical stamina throughout the workday to complete tasks with an eye to efficiency. Because of the requirements of Thicke's position, his work as a gardener is expanded beyond intensively tending to a single area, like the maintenance organization of the Japanese garden at *Espace pour la vie* with a team focussed specifically on that garden and includes planning with community members and the municipal council to manage the maintenance of several gardens with different functions. There is a prominent garden on Westminster Avenue that is maintained by a local community member with an interest in horticulture, showing an interest and activation of the public gardens by the

[3] For the intensive part of the season (June/July) he had a "summer student" with him sponsored by a government employment program, that was a novice to horticulture but had previously worked outdoors. Because of the research agreement directly with Bruce, the summer student is referred to as such and not featured in the photographs.

citizens who link gardens to notions of community care and pride. The gardens that Thicke was responsible for hold extra functions in addition to being ornamental, such as the traffic extensions on Westminster Avenue that aid traffic control at a busy intersection, and perennial beds at the edge of a children's park that provide privacy and visual variety with grasses and flowering perennials. These gardens express some of the citizen's expectations of the municipality: to beautify public space, improve safety in central areas, and highlight important monuments and buildings. The municipal garden's connection to public utility in Montreal West impacts the tasks and responsibilities of the gardener. In contrast to the Botanical Garden where the visitor's impact on the gardens is contained and highly prescriptive, the civic gardener must maintain the gardens as well as assess and replace damage to plants due to vandalism, traffic accidents, and the unpredictable impact of people on city gardens.

Several factors contributed to my research project being situated with Bruce Thicke in Montreal West. My thesis proposal was accepted in the spring of 2020 during the first lockdown of the pandemic, and the research design included the selection of sites with proximity to where I lived in Montreal. The proposal included research co-operations with local institutions and companies to allow me to follow the working tasks and approaches of their employees (including *Espace pour la vie* and the subcontractors of the Home Depot parking lot gardens). At that time both myself and the committee members could not envision what was to follow in the coming two years in terms of lockdowns and restrictions and how that would impact ethnographic research globally. For the 2020 and 2021 gardening seasons in Montreal, it was not feasible to approach and work with organizations with the research model I proposed, and the result was an alteration to the original proposal to accommodate this changing scenario. In the fall of 2022, through the personal contact of my advisor MJ Thompson and Concordia dance history instructor Philip Szporer, I was introduced to Bruce Thicke, head of gardens for Montreal West who was

open to the research project and facilitated permission from Montreal West's management. Thicke's role in Montreal West is unique because he is responsible for tending and managing the gardens which includes the on-the-ground maintenance that responds to the overall planning, ordering, and task management. This research cooperation with Thicke highlights and emphasizes the embodied role of the gardener by concentrating on the movement observations, contextualizing them both within what is happening botanically and the overall purpose of the garden for the community members and decision makers.

This chapter was developed with an interdisciplinary methodology using direct observation and participatory action research, followed up with a research-creation project in the dissertation's final chapter. The direct observations are integrated into the following breakdown of tasks and movements. The participatory-action research methodology was built into the design of the research, collaborating with Thicke to select tasks that highlight his technical expertise and have the most immediate impact in the gardens that he manages. Participatory action research (PAR) challenges research models that view research subjects as passive populations and involve them as active agents in the research design, often to solve problems. (Lawson et al.; Lenette; McTaggart; Somerville; Whyte) And while the terms of Thicke's employment were equitable and allowed for him to retire with dignity at the end of the season, the lack of recognition for his skill and commitment was identified as an issue this research could address. The research-creation element is discussed in the final chapter, and I created a dance work composed of movements noted in the observational sessions, including hand work, visual spotting, and walking patterns. I showed and explained these gestures and patterns to dancer Mairead Filgate and suggested a format to put them together in a danceable format. This methodological constellation shows the broad ranging implication of the civic gardener, who is a key agent in the urban ecosystem.

Figure 53. Montreal West Greenhouse. 29.05.2023.

Observation 1: Watering the Greenhouse 29.05.23

At the first meeting with Bruce, he was tending to the public greenhouse located in the back of the Montreal West Town Hall building at 50 Westminster Avenue South. We had an opening interview and orientation of the facilities during this meeting. The Town Hall houses municipal offices, a community centre, a large events room with a stage on the second level, the greenhouse, and the headquarters for the Montreal West groundskeepers in the back. The headquarters includes a small office, storage shed for tools, and a connected parking lot. The parking lot serves as a staging area to load vehicles, store tools and supplies, and accommodate other vehicles used by municipal services. Thicke noted that there was a major change to the usage of the Town Hall after the January 1998 ice storm that left Montreal without electricity for approximately a week. After large numbers of people in the municipality were left without electricity to heat their homes, the Montreal West Town Hall was designated as an emergency community gathering space. Over the course of a morning, he introduced himself and his history working and living in the municipality, described the range of tasks that he performs in his job, and offered a history of the greenhouse.

The horticultural history of Montreal West is an important part of the municipality's identity, and Thicke mentioned that the municipality was nicknamed "The City of Flowers" because of its emphasis on civic horticultural activity. The municipality was recognized for its vibrant annual gardens and floral displays in its main public spaces. Thicke explained that the municipality used to maintain a second larger "working" greenhouse for the production and planting of annual flower beds, formerly located in the back of the town hall. The current "display" greenhouse served as my meeting spot with Thicke during my research visits. It is a mid-size room with a glass-paned ceiling coated in UV blocking paint that protects the plants with a translucent white coating on the glass. The greenhouse was built at the turn of the 20th

Century and still has functioning hardware like handles and levers from that period that open windows for ventilation. A fountain runs in the centre of the room surrounded by garden beds built into the floor circling the fountain's base. Along the north windows there are several tall cactuses, succulents, and potted houseplants. On the longer eastern and western window edges are waist-high wooden window boxes, with ferns, roses, and houseplants. The greenhouse has a jovial atmosphere with bright light, warm temperatures and pop radio playing on a boombox during the workday.

In our first discussion, Thicke walked me through his general responsibilities and work history, while performing some of the key maintenance tasks in the greenhouse. The main task in the greenhouse is to water the beds and soak the roots of the potted plants, which typically takes 30 minutes. He waters weekly and twice a week during the higher temperatures of summer. He begins by watering planted ferns using a watering can to control the flow of water to the pots. The next plants that received water were the crown of thorns, the desert plants, a particularly old blooming cactus, and a potted aloe. Thicke noted that on occasion some of the plants in the greenhouse bloom in the night. He then moved to spraying the window boxes with a hose and nozzle to distribute the water flow more evenly over the plants. After watering the side beds, he removes the nozzle and lets the water run into the bed built into the floor at the base of the fountain that houses an impressive three-meter-high succulent tree. The tree's size requires a more substantial amount of water to completely soak the roots, and Thicke leaves the hose running for an extended period. There are occasional maintenance tasks to remove dead leaves and 'deadhead' spent flowers, but the major tasks in the greenhouse are watering and managing the plants through Montreal's extreme winters. Often some of the older plants sustain major damage in the winter months and during the increasingly dramatic temperature fluctuations that happen in the spring. Thicke explained the process to restore various plants damaged by weather

fluctuation, often substantially cutting back plants that partially die over the winter. During our discussions, it became apparent that climate change and the extreme weather accompanying it are having a major impact on the responsibilities connected to the greenhouse. This is characteristic of the effects of climate change on the work of gardeners, they must address and respond to the damage caused to plants and trees by extreme weather and in Montreal, which includes ice storms, extreme heat, flash freezes, and strong winds.

During the task of watering, several key movements emerge and are repeated by Thicke. These movements include lunging, leaning, carrying and lifting a large watering can, cantilevering, tipping, spilling, balancing, grasping, and pouring. These actions require the tools designated for watering: a large watering can and a garden hose with a nozzle. Thicke performs these movements without hesitation, grabbing the watering can, tilting the can, spraying the plants, and continuing a conversation with me about the greenhouse throughout watering. In combination, performing these movements require continued balance and counterbalancing from Thicke, as well as spatially keeping track of the completed watering. Watering the central island of plants using a dropped hose is an efficient choice to free Thicke to do other duties while providing sufficient water to the large and old tree.

Through these co-ordinated movements, Thicke enacts the municipality's project to retain a year-round botanical space that counters the harsh winter climate. His work in the greenhouse combines planning, observation, and the use of basic watering tools to maintain plants (some from desert and tropical climates) during drastic temperature changes throughout the year, paralleling the successes of colonial head gardeners who manage to modulate and control the environment to support plants from warmer climates. The presence of this small year-round public greenhouse recalls the colonial projects described in Musgrave's *The Head Gardeners*

(2007) and is one of the first linkages to British colonial history revealed in the municipality's garden.

Figure 54: Thicke with wheelbarrow, trimming plants during the mosaic planting. 06.06.2023.

Observation 2: Mosaic Planting 06.06.23

The annual mosaic planting happened during the second observation session, where Thicke and his student summer assistant planted hundreds of small plants to spell *Montreal West* and *Montréal Ouest* in the two garden beds on either side of the Town Hall's main doors. This task was scheduled after the May 24th long weekend, a point in the season where nighttime temperatures are warm enough not to damage annual plants. During this observation session, the corner facing the town hall (Westminster Avenue South and Avon Road) was extremely busy, with ongoing construction of a low-rise apartment building and non-stop traffic at the intersection aggravated by the construction. At the same time, there were massive fires in Northern Quebec that were blanketing the skies in Montreal with a grey haze, the public was warned to minimize outdoor activity, and the international news picked up the stories of the fires. Overall, this observation session was noisy, focussed on a specific task, and underneath a strange atmosphere produced by the smoke of the fires.

At the beginning of the task, two beds that stretch across the front of the building start bare except for the two low-lying junipers tucked in the corners beside the staircase. When I arrived, Thicke and his assistant completed the first two letters *M* and *O* in the left bed (the direction I refer to is determined by the position of someone facing the building). There are string lines running horizontally in the bed that act as a guide for the upper and lower parts of the letters – like lines on a piece of writing paper. (Figure 54) The plants used for the mosaic are several different colour variations of alternanthera. A border of a yellow green alternanthera is planted above the top string line. The letters are a sage green coloured alternanthera, and after the letters are completed, the negative space between letters is filled in with a red-tinged alternanthera to contrast the light green of the letters. Thicke brings out wheelbarrows of the alternanthera and gives them what he calls 'a haircut.' (Figure 54) He uses a handheld mechanized trimmer to level

off the sage green plants, reducing and standardizing their size. Thicke notes that the sage green plants grow vertically, while the reddish and yellow-green plants spread their leaves horizontally – which means there is a contrast in colour and height of the plants in the mosaic. Thicke notes the different growth patterns while he's planting, and that there is a major issue about water retention in the bed throughout the summer. If the summer is particularly hot the beds can dry out, so he retains and maintains several flats of replacement plants if they are required throughout the season. He says that by August there will be a full carpet of plants, which will also cover any visual discrepancy in the accuracy of the letters.

To plant the mosaic, Thicke moves from left to right along the garden bed, the same direction that English and French are written. While he plants, the summer student waters the open soil that will be planted, a strategy to loosen the soil and increase the speed of planting. The damp soil facilitates the use of a conical planter tool that Thicke uses to punch a hole in the soil. This tool is distinct from a conventional gardening trowel used for smaller plants like annuals, and the wet soil allows the conical tool to enter and release easily while leaving a hole to be filled with the mosaic plants. The tool allows for substantial precision in spacing, and once Thicke starts moving quickly he takes 7-10 plants out of a flat, makes a similar number of holes in the shape of the letter, quickly drops the plants in the holes, and pushes in the plugs. This technique depends on the moisture of the soil, which allows him to quickly punch a series of holes in the soil as a grid in the shape of a letter and fill the grid with plants. He doesn't close the holes with his hands so the water can access the plant's roots more quickly (he says the soil eventually encompasses the plant's roots). He uses small wooden planks cut to the letter's dimensions to create a repeatable rectangular frame, and there are two thinner pieces of wood that space the width of the letters between the planks. As he moves from left to right along the bed, he spaces the right and left planks with a smaller plank to measure the width the letter, moving and

arranging the planks continuously to the right. He uses pressure from his hands and occasionally his full weight on his knees to press the boards into the soil to make an imprint of the frame. He traces the outline and width of the letter with his fingers in the soil inside the frame to make a visual plan of where he will plant. The letters in the bed are approximately one meter in height and Thicke works on his knees, spaced apart for stability, levering his body while he reaches the full meter across the bed, and often puts weight on his hands. He pushes the conical tool into the soil with one hand, drops the plant using the other hand, and he moves his weight between his hands and feet while he covers the shape of the letter. He occasionally alternates holding his weight between hands and occasionally using a crouch position as an alternative to kneeling. All these actions and movements are accomplished while planting letters in a fixed area – letters that are only legible when you step away from the garden beds.

Over the course of the task, Thicke stands up, crouches or kneels, and occasionally avoids fully standing up by shifting a knee pad, and then himself, to the right to complete the next letter. As the letters and the spiral shape that fills the extra space beside the door, are complete both Thicke and the summer student plant the reddish Alternanthera in the remaining open soil. They use a similar technique to punch a hole, wiggle the tool to release it, and punch in the plant plug. Thicke has a single conical trowel, and the alternate tool is the end of sledgehammer that has been modified for the mosaic planting. The summer student uses the sledgehammer end and generally plants the Alternanthera with a closer spacing than Thicke – who has the experience to anticipate the growth of the plants. Thicke and the summer student divide the tasks, instead of completing one area, they complete one task throughout the bed and then begin the next task.

After completing the first bed, three tasks remain for the end of the day. The first is measuring the second bed with stringlines, where the name of the town will be written in French (*Montréal Ouest*) the following day, the second is to water the planted bed, and the third is to

plant a small group of annuals in a bed to the side of the Montreal West Townhall facing Westminster Avenue. Thicke and the summer student work together to stretch the stringlines over the several meter bed, measuring the width with the wooden frames, marking the soil with their hand and rocks. They tie one side of the string to a short wooden stake and drive it into the side of the bed closest to the building's entry. The string is then stretched across the bed where Thicke and the student work to make sure it is level. They set the second stringline to match the width through the entirety of the bed, which is measured using the wooden spacing planks. After marking the main lines for the letters, they put away the tools and the unused plants by loading them into a wheelbarrow to store them in the supply shed and the summer student begins watering the planted bed.

A third bed on the east side of the Town Hall building is planted the same afternoon. This garden has several bushes and perennial plants in the back half of the bed and Thicke adds some vibrant annuals with yellow, reds, and pinks to "keep the colour going." (Personal communication, 2023) The plants are loosely spaced in this garden, the soil in the bed is firmer, uncultivated, and drier with rocks. Thicke plants ornamental cabbages at the back of the bed whose leaves have been eaten by groundhogs, his idea is to give them a chance to regrow during the summer (note: it doesn't work; on my next visit to the garden the cabbages have been removed). In terms of movement while planting this bed, Thicke squats and shifts around the perennials. He shifts his squatting positions side to side, and pivots while using one hand to forcefully dig in the ground with the other hand inserting the annual plant. He moves in a squat around a low-lying tree, with his chin close to his knee, and sometimes squats on one leg with the other stretched behind him. Although he plants in a squatted position similar to the mosaic bed, his approach to planting this bed is distinct because he maneuvers around larger plants instead of moving across an open flat bed. He uses a standard trowel to plant these annuals as they are more

spread out and require less intensive energy to put the plants in the ground. He leaves the holes around the base of the plants loosely open, so the water reaches the root. The final step after completing the planting is to water the plants.

Throughout the process of planting the two beds, Thicke and I discussed the techniques he uses and the discoveries he's made during his term as lead gardener. He notes that throughout his time working as a gardener the plants used in the mosaic have stayed the same. Thicke describes his technique for planting the mosaic plants as 'freehand', which refers to the way that he spaces the letters in the frames. He also talks about wishing to plant more drought resistant plants in general, because of the increasing summer heat and general volatility of the weather. In particular, he points to the hydrangeas in specific beds around the town hall that fight with trees for moisture during periods of high temperatures, when they struggle with water hydrangeas appear wilted. Planting the mosaic requires substantial physical repetition, hundreds of the same plants are planted. The garden bed is measured and spatially divided to produce the pattern and a loose grid is pushed into the beds. The job is specialized and although two people work on the task for more than half the day, it is mainly done by Bruce who has done the job for almost twenty years.

The mosaic is a highlight of the West Montreal gardens. The beds being planted are in a significant area for the municipality, on either side of the main entrance, and the mosaic asserts the municipality's identity and prosperity to those arriving at its offices. The planting movements for this task mainly revolve around a crouch/squatted position with shifts back and forth onto the hands. Thicke uses the basic technology of the frame although companies now make stencils that can be rolled out on a garden bed with the letters pre-cut. Thicke is skeptical about stencils, especially about the nuisance of its annual storage. The perennial bed that was planted in the late afternoon required more variation in movement to shift around perennials and trees, and to scatter

the annuals throughout the garden bed. The uncertainty of gardening unfolds in this task -- mosaic didn't survive the full season. There were problems with drainage in the beds, and the plants began to rot early in the season. Thicke pulled the plants from the beds completely for the remainder of the year, which undergirds the unpredictability of gardening – even when the task was successful the year before. However, this was one of the most precise and repetitive movement tasks of the season, and Thicke had created many 'site-specific' physical techniques for the mosaic at the front of the Town Hall.

Figure 55: Thicke planting one of the traffic extensions on Westminster Ave. 20.06.2023.

Observation 3: Planting the Curb Extensions 20.06.23

During this observation, Thicke and his summer assistant planted the curb extensions at the north end of Westminster Avenue, the main commercial road in Montreal West. At the beginning of this observation session a team with the Parks Department delivered and planted a tree in the large park northeast of the town hall – so this additional task is described. As the observation was conducted mid-June, it is notable that it was the peak of planting season, and the gardeners were towards the end of a physically intensive season. The perennial gardens were actively blooming, so during the observation on this day I took an added walk around the gardens connected to the Town Hall which had blooming peonies, poppies, and lilies. Considering the vibrancy of the gardens, and the sunny and warm weather in Montreal, being outside during this observation session was a highlight of my fieldwork.

The first task of the morning was planting a tree behind the Cenotaph, northeast of the Town Hall. The tree installation crew was four men in addition to Thicke, who was integral in the planning and direction of the task as he knew where the tree would be planted. Two of the men carried the 1.5 meters tall tree from the truck that delivered it. The tree was inside a 30-40 cm diameter plastic pot with handles designed for lifting substantial weight. Each man held a handle, and together they walked the tree over to the place where it would be planted. There was some discussion lead by Thicke about the exact spot the tree should be planted. When it was decided, another worker driving a digger opened a hole in the lawn, scooped out the dirt to create a hole large enough for the tree's root ball. Another worker stood by with a shovel to assist the formation of the hole by shaving the edges to ensure the correct shape. Once the hole was the correct depth and width, two men lifted the tree into the hole, and two other men quickly backfilled the hole with the soil that had been removed and piled to the side. The two men held the tree to keep it upright, so the soil filling stabilized the tree's base. One person pulled the lawn

turf pieces out of the soil being packed around the tree and used a flat shovel to push extra soil around the tree's base. He also started stamping one foot around the tree base to pack the soil, using his hands to pull on the tree trunk to adjust its position. There was an inconclusive discussion amongst the group about whether to use braces to protect the young tree, and two men work together to push the soil around the tree's base: one using a hard rake to move the soil, the other using a fine rake to spread the soil more precisely. Planting this young tree was surprisingly fast, approximately 20 minutes, and the group of men divided the labour to move efficiently to get the tree in the ground. The efficiency of the task was further assisted by the mechanical digger that took over the most strenuous labour of digging the hole, but the quick completion of the planting was collectively orchestrated by the four-person crew.

The next task for Bruce and the summer assistant was planting the four curb extensions. To prepare, Bruce and the assistant loaded flats of plants into the municipality's pick-up truck in the Town Hall parking lot and drove to the location. We meet at the north set of curb extensions where the beds are at all four parts of the intersection. The extensions are trapezium shape where the thickest part of the beds are at the intersection's edge to visually signal to drivers that there is a change in the street to a commercial area with more pedestrians and parking disruptions. There are already trees and bushes in the centre of the curb extensions, and the bed is open around the edges where the planting will happen. The beds are covered in mulch to retain moisture and reduce the necessary watering (especially in the hot months), which happens by use of a mobile watering station and by rain. The beds are prepped with a digging fork and a hand rake to loosen the soil, along the exterior border of the curb extensions. Thicke starts the planting by distributing the plants, laying them out in the bed to mark the border. There are three types of plants going into the beds: two grasses – rubrum and fuzz Pennisetum, and sweet potato plants. He walks

through the beds as part of the planting, laying out two rows of the different plants along the street-side exterior of the curb extension.

In terms of body position during the planting, both gardeners have their weight over bent knees often leaning over on their hands to plant linear rows. They carry plant trays with them along the row and use a pad for protecting their knees. After the row is planted, they stand and use a single pronged rake to loosen the soil and allow more water to enter the beds. More preparation of the beds continues by removing garbage and debris, removing weeds, and loosening the soil where it has been compacted. The following lines are established by drawing a line with the end of the rake in the soil and the two gardeners start planting at each end and work towards each other. The grasses have a larger plug, requiring a loosening of the soil using a trowel and a second pull of the trowel in the soil towards their bodies to create the hole. The digging is repeated with the other plants by putting the trowel into the soil and pulling towards themselves. As the gardeners plant the exterior line of plants, they position themselves by kneeling over the edge of the curb and use the rubber knee pad, which is slightly wider than the width of their kneeling stance, to cover the concrete of the curb and protect their knees. The gardeners don't use the kneeling pad inside the bed as the soil is soft enough to avoid pressure on the knees. In the third bed, because of its exposure to the sun, the soil on the outside is dryer and tougher to plant. This means that the gardeners need to put more effort into the act of inserting the trowel and pulling the soil, as they continue to plant around the perimeter of the third curb extension.

The fourth and final curb extension is planted significantly faster and is complete in under 30 minutes. Thicke describes the spatial strategy of planting these beds as "working into yourself" (Personal Communication 2023), a strategy to navigate planting through kinesthetic orientation. After the curb extensions have been completed and Thicke and his student have taken

lunch, the gardeners water the beds using a mobile watering tank that was loaded onto the truck and filled with water. It is approximately one meter cubed in volume and has a pump attachment on it to generate pressure when watering. The pump is attached to a hose that is long enough to be pulled out and moved around the bed while still being connected in the truck. As Thicke continues with the watering, people in the cars take more notice of his work as he is standing stationary, as opposed to the hidden squatting position used during planting.

Throughout the curb extension planting, it is extremely noisy as the beds are in a high traffic area and its din is continuous. For the most part, drivers don't acknowledge or notice the planting. Pedestrians differ as many of them recognize Bruce. This means there are many informal conversations happening with people passing by, including remarks about these traffic extensions being planted. There are many idiosyncrasies about these public garden beds and Thicke notes several challenges: there is a problem in the beds at the northern intersection with salination because the four-way intersection is heavily salted in the winter; the southern set of beds also has more sun exposure which makes the plants more prone to burning in summer; there are occasional traffic accidents that damage the plants; and more regularly, litter collects in the curb extensions. The planting is designed around and highlights the perimeter, as the extensions act as a slowing mechanism and point of visual attention. The main physical movements involved in accomplishing the curb extension planting include crouching with both legs and the feet on the ground, using a crouch where one leg is bent close to the body and the other knee drops, shifting sideways in a crouch with step or drag of the foot, digging with one hand and planting with the other, carrying knee pads and trays, dragging the rake end to make a linear imprint in the soil, walking and dropping plants, managing the mobile watering station, and standing with occasional repositioning to water.

Planting the curb extensions is a task loaded with responsibilities to municipality, and the four garden beds are designed to impact the behaviors of drivers at the intersection. The design is straightforward, as the plants are restrained in terms of their aesthetic and growth patterns because Thicke selected plants that create general visual interest without distracting people from driving. These four garden beds show Thicke's understanding of the flows of people and traffic within the community, subtly beautifying an everyday location. He puts himself and the summer student at a slight risk to plant these curb extensions, where he knows there is a history of accidents and cars careening through the beds in the late hours. The risky part comes from the position that both gardeners take when they are planting, as they work close to the ground crouched on their knee pads, hidden by taller grasses and the muted colours of their work clothes. The other unique feature of these four beds is that they are exposed to extreme summer weather without irrigation and the threat of high traffic, so there is continued commitment to maintenance for these beds in the form of watering and replacing plants. The planting of the curb extensions signals and sets up the beginning of a season of maintenance tasks where the gardener responds to the weather and the intensive usage of these garden beds. The extreme summer temperatures in Montreal affects these beds, which are watered by mobile truck and don't have built-in irrigation. Here the direct labour of the gardener keeps this subtle site of functional beautification growing.

Figure 56: Thicke in a perennial garden at the South Park. 02.10.2023.

Observation 4: Winterizing the Perennial Gardens 02.10.23

This observation happened in the first week of October and there was a notable time gap from the previous observation. Thicke took a vacation during August and there were minimal tasks during July and September beyond watering and occasionally clearing debris in the gardens. For this observation I joined Thicke, who no longer had a summer student assistant, as he worked on several gardens cutting back the summer growth of perennials in preparation for the first frost. We began at the South Park, formally named Parc Davies or Davies Park, north of the Town Hall on Westminster Avenue on the southern side of the train tracks.

Thicke began with the perennial and grass bed located on the southern edge of a children's park. The bed is notable for its tall grasses, over two meters in height, planted in a location that gives privacy and framing to the children's park. There is a substantial number of weeds to be pulled from the bed, which are both tall and spread out close to the ground. The tall grasses are left over the winter months to protect the crown of the plant, provide visual interest, and keep some privacy for parkgoers. The garden bed contains litter and debris including vape boxes, candy and condom wrappers, and coffee cups that Thicke removes on his maintenance visits. It's not clear if the wind has carried these objects into the garden or if people were deliberately disposing of them there. Thicke sets up large plastic garbage pails to collect the weeds and cuttings, and as he moves through the garden he lifts and places the plant clippings in the bins. He leaves the sedums, which he says stay intact in the garden until the first frost but cuts back the perennials which have finished flowering and are going to seed. He spends time pruning an oakleaf hydrangea, mainly removing straight suckers that change the rounded shape of the plant. In general, Thicke clears space between the plants so that he can pass through them, many of which are almost his height, moving from the edge to the interior of the bed. In general, Bruce maintains the spacing between plants and when various reasons, primarily weather related,

change the composition of the garden, he replaces plants. After cutting back many of the plants, he hard rakes the garden to remove debris and plant cuttings. He notes that at this point in the season, many of the perennials need to be cut back after their summer growth before the frost and the leaves start falling, at which point a new series of tasks will begin.

Thicke elaborated on a previous design of this garden that was changed during his tenure. The bed currently contains oakleaf hydrangeas that replaced a group of spiraeas (a more conventional bush that flowers in the spring) overused in a design created by a Landscape Architect several years previous. The Landscape Architect had 40 spiraeas delivered to the small garden to build a u-shaped hedge through the park, planted by the Thicke and the park's staff. But flooding and waterlogging kept occurring in the area, which didn't support the growth of the planned flowering annuals integral to the original design. After a period where the staff responsible for maintenance reported that there were problems with the design, the beds were replanted. At the time I was observing Thicke working in this garden, the current design had endured the elements and was well used by the people in the area.

The next area Thicke concentrated on was the Broughton Dead End, a narrow garden built into a curb that blocks traffic going south on Westminster Avenue from turning right after crossing the train tracks. The tasks were the same as his work with the previous bed: selectively cutting back perennials and cleaning up the garbage in the garden. This bed was another area with high pedestrian and car traffic, located beside the train tracks for the commuter rail line (the sound of these trains was present during the observation). Thicke started trimming and reshaping forsythia plants and cutting back perennials as he moved through the bed checking on each plant. At times he simultaneously pulled weeds and cut back perennials by sweeping his hand and grabbing the plant, using the other hand to cut with secateurs. He put the organic waste into a large plastic garbage can to be transported to the compost depot. During this session of

maintenance many people passed by and talked with Thicke, including the head of finance for the municipality and people walking to classes at the Town Hall, integrating Thicke's gardening with social interaction.

Bruce worked on two beds over the course of approximately 3 hours in the morning: the South Park and the Broughton Dead End. The South Park is a perennial garden on the edge of a children's playground. The tallest plants in the garden are grasses and oakleaf hydrangeas, but the garden also contains sedums, day lilies, and hostas. The garden functions as a gentle privacy screen for the kids' playground, demarking a boundary for people sitting around the edge on public benches. The other garden, the Broughton Dead End, blocks traffic to the main road. Forsythia is a main plant in this garden because it turns bright yellow in the spring, and the other plants are low-lying perennials in the bed, many of which are purple-flowering perennials. This bed functions as a decorative blockage of the intersection, so the bright yellow forsythias are a functional choice. The main maintenance tasks reshape plants that have overgrown during the summer, remove weeds that have crowded the perennials, and cut back specific plants like the daylilies which will suffer during the frost. The gardener essentially cuts a path through the summer growth, leaving enough space for tight passage between many of the plants. He uses touch and kinesthetic awareness to assess the distances needed between plants and level of cutting back required. The main movements performed by Thicke are kneeling, cutting, moving on all fours, pulling with the hands, crouching, raking, grabbing, touching, collecting and moving organic debris, and cutting selective plants, co-ordinated with the senses of sight and tactility. The gardener displays a tactile awareness in their maintenance actions, moving and making decisions to space the plants using touch through the hands, arms, and torso. Furthermore, many of the small actions that Thicke takes anticipate the movements of the garden – planning for the seasons and weather ahead, not solely to improve the immediate situation.

Figure 57: Thicke blowing leaves north of the Cenotaph. 20.11.2023.

Observation 5: Leaf Blowing 20.11.23

The primary task that took place during this observation was leaf blowing the Cenotaph and large lawn to the northeast of the Town Hall. Gas-powered leaf blowers are proven to be high-polluting tools and were banned by the municipality during the 2023 season. Efficiency is the main reason professional gardeners use gas-powered leaf blowers, which are significantly more powerful than electric blowers and substantially reduced the time and effort for clearing leaves. Because this was our final observation, Thicke and I took 30 minutes afterwards to have a general discussion about his work as he was weeks away from formal retirement. Typically, when I would meet and organize my observations with Thicke, I would wait in the greenhouse until a plan was clear or he was finished with his morning break. During this waiting period, I took note that the greenhouse has had substantial growth through the warmer months. The long planters running beside the windows had filled out, and the plants surrounding the fountain had also filled out the beds during the warmer months. The lushness of the greenhouse was a stark contrast from the outdoors where many plants were cycling into dormancy for the winter, the greenhouse remained fertile and humid.

We moved to leaf-blowing the Cenotaph area, which was still decorated with small wreaths from Remembrance Day ceremonies. The Cenotaph memorializes men from the Montreal West borough who died in World War II. There is a central memorial statue with a brass soldier surrounded by landscaped beds that reflect and compliment the shape of the statue, and a wall at the back of the landscaped area with engraved names of the men from the community that died from 1939-45. The lawned park is approximately 100 meters by 60 meters and covered in old trees. Thicke starts leaf blowing from the southernmost corner of the park and wears an orange, black, and white standard leaf blower, as it's designed, as a backpack. Thicke takes care of leaf blowing regularly so the lawn isn't completely covered in leaves. However, there are a

substantial amount of leaves, and it is skilled task to effectively coral them. As Thicke moves through the lawn his gaze is downwards at the leaves, and he walks backwards and forwards to move the leaves in a specific direction aiming for a single pile at the far edge of the lawn. Thicke mostly uses a linear technique walking sideways to push the leaves into a pile, which moves approximately a half metre every time he makes a walking pass.

He also must contend with the wind. He orients and directs the leaf piles, but inevitably with certain gusts of wind or positions the leaves blow back and he needs to repeat blowing leaves in a certain area. Thicke continually looks up in the same direction while he is leaf-blowing, and once we are debriefing, he explains that he was looking at the direction of the flag to interpret the direction of the wind. He continually uses the flag's direction as an orientation tool while leaf blowing. He moves quickly while wearing the leaf blower, walking forward and backwards, holding the nozzle of the leaf blower with his right hand. He moves the nozzle in a circular motion, while blowing the leaves into a pile that moves along the lawn. At a certain moment he hits the landscaped area of the Cenotaph, which has small hedges and commemorative wreaths surrounding the main statue. He blows the leaves intensively around the base of the hedges and works delicately not to disturb the wreaths or the other plants in the beds. Clearing the lawn of leaves takes about an hour, and by the end of the hour Thicke has two massive leaf piles – one beside the town hall parking lot, and the other beside the street at the northern edge of the park. These piles require car access for other Parks staff to clear the leaves and move them to the compost site by the arena.

When Thicke was about three-quarters of the way through the leaf blowing a passer-by confronted me about the municipality's ban on gas powered leaf-blowers, asking if the blower Thicke was using was gas powered. I pointed them to Thicke to answer their questions, and he confirmed that the Municipality continues to use gas powered blowers due to their strength,

efficiency, and the amount of space they are required to cover. Part of Thicke's work is communicating and representing the municipality as he is uniformed working in the civic spaces of the municipality, and in this situation the meeting had a confrontational tone.

Thicke and I had a discussion after he cleared the lawn, reflecting on his work as a gardener and time as an employee in his position with Montreal West. One of my most pressing questions for Thicke was regarding his experience and perception of how his mind and body work together, specifically if he experiences the phenomena of 'muscle memory' – dancers often refer to this when they know a piece of movement well enough, they have a sensation that the body performs it without hesitation. He acknowledged a similar feeling in his approach to physical tasks in the gardens, and he also noted that he had been mandated to take a course on movement and ergonomics where he felt like the organizers were not aware of the specific rigors of his job. He spoke about a sense of "automatic movement" and used the example of cutting suckers from a lilac bush, without hesitation or planning. We spoke about the gap between planning an action and performing the actions, with different instances requiring a different gap between the thinking or planning and the physical action. Thicke compared the concept of muscle memory to his experience as a church organist playing the concave and flat organ, joking that his seat there was "perched on the edge of oblivion." (Personal Communication 2023) He discussed the popular perception of people working in manual labour positions as "the lowest of the low" even though he is a classically trained musician. His colleague trained as a CPA who preferred working with the Parks department, and another colleague who trained to build the internal structures of buildings – himself and his colleagues defy the stereotype of the lazy and uneducated labourer. He also noted that even for plumbers and electricians whose work is in demand, there is a popular perception that no education is required despite the several years necessary for training and apprenticeship. During his career with the municipality of Montreal

West, he also worked at the hockey arena and noted the recent digitalization of the Zamboni used to maintain the ice – essentially that there is a rise in digital technology used for jobs typically perceived as manual labour that are phasing out physical work. He pointed to a YouTube channel that he follows of a farmer whose administrative tools and physical equipment are computerized, with GPS being integral to the equipment, and even the use of sensors to read the moisture of the plants.

Thicke's position with the municipality of Montreal West included several responsibilities that reveal the complexity of his work beyond executing gardening tasks, the gardening is integrated into the planning and decision making of his role. When I asked him if he would like to put something on record as a final summation of his position he said: "Dealing with your superiors is a problem." (Personal Communication 2023) This was surprising for me as an observer, because I had witnessed the autonomous parts of his job and the cordial interactions with residents and colleagues working with the municipality. Although I followed Thicke for several months, I was rarely privy to his administrative work, which from our discussions I perceived as a substantial part of his daily responsibilities. The identification of his role as strictly a civic gardener is not entirely accurate, as he was responsible for ordering plant materials, maintaining and organizing tools, training annual summer students, respecting the municipality's parks budget, and co-ordinating various landscaping tasks between crews. Furthermore, in a question posed to me regarding this research in a presentation in 2024 it was noted that Thicke is portrayed as a solo worker, often alone working on tasks in contrast with other larger crews that accomplish tasks together. But Thicke is often in a co-ordinator role, liaising with other crews and workers within the municipality and working with a summer student annually. In this research, the physical component of specific gardening tasks is isolated and highlighted, but the

reality is that these tasks exist in a continuum of responsibilities and relationships to manage urban public space.

Throughout this chapter I draw a comparison between the thinking body in manual labour and dance, and conditions for the working body to be considered a site of embodied action – moving is thinking. In 20th Century dance history, manual labour appears in research that corresponds to industrialization, modernity, and authoritarian regimes. (Laban and Lawrence; Wilcox) In these cases, dance became part of the political ambition to mobilize and glorify the working body, including by mobilizing the cultural field of dance to appeal to mass populations and more recent attempts to grapple with the "work of dance." (Franko; Pouillaude) Thicke's work, and its immediate impact on the urban environment traces ways that dynamic embodied action creates dynamic human interactions with the environment. It shares a perception of spatial information and a relationship with the surroundings that is recognizable to the contemporary dancer used to simultaneously gathering information from what's around them while in motion. The gardener excels in tactile and visual co-ordination, managing the technical execution of various tasks, responding to the impacts of increasingly dramatic weather on gardens, navigating the social and political space of their workplace, and creatively deploying skill in the urban ecosystem. In the case of Bruce Thicke, the gardens that he is working on correspond to a specific set of concerns around fiscal responsibility, restraining municipal gardens in terms of annual planting and colours, by emphasizing the perennial gardens' regenerative and cost-saving benefits. Montreal has a history of urban beautification campaigns to counter waves of industrially driven urbanization (Despard), and the municipal gardener is a discrete but necessary state actor extending their efforts to support both beautification and use function through gardens. Finally, observing and describing Bruce Thicke's physicality in the garden shows an important example of manual labour and the environment at the edge of major technological changes in

2025 that will have consequences for the future of work. The looming displacement of white-collar workers by AI models leaves manual work as a form of security, gardening could continue to be part of urban society as a low-status form of employment or could soon face its own technological changes with the advancement of robotics. In the current moment, as Bruce Thicke displays throughout the 2023 season, the labour of the gardener is specific and needs to be completed with manual dexterity, task co-ordination, and embodied knowledge. The contemporary technicity of the gardener is a complex form of embodied thinking across contexts and tasks that alter immediate and specific environments.

Figure 58. Home Depot Parking Lot, East Facing. 23.08.2020.

Re-imagining the Garden
Fieldwork Study #3: The Home Depot Parking Lot at 100 Beaubien St. W

Soon we will have to learn to fly, to swim in the ether.

Paul Virilio*, Open Sky*, 3.

At first glance, the Home Depot parking lot at 100 Beaubien West in Montreal seems an unlikely place to host a garden. It is an expansive parking lot on a border of residential and industrial zones of the city that transposes the design of a North American "big box" store, recalling suburbia's vast paved sprawl, into a densely populated part of urban Montreal. This parking lot puts environmental pressure on the neighbourhood because it attracts substantial vehicular traffic and its large, paved area increases local heat during extreme summer weather. Beyond the obvious intention of facilitating parking, this lot hosts several botanical networks: the commercial networks of plants and soil connected to the garden centre, miniature gardens planted on parking islands, and a boundary of "wild" flora and fauna along a railway track on the southern border. The parking lot is in a rapidly changing area of Montreal, a neighbourhood that was targeted for development by the City of Montreal from 2013 (Jolivet et al.; Office de consulation publique de Montréal), engulfed in active redevelopment debates, facing urban toxicity from former industrial projects and the capital flows of new artificial-intelligence ventures, all the while urban greening projects are being ubiquitously launched in the neighbourhood's alleyways amidst a wave of gentrification. Outside of business hours in the warmer months when the store is closed and there is no security walking the lot, the parking lot hosts people subtly repurposing its function. For the duration of this research (2019-2024), I lived around the corner and was an active user (observer, customer, choreographer, short cut taker) of the site, which took on a new relevance for people living in the neighbourhood during the height of the pandemic (2020-2022). Influenced by Anna Tsing's concept of friction, Michel de Certeau's distinctions of space and place, Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, concepts from human geography, and various points of view on gardens, this chapter will consider what is at stake by

considering this parking lot a garden. It will conclude with an indefinite proposal for a future garden, pointing to the choreographic project as a discrete tool of urban ecological reclamation.

The Home Depot is situated at the borders of the Little Italy, Mile End, and Alexandra-Marconi, which are high-traffic neighbourhoods in the central part of the island of Montreal. There is substantial north-south vehicular traffic in the area between Highway 40/Laval (the northern island suburb of Montreal) and the Plateau/Downtown. At the same time, the neighbourhood is walkable and pedestrian-friendly with parks, cafes, and restaurants that spill out onto the street, as well as the bustling Jean Talon market on the northeastern edge of the Little Italy neighbourhood. The Home Depot is separated from the rest of the neighbourhood by a slight elevation from the street level, an office building for Videotron (a Quebec telecommunications firm) directly on Beaubien, and the fenced-off train track on the southern border. The parking lot is expansive, shared with the employees of the Videotron office, and accommodates shipping trucks carrying oversized products like large pieces of plywood, lumber, drywall, windows, and home appliances. The Home Depot supplies local contractors, people working on home improvement projects, and acts as a general hardware store for people that live in the vicinity. The parking lot supports the movement of raw building supplies, the consumption of goods from the warehouse style store, and is uncharacteristically large for the dense and changing neighbourhood. Scholars and historians of Montreal have recently tracked adjacent lots with innovative and critical research projects that include the *Champs des possibles* (Didur and Fan), *Parc des Gorillas* (Janssen et al.; Silvano de la Llata and Shahamati), and UDEM's installation of Campus MIL (Jolivet et al.). This scholarship follows how the city of Montreal led the rezoning and redevelopment of sites that line this stretch of the Canadian Pacific (CP) railway, many of which had become fields and abandoned lots, producing rapid changes in the neighbourhood that has consequences for key urban issues such as housing, green spaces, transportation, business,

artistic communities, planning, "gentrification-induced displacement," and quotidian movement. The acceleration of changes in the neighbourhood was happening in the background of my fieldwork period and the parking lot's expansive presence is implicated in these changes, although it is often overlooked as a potent site of urban and botanical friction.

At first glance, the banal vista of the Home Depot parking lot recalls what anthropologist Marc Augé calls a "non-place," an unremarkable area that people move through. Augé posits that the counter to the non-place is the "anthropological place" where the ethnologist is an outsider, and the fantasy of an isolated site of Indigenous significance is agreed upon by its inhabitants. (Augé 43) The period of supermodernity is crucial to the non-place, expressed by "…the three figures of excess: overabundance of events, spatial overabundance and the individualization of references." (Augé 109) The Home Depot parking lot could be seen a non-place; it functions as both a product of supermodernity and a counterpoint to an anthropological place. It's empty of the anthropologist's fantasy and is instead imbued with the banality of the everyday in its "spatial overabundance." Furthermore, the site shares the history and challenges of commercial redevelopment in a potentially toxic landscape that Jill Didur and Lai-Tze Fan describe in their locative media project *Global Urban Wilds* based in the *Champs des possible*. The *Champs des possible* is another former trainyard about 200 meters away on the same train track that was slated for development, but local citizen groups successfully lobbied to resist and protect the lot as an urban meadow. (Didur and Fan) Didur and Fan point to biologist Peter Del Tredici's distinction of "ruderal landscapes" to conceptualize urban wilds on the edges of infrastructure like train tracks, where the "margins" create a wild boundary that "destabilize existing vegetation patterns and promote the formation of entirely new plant associations better adapted…" to the results of climate change. (Didur and Fan) In contrast to the citizens' success protecting the

meadow of *Champs des possible*, the Home Depot reclaimed the abandoned former CPR trainyard further up the track and installed a suburban big box store.

Although the neighbourhood surrounding the Home Depot is a bustling part of Montreal, the parking lot has a single indirect pedestrian path dedicated to access the store, and the alternative of entering by foot from the east side requires a trepidatious walk into oncoming traffic that is blindly turning a corner (the most convenient entrance from my apartment). Pedestrians are regularly at odds with the flows of cars in this lot, as people cut through the full length of the lot by foot – being there is a by-product of getting to the store. The oversized scale and disjunction of this parking lot from the rest of the neighbourhood are part of what originally piqued my interest in this site. Two other factors – a surprise encounter of a maintenance crew mowing a large parking island and the increasing local frenzy around artificial intelligence development in the offices and former industrial sites surrounding the Home Depot (Serebin; Rosenthal; Colpron), contributed to framing the parking lot garden as a focal point for the changes taking place in the neighbourhood. The Home Depot parking lot garden exists in a state of what anthropologist Anna Tsing describes as "friction," where both the benefits and drawbacks of a globalized world coincide and collide. (Tsing) The scale and multinational corporate branding of the parking lot create many frictions within the neighbourhood, including as an occasional site for common creative repurposing by people in the neighbourhood. The garden itself promises to offset the dominantly concrete landscape but is bound to the function of the parking lot and capital flows of the Home Depot. The process of creating and performing a choreography that experiments with the vastness of the parking lot surface was crucial to an embodied understanding of the site, which is detailed in the last chapter of this dissertation. I will argue throughout this chapter that a perception of the Home Depot parking lot as a non-place is

challenged by the presence of multiple gardens and by residents' repurposing of the lot, an assertion supported by observational and artistic research conducted in-situ.

The case for the parking lot as a garden

Considering the Home Depot parking lot as a garden surprises people familiar with the site. However, the current context for urban gardens throughout Canada is full of multiplicities in terms of form and function including: gardens functioning as urban agriculture projects, uses and co-operative places for multi-cultural communities, diverse geographies and topographies, spectacles of landscape architecture, visual references to European gardening aesthetics, places of contestation between colonial and indigenous views of land, and tensions of private and public in the urban sphere. (Dawson and Morales; Ron Williams; Diduck et al.; Lauzon Chiasson; Despard; Heydari et al.). My initial reading of the lot as a garden originally came from a combination of my experience as a gardener noticing the small, seasonally blooming garden beds and encountering a maintenance session of a crew mowing the lawn on the Beaubien boundary – a sign of garden management happening at the parking lot. In 2001, a local newspaper mentioned Home Depot's negotiation with the city of Montreal to develop an oversized parking lot on this site by including the installation of "a public garden." (Sirois E3) What exists on the current site is a skeletal version of a conventional garden with hearty plants relegated mainly to the edges of the lot, but I propose expanding the concept of the garden to include the lot's potential for multi-purpose use and the scenographic quality of the asphalt. It could be a future garden that takes practical aesthetics into consideration while combining details of plants and landscape, incorporating the complexities of Montreal's industrial history, unceded Indigenous territory, public and private accessibility, and regulations regarding railway lands – factors of which are all at play in this site.

In the often cited book *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*, European garden historian and theorist John Dixon Hunt includes a chapter entitled 'What on Earth is a Garden?' that outlines the challenges of strictly defining a garden, acknowledging the importance of the renaissance concept of "third nature" for a functional definition, a category of nature whose thirdness follows the nature/culture binary. (Hunt 14–31) He resolves to define a garden in a flexible paragraph that he invites to be altered:

> A garden will normally be out of doors, a relatively small space of ground (relative, usually to accompany buildings or topographical surroundings). The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set: by the invocation of indigenous plant materials, by various modes of representation or other forms of reference (including association) to that larger territory, and by drawing out the character of its site (the genius loci). The garden will thus be distinguished in various ways from the adjacent territories in which it is set. Either it will have some precise boundary, or it will be set apart by the greater extent, scope, and variety of its design and internal organization; more usually, both will serve to designate its space and its actual or implied enclosure. A combination of inorganic and organic materials are strategically invoked for a variety of usually interrelated reasons – practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic—all of which will be explicit or implicit expressions or performances of their local culture. The garden will therefore take different forms and be subject to different uses in a variety of times and places. To the extent that gardens depend on natural materials, they are at best ever-changing (even with the human care and attention that they require above all other forms of landscape), but at worst they are destined for dilapidation and ruin from their very inception. Given this fundamental contribution of time to the being of a garden, it not only exists in but also takes its special character from four dimensions. In its combination of natural and cultural materials, the garden occupies a unique place among the arts, and it has been held in high esteem by all the civilizations of which it has been a privileged form of expression. (Hunt 14–15)

Dixon Hunt's paragraph offers definitive criteria for a garden including: the designation of a place outdoors; the combinations of organic and inorganic materials with plants and/or referential objects; the strategic use a specific area; the presence of a boundary; and an "ever-changing" quality taking place within these boundaries. Considering these criteria, the Home Depot starts to be framed as a garden through its boundaries (a chain link fence bordered by trees on the west and south side, the store and outdoor storage on the east side, the Videotron office and street facing lawn on the north side), outdoor location, the organic and inorganic combination of asphalt

and small garden beds, exhibiting an "everchanging quality" largely provided by the flow of parking cars, as well as the presence and arrangement of plants and referent objects such as the branded-orange shopping carts. Dixon Hunt considers the etymology of the equivalent word *garden* in different languages, that reinforce the idea that the enclosure is integral to the meaning of garden. He also supports his definition by drawing from examples and variations in ancient Persia and Greece, medieval Europe, and the often-analyzed mega gardens of Europe such as Capability Brown's English landscape gardens (1760s), and André Le Nôtre's *Vaux-le-Vicomte*. These examples of historic gardens inform the definition of a garden that includes the parking lot, and I am arguing that the scale of planning and landscaping as well as the complicated beauty of the asphalt plain at the Home Depot site be seriously considered as a garden.

Gardens have symbolic resonances, evoking a kind of pathos for sensorial and phenomenological experiences in the outdoors. In the 1990 book *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*, a distinct conceptualization of gardens is already expressed in the title. The editors write in the introduction:

> Gardens have special meaning. They are powerful settings for human life, transcending time, place and culture. Gardens are mirrors of ourselves, reflections of sensual and personal experience. By making gardens, using or admiring them, we create our own idealized order of nature and culture. (Francis and Hester Jr. 2)

The editors reference the typical European binary of nature and culture that is quickly embedded in any discussion of gardens. Furthermore, broad definitions of gardens in the context of reflective writings lead to the symbology and metaphor of gardens that draw from conventions of beauty and the romanticization of the organic. Author Claire Cooper Marcus writes in her essay in the same book entitled 'The Garden as Metaphor':

> Boundedness, sacredness, centrality…are these not also the qualities of our own humble domestic gardens? The garden exists for us at many equally important levels of consciousness—as a plot of land, a cultural statement, a place of horticultural activity, a design on paper. It is also a significant symbol and metaphor for what we have lost and what

> we might yet attain, as the continual cycle of change and transformation occurs at both the level of the individual and the level of the whole earth. (Cooper Markus in Francis and Hester Jr. 32)

This text emphasizes symbolic and semiotic readings of gardens, and symbolic references can be part of reconsidering an overlooked urban space as a possible garden, a cultivated and intentional place to experience the botanical world. It is already stretching the imagination to consider the Home Depot parking lot a garden, and to extend the notion of sacredness to the parking lot could start to seem unlikely. But over the course of my observations, creation of a choreographic project, and generally hanging out during the period of the pandemic's confinement, I assert that the Home Depot parking lot is a unique and unconventional garden.

In his article 'Just what is a garden?' Montreal-based professor of landscape architecture Bernard St-Denis compares images of an area of Parc Citroën in Paris designed by Gilles Clément with an image of an Italian renaissance garden at Villa Lante. Clément's design is based on his concept "*jardin en movement*," where the cycles of growth and reproduction of plants lead the development of the garden, including the migrating locations of the plants. (Clément, *Le jardin en mouvement*) The image representing Parc Citroën appears as an undefined mix of plants, and St-Denis describes it as appearing to be fallow. In contrast, the garden at Villa Lante has tightly trimmed boxwoods surrounding elaborate stonework with a central fountain and fences that define the garden, which St-Denis speculates is instantly recognizable as a garden. St-Denis goes on to list a series of criteria to support the recognition of a garden through qualities of artifice, representation, and being a pleasurable place to visit. He returns to Clément's concept of the *friche*, an area where "weeds" are allowed to flourish, "native" and "invasive" species co-mingle freely, and the gardener's role changes from pre-emptive to supportive. St-Denis describes the maintenance of the *friche* that includes seeding new plants to return the design to a more favourable composition, removing plants that were not growing well, and encouraging plants that

grow symbiotically. (St-Denis 69) He argues that Clément's design still has the artifice and aesthetic qualities present in the gardens of the Italian renaissance, but is essentially retraining the public to broaden their perception of gardens through the support of public institutions and Clément's prolific writing. (St-Denis 73) The comparison of elements in Parc Citroën and Villa Lante plays out in the Home Depot parking lot – although the tight, fastidious, and opulent elements of the Italian Renaissance Garden are obviously not replicated. The Home Depot parking lot garden includes a focal point (the store), enclosures (fences, roads, boundary trees, and parking islands), miniature gardens (parking islands, maintained lawns), and an area that recalls Clément's *friche* (the plants along the railway). As much as Clément's design challenges traditional expectations of gardens through his principle of "the garden in movement," the Home Depot parking lot makes a conceptual challenge of gardens that rely on conventional criteria and giving order to a delimited area, shifting aesthetics from the botanical enchantment that a garden like the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* encourages in its visitors, to a multi-referential functional ornamentation. I would also argue that the seemingly haphazard assemblage of landscaping styles in the parking lot offers a futuristic model to represent urban nature's multiplicity and possibilities for interventions on the banal landscapes of global corporatism.

When posing the question of 'What is a garden?' in the context of contemporary Montreal, an Indigenous perspective that reflects a larger question of traditional land practices and ecological knowledge is present from the outset. Montreal is considered unceded Indigenous territory, of which its old and new gardens are part. Finding a succinct text-based explanation of a garden from an Indigenous Canadian perspective is a challenge, because the answer expands to address the cosmological, ecological, political, familial, legal, and botanical. Relevant publications on Indigenous gardens are often oriented towards more comprehensive cosmological and spiritual approaches to horticulture that includes vast traditional knowledge about ecosystems

management and ecological reciprocity. (Kimmerer; N.J. Turner; Kimmerer and Burgoyne) The subject of the Canadian garden is already infused with histories of colonialism and colonial land (mis)use, and it becomes a place to think through relations with horticulture theoretically and experientially. (Laing) Places in Montreal such as the First Nations Garden at *Espace pour la vie* and the Three Sisters Garden at Dawson College are developing experiential perspectives on and advocating for the presence of Indigenous horticultural practices that incorporate traditions of forest gardens and integrated landscapes, practices that intertwine the aesthetic, agricultural, social, cultural, and ecological. Although not an active site of direct contestation, the Home Depot parking lot is part of the Montreal territory that is recognized as unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka, a community that is currently and historically embedded in local land use, including railways, agricultural land, industrialization, and deindustrialization.

As urban density increases in Canadian cities, outdoor social places that are not work or home ("third spaces") are appearing in unexpected places. Post-colonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha points to the transformative potential for third spaces to become resistant sites that alter the use intended by dominant forces through adaptation to hybrid identities. (Bhabha) I would argue that the Home Depot parking lot has become an informal multi-purpose third space, a kind of common garden and resistant site, especially when the flows of capital rest. Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, claimed in a 1967 lecture that:

> The city garden, whether it is a garden planned for a school, an industrial plant, or a hospital, assumes a greater significance because it is closely linked to the urban question. Even large parking lots should be given a garden landscape solution, so as to reinstate the city dweller—a prisoner in areas of the most pressing activities—in a more dignified setting. (Burle Marx 173)

Burle Marx invites the garden to solve the despair of an urban parking lot, as part of his commitment to gardens being part of daily life for all people in the city. A parking lot is typically devoid of plants and a social conviviality associated with public gardens, but the Home Depot

parking lot on Beaubien is already being discretely reclaimed for multi-purpose use by members of the neighbourhood.

I would offer a definition of a garden to compliment the previous versions. A garden is a place that invites a reflexive encounter with the botanical – visually, tactilely, sensorially, and physically. There is a principle of organization that guides the botanical and demarcates the place. Although a generally accepted principle, a garden does not need an enclosure. However, it does need a boundary to delimit a perimeter, at least as an aid to the work of the gardener, who is a critical agent (or team of agents) supporting the garden. A successful garden is inhabited by animals, insects, and fungi that accept the garden as part of their ecosystem, offering cover, food, water, and versions of habitat. A living garden is a dynamic site that embraces change, seasonal changes of the plants and their blooms, the long duration of plant cycles, and in the case of the Home Depot, the endless movements of cars amid the botanical proposition of the garden. The Home Depot parking lot demands a critical rethinking of a garden, one that largely alienates people from the practical tasks of gardening and emphasizes a functional understanding of the place. City gardens have the potential for social co-operation from the people that live in the surrounding neighbourhood and the garden centre, and possibilities for covert plantings exist in the open beds whose maintenance is overlooked (evidenced by the weeds growing through the intentional plants). For me, the parking lot is embedded with a suburban nostalgia of empty vast parking lots, the kind I remember spinning parents' cars in 'donuts' with friends during nights after snowstorms. The parking lots that lined the town of my adolescence sat empty in the nights, and although were full of vehicles in the day, this vastness remained in the nights – which haunts my hope for a garden that eats at the expansionist tendencies of the parking lot.

During the observational data analysis of the Home Depot lot, I designed a collage to envision an expansion of the garden to incorporate formal garden features and offer more ways

for people to experience the garden. (Figure 59) The clusters of gardens in the picture are based on the aerial maps of the parking lot and generally expand the parking islands with an increased planting of vines and perennials. The area along the train tracks is expanded to include more elaborate and flowering hedges as well as water features. Towards the main driveway, the entry sidewalk has been replaced by a mulched path lined with potted displays, flowering vines for the fence along the Videotron office border, and more intensively flowering beds that incorporate different heights and groupings of plants. The negative space represents the parking on the asphalt, which would remain an important part of the garden – although the alternative proposal would slow down and complicate the parking process. This collage represents one visualization of many possibilities to recalibrate the amount of garden versus parking on the lot, including proposals like a fountain to take a more celebratory approach to the garden's presence.

Figure 59. Collage proposal for expanding the garden beds in the Home Depot parking lot/garden. The negative space remains asphalt, available for parking. 09.2024.

Context for the parking lot

Conceptualizing Montreal's Home Depot parking lot garden as a site of urban friction is supported by literature in human and Marxist geography, the history of corporate gardens, urban political ecology, and historical/analytical texts on parking lots. What is at stake in the garden is the beauty of a constant collision between an expansionist multi-national hardware store with a garden fighting for visibility that is pushed to the perimeters of a huge swath of asphalt lined with battered trees and bushes, a site full of deindustrialized traces. The Home Depot is a multi-national company headquartered in the United States; its presence and oversized parking lot in Montreal is an example of global corporate capitalism. The familiar orange signage and vast retail space at Home Depot repeats across North America; similar parking lots are in Atlanta, Monterey, San Jose, Toronto, and many other cities. The garden centre, the layout of the parking lot, the warehouse-come-retail interior, are all designed by a multinational retail entity and its networks to be a recognizable and repeatable place. Anna Tsing describes the foundation for the global networks reinforced by multinational chains (like Home Depot), their political implications, colonial connections, and nuances that result from the agency of local populations in her book *Friction* (2005). Tsing reasons that the expansion of globalization's forces are due to the mass appeal of the pursuit of "prosperity, knowledge, and freedom." (Tsing 10) She centres a duality of globalization's impacts through the concept of Universalism, stating:

> Universalism is implicated in both imperial schemes to control the world and liberatory mobilizations for justice and empowerment. Universalism inspires expansion—for both the powerful and the powerless…. The concept of friction acknowledges this duality and puts it at the heart of our understanding of "modern" global interconnections, that is, those that have developed under the aegis of Enlightenment universals. Friction gives purchase to universals, allowing them to spread as frameworks for the practice of power. But engaged universals are never fully successful in being everywhere the same because of this same friction. (Tsing 9–10)

A sense of universalist power appears in the parking lot /garden, where a for-profit company traded a garden for an enormous parking lot with the municipal government. Here the Home Depot benefitted from the loose idea of garden, as only a minimal grouping of plant beds appeared to direct and contain parking for hundreds of customers. Tsing applies globalization's "friction" to ethnographic studies based in Indonesia, such as the development of "nature loving" groups among university students, environmental activist groups that connect struggles in the Amazon and Indonesia and recounting the Canadian mining company Bre-X's scandal. In the examples Tsing raises, the crisis-inducing effects of globalization on the environment accompany other narratives embedded in global networks that upend expectations through the agency of local populations. People living close to Home Depot enact their agency by using the parking lot Sunday evenings to learn to drive or meet with friends, but the more sinister effects of global capitalism like surveillance and the urban housing crisis appear with people learning to fly drones and cleaning out their live-in vans in the lot. These activities are intertwined with signs of urban nature: the relatively wild space of the train track, the landscaped parking islands, and the garden centre, contributing to the Home Depot parking lot being a complex site of globalized friction.

Parking lots have distinct impacts on the built environment, unique organizational patterns, and are a sign of the car at rest – the premise of geographer John A. Jakle and historian Keith A. Sculle's analysis in *Lots of Parking* (2004). They claim that parking is just as integral to American driving culture as driving itself, stating: "Parking dominates both at one's point of departure and at one's destination." (Jakle and Sculle) The authors point to the relationship between highway development, commuting and shopping culture of the 1980s and 1990s, the social changes in American cities in the 20th Century that account for the proliferation of parking lots on the American landscape. The authors note the paradox of the word *park* in the term parking lot as well as its distinction from garages, storage, and parks, which are the origins of

parking lots. (Jakle and Sculle 8) Geographers and planners refer to the "transportationscape" that parking lots are part of, eventually becoming an "…auto space (which) stands to anathematize the pedestrian. The pedestrian treads only with great care." (Jakle and Sculle 9) The phenomena of the "auto space" in opposition to the pedestrian space defines my experience walking into the Home Depot parking lot during business hours, where I was one of many pedestrians walking through the site. As a researcher pausing and observing the lot from outside of a car, I became an anomaly in a sea of vehicles. The book describes the history of parking techniques and corresponding spatial usage, case studies in major American automotive centres such as Detroit – which saw substantial urban demolition for parking lots, commercial and municipal scenarios for parking, different phases of parking in 20th Century urban planning, and the necessity for parking to be incorporated into institutional planning. The book ends with a focus on parking as a site for change in the contemporary American consciousness, identifying parking as a typical misuse of land in the United States. The Americanization of parking lots and car culture permeates the Home Depot parking lot, which recalls expansive lots of the American suburbs and even the car-centric urban planning of cities like Detroit.

The vastness of the Home Depot parking lot/garden is one of its primary characteristics, and literature on space and place in the urban context takes on a practical significance. Throughout this dissertation the distinction between space and place is informed by Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) which identifies place as specific and subjective, and space as indeterminate and oppositional. De Certeau's *place* is a distinct location, "…an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability." (De Certeau 117) In contrast, *space* is the confluence of "…vectors of directions, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements….In short, *space is a practiced place*." (De Certeau 117) Practicing the place of the Home Depot parking lot is embedded in its basic

function as a parking lot, cutting through the lot for different purposes in different directions, having it be the set of the neighbourhood's gentrification and impromptu choreographies of residents. Space and place are conceptually softened by the distinctions and musings of geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). Tuan reflects on space in relation to time, spatial analysis, experience, and ego, while place becomes a reflection on social status, location, and specificity. Tuan's reflections culminate in a desire to infuse geography with a humanism that prioritizes reflexivity and interdisciplinary connection. In terms of the impact of this approach on the Home Depot parking lot research, it lays a foundation for the lot's possibilities – creatively, spatially, functionally, and botanically.

Opening the modes of perception and observation in the city, was a critical part of Henri Lefebvre's treatise on the urban quotidian: *Rhythmanalysis* (1992/2004). The text emphasizes the researcher's body in the urban setting by relating and contrasting its rhythms with the exterior world. Lefebvre writes:

> The theory of rhythms is founded on the experience and knowledge [*connaissance*] of the body; the concepts derive from this consciousness and this knowledge, simultaneously banal and full of surprises – of the unknown and the misunderstood. (Lefebvre 77)

Drawing from the body's experience and knowledge is where interdisciplinary methodology requires on-site observations to inform the production of an in-situ choreography, inflecting research with corporeal subjectivity. As a researcher, my body watches, breathes, recognizes, and moves within that place, and then it is danced as another layer that watches, breathes, recognizes, and moves within that place. Time is critical for Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis*, as rhythms are perceived as temporal repetitions. He encourages temporality through cycles where the linearity of time is challenged by the overlapping cycles of work, sleep, seasons, mealtimes, etc.. (Lefebvre 82) *Rhythmanalysis* has intersectional potential, depending on the researcher's gender, race, class, physical ability, etc., which alters how they experience the rhythms of a place and

change the question of access. (Reid-Musson) For example, as a woman I did not feel comfortable conducting observations between 12-6am because the lot is relatively vacant. Although there is no imminent threat, the parking lot in those hours is relatively unpopulated, dark, and slightly hidden from the main street, which is a conventional safety concern for women alone in the city. The parking lot rhythms I observed happened primarily in the day, watching flows of people through working hours and in their leisure time on weekends. Observing the parking lot includes and implicates the body of the observer/researcher, who is under the same pressures of the capitalist system. When I was observing the parking lot, walking and standing to take notes, I became a suspicious entity disrupting the regular rhythms of people entering the lot and moving directly in an out of the store. Pausing my body to observe the surroundings contrasted the rhythms of cars and shoppers, and I became more visible than people driving, parking, and entering the store. My positionality is also key here, as I am a white woman in my forties, often casually dressed in trainers and pants, notably distinct from people moving through the parking lot as workers, or the parking attendants of the Home Depot wearing high-visibility vests corralling the shopping carts. Furthermore, I was a low-income resident of the neighbourhood who was eventually priced out of my housing during the observation period, and I watched as continual renovations to local properties fed by the products sold by the Home Depot increased local housing rental rates. The rhythms of the parking lot, the people who arrive and leave based on their working hours, the people who come to get work supplies throughout the day, and the quiet flow of retirees that are purchasing different items for home improvement projects, all permeate the lot. The cycles in the parking lot are expressed weekly, with an intensity throughout the conventional work week (M-F 8-4), deliveries by large trucks in the weeknights and evenings, a different intensity on specific weekends (I was once there during a spring weekend at the start of the second pandemic summer and witnessed a total chaos of people

preparing their private outdoor spaces), and the eerie calmness of Sunday evening in the lot. Lefevbre's *Rhythmanalysis* offers a model to understand the urban rhythms of both the places and the bodies that share the city.

One of the key characteristics of the Home Depot parking lot is its homogenous corporate branding and spatial layout of a non-descript suburban store. Louise Mozingo's book *Pastoral Capitalism* (2011) follows several case studies that illustrate a criteria and history of the way corporations used landscaping in the mid-20th Century to expand their impact and begin the entrenchment of suburban populations. Mozingo critiques and contextualizes the sprawling corporate landscaping of the United States, mainly hosted in suburban locales and often referred to as "Office Parks." These parks encouraged the expansion of suburban industry and "managerial capitalism" to the suburbs that corresponded with white middle- and upper-class families leaving the cities and the adoption of the family car. (Mozingo 7–8) American suburbanization had a profound influence on shaping transportation networks, social life, industry, labour and working environments, housing, and even on the adjacent cities. Mozingo brings attention to the often-overlooked element of landscaping that was also part of this profound cultural shift and links the current standards of large lawns and expansive properties to the colonial aspirations of British pastoralism. She writes:

> By the mid-twentieth century the trenchant correlation of greenness with goodness held sway in American culture. The introduction of corporate landscapes into the pastoral suburbs usefully subsumed the capitalist enterprise into the pastoral suburb's implied moral order. After all the broad public viewed the new phalanx of giant corporations as suspect, even threatening….In this sense, the appropriation of the pastoral landscape by American business became a useful trope for corporate capitalism. (Mozingo 11)

These pastoral design schemes included ample planned space for parking, a way to facilitate and integrate the working centres into a car-centric suburban lifestyle. Parking became integral to the built environment. Mozingo offers extensive research into the development of corporate campus

such as AT&T Bell Telephone Labs in New Jersey, The General Motors Technical Centre outside of Detroit Michigan, Deere and Company Administrative Centre in Moline Illinois, and Boeing Longacres Campus in Renton Washington, of which the design scale and impact on the landscape was often touted as an "industrial" or "American" Versailles. (Mozingo 79) Corporate campuses were places that housed scientific and managerial headquarters of corporations, forbade industrial signifiers like smoke stacks, had links to factories via train or highway, typically had low sprawling buildings, controlled access to the vast landscaped surroundings, and reinforced an influential prestige that continues to be exemplified in places like the corporate campuses of Silicon Valley. (Mozingo 97–98) Ultimately, Mozingo argues that the retreat and pastoral quality of these corporate power centres acerbate and reinforce the social inequality, environmental inefficiency, and limited participation that corporate structures engender, which needs to be directly addressed with public benefit foregrounded to face the massive changes that climate change is accelerating. Although not a corporate headquarters nor particularly resplendent, the Home Depot parking lot recalls the suburban expanse and pastoral design that Mozingo describes. Part of the parking lot is shared with a Videotron office headquarters, which gives the flow of the parking lot an even more corporate timing. The lawned edges and decorative islands throughout the parking lot attempt to establish some form of aesthetic attention to the parking lot and promotion the garden centre. The overall pattern of these parking islands dictates the flow and organization of cars; the garden is left to be glanced at from a moving car or in passing into the store.

Corporate gardens link to a history of company headquarters in England and the United States that extends to the production site. Design historian Helena Chance's book *The Factory in a Garden*, describes the changing histories of corporate landscapes in the Anglosphere (England and the United States), including early industrial configurations of factories that included on-site

allotment gardens for the workers, the 20th Century development of on-site pleasure gardens, and even sport fields. Chance weighs the impact of digital and global forces on the corporate place, which is now de-centred through multi-nationalism and virtual locations. Chance also takes issue with Mozingo's placement of corporate landscapes as a post-war phenomenon and argues that the development of corporate landscaping is a result of companies fostering ideal communities in their large-scale workplaces that can be traced to the early industrial revolution. (Chance 4–5) Throughout the book, Chance uses several examples including the Cadbury Factory in Bournville UK, the National Cash Register Company in Dayton Ohio, and the Shredded Wheat factories in the UK and US, to offer examples of how industrialists combined gardens and recreation as part of model factories from the late-1800s. These utopian-informed factories attempted to improve the brand of the companies, reinforce popular ideas of gardening as part of responsible citizenry, motivate employees, all the while reinforcing the social control of workers at the factory. (Chance 86–87) *The Factory in a Garden* gives many examples of the complicated history of corporate gardens in the UK and US that aim to improve and socially engineer the life quality of workers using gardens on work sites.

Introducing the Home Depot Parking Lot/Garden:

One of the main ways this parking lot resists being a "non-place" is by the indexical quality of the garden. This semiotic indexicality refers to the way that the garden supports the function of parking, used to delimit the lot and the contain/direct vehicular movement while holding its own cohesive function as a garden. The presence of plants is a basic expectation of a garden in Montreal, and the Home Depot parking lot includes a multi-modal use of plants by incorporating ornamental planting on parking islands throughout the parking lot (the small curbed areas that line the entries and thorough fares in the parking lot), the flora and fauna along the train track on the north edge of the parking lot, and the garden centre which sells plants, gardening supplies,

and soil amendments to residential and commercial clients. These three parts of the garden characterize the friction of competing and complimentary interests of the human and botanical environments in this lot. Furthermore, reframing the multiplicity of the Home Depot as a multi-modal garden with the miniature gardens of the parking islands, the wildness of the plants on the edge of the train track, and the categorization/display/purchase approach of the garden centre, makes the Home Depot parking lot a critical example of the multiplicity of Montreal's urban botanical.

The following photos show Google Map and satellite view screenshots of the Home Depot parking lot and immediate surrounding area. (Important note: these maps appear slightly angled from cardinal directions, and it is generally accepted in Montreal that the orientation of the city is slightly angled – for example Saint Laurent runs 'north-south' in common parlance). In the Google map (Figure 60) the parking lot is represented by long lines slightly angled to Beaubien. Although similar colours are used in the Google map to define the parking lot and surrounding streets – it is distinctly an open parking area. The orientation of the large store and parking lot hug the train tracks and the green area on the northeastern edge of the parking lot is the start of a several kilometer path along the railway tracks that acts as a major thoroughfare in Montreal for cyclists and joggers. The chain-link fence that runs along the railway tracks often has human sized holes cut through it to allow people using the path to cross the tracks (often used by people travelling between the Rosemont metro station and the Mile-End neighbourhood), but there are holes cut into the fence to facilitate a pedestrian short cut to or through the Home Depot. The opening through the fence onto the Home Depot parking lot at the southeast section is regularly opened and repaired, and there is a well-worn trail inside the train tracks that takes you to other openings. Both these maps, and the contradicting pathways people are carving through the

boundaries of the parking lot, reveal human movement through the lot – regardless of the planning, markings, and fences.

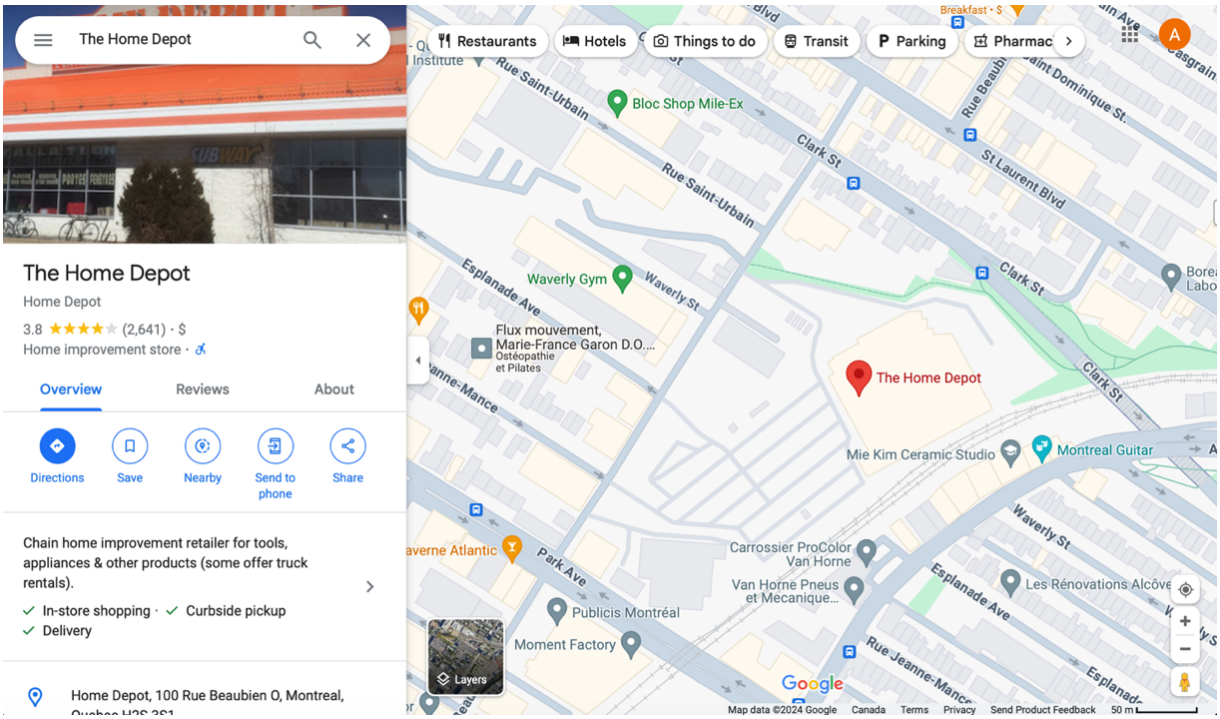

Figure 60. Screenshot, Google Maps, Home Depot, 100 Beaubien Ouest, Montreal. Accessed: 17.08.2024.

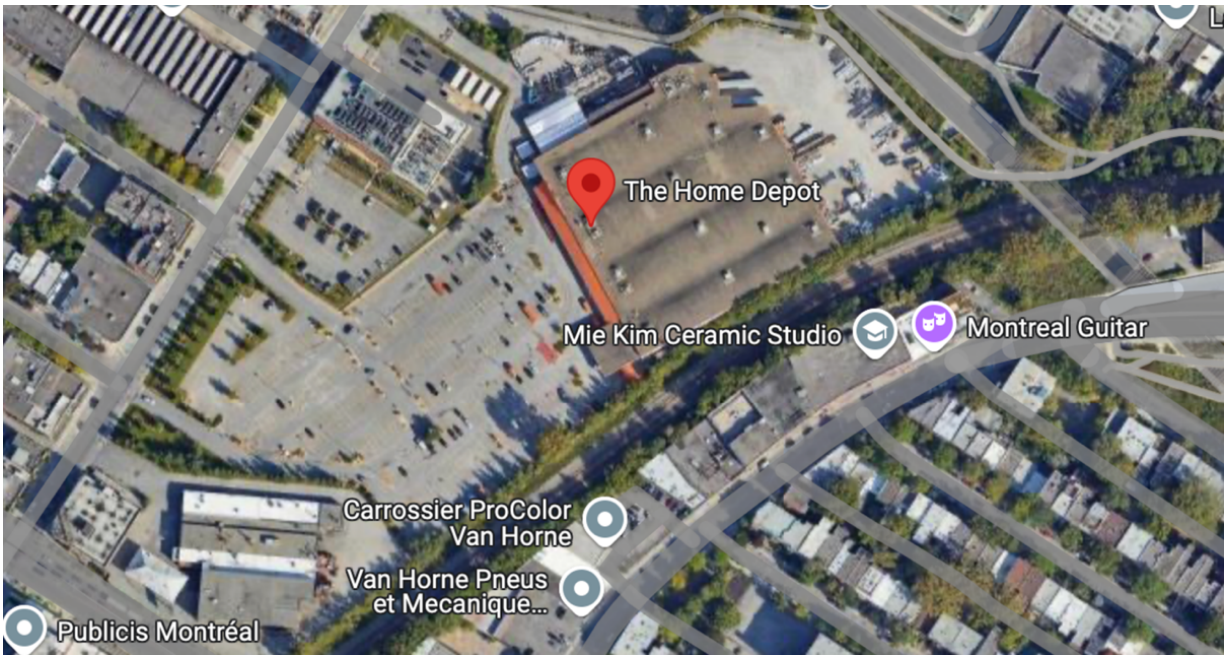

Figure 61. Screenshot, Google Maps (Satellite view), Home Depot, 100 Beaubien Ouest, Montreal. Accessed: 30.08.2024.

The second map (Figure 61) shows an aerial satellite view of the parking lot via Google Maps, which improves the visual distinction between the concrete and garden elements. Following the same contours of the Google map, the visibility of the Home Depot lot's boundaries can be seen as trees and greenery. Because of the time of day, shadows are cast on the asphalt from the trees and bushes. From this angle the organization and planning befitting a garden becomes more obvious, as the greenery of trees and parking islands show symmetry, defined borders, and what Burle Marx points to as a "garden landscape solution" (Burle Marx 173) incorporated into the parking lot. The vastness of the concrete lot is evident from this aerial perspective, but the stillness of this screenshot obscures the constant movement of people and vehicles which characterizes the lived observations in the parking lot.

The Home Depot parking lot creates a physical opening in the density of the neighbourhood; it is flat and open to facilitate vehicular movement. The functional necessity of allowing vehicles, including transport trucks carrying large materials, to easily access the store simultaneously provides local residents open vistas of the sky, sunsets/sunrises, Mount Royal, and the city's northwestern skyline. This simultaneous benefit and drawback of an area earmarked for parking to the detriment of the city's pedestrian population, exemplifies Tsing's "friction;" the break in density that is part of the Home Depot's scale creates vistas for the urban sky gazer. Using this quantity of space solely to support car culture is at odds with the city's vested interest in pedestrianization and environmental care. However, I propose that the contrast of this flat open space offering a view of the sky and mountain becomes a potent place to observe unique views of Montreal, which is part of my intention to highlight the reclamation of the parking lot from its primary function.

A possible history of the site

In general, Montreal/Tiohtià:ke has been influenced by its geography as an island bordered by mountainous regions (Laurentians to the north and Appalachians to the south), which makes it an ancient region for transportation and passage. (Fougères and Macleod) As an island on the St. Lawerence River, the movement of both people and goods through the region spurred the establishment of the island as a city and led to Montreal becoming a sophisticated transportation network and hub by the 20th Century. The train track that runs along the southern border of the Home Depot parking lot, is part of the remnants of this transportation network and is the major reason for the unusual shape, surface, and cut-off relationship with the neighbourhood. The ground of the Home Depot parking lot has existed for millennia, but the installation of the railway track in the late 1800s began the process of reshaping the area into its currently recognizable combination of industrial and residential neighbourhood blocks. Immediately prior to the installation of the railway, the area was largely agricultural and had several active limestone quarries close-by (on the sites that are now Rue des Carrières and Père Marquette Parc) that were mined to build local churches. (Germond; Boxer) The development of a rail line named the Montreal Northern Colonization Railway originally running from Ottawa to East Montreal, was in different stages of approval and development from approximately 1870 to 1890. The exact route of the railway through Montreal was a source of civic controversy and debate in the 1870s, as a councilman of the period was trying get the route to run through his family's agricultural land (the Beaubien's), because during that period there was an expectation that prosperity would follow the installation of a railway. (Desjardins; *Montreal Northern Colonization Railway, Yea or Nay?*) The Beaubien family spearheaded the placement of the Mile-End train station on land they owned as a key node for the railway route, although the proposed location was primarily agricultural, distant from the original "Mile-End" area of the city and would not directly service a

population. The Mile-End train station was eventually made redundant by the Parc Avenue train station at Jean Talon and Parc and was torn down in 1970. Currently, the site of the former train station is at the east end of Bernard Avenue. The railway offered a counterpoint in the city to the heavy industry located in the south of the island that connected the railway and water way shipping via the Saint Laurence River. Eventually the railway running through the Mile-End was connected to the Canadian Pacific network and became part of a transcontinental railway. The rail line facilitated distribution capacity for local factories such as breweries and appliance companies, which in turn supported the development of neighbourhoods of workers who continued and were attracted to both the employment and opportunity to tend the local agricultural land that was still available. (Germond) The industrial transition of the area of what is now the Home Depot parking lot was influenced and led by the development of the railway line, which continues to dominate the flows of the neighbourhood.

Because much of Montreal's industry and population lived mainly south of Sherbrooke Street until the beginning of the 20th Century (High), publicly available insurance maps of Montreal concentrate on the southern areas of the island until the early 20th Century. Most of what is now the Home Depot parking lot, particularly the western portion of the lot, can be identified on these maps as a Canadian Pacific Railway train track yard as early as 1920. (Goad and Underwriters' Survey Bureau) There are a series of companies that occupied buildings on the east side of the lot from 1920-1943, including a lumber yard and shed in the 1920 map. Readable names of other companies on historical maps that occupied the main and adjacent lots include: *The Caledonia Spring Company: Heat, Steam, Fuel, Coal* (1920), *Bottling Works* (1920), *National Building Supply Storage* (1943), *Quebec Paving – Concrete Mixing* (1943), and *Canada Dry bottle storage* (1943). (Figure 62) Throughout the early and mid-20th Century this lot was used by different parts of local industry, including for building supplies and lumber, the same

function as the current Home Depot. The train yard is shown in an aerial photograph from the CP archives that the archivist at 'Exporail' estimates to be either the 1940s or 50s. (Figure 63) In the newspaper clippings that I found in the BANQ archives announcing the Home Depot's installation on Beaubien referred to the lot in 2000-2001 as abandoned, and the train yard had been closed and abandoned before this date.

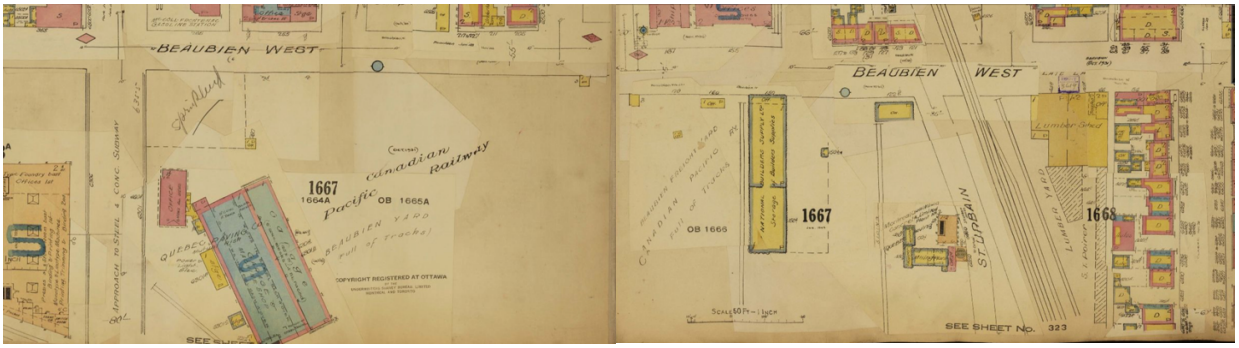

Figure 62. Underwriters' Survey Bureau, *Insurance plan of the city of Montreal, volume V, 1943,* #330 & 331. BANQ Archives, Accessed: 01.11.24

Figure 63. Canadian Pacific Beaubien Trainyard, 100 Beaubien Ouest, Montreal, QC. 1940-50 (date approximate). Photo credit: Exporail/CHRA Archives.

In his essay “The Temporality of Landscape,” anthropologist Tim Ingold argues for the inclusion of temporality when considering a landscape, not limiting a landscape to solely the cartographic features that lend itself to geographic representations. (Ingold 'The Temporality of the Landscape') Integrating a temporal point of view on the Home Depot parking lot landscape frames a selective retelling of the history of what can be seen, opens the possibility that an invisible or alternative history exists beneath the visible surface, and yet another possibility of a future that can grow within the site. Many publicly available materials and documents that trace the changes in the lot are intimately linked to colonial projects such as the railway, the expansion of the city of Montreal throughout the 20th Century, and the transition to a hub of multi-national consumerism in the 21st Century. However, I remain curious of what the ground layers could reveal: the asphalt covering the soil from the railyard period, covering the agricultural period, covering what else? Was there a forest or a meadow that preceded the agricultural period? Were there pathways cutting through the landscape? By retelling a version of how this site came into its current “temporality” I feel the limits of my social and familial connections, which could be a source of local knowledge and point to the alienation that a consumerist entity like Home Depot propagates – the illusion that nothing exists before or after the shopping experience.

As the area surrounding the Home Depot is increasingly in demand for residential properties and the prices of homes in the area have doubled since 2018, a question remained throughout my research about why such a large parking lot could exist in a dense and increasingly valuable area of Montreal? The area directly north, from Beaubien to Jean Talon, mixes residential and industrial buildings, so an industrial scale parking lot is not completely out of place. However, paving a large swath of land in Montreal raises the possibility that the land was contaminated by the presence of the rail lot. Old railyards can be contaminated by the chemicals involved in mechanics, the ties, and maintenance of the tracks, which would explain why the area is paved

over. In 2001, there was a newspaper article in *La Presse* (Sirois) and a public announcement from the city in *Le Devoir* about Home Depot's construction on the abandoned lot at Beaubien and St. Urbain. The *La Presse* article notes that the proposal from Home Depot features a garden for the site to rehabilitate the abandoned lot, and to offset the substantially sized parking lot for 625 cars. (Sirois E3) The proposal for the garden listed in this *La Presse article*, was extraordinary for my research. I have been arguing that the parking lot displays characteristics of a gardens for years and other people familiar with the site have interrogated or laughed at my assumption. The scale and aesthetic decisions of the garden could still be questioned, but the promise of a garden was integral to the city of Montreal agreeing to a large parking lot's installation on this site.

Figure 64. Home Depot Parking Lot, West Facing, 23.08.2020.

Figure 65. Home Depot Parking Lot, West Facing, 28.08.2024.

Method and Observational Outcomes

After outlining possible definitions for a garden and discussing some of the transformations that shaped this lot, the next step is to describe and analyze what was present in the lot during my observation period of 2019-2024. Drawing from the subjective positionality of the urban observational method attributed to Henri Lefebvre's post-humous *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), I spent periods observing the lot from 2019-2024 taking note of my own ways of using the lot and considering the flows and movements of people, vehicles, and plant life. Lefebvre writes: "Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is

rhythm." (Lefebvre 25) He emphasizes repetition, cycles/processes, and growth/declines of elements as ways to read the temporal rhythms of a place, which affords a model to interpret the patterning of flows of traffic, people, and goods. While watching the lot, an observer can see the daily and seasonal rhythms of its use and how those rhythms incorporated into local urban life. I regularly visited the lot midday, studying what was growing in the gardens and take notes of general happenings with the Home Depot. I visited several times in the weekday evenings, but I was personally spooked by the darkness and large delivery trucks barreling through the lot at night. I took note of the flows of people in different phases of the day, seasons, and long-term changes in parking flows related to the pandemic. For a period in 2024, I worked as a horticulturalist and was in the lot during the early morning parking in the "Pro Zone" with other contractors and landscapers. Because of the lot's large size where there are several discrete pockets, people use the lot in many ways besides the main function of parking. The lot starts to be a catch all for people's activity in vehicles (workers eating lunch in their vehicles, parking for long term van dwellers, a place to learn how to drive for beginners). I often visited on Sunday evenings to work with my colleague on the dance piece described in the appendix, a time when the parking lot was emptied of customer's cars and delivery trucks. The void of conventional use changed the lot into a more peaceful place sonically, spatially, and for the pedestrian. The choreography that I was developing could only take place on the Sunday evening when the lot had emptied – the rhythms and patterns we were developing in the choreography counter the quotidian rhythms and spatial restrictions of an active parking lot typically used by several hundred vehicles. As we walked, ran, and danced through the lot, we were temporarily altering its rhythms and drawing from urban scenography (Hann; Janssen 2021; McKinney and Palmer) to suggest the lot become an oversized dance-space. The following sections describe the main features and typical rhythms of the parking lot.

Figure 66. Home Depot Parking Lot, Garden bed adjacent to Beaubien with shrubs, trees, ornamental grasses, and “spontaneous plants.” 16.09.2021.

Figure 67. Parking Island at the Home Depot. 02.11.2024.

Parking Islands, Plants, and Trees

Pictured in Figure 67 is my favourite parking island of the lot. It's unique because of the shape and cluster of large trees with a centred lamppost. This parking island is distinctly lit as a landmark in the night, and its coniferous trees stay green throughout Montreal's long winter. In general, the parking islands are raised, curbed garden beds lining the juncture between rows of parked cars and the driving paths in the lot to facilitate access in and out. The islands are organized miniature gardens anchored by trees with small shrubs, perennial stands, ornamental grasses, and occasional weeds or "spontaneous vegetation" (Argüelles and March) winding through the beds. My plant identification is rudimentary, but Montreal urban botanist Roger Latour has published a guide to the local flora found along the lots adjacent to the train track. His

text identifies some common spontaneous plants in this area to include burdock, amaranths, ragweed, wild parsley, jewelweed, curly dock, and Virginia creeper (Latour) – which can be found along the far edges of the lot or slowly seeding themselves in the parking islands. Mulch covers the garden beds. It is a layer of chipped wood commonly used in commercial gardening to reduce maintenance costs by retaining moisture in the garden beds and limiting the growth of "spontaneous vegetation." The positioning of the beds and plants create barriers, to define and reinforce the parking lot's boundaries, direct the movement of cars and pedestrians, and to beautify the asphalt.

The organization of the plants and miniature gardens on the parking islands display a typical tension of urban gardens, a tension that makes many demands of plants: functionality through shade and visual cues, beauty through the shapes and blooms of the plants, aesthetic organization of planted rows and colour coordination, all amongst the chaotic flows of human, non-human, automobile, and locomotive life worlds. Spontaneous vegetation is always lurking in the beds, a threat to a fastidious labourer responsible for the garden. A weed is considered "…an undesirable presence in human activities (social definition) and its capacity to propagate (ecological definition)….In urban areas weeds…(are) disturbing signs of abandonment." (Argüelles and March 45) The weeds that creep up between the shrubs, especially towards summer's end, are a reminder of the lot's former life as an abandoned yard and the potential for these "spontaneous plants" to threaten the order of the garden. These mini-gardens are bound to the Home Depot parking lot, they are the bargain for the parking lot's existence, fulfilling the site-developer's promise to the city of Montreal to supplement the enormous parking lot with a garden. However, many of the beds seem neglected, and could benefit from not only more variety and density of plants, but also a more experimental sensibility in shape, colour, and maybe even fostering the will of the local spontaneous plants to include themselves the beds.

Figure 68. The snow dump on the Beaubien border of the garden, 06.03.2023.

The Winter Garden

When I started to watch the garden/parking lot at the Home Depot, I was shocked to see that the garden bed and lawn along Beaubien (Figure 66) is used as a snow dump during winter months. (Figure 68) It is typical in Montreal that roadways and parking lots need snow to be removed and dumped, and in this private lot they dump the snow onsite in one of the larger garden/lawn areas. Snow dumps are known sites of toxicity and recent research is emerging in

Montreal about the formation of an “urban glacier” in the municipal snow dump on the outskirts of the city. (Toso and Tremblay; Zinger and Delisle) Visible in Figure 68, is the snow pile at the Home Depot lot which is several meters high, completely immersing the shrubs and trees in the garden. During the winter, these snow hills go through several metamorphoses of snow and ice, changing from fluffy white at the start of winter to crusty grey mounds at winter’s end. Incredibly, this garden bed regenerates annually, the shrubs underneath survive the weight and toxicity of the urban snow. Many of the shrubs have broken branches in the spring, but they are extremely hardy and continue to regenerate in the warmer months. In my observations I never saw evidence of gardeners working closely in the shrubs to remove broken branches, which would be a gardener’s task in a residential garden to ensure the breakage points had clean cuts and dead branches were removed. The breakage remains in these shrubs, but new growth continues revealing a self-sustaining quality of these plants.

The Home Depot parking lot garden faces a similar challenge to what Bruce Thicke dealt with in West Montreal – managing significant damage from extreme weather, especially in spring. The maintenance practices at the Home Depot are more minimal, because the gardens barely register for people who use the space, following standards for corporate and commercial gardens. The beds, such as the one along Beaubien, are not display gardens for exotic species. The bed is mono-planted with single shrub species and single tree species. Both this mono-garden style and the use of this garden bed as a snow dump, shows a level of disregard for the plants used in these gardens. I would offer a counter view considering the plants that survive every winter under the massive weight of snow piles – that the garden that runs along the edge of Beaubien is a resistant garden, a place of unsuspecting regeneration in light of corporate disregard.

Figure 69. Late summer annuals at the Home Depot Garden Centre Entrance, 28.08.2024.

Figure 70. Autumnal flowers at the Home Depot Garden Centre Entrance, 01.09.2021.

The Garden Centre

The garden centre is one of the three botanical networks on site and an example of a commercialized network where garden components are imported, separated, and redistributed for profit. The plants never take root here; they are in transit when they move through this centre. It is not only a source of seasonal plants and trees for local gardeners, but the garden centre sells fertilizers, soil, mulch, fountain pumps, planter pots, and mystical figurines to enhance personal gardens. The Home Depot Garden Centre, amongst several other garden centres in the neighbourhood, functions as a local supply centre for garden materials, plants, soil amendments, and containers that move into/onto residential and commercial properties. The garden centre is one of the last steps in the supply chains of botanical, organic, and material goods destined for local gardens, a key node for the flow of these materials.

Amateur and professional gardeners become the final distributors of these organic materials, where they use plants to define, shape, create barriers, and beautify the outdoors of residences and properties of the city. The garden centre divides plants in aisles of similar plant species, and the constellation of plants change according to season. Bushes, roses, and fruit trees stay from the late spring into summer; perennials, vegetable seedlings, and flowering annuals dominate in early summer; there is a push to sell off the season's end perennials at the end of August; autumnal chrysanthemums and asters dominate the Home Depot entryway in fall (Figure 69). Garden centres act as staging sites for the propagation of urban nature, places where people can materially start the transformation of private properties. The Home Depot is one of several garden centres in the neighbourhood which promises planning, beautification, and control over the botanical presence in private gardens and balconies. Plants in garden centres are hyper-commodified, stacked amongst plastic containers and electrical wires, temporarily uprooted and sold as part of the big box experience. The selection of flowering perennials and annuals includes

plants like cornflower and false Soloman's seal that grow and proliferate locally, but the garden centre also sells rose cultivars and exotic tulip bulbs that can grow in hardiness zone 6A (interestingly Laval and Sherbrooke are in different zones). The garden centre promotes seasonal plants in the front of the store and overall is a site of subtle selectivity over the local botanical biome through its proximity to the neighbourhood and techniques of plant promotion.

Figure 71. Home Depot Parking Lot Markings in front of the main entrance, 28.08.2024.

Markings

One of the key semiotic signs in the parking lot are the yellow markings painted on the asphalt that delineate the parking spaces, the areas where it is forbidden to park (Figure 71), and direction arrows (Figure 72). The yellow paint covers the asphalt with contrasting patterns that regulates the movement of people and their vehicles; it imposes visual order in the large and strangely shaped lot. The yellow colour sets a vibrant visual tone accentuated by the garden's yellow plants, mainly grasses and trees which are highlighted by the yellow paint. The occasional dark green conifer in the garden beds create a visual contrast to the yellows that dominate the lot. There is a section of parking at the southern entrance of the building dedicated to professionals purchasing supplies at the Home Depot, which is marked by red parking lines and a "PRO" symbol in the parking spaces. This is the lone area in the lot that breaks from the yellow markings. Although it seems a possibility, during my observations I never witnessed any rogue markings – no stenciling, chalk drawings, or alternative painting. I deduce that this is part of the forgotten and recessed location of the lot, supported by the raised bed and Videotron headquarters along Beaubien.

Although the yellow lines are part of a car-centric system that could be considered "anti-nature," the lines allow for a collective understanding of how to use the lot and are visual referents to direct car movement. The yellow painted lines act as an oversized diagrammatic on the asphalt, predicting, directing, and offering a sense of security to the person arriving in their car to the Home Depot. These lines are an example of the overlay process that is integral to quotidian city life. Michel de Certeau writes in his essay 'Walking in the City':

> Perspective vision and prospective vision constitute the twofold projection of an opaque past and an uncertain future onto a surface that can be dealt with. They inaugurate…the transformation of the urban *fact* into the *concept* of a city. (De Certeau 93–94)

The surface that is "dealt with" is the asphalt, flat and consistent, in contrast to the garden, which is bumpy, permeable, and alive. De Certeau points to the pressures of temporality that lurk with in the city, drawing from the lot's past as a forgotten trainyard and many possible future uses. The asphalt holds back the future ruin that is this garden, and the markings contribute to a sense of organized flow on its surface. This spatial directive communicated by the markings is part of the tacit obligations of living in a city: to observe, comprehend, and co-operate, while interpreting semiotic systems that manage our everyday flows.

The pedestrian cutting through the lot disrupts these patterns, and the areas devoted to their entry and exit into the lot are minimized. Typically, I moved through the lot as a pedestrian, often against the visual guides marked on the asphalt, carving my own routes and passages through designated spaces and driveways. My intention wasn't to actively disrupt the flows of cars; it was a by-product of being car-free in my daily life – an eco-political position that occasionally leaves me stranded to contend with urban traffic flows. Other people regularly cut through the lot to get to the store using the most direct path possible. During every observation session I undertook when the store was open, I saw people moving contrary to the painted lines and patterns, relatively far from the sidewalks placed for meandering strolls to the store entrance. Again, in De Certeau's 'Walking in the City,' he writes:

> The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them. (De Certeau 101)

De Certeau's connection between the markings and walking patterns sets a precedent for choreography. A choreographic map already exists on the surface that is regularly ruptured by people living and "walking in the city." The markings, pathways, walking, "forest of gestures"

(102) and other “ambiguities” generate a choreographic prototype, a model for remixing movement onsite.

Figure 72. Direction markings and pedestrians at the Beaubien street exit from the Home Depot Parking lot, 28.08.2024.

Figure 73. Home Depot parking lot, Videotron employee parking area, west facing, 15.10.24.

Parking

Parking is the explicit function of the lot. Cars enter and exit from three points on Beaubien: the eastern and western edges, and a central driveway beside the large Home Depot sign at an intersection with traffic lights. The parking lot is shared between Home Depot customers, discretely long-term parked vehicles, and the employee parking allocated to the Videotron headquarters (a Quebec telecommunications company) located on Beaubien. The Videotron building and its rows of large satellites are part of what hides the large parking lot from the view of the street. On the edges of the buildings are mounted surveillance cameras, monitoring the perimeter of the satellites at the Videotron HQ and the entrances of the Home Depot store – no other surveillance cameras are visibly mounted throughout the parking lot. Cars connected to the

headquarters are parked outside of store hours in the north section of the lot, so there are several different usage flows taking place throughout a workday. During the pandemic there were different waves of usage that contrasted the last period of my observations in 2024 (which was noticeably more unpredictable and more voluminous in terms of traffic). For the most part the parking was relatively quiet during the pandemic, but during weekends at the start of the spring there was a frenzy of people preparing their outdoor spaces, buying lawn furniture and gardening supplies, and packing the parking lot. During both pandemic and post-pandemic phases of my observations, the area on the far southwest corner remained underused. It was a spot where I would see a couple cleaning-out their live-in van weekly, a place where they could spread out in relative privacy, but this area of the lot typically remained quiet. Along the border of the train track towards the store were the Home Depot rental vehicles, vans and drivable equipment, that were there throughout the opening and closing of the store.

At the start of a general workday, the parking lot opens early for professionals at the southern edge of the store. This means the southern edge of the lot is full of activity with vans and trucks, with workers dressed for their various professions (construction, painting, landscaping, plumbing, etc.). Carts and dollies become part of the early morning soundscape as people collect supplies in large quantities. As the day progresses, more people use the lot. At midday, many labourers are eating lunch in their vehicles parked in the "Pro" section of the lot.

Throughout the day, people regularly pull up on to the store on bikes and in *Commune Autos* (a Canadian car-sharing program), the flow of car traffic in and out of the lot is continuous without becoming congested. Cars are constantly pulling in and backing out of parking spaces, which adds to the sensation that the lot is continually in motion. Some cars along the less busy edges park for extended periods of time, especially in the southwest corner far from the store. At midday the parking lot holds hundreds of cars between the Home Depot and Videotron office

parking. There are signs throughout the lot that delimit the parking, for example towards the office the parking is restricted to employees of Videotron. The combination of alternative transport modes, professional labourers, telecom employees, makes different patterns and flows of people happening throughout a given day that are not only related to the Home Depot.

Parking lots can reveal patterns of people moving through the city. Their emptiness and fullness of cars communicate economic factors, labour cycles, commutes, shopping – cycles of human presence and absence. In *Lots of Parking*, John Jakle notes that parking lots in American culture accompanied the entire remaking of the society with the mass production and infrastructure for the car, and asphalt became a symbol for leveling and changing a landscape. (Jakle and Sculle 93) He writes: "A parking lot did not need to be anything other than a straightforward container for its function." (Jakle and Sculle 98) Parking lots are connected to expansionist American culture and urban demolition, which partially accounts for why the Home Depot lot seems so out of place in a bustling central neighbourhood of Montreal. The huge swath of land, large enough to formerly accommodate locomotive cars, is now reserved for hundreds of personal vehicles. Jakle argues for the urban void associated with parking lots, but the absence of parking reveals the design in its totality as a functional statement, a design complimented by the hues of the garden's plants that shows boundaries that can be critiqued and re-imagined.

Figure 74. Home Depot Parking Lot, south facing at the edge of the lot against the train tracks, the ballast can be seen through the fence on the right. 05.10.2020.

Railway Line

The southern border of the parking lot is a train track, a fenced off area that runs along the Home Depot lot and the buildings on the North side of Van Horne Avenue. Although the track is fenced off, people regularly create holes in the fence to allow for a short cut across the tracks. There is a well-worn path running on the inside of the fenced in train track area that links to another formal pedestrian path running beside the tracks (Figure 75). The train tracks have distinct management practices, including strict policy on vegetation. Canadian-Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) is currently and historically (as Canadian Pacific) responsible for the tracks that run beside Home Depot, and CPKC maintains a practice of annual chemical herbicide treatment to eradicate plants along the gravel ballast and mechanical removal of plants along the track edges. (CPKC) What grows along the fence is largely left as a visual barrier and could be perceived as relatively wild, as the verge (the section between the fence and ballast) can act as a conservation corridor. (Borda-de-Água et al.) In the verge, specific species of plants are not managed, and the vegetation along railway include plants categorized as "invasive" and "native" that are constantly reorganizing themselves in the ecosystem through competition and hybridization. (Borda-de-Água et al. 68) Friction appears again in this lot at the border of the tracks (Figure 75), the mix of flora and fauna running along the fence contrasts the orderly displays of the parking islands and garden centre, but the organization is based on the railway industry's safety standard, not the aesthetic goals of urban beautification.

The southern edge of the parking lot along the railway is a corridor for train transportation but also for urban wilds. Quebec geographer Diane Saint-Laurent identifies the concept of a "green link" ("*lien vert*") that includes urban railroads, places that foster the movement, dispersal, and interactions of plant and animal species in isolated ecosystems, of which Montreal could be classified because of its island geography. (Saint-Laurent 150) The southern border of the parking

lot is a "green link" and an area of what urban botanist Matthew Gandy calls "marginalia" which he defines as "…anomalous spaces of urban nature as an interdisciplinary terrain that extends from renewed interest in urban biodiversity to alternative conceptions of landscape authenticity." (Gandy 1301) This strip of plants growing subject to the industrial-scale maintenance of the railway replicates an ongoing friction between the urban, rural, and open geographies connected by Canadian rail lines. The horticultural management of Canadian-wide railways concentrates on the challenges of distance and safety, as opposed to precise botanical management, and in that gap the spontaneous vegetation of the railway verge reveals a brief reprieve from the hyper-management of urban gardens, a snapshot of spontaneous vegetation between clearings. Furthermore, the unplanned pedestrian pathways weaving together the train track and the parking lot recall reclamation projects for urban railways like New York City's *Highlin*e (1999) or Berlin's *Park am Gleisdreieck* (2011-2013) – repurposed "wastelands" of former urban train lines. Critiques have emerged of these "rail-to-park transformations" that accuse cities of "green gentrification"– producing urban oasis' from marginal sites when there is an accumulation of capital in the location. (Argüelles et al.) And in fact, Montreal's *Réseau-Vert* is already a park running along several kilometers of the train track behind the Home Depot with paths, dog off-leash areas, and an outdoor calisthenics gym. Geographer Saint-Laurent re-iterates the importance of acknowledging the already existent ecosystems within cities as a critical part of designing public parks (Saint-Laurent 155), something that is starting to be embraced in projects such as the *Réseau-Vert*. These examples of parks reclaiming trainyards indicates a unique moment where the environment and infrastructure are catching up with an economic boom. The pressures on this railway running through the city are immense, with dangers from pedestrians, high maintenance costs, and the overall value of the land holdings increasing. It may be outside

the scope of my dissertation, but the gentrification of the area seems more likely to displace the railway before the Home Depot or its parking lot.

Figure 75. Train tracks and path running along the southern border of the Home Depot parking lot, 11.10.2020.

The Home Depot parking lot's components semiotically and pragmatically operate as a garden that straddles seasons, functions, and intentions, bound to the corporate entity of Home Depot but still a potent resistant site. There are several botanical categories to be found on this site, including "spontaneous vegetation," decorative container monocrops, miniature gardens, soil amendments, vegetable seedlings, trees, and shrubs, and selective categories are for sale and ownership. Other parts of the garden grow around the plants moving with the desires of humans who take them home, transpose industrial flows in the landscape, and sell them for capital gain.

The Home Depot structures, sanitizes, organizes, and profits from the botanical elements of the lot, but the continuing presence of spontaneous vegetation offers a resistant alternative where the plants are enacting their own agency to seed and grow on their own timelines. Over the course of my observations, I became fond of many of the trees in the lot, especially the conifers whose intricate shapes and growth patterns were even more unique in the ambiance of the parking lot (Figures 67 and 74). The shapes and hues of the conifers remain throughout the winter, and the connection to the prized and rarified conifers of the Japanese Garden is not lost on me. In figure 74, there is a twisted pine tree whose shape has been altered by damage in the winter or from a parking car, but it shows a shape of regrowth and challenges from the environment – what the Japanese Garden is trying to train the central trees in the pond to show. The planted parking islands are a concession to the city and an acknowledgement that gardens benefit the commons, a way to break up the intensity of the asphalt and create different sections within the parking lot. I argue that this parking lot should be taken seriously as a garden, with its different areas (stroll garden), its views of the mountain (borrowed scenery garden), and plants that keep a subtlety amongst the mission of shopping. These details are just as intricate as the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, without admission fees, didactic panels, or an institutionally imposed ambiance.

A Parking Lot Garden

During the fieldwork period, from the vantagepoint of a neighbour and someone conducting ongoing rehearsals during the summer months, I saw the parking lot actively repurposed on Sunday evenings by people living in the neighbourhood. Using the site for creative practice during the pandemic when working in a dance studio was restricted, felt like a logical usage of a local outdoor space. Furthermore, re-envisioning the parking lot as a garden through both criteria

outlined in the literature, a stretch of imagination, and now confirmed through archival research, offered a sense of hope for the built environment. Reclaiming this parking lot from the realm of a big box store "auto space" suggests a re-envisioning the parking lot as a multi-use space that personally recalls a 1980s and 1990s suburban nostalgia.

Asphalt covers most of the terrain of the parking lot, but it requires maintenance to stay as a permanent cover. If the asphalt has a limited lifespan, what could the future garden be? The condition of the soil and the industrial history of the land are inevitably part of the future garden going forward, which resounds with modernist and post-industrial ideas about progress. From the enthusiasm for the colonial promise of the railway, to the current flipping of the neighbourhood housing stock and arrival of venture capital funded artificial intelligence companies, the surrounding neighbourhood continues to be a harbinger of displacement and capitalist expansion. This research counters this site slipping into a "non-place" by observing and re-establishing the lot as a garden, where the possibility exists for the neighbourhood to reclaim the promised garden and reimagine a commons based on the original deal with the city. The parking lot garden would be a subversive garden type, where the garden resists among the expansionist flows, or could become a garden of ruins. The disintegration of the asphalt could accompany the spread of the plants from the railway track, the garden centre plants could finally take root, and the parking islands could start to take over the lot.

In this period in Canada the likely future of a large urban lot would be a high-end condominium development, which is already happening on the perimeter of the Home Depot parking lot, marketed and occupied by a limited socio-economic class of people able to buy and maintain expensive apartments. As this outcome of dense overpriced apartments in urban centres is being repeated in nearly every Canadian city in 2025, I find myself supporting the awkward presence of the parking lot. Maybe it could even be an expanded site of deterioration and public

nuisance? The site could pull from Gilles Clément's *friche* and incorporate concrete and materials of the built environment in a hazy confusion of urban construction. It could become a place where the concrete is left to crumble, and the plants grow between the cracks as nouveau crevice gardens. Small flat areas of concrete can be maintained to host performances, driving lessons, and a strip of parking could remain for the Home Depot. Many of the cars left overnight in the lot could start to resemble a junkyard. The Home Depot landscaping subcontractors could start to incorporate the debris from local renoviction projects and the garbage that's created when people are uprooted and priced out of affordable neighbourhoods, to turn this detritus into an outdoor museum for the new class of condominium owners. The neighbourhood surrounding the Home Depot was notorious for its studios and late-night warehouse parties, which have now been converted into multimedia entertainment studios, CrossFit gyms, and expensive restaurants. Instead, the toxic detritus of this cultural moment should be enshrined in the parking lot as a garden for the 21st Century, ready for the towers of e-waste between the remaining parking spots from the artificial-intelligence companies based around the corner. With the mix of detritus and the plants left to grow in a selective *friche*, the Home Depot parking lot can serve as a reminder of how flows of an ecosystem happen simultaneously, and the ways that people, our actions, and our consumption are a fundamental part of this ecosystem.

Making movement/Making gardens: Artistic Research

Accompanying the fieldwork and analysis for this dissertation are three corresponding choreographies. The choreographic projects expand the critical resonance that emerged in the research such as: How to represent and acknowledge the effort, maintenance, changes, and control of the Japanese Garden? How can the intricacies of a gardener's movements be shown in a performance context? How can dance act as a resistant practice to conventional patterns of consumption? How do choreographic process, site-based fieldwork, and ethnographic research merge in a performance? And how can interdisciplinarity function in a research-based choreography? The choreographic process for the three pieces integrates observation, physical action, and temporal structures to create extra-textual outcomes, offering modes of synthesizing information that includes and expands the scope of text-based research practices and outcomes. In general, dancers can simultaneously observe sites sensorially and express concepts corporeally, generating critical artistic modalities through ineffable, temporal, and viscerally expressive qualities. In a city such as Montreal, the merger of the urban landscape and the body produces and reflects many tensions. In the introduction to the reader *Performance and the Contemporary City*, the authors write:

> …bodies can be said to both produce and be produced by the city. And while cities obviously contain bodies, bodies also contain cities. In fact, the city itself functions as an ecological body, on that facilitates the circulation of particular socio-economic and cultural discourses while also thereby delimiting them…..In this sense cities can be said always to be 'on the move'; bodies, moreover, move because the city does and vice versa. (Whybrow 3)

This quote can be critiqued for its homogenous view of bodies, but points to the productive exchange of the urban environment and the bodies that inhabit the city with implications for urban gardens. Ecologically connecting the dancing body to the city's body collapses the

distinction between human and environment with subtle semiotic systems of urban, human, and botanical flows.

The artistic research for this dissertation based in dance and choreography happened within an academic context that has diverse ideas about artistic practice as research, research-creation, practice-based research. I'm influenced by the "methodological approach" outlined by Lyle Skains, who makes a claim for "practice-based research" (PBR). Skains outlines several ways that scholars from different fields approach the question of artistic production and analysis in the academy. This includes "practice and research" – dividing the artistic work and analysis, "practice led research" – the innovation of the research is through the artistic contribution, and "practice-based research" where "…the creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge….achieved through the cohesive presentation of the creative artefact and the critical exegesis." (Skains 86) Particularly helpful here is Skains combined methodological approach of "autoethnomethodology," a form of on-going documentation and tracking of an artistic process, with the "serendipity" possible from artistic creation. (Skains 86-87) Surprises and reveals are integral to my choreographic process, as a live art form there is the possibility for many different possibilities to emerge during the practice. The combination of choreography with research and documentation builds the picture of complexity that is often missed in the speed of its execution as a live performance.

In the Canadian context, research-creation has become the dominant category of artistic research, and interdisciplinary scholars are uniquely situating their research-creation efforts in the academy. Quite simply, research-creation is described as: "…an approach where both research and creation reciprocally influence each other in a dynamic and causal interaction." (Stévance and Lacasse 125) In her book *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (2019), research-creation scholar Natalie Loveless writes:

> I look to research-creation even as it is being commodified right under our feet, as a site of generative recrafting: a touchstone and orienting point that might help render daily life in the academy more pedagogically, political, and affectively sustainable. (Loveless 3)

Loveless critically writes about her personal impetus to work within the research-creation modality, and the optimism and relevance that broader forms of knowledge bring into the university. She claims that research-creation alters artistic production from "an *object* of scholarly inquiry, but is itself legitimate *form of research and dissemination* which in turn raises questions regarding the book-length monograph as the only legitimate product of a dissertation in the arts and humanities." (Loveless 13) In closing, Loveless advocates for research-creation as an alternative mode of expressing what is critically important in humanities research, suggesting that by challenging forms and boundaries of knowledge we can engage creativity as a mode to rethink our "material and social conditions." (Loveless 107) Feminist scholar Sarah E. Truman describes conceptualizing research-creation by an interchangeable process that:

> …situated speculation, rigorous agitation, emergence, affirmation (refusal), and more-than-representation….and it's always a work in progress: theory is also needed to make sense of the event of research afterwards, and this always means more reading and thinking in relation to what emerges. (Truman 1984)

The cyclical process of research and creation, the knowing by doing, reflecting, and writing – repeat – offers a modality that can create new knowledge that the PhD degree promises, and in the case of this dissertation new pathways between knowledges.

Scholars are continuing to critically examine the relationship between fieldwork and performance, including Scottish interdisciplinary scholar David Overend who argues for "performance research" as a unique research modality in his book *Performance in the Field: Interdisciplinary Practice-as-Research* (2023). Performance becomes a "toolkit" to encounter and perform multiple landscapes from an outdoor landscape like a river to a social landscape like a nightclub. Overend acknowledges the analytical framework that considers the landscape as a

form of performance and draws from Richard Schechner's quote that performance is a "field without fences" to deduce that "Performance emerges as a method, subject, and outcome of fieldwork." (Overend 7) In this dissertation, performance is used as all three: method through the reading of sites and creating of performance, subject in terms of performances that take place in situ and an analysis of a specific selection of contemporary dance projects performed in gardens, and outcomes in terms of the choreographies that were created to compliment the fieldwork. The interdisciplinary quality of Performance Studies troubles the garden as it overlaps the human and non-human worlds, places where we see nature displayed for us as citizens, but often without us and our input. Furthermore, by implicating the researcher as a performer and performance creator it pushes the responsibility of the researcher to become a live interpreter of the place.

Performance research in the frame of a doctoral degree is a relatively recent, with dance and choreographic practice being part of recent dissertations. York University PhD Jonathan Osborn's dissertation *Between Species: Choreographic Human and Non-Human Bodies* (2019) is an example of a recent Canadian PhD that used dance as an integral part of the methodology, critically considering animal movement in selected zoos (Toronto and Berlin's Zoologischer Garten). A longtime colleague from the School of Toronto Dance Theatre, Osborn's dissertation sets a precedent for deep research and the need for considered theoretical orientation to accompany the production of choreographic works in the frame of a PhD. His comparative research on zoo cartography in Toronto and Berlin, includes a description of his research-as-creation contributions as "companions" to his research on the humanist-centering of thinking about animal movement that eventually became central to the overall thesis. (Osborn) His solos for dancer Danielle Baskerville represent the two Zoos with an encyclopedic and cartographic recall of animal movements performed by Baskerville and set a standard of choreographic density born out of the research process. In the United States, scholar and artist Maya Stovall wrote her

2018 dissertation entitled *Liquor Store Theatre*, based on her ethnographic and choreographic research at a local Detroit Liquor Store. Stovall's research incorporates performance and dance as part of connecting and understanding Detroit's McDougall Hunt neighbourhood's quotidian flows related to the "political economy of space and place." (Stovall-Dumas, 452) In this project, dance becomes a way to connect and know the place and the people of the neighbourhood, using the complicated site of the local liquor store in a low-income predominantly Black area of Detroit as the meeting ground for understanding the current condition of Stovall's city. In the UK, Professor in the Dance Department of Roehampton University Surrey Anna Pakes, evaluates what could constitute new contributions to knowledge in the context of dance-based performance and embodied research, pointing to the challenge of its double field of study – academic through dance studies and artistic through dance practice. (Pakes 129) She uses George Bailey's five criteria for original artwork and resolves that dance-based research demonstrates original contribution through: an original incorporation of dance in a multimedia capacity, the complexity of physical movement, comparatively distinctive style of movement, an innovation in theoretical explorations through dance, and original content revealed through the performance. (Pakes 130) Pakes also tracks the growing institutional importance of process to artistic research, that the originality is often revealed in hindsight and in context, so the originality and importance of artistic process are crucial in the frame of artistic PhD's. In the article's closing, Pakes argues that what could be artistic-research's major contribution is not justifying the academy's expectation of originality, but challenging the assumptions of originality that the academy is upholding. (Pakes 144) In terms of addressing the question of originality in this doctoral submission, I would suggest several places where originality is crucial. The process for each piece required a specific dexterity to move between the research and choreography, and each choreographic work incorporated research data and approached site-specificity in different ways. For example, the site

of the Japanese Garden forbade performances but encouraged photography and videography. The solution to work with this limitation of site and incorporate concepts from the research resulted in several of the key characteristics of companion artistic study for the Japanese Garden *Skeleton of Stone*. This is distinct in comparison to the *Future Garden* choreography that takes place on-site at the Home Depot parking lot, staging a more conventional relationship with site-specific performance. Furthermore, the three artistic research projects do not ask for a theatrical framing, they are themselves studies and reflexive tools as opposed to stand alone choreographies for a performance event.

Performance scholar and practitioner Ben Spatz advocates for embodiment in practice-based research, notably in his book *What Can a Body Do?* (2015). The title of the book follows the philosophical inquiry of Baruch Spinoza then Gilles Deleuze which sought to expand thought, practice, and cognition beyond a singular function of the mind. Spatz considers embodiment's function in the physical training for acting, as well as its applicability to the everyday use of technique. Spatz's central claim of the book is that: "Technique is knowledge that structures practice." (Spatz 1) In the case of this thesis, I would argue that beyond a conventional understanding of dance technique, which I would assign to a dance form such as ballet with its repetitive technical practice and related repertory, the referential frame of physical technique builds an embodied scaffold of relation to the outcomes of my research. In the lexicon of modern and contemporary dance, the research takes on an extra-textual form, one that relates both to an artistic canon of site-specific and Western contemporary dance.

The triptych reappears in these artistic works – they can be seen as three distinct parts, and/or three parts of a whole. These works were created from 2021-2024 to correspond to research on the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie*, Bruce Thicke working in Montreal West, and the Home Depot parking lot. Each work has distinct choreographic operators and different

positions on site specificity and documentation. The work that corresponds to the Japanese Garden at *Espace pour la vie* is a choreography embedded in the video through green screen production, representing the controversy surrounding the garden's greening and human interference in the maintenance of the garden's presentation of the natural. The choreography developed from the observations of Montreal West's head gardener Bruce Thicke, is performed in real-time (video documentation suffices for the thesis) by a dancer who is isolating, highlighting, and remixing his skilled movements working in the municipality's gardens. The dance work that accompanies the Home Depot research is a site-specific contemporary dance work, choreographed to correspond to the spatial characteristics of the site, with a doubled documentation to show the flexible or interchangeable structure of the choreography. Each piece and process are described in detail in the following pages, contextualized into broad discussions of artistic research, practice as research, and the Canadian category of research-creation. Building dance works to accompany the primary chapters of this dissertation research amplifies the relationship between the human, botanical, and spatial agents that make up a garden, bringing a visibility to the human interlocutor and their integration of their environment through movement. One of the ironies of creating reflexive choreographies related to gardens in Montreal, was that rehearsing a dance without formal permission was easier than accessing a garden as a gardener because of controlled access to land and labour regulations. In the case of this dissertation, choreography is not a strategy to dominate a space as a human agent, but rather a way to see the garden as a place of co-operation and resistance. The works make no imprint on or threaten any damage to the gardens, and the short lengths resist the "masterwork" trope of a thesis. The promise is to situate the physical, choreographic, and compositional strategies within existing conversations about artistic research in times of ecological crisis.

In the case of the three works that follow, each approaches the choreographic task by starting with an embodied and sustained encounter with the fieldwork research. Before embarking on a choreographic project, my commitment was to generate something (the form remained undefined – dance, video, etc.) that acts as an artistic reflection of key research findings. For the Japanese garden the key subjects are the greening of the garden and the obfuscation of human intervention on the site; for the chapter on techniques of the gardener are a series of task-related gestures; and for the Home Depot the choreography grapples with the expansive size of the parking lot. The artistic process was not homogenous between the three works, and occasionally circumstances like access and pandemic regulations subtly shaped the choreographic form. In the sections that follow, I will describe the context, process, and artistic affordances that are part of the choreographic research – developing choreographies to synthesize and reperform aspects of the fieldwork and considering these minor performances as a step to assert dance choreography as part of an ecology of knowledge production and dissemination.

Skeleton of Stones:
(Video Documentation)

Figure 76. *Skeleton of Stones* The human form is slightly distinguishable from the landscape, screenshot, 23.04.25.

Skeleton of Stones is the artistic research component of the chapter on the Japanese Garden of *Espace pour la vie* that uses a video and choreography to critique the displacement of human effort and input in the Garden's public facade. The iteration of the video that I am submitting developed out of choreographic experimentation using greenscreen technology to combine and layer footage of danced movements and gestures of a person in a greenscreen suit with footage of the Japanese Garden. All the footage was shot from Spring 2022-Summer 2023, and experiments in post-production continued into 2025.

Initially, I had hoped to develop a choreography onsite, but this turned out to be both administratively and financially prohibitive. In 2018, I made some inquiries to host an event with Concordia's PULSE research cluster and the Botanical Garden responded with high-priced rental conditions restricted to a specific location close to the Eastern entry gates dedicated to private and corporate events. A conversation about artistic collaboration or relocating to another site in the garden wasn't realistic, welcome, or logical. From 2022, during my fieldwork period, the institution was hosting outdoor performances, including a French performance group that built a multi-story eco-dome "spaceship" (July 2022) and a performance evening of a dancer and music composer completing a residency at the Insectarium (July 2024). After the pandemic, performances returned to the Japanese Garden during the spring O-Hanami/cherry blossom festival which included traditional Japanese cultural performances of drums and tea ceremonies, and during the annual *Jardins en lumiere* event, where programmed light shows happen throughout the botanical garden including the Japanese garden during the fall. It seemed that over the course of my fieldwork period, the institution was starting to selectively embrace public performance to animate the institution and attract audiences, but I found the garden too highly surveilled for an impromptu performance and the planning process prohibitive. The Japanese Garden is thoroughly managed, with horticulture staff onsite most of the day and security roaming in the evenings, so I began creating work around what I perceived as restrictions in the garden. It encouraged me to develop a work that required covert production tactics, rounds of corresponding dance practice (or even 'dance approximations' because the dance footage was generated and altered in post-production. I was always trying to predict how the movement in studio would come through the garden footage) in a video production studio and fiddling with image and pacing in the post-production phase, to build a critical commentary on the displacement and artificiality/performance that ricochet throughout the site. Because of the

adaptative process of this work, I categorize it as site responsive, because the video production was a response to access constraints to the garden, the video concept is dependent on the site, and the moving body is visually embedded in the garden. Although *Skeleton of Stones* is a video, it is intertwined with the place, dependent on the observational, experiential, textual, and photographic research related to the Japanese Garden.

As my experiential understanding of the Japanese Garden developed during my fieldwork, representing the key friction of the garden – the institutional greening of the gardens – became a critical point of interest. In contrast to performance, photography and videography are encouraged as a way for garden visitors to experience the site (although professional filming requires formal permission). I took advantage of this loophole for visitor photography and video to capture different points of view of the garden at the end of the summer in 2022. Shooting the video happened without incident, even with the bulky equipment of the video camera and tripod. I conducted a second video session the following year, realizing that because the first footage session was shot in the late summer season many of the trees had started to change colour. The garden's 'green-ness' is part of the institution's subtle redesign of the garden, and the green screen pun and concept was part of my artistic resolve, so I returned in the late spring of 2023 to add footage of the garden at the height of its most green period. In the final version of the video, the footage of the garden shifts from bright green to the start of the autumnal colour change, reflecting a seasonal arc. The changing colours throughout the video cycle mimic my observations during the fieldwork, again reflecting the connection between long-term observational and artistic research.

In May of 2022, I started working with dancer Mairead Filgate in the greenscreen studio of the Intermedia and Computer Arts (IMCA) Department in Concordia's EV building. I asked Filgate to wear a greenscreen suit while we recorded movement trials to begin experimenting

with blending the human figure with the landscape. We met twice to experiment with movements for the green screened figure, and I spent the following several days layering the landscape and danced greenscreen footage. It was crucial to decide on the movement and choreographic patterns in concert within the video editing process, to pull the movement through the greenscreen technology and visually merge the dancer with the landscape. Mairead and I would generate footage by working with a proposed movement idea, like walking to laying on the floor or shifting the dynamics in a swinging arm gesture that directly confronts the camera. I would suggest movements based on my understanding of the walking pathways, topography, and botanical features in the garden. This built a storehouse of movements to work with when matching and overlapping frames in post-production. We also experimented with costuming, considering the conventional usage of the greenscreen that transposes a figure into a different location – which created the ultimately undesired Godzilla effect of a super-sized Mairead walking through the garden. The variations were experiments in proximity to the dancing form; I was trying to understand if smaller gestural or larger kinetic movements would be visually legible within the greenscreen effect to subtly disturb the Garden's visual composition. I layered the video footage and experimented with positioning, movement quality and speed, legibility of movement, and variations on costuming. After working with the footage over the period of about a month, I returned to the production studio to record myself costumed in the greenscreen suit, in a position representing a rock. The image is also included in the final video edit as a still image, to enhance the representation of the inanimate qualities of the stone. This was a crucial change in the video that shifted the work from a loose sequence of video effects, tethering the moving figure to the core concepts of the Japanese garden – that the stones are the key to understanding the history and original design of Nakajima's Garden within the institutional "greening." The stones were the most substantial part of the garden's installation, the most controversial, and most

misunderstood cultural convention of Japanese gardens. Imitating a rock develops a code in the choreography, where the body represents and unsettles the dynamic history of the garden. The stones underpin the entire Japanese Garden, the "skeleton" is a challenge to the Eurocentric colonial conventions and perceptions of gardens in Montreal – echoed by the appearance of a human representation of a stone.

In the final variation of the video, there are several key choreographic moments and pivots. The opening seeks to establish the relationship of the body bleeding through the landscape in different iterations. The video editing process alienates the dancer from the choreography, which doesn't exist as a continuum of gestures, but rather a series of danced "landmarks" which overlap and are organized around the pacing of the garden videography. The alienation of the dancer from the overall composition is a replication of the alienation happening to a Japanese Garden visitor, who is alienated from key details of the garden's construction and maintenance. The shifting visibility of the dancer in the garden suggests an emergent entity in the landscape, and after several repetitions of this visual trick to build anticipation, it sets the precedent for a viewer to fabricate the phenomena themselves – to think that they see a person emerging from the trees and waterfall. At the halfway-mark the work shifts tone by using the last summer footage of the garden, where tones of brown and orange start to infiltrate the pristine garden. The greenscreen figure is revealed as a static rock and returns in a series of sweeping arm gestures that confront the camera. This movement has multiple significations: spreading seeds, damsel in distress, calming a crowd, casting magic – it is enigmatic in its communication, and the video eventually returns the flow of the waterfall. The technique of blending the performing subject with its surroundings recalls Performance Studies scholar Laura Levin assertion that camouflage as a critical tool for performance theory in her book *Performing ground: Space, Camouflage, and the Art of Blending In* (2014). Levin outlines a concept of "performing ground," analyzing ways

that the figure performs, is intertwined with, and makes visible the back/foreground/environment, in order to move away from a Cartesian conception of the body as separate and individuated from the environment around it. (Levin 14) The figure emerging and dissolving into the manicured landscape is merging and remerging from its environment.

Skeketon of Stones culminates the experiential, text-based, site, and archival photo research that implicates the human construct of the Japanese Garden, a counter-narrative to the institution's promotion of a calm and perfect vision of nature. The "perfect" garden is maintained by the labour of many people, and their absence is a façade. The greenscreen technique creates an effect in which an unrecognizable person merges and emerges from the Japanese Garden. This technique is an anthropomorphizing of the garden and a way to indicate that its photogenic vistas are labour intensive and highly selective. The human figure is intertwined with the garden by appearing as an anthropomorphic apparition that shifts to becoming a rock, a figure that is repeatedly absorbed and swallowed by the highly controlled landscape.

The Gardener's Effort:
Video Documentation

Figure 77. *The Gardener's Effort* performed by Mairead Filgate dancing a gesture corresponding to mosaic planting 08.05.2024.

The Gardener's Effort is an experimental choreographic proposition where Mairead Filgate dances and performs Bruce Thicke's gardening tasks, drawing from post-modern dance composition and performed in a style reminiscent of modern dance. Interdisciplinary comparisons of horticultural and dance practices bring together ideas of human agency in the environment, tactile perception, physical mobility, "techniques of the body" (Mauss), and perceptive facility, while pointing to questions of human movement and symbolism. As experimental and/or contemporary dance has an internal logic and tacit proposal for semiotic meaning embedded in human movement, the gardener in-motion outdoors is equally thinking with the body's actions. The gardener does not signify or perform proscenium-oriented tasks like a dancer; they complete the tasks in three dimensions. Comparing dance to another skilled trade like window washer or bricklayer is possible, but the gardener's daily integration of the environment into movement connects to post-modern dance training that integrates environmental and spatial awareness. In my own dance training there were countless improvisational sessions turning attention to other people and architectural features of the room, all the while continuing to explore dance movements and patterns. Training to integrate environmental observations and movement proved to be extremely useful in my horticulture work. As someone who trained in post-modern dance, somatics, ballet, and other dance forms, and has a political commitment to represent, address, and be influenced by the natural environment, the task of responding to environmental conditions is revealed in the juncture between horticultural and dance practices. The gardener is a local agent in this political gesture and environmental necessity, a moving part of the plants, land, animals, and ecosystems.

A confluence of research on dance, labour, and work is present in 21st Century dance studies discourse. (Franko; Pouillaude; Van Assche; Kunst; Kunst, Klein, and Noeth; Thompson) The connection between work and dance is further integrated by the synonymous use of the word

"work" in common parlance to describe a dance performance – dancers are endlessly working on their works. Mark Franko traces the development of concerns surround work, labour, and dance in his book *The Work of Dance* (2002), describing the relationships between American dance and political culture of the 1930s. Franko writes in the introduction:

> Work's actual doing became a subject worthy of attention and artistic treatment, and hence the representation of work and workers by dancers and actors could itself be legitimately valued as labour. The coincidence of dance and work, often a question of the collective rather than the singular body, was in turn influenced by Fordist and unionist organizational formations, the administrative structures of the Federal Dance and Theatre Projects, and the Communist Party. (Franko 1)

Franko argues that this relationship between work and dance that developed in the 1930s context extended the possibility of dance studies to grapple with "the relation of politics to aesthetics," producing a form of "sensuous ideology" where "emotional expression became the social consequence of embodiment." (Franko 2) Franko details a tension around expressive and political action in the works and organizational narratives of modern dance in 1930s America. In contrast to the radical political undercurrents of the American context, is a history of manual labour informing dance performance in the realm of state-sponsored socialist realism. In his book *The Body of the People* (2013), Jens Giersdorf describes socialist realism's goal as:

> …an unambiguous reading of the representation of socialist society's essence. Artists were told that to achieve that goal they needed to go out and teach the producing population about art history and artistic methods. In return, the workers were supposed to show artists how they worked and lived so as to enable these artists to depict them in their art. Art would finally move away from being an elitist occupation. (Giersdorf 63)

Giersdorf goes on to describe the GDR's state's involvement in the 1950s controlling the content of dances, favouring ballet and folk dances over modern dance to tell the "stories of the people." (Giersdorf 63) In her article 'Dancers Doing Fieldwork,' dance scholar Emily Wilcox describes the use of fieldwork in dance training in communist China, where dancers were required to work in the domains that they represented on stage. Wilcox describes the principle of "learning from

life," promoted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Mao Zedong, and analyzes the content of interviews with dancers active during the 1960s and 70s in China who were sent to work with "peasants" and in steel factories as a form of fieldwork to inform the physical authenticity of ballet characters in modernizing Chinese society. Specifically, the interview with Ba Jingkan, a state ballet dancer in the 1960s, describes his experience researching his role in the ballet *The Steelworker* by working at the An Mountain Steel Factory including detailed descriptions of experiencing the extreme temperatures that were part of the job, and incorporating gestures in the ballet such as shielding the face from heat when removing a piece of steel from a vat, that are regular and identifiable movements for steelworkers. (Wilcox 7) Wilcox describes an established method in Chinese Socialist dances of non-representational dance training that relies on dancers engaging in manual labour and physical tasks as a tool for the dancers to "authentically" perform these gestures on stage. The 20th Century saw a connection between manual labour/work and dance on stage for political purposes with a largely communist orientation, attempting to express authenticity through movement and action, seeking ideological influence and connection with audiences.

In the current urban Western context, the stakes of labour, work, and its relationship with dance are shifting with forces of globalization, technology, and the changing nature of work. Digital innovations related to artificial intelligence are concentrating massive amounts of financial, intellectual, and artistic capital, while manual skills are falling out of view and becoming the domain of marginalized workers. In turn, a new body starts to appear on stage, a body quieted by scenography catering to projections and digital equipment, supported by an audience's relative literacy and interest in digital information. The manual skills of gardening and the people performing them are a basic expectation in Canadian cities, but the recognition of the skills and endurance that are part of maintaining this environment remains undervalued and

largely hidden. The gardener anticipates the seasonal changes in the urban environment, supports the usability of outdoor public places, and dialogues with botanical elements to support the overall function of a garden. By highlighting the importance of dynamic embodied action, historical materialism – a changing labour environment based on flows of capital – and emphasizing the complexity and intentionality of a gardener's actions, this choreographic proposition uses an analytical imperative developed from dance. Dancing the gestures of work becomes a critical analytical tool.

The Gardener's Effort is a title that conjures literal and poetic possibilities of tending and growth, but in this instance grounds the piece in contemporary dance conventions to glamourize and abstract the movement techniques of a gardener (modern dance also appears – although this is related to the movement vocabulary of the person who dances the piece). This work appears second in the list of choreographies to correspond to the chapter order, but it was the final work of this series created in the spring of 2024, significant because its realization and performance was a personal signal of the actual return from the pandemic to the dance studio. For this piece I collaborated again with dancer Mairead Filgate to create a solo reperformance of Bruce Thicke's working gestures. The process to create this work started by isolating movements from the observations of Thicke in the various Montreal West gardens, including watering with a can at the greenhouse, punching holes and planting during the mosaic planting, dropping plants to be put in the ground during the traffic extension planting, and the walking pattern and looking at the flagpole during leaf blowing. The conversion of these working tasks to dance gestures was translated as follows:

Watering: Lunge and bent arm, hold, wrist movement

Planting: Kneeling with flat/directed hand (trowel) and fist (punch tool)

Plant Placement: Carrying flat and dropping from the hands

Leaf blowing: Walking pattern and looking at the same spot slightly above a horizon

Each of these movement-assigned tasks were learned by Filgate and layered with a specific dynamic. For example, the movement that represents watering steps out to a lunge with the right elbow tucked in at the waist and the forearm extended. Once a still position is established, the hand which is flattened, palm facing front, makes a quick tilting gesture downward to signal the pouring of water. The dancer can choose how many "pours" they wish to give, and it becomes a dynamic tool structuring the musicality of the composition. Each of the four movements has a unique dynamic structure that the dancer chooses to generate the composition. The dancer practices a familiarity with the gestures, and I assist her with the clarity of movement, which requires explaining, demonstrating, and reiterating details of the movement from the fieldwork. For example, reperforming Thicke's reading of a flag for wind direction during leaf blowing takes precision for a dancer to recreate repeatedly looking at the same imagined spot. The precise repetition of the four movements builds recognizability within the composition and is a way for a structure to emerge through the choices and musicality of the dancer. As the person holding the choreographer's role, the emergence of the composition through the dancer's decisions and physical patterns is choice to let the dancer find the dance through practice. After the movement composition is firmly established by the dancer with 10-15 minutes of movement in silence, starting to push the audience experience into the realm of boredom, the dancer continues in the same physical dynamic while an instrumental version of Madonna's *Angel* plays. It's a highly recognizable and synthesizer heavy pop song, without the vocals, and the contrast of the stark presentation and movement gestures of the dancer combines to generate a new idea. The dancing becomes more recognizable in its relationship to music that builds nostalgia and a sense of synchronization – essentially becoming "a dance."

Filgate's specialized training in both modern dance through her longstanding work with the Danny Grossman Company in Toronto and extensive post-modern dance training with the Trisha Brown Company in New York City, means that she has the facility and familiarity to call upon modern dance techniques and post-modern performance strategies. The physical movement in *The Gardener's Effort* could be grouped into a modern dance revivalist cliché, but the choreography is distinctly post-modern in its instant composition by the performer. The modern dance gestures and post-modern composition collapse notions of task-based movement– instead of trying to produce a sense of authenticity by structuring a task to produce movement (post-modern), the everyday tasks are performed as dance movements (modern). This is a critical feature of this choreographic proposal; it takes the post-modern score-based form (interchangeably referred to as tasks) and gives space for a dancer to layer their own movement patterns onto the gestures that perform working tasks. By utilizing conventions of modern dance: the angular lines of the body, abstracted gestures performed with a staccato rhythm, a unitard costume, the minimal facial expression of the performer, the work references a particular moment in dance history. However, there is nostalgia embedded in this style of performance, linking the performer to her training and performing history – a direct linkage to New York modern dance luminary Paul Taylor. It counters and glamourizes the working figure, as opposed to an artist like Bruce Nauman for example who often appears in working clothing to perform tasks in the frame of contemporary art. *The Gardener's Effort* attempts to glamourize the dancer and the gestures she shows as a strategy to increase the gestural visibility and amplify the performance moment, not to simply repeat the gestures of the person working and remove them from the task. These gestures are put into compositional dialogue and relocated in terms of use-value (from garden to dance studio). In the performance, the movements are replayed, removed, and resynchronized within the choreography. The composition style offers the possibility for a radical transformation

based on the dancer who performs the work – another dancer and/or dance modality would transform the work. Filgate has her own movement repertoire, based on her unique lineage of training and performing, that pulls together the working gestures into a recognizable dance composition. The choreography is performed by Filgate with a starkness that challenges the attention span of a viewer – its minimal repetition repeats the practice of gardening.

Future Garden 1&2

Version 1

Version 2

Figure 78. *Future Garden* screenshot of documentation, 05.08.2023.

I was initially ambivalent about setting a conventional site-specific choreography at the Home Depot's parking lot because the choice seemed obvious – the lot's spectacular scale and peculiar quietness on the Sundays made for sublime scenography. My first attempt at making an artistic work in concert with this space was a contribution to the Feminist Performance Creation Research Project run by the Performative Urban Lab for Social Spatial and Scenographic Experimentation (PULSE), spearheaded by Professor Shauna Janssen in collaboration with artist-researcher Anna Birch. ("Feminist Performance Creation and the City") With the influence of Anna Birch's historical research for performance, and Shauna Jansson's facility with site-based performance research and local urban archives, I started developing an artistic research project to function as a station within a procession of feminist performances that crossed central Montreal. At the start of the project, Janssen invited a group of feminist artists with backgrounds in theatre, dance, costuming, and performance art to research and develop a performance event. All the members of the group selected a site; we began to develop common thematics through research and site visits to experience the city through a feminist lens, eventually walking the sites together on a Saturday afternoon to find collective resonances. My very quick intervention at an early phase of this research was to create a ghostly photo in the parking lot at night, which came out of a shared interest in haunting as a metaphor for feminist industrial urban histories. Personally, I knew the chance of locating a feminist historical narrative on site through research was minimal, and the request was part of considering the research and performance style of Anna Birch who had unearthed many iterations about the forgotten history of Mary Wollstonecraft at a single park in London. The Home Depot parking lot site was a different situation, related to limited historical information and the limited participation of women in the railway industry during the early 20th Century. As a commemoration for women who may have never been there, I shot a photograph of myself disappearing in movement on site. In comparison with the choreography that was

eventually made on site, I can see the start of a relationship between movement quality and being in the parking lot.

Figure 79. Photographic experiments to move as a ghost who was never there, Home Depot parking lot, 19.10.2019.

My photographic contribution was intended to be the first of several iterations of the feminist performance research project but ended up being part of this dissertation process. The project took on a new phase during the pandemic, when we had meetings via Zoom, and were trying to find ways to develop our performances in an uncertain framework – we were not sure where and when we would be able to meet and perform. As a result of the constraints of that period, I developed a hypothetical performance at an impossible scale in terms of performers, co-ordination, precision, and equipment entitled *Grow Over*. I envisioned a routine for a fifty-person roller skater team to be viewed by helicopter in the parking lot and narrated a test version of the

choreography alongside the soundtrack for the performance and the sound effect of a helicopter. A copy of the instructional image and fantastical score are seen in figures 80 and 81.

Feminist Performance Creation in the City
Score for Home Depot Parking Lot, 100 Beaubien Ouest

GROW OVER an imaginary performance in the Home Depot Parking lot for an aerial audience

-This performance takes place for an audience in a silent glass-floored helicopter hovering over the parking lot during sunset
-along the fence on the train track are several large sound systems turned towards the helicopter playing 'Show me love' by Robin S https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYqX6_6ouA0
-A 100 person roller skating team floods the parking lot in 10 single file lines
-Raised above their heads are large placards That obscure their bodies to the audience above with images of the parking lot
-The team creates many patterned formations: spirals, lines Crossing, lines weaving, diagonal formations, all while the placards are overhead
-As the sun is setting, the shadows from the skaters with placards stretch out over the lot
-As the breakdown of the song hits a group of roller skaters perform solos of their best tricks simultaneously
-The skaters Return to their patterns and flip over the placards to the side showing greenery in a slow wave style
-skaters form a whirlpool formation with greenery overhead, and skaters swirl off individually until they have all left the parking lot
-The helicopter continues its trip for the audience....

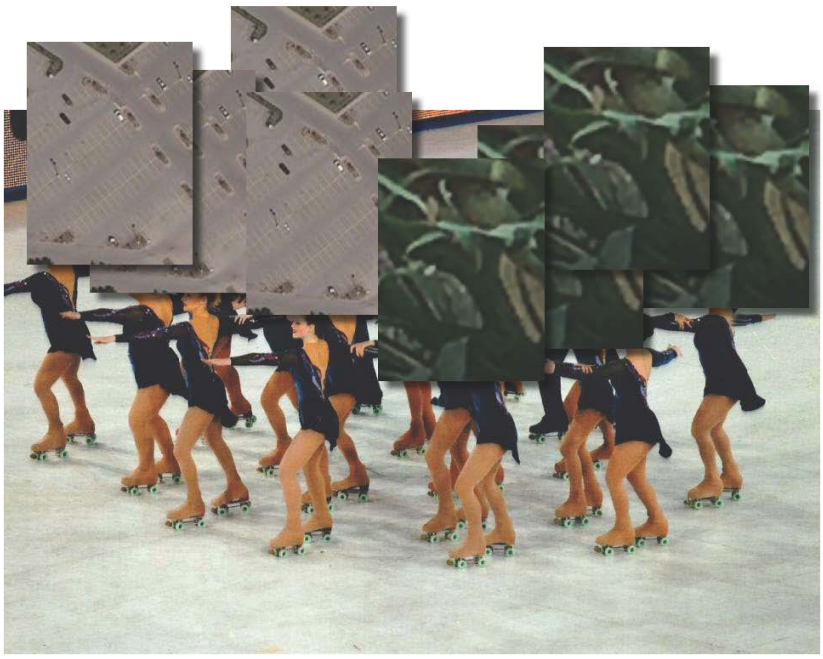

Figure 80 and 81. *Grow over* the score is shown as 80, and the collage follows as 81.

In 2020, a fantastical score seemed like a plausible solution to a site-specific work with international colleagues. By 2023, I had created, performed, and recorded a work that had become a simple sketch of epic fantasy dance. The dance as it exists now is entitled *Future Garden*, and it is an expandable sketch of a choreographic concept to be enacted and to disappear.

Starting in the summer of 2021, I met Sunday evenings with my colleague Mairead Filgate to continue my artistic research and dance together with a friend and colleague. At the time, most activities in the city were restricted and people needed more outdoor space when in contact with each other, which had the unanticipated outcome of a large outdoor quasi-public spaces like the Home Depot parking lot becoming an informal place for outdoor activities. This was the case especially on Sunday evenings after the store closed and no deliveries were happening. Through the weekdays, large delivery trucks often passed through the parking lot, which made the parking lot less viable to spend time in as a pedestrian. Filgate and I started meeting on Sunday nights to develop a choreographic piece for this parking lot. We met on Sunday evenings typically at 6:30 pm until dark and created different dance phrases and compositions. During our rehearsals other people were also using the parking lot, often for activities like learning how to drive, flying drones, walking their dogs, and we regularly saw the same couple cleaning out their live-in van. We never witnessed any scheduled activities during this time; it was occasionally people using the lot who needed larger outdoor spaces and benefitted from the flat surface of the asphalt. On Sunday evening, the parking lot was reclaimed by people looking for outdoor space that was calm and open. The peacefulness of the parking lot on Sunday nights contrasted the booming public parks that people were using for social gathering and it continually sparked my imagination as a quiet reliable spot to take in the sunset and meet with a limited group of friends.

During Sunday evening rehearsals with Filgate, we worked on short dance phrases and combinations that integrated details of the parking lot. Some examples of this included creating stepping patterns to correspond to the painted yellow lines, using rows of trees as backdrop, navigating around and indicating the curbs of the parking islands, and using the expansive surface of the parking lot to structure the choreographic composition. In one of the final rehearsals Filgate observed that "the dance belongs to the space and the landscape," (Personal Communication 2023) and I can echo that sentiment in my experience performing the work – it is intimately linked with the site. The choreography actively takes the onsite elements, such as the parking lines, and seeks to temporarily re-signify the parking lot through a series of danced codes.

The choreographic premise asks the dancers to start and end the work in close proximity to each other, using the dance time to expand and contract the choreographic area. We established a range of sequences that we could call upon to move throughout the space:

1. Push-turn swaying jumps on the parking lines
2. Running jumps on the spot
3. Arm swings to rest and survey the area
4. Marking leaps (double stag and Russian split jump)
5. Body waves to pony stance
6. Ball-change to release
7. Lunging jumps with arms on the head
8. Standing Pauses
9. Walks

While dancing we could select any of these movements, which functioned as a choreographic vocabulary. In the videos, we demonstrate both a dynamic range of these movements, and a personal interpretation of the movements – the movements are intended to be performed by different people moving differently. The video shows two variations of the choreography performed by myself and Filgate, and it acts as a sketch for a performance danced by more

people. The dream would be to have fifty trained dancers perform the dance together in the parking lot, to overtake it in numbers comparable to the parked cars that are typically in the lot. The dance is preserved on video for the requirement of this thesis but has disappeared from the parking lot without a trace after the documentation. This choreographic temporality is connected to the environmental principal of "leave no trace," typically a guideline for waste management while hiking or camping. But dance has the capacity to leave no trace, especially on a thick layer of asphalt.

In closing

The garden is a dynamic place of action, movement, change, and performance produced through practice and ecological co-operation. It is a model for rethinking environmental agency, where not only the gardener, but the plants, rocks, soils, waters, and animals act together. Notions of control and delimitation lurk in Euro-centric garden traditions, places where botanical elements are prized and organized to support and express the idealizations and realities of what grows around us. This dissertation is a collection of fieldwork case studies in Montreal, a city that grapples with post-colonialism, deindustrialization, and contemporary capitalism, and the dissertation follows the specific idealizations and realizations of the expression, control, and challenges of local gardens while advocating for the necessity of experiential encounter.

Simultaneity as a central thematic for this dissertation points to the constellation of distinct gardens and conceptualizations of nature that elaborate on how non-human agencies are nurtured and restrained by people within Montreal's boundaries. These local gardens reveal particularities of Montreal through a disparate combination of gardens that become a catch-all for cosmopolitan cultural ambitions, outdoor work environments, spontaneous plants moving through green corridors of the city, places of civic aspiration and control, paths surrounded by imported plant collections, and discrete modes of rethinking landscapes marked by capitalist

despair. The contrast of the Japanese Garden, following Bruce Thicke in Montreal West, and the Home Depot parking lot garden, weaves together intricate local legacies of industrialization, toxicity, cultural friction, colonialism, and capitalist driven land use that organize the urban botanical politically, scientifically, culturally, and functionally. The formality of the Japanese Garden is expressed through its regimented maintenance and staging of nature. Bruce Thicke's working environment incorporates his lifetime of knowledge of the area he grew up, physically tending to Montreal West's public space in a way that shows attention and care to parks and garden representing the municipality. The Home Depot parking lot garden acts as a proxy for the current state of landscapes altered by intensive colonial infrastructure at the turn of one century and the forces of global capitalism marking the turn of the next century. These contrasting case studies are held together by their identification as gardens, but their distinct and unique problematics and challenges explode the conceptual cohesion of the garden as a singular and predictable place. Simultaneity reveals the garden as an idea in flux, mutating with the practices, terrains, and controls that realize it, microcosms of urban political, historical, spatial, artistic, and botanical multiplicities.

Performance helps to further frame the ways urban gardening is part of human entanglements in local ecologies and collective aspirations. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Erving Goffman writes:

> A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. (Goffman 8)

Goffman's picture of performance applied to gardening, expands the garden's agential potential by linking the gardener's influence on the garden's non-human participants and contributors. The gardener works to construct the garden as a reality, envisioning the cycles of plants blooming,

expansion, and dormancy as part of their role to imagine and foresee the garden as an actuality. Sally Ann Ness weighs several conceptualizations of performance within her analysis of Yosemite National Park, including the Peircean semiotic inflection that:

> Human performance is itself but one variety of semiosis. Performance, for its part, is understood from this pragmaticist perspective, as one mindful way of making things *lively* when they might not otherwise be so–of making them *matter* when they otherwise might not, and of making them somehow consequential in a world whose consequences may seem always already overdetermined. (Ness 21)

Examples of the discretely consequential performances that I observed in various gardens during my fieldwork included the nurturing of rare rose cultivars by a team in the Botanical Garden, people promoting gardens on social media as backdrops for assembly and experience, public talks about local invasive species that visualize the plants and accompanying phenomena, and the planting of vibrant annuals to bring a liveliness to specific areas of civic importance. These quotidian performances are part of the more elaborately documented fieldwork case studies that reveal the importance of gardening to identify the place of the garden as consequential to the urban fabric.

Furthermore, beyond strictly performance I am arguing for choreographic projects to be part of the entanglements of gardens and agency, by elaborating on the connections of practice, place, movement, labour, embodied and phenomenological experience, urban histories, and the non-human in the garden. In *Critical Moves* (1998), Randy Martin writes:

> Dance is a specification of bodies in a given historical conjuncture, and its coherence must be understood not simply in respect to the resonance between dance and the entire social kinesthetic. Because dance concentrates the social forces that make bodies what they are, it can be drawn on to rethink conventional views of politics as well. (Martin 24)

Martin makes a timely argument for the political relevance and possibility of dance in the late 1990s, but I would add to his claim of the social forces working on bodies that at the current historical conjuncture the environment is another vital force impacting our physical and

collective bodies, with major clues about environmental forces expressed by the gardens these bodies tend. Dance choreography not only concentrates on physical movement, but it reiterates the co-dependence of the moving body on the environment. The fantasy or bareness of the performance environment is a critical tension for contemporary dance performance, which embraces extremes of integrating dance and environment like the collective Dance for Plants claim that dance is so wholly integrated in the environment that it is an "Ecosystem Service," defined by the United Nations as: "…the many and varied benefits that humans freely gain from the natural environment and from properly-functioning ecosystems." (Loup 226) Dance and choreographic practice are methods of connecting to and being part of ecosystems and environments, moving and organizing movement is synonymous with being dynamically engaged with the environment.

Gardeners, often camouflaged by the garden and its demands, are key actors in the maintenance of the garden's boundaries from urban encroachment of things like mass infrastructure and profit-seeking condominiums, by refining practices that make the garden readable to other people. They accumulate experience and knowledge of the gardens they tend, and the urban gardener by extension accumulates experience and knowledge of the city they tend. This knowledge is particularly astute at the places where the city and the gardens overlap, the places of "friction" that expose how gardens are dynamically integrated in urban life hosting visitors and displaying exotics, acting a parking barriers and botanical network nodes, and aesthetically enhancing municipal hubs while guiding people to services. Gardeners support the functions, record the functions, and tell the stories of how their embodied relation to the gardens shaped the way that they are inhabited and used. In the case of Bruce Thicke, we see his work changing and adapting to the extreme weather characteristic of climate change in Montreal, changes that affect the plants and the urgency of his responsibilities. In the Japanese Garden,

many of the trees had major damage from an ice storm in April 2023 and on a subsequent visit in the spring I saw two arborists working on the pine tree stand pruning damaged branches. The arborists show the changing roles in garden maintenance that correspond to the climate-related damage, meaning that the needs for a formal garden in this period of accelerating climate change surpasses the capacity of a singular designated horticulturalist. And in the Home Depot parking lot garden the plants have established themselves as hearty survivors of massive snow piles, summer temperatures exceeding 40˚C, corresponding droughts, hailstorms, and tornados, the extremes of Montreal's weather. The minimally acknowledged plants of this garden are the future garden, demonstrating heartiness in extreme weather. In this research the gardener moves to pick up the damage, restore the boundaries of the garden bed, repair the greenhouse, survey the damage of flash floods and freezes, and the dancer moves to assert their belonging in, synthesize their response to, and express their solidarity with the environment. The garden gives specificity to the environment, to be environmentally conscious is to be gardening.

Pressure is increasing on urban populations to address and change consumptive habits that impact the environment, and gardens offer ways to understand how urban planning and ideologically informed decisions are actively shaping interactions with the botanical world. Gardening is a practice that is with us, whether it is related to the window box planted outside an apartment window, splitting perennials in a garden abandoned by a landlord, tending to community plots, or gentle acts of urban protest, like filling and planting potholes with pansies to protect cyclists. This dissertation tracks a shift from gardens as site to gardening as practice. The opening considers a history of site-specific choreography in the garden, through its connection to other artistic fields and specific recent performances. In the first fieldwork study, I argue for the garden as a site of colliding agencies to foreground the material agency of the garden. Whereas state institutions and landscape architects can have different desires to control the Japanese

Garden's representation through elements and objects, the landscape architect performs the Garden differently – leaving a photogenic landscape grounded with the by-product of asbestos mining. In the second fieldwork study, I follow the work of a professional gardener and show the physical technicity of gardening, often an invisibilized collaboration with garden elements. In the third fieldwork case study, I elaborate on the Home Depot site as a future garden, in a manifesto like argument for a resistant, improvised, and radically different garden. In the remaining pages, I document my own choreographic and artistic practice in relation to the fieldwork, to perform the garden and involve a deeper perceptual engagement. I describe the processes and implications of works that correspond with the fieldwork studies to formulate the research into a physically danced practice – challenging the delimitation of research outcomes as strictly text based. It may seem troubling to advocate for dance, a human-centric art form, as a counterpoint environmental degradation and obliviousness. However, in the case of dance, the human body, presence, and techniques are central to the practice of being with the environment and local landscapes. Dance is a critical tool in the urgent and necessary re-evaluation of society and culture in the Anthropocene. This reorganization requires people to re-imagine how we see ourselves as fundamentally part of the environment and how we will take responsibility for the extraction, exhaustion, and pollution of the planet. As an artform, dance is both from and for end times. As much as it is human-centric, dance needs the presence and desire of the people and environments that enact it, operating without degradation to its immediate ecosystems and environments.

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