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Care as a Method and Methods for Care: Researching Multispecies Relationships in Urban Gardens in Finland

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Abstract

Care as an ethical guide and practice is paramount in multispecies relationships in urban gardens. This article contributes to the discussion on the diversity of care in urban gardens. We assert that the choice and combination of methodological approaches play a crucial role in noticing and acknowledging new forms of care among multispecies gardeners. Furthermore, a better understanding of care in urban gardens, as a specific form of nature, extends to broader perspectives on urban relationships with nature in cities. We analyse care from two disciplinary entry points, social anthropology and ecology, thereby adding to the multidisciplinary toolkit for addressing the complexities of researching multispecies relationships in urban settings. We focus on the specifics of visual methods such as videos, photos, sketching, observational drawings, and plant identification apps. We demonstrate how these methods provide a "closer look" at the human and more-than-human communities of care and their broader implications. More specifically, we view care as a process that encompasses actions ranging from loving care to indifference and even killing, often all at once. We challenge the notion of "plant blindness" that affects the care implications in gardens. Finally, we contribute to the discussion about anthropocentrism and analyse who has the "right" to care, who cares for whom, and how this affects who can be considered a gardener in multispecies entanglements in urban gardens.

Keywords

art of attentiveness; art of noticing; more-than-human; multispecies gardens; multispecies methods; multispecies studies; slowing down and silence; urban gardens; urban natures

1. Introduction

This article investigates the diversity of care in urban gardens. We argue that viewing gardening practices through the lens of care offers unique insights into urban natures and human relations with them (Edwards et al., 2023; Myers, 2019). We show how diverse forms of care in gardens can be noticed and "made visible" by applying and analysing multidisciplinary experimental approaches from ecology and social anthropology.

Gardens in urban areas are often perceived as curated spaces that can serve to exert control over nature and social relations (Brinkley & Vitiello, 2014; Edwards et al., 2023). Various types of gardens represent a specific form of carefully curated nature within enclosures where individuals intentionally "stage and restage their relationships with nature" (Myers, 2019, p. 125), and where interconnected human and more-than-human designs follow certain sets of rules (Müüripeal et al., 2023; Poikolainen Rosén et al., 2022). In our research, we explore how gardens can be re-seen and re-imagined through different forms of care. We work with the notion that multispecies studies—in our case, combining social anthropology and ecology—are always open to change and fluidity, permeating the formation of multispecies entanglements of care and reflecting the multiplicity of experiences among the actors within these entanglements (van Dooren et al., 2016, pp. 3–4).

The dynamic and evolving multispecies care in the gardens we study becomes visible through the "art of noticing" and "attunement" (Tsing, 2010, 2024), and the "art of attentiveness" (van Dooren et al., 2016). Attentiveness, noticing, attunement, response-ability, and curiosity are part of a broader set of methodological and conceptual tools widely applied in multispecies studies to focus on the particular while also exploring complex systemic issues at the same time. Being attentive and noticing in multispecies studies involves an openness to knowledge practices that stem from the lived and perceived experiences with(in) and through complex species entanglements (Tsing, 2010; van Dooren et al., 2016). In research on care between human and more-than-human, attentiveness plays an instrumental role in creating a space for multispecies relationality (Krzywoszynska, 2019; Turner, 2023). We show that gardens can be and become entanglements of diverse multispecies care, which are observed, perceived, and conceptualised through attention and noticing.

In the classical perspective of gardening—namely, one that emphasises human control and manipulation over nonhuman beings—Power (2005) identifies two distinct approaches to gardens. The first focuses on the visual aspect of the garden as a whole, where individual plants are viewed as elements of a larger aesthetic entity, chosen for their contrasting or complementary colours or foliage. The second approach treats individual plants as organisms that need to be controlled and maintained, for example, by planting them in a certain way or shaping them with specific tools. While these perspectives tend to be anthropocentric, we argue that they also provide productive distinctions for an interactive and collaborative view of the garden. Firstly, they reflect the gardener's perspectives on the garden. Furthermore, exercising control in a way that the gardener considers successful requires observing the plants, reflecting on gardening practices, and learning from the experience.

Although gardening has the ethical potential to create spaces of care and relationships of care, this potential is shaped by contextual, situational, and individual aspects (Pitt, 2018). Thus, elements of relationality and the assumption of care are constantly present in the multispecies entanglements found in gardens. However, loving, attentive, kind, and enchanting care is often entangled with cuts, exclusions, no-relations, hierarchies, and the prioritisation of care (Ginn, 2014; Giraud, 2019; Power, 2005). By examining specific methods for

researching multispecies care, we confront broader questions about how we notice, become attentive to, and perceive care. Is noticing and seeing care critical to discussing our relations with other species in the biodiversity and species extinction debate? Does noticing and becoming attentive make us more caring? What are the implications of diverse forms of care for these major debates?

Pitt (2018) points out that "close encounters with nature"—such as those in urban gardens—do not necessarily lead to a sense of proximity with more-than-human entities. Significant qualitative differences exist in relations with various more-than-human life forms, informed by pre-existing values and ethical commitments. For example, a gardener might still be inclined to kill slugs if she sees them as a threat to her garden or as a species that does not perform any useful functions. Attentiveness facilitates affects that might lead to "ethical contagion" and a relation of care (Krzywoszynska, 2019; Yusoff, 2013), but human actors still need to construct ways of being together with the beings they attend to and form relationships with through gardening.

Multispecies, posthumanists, and related scholarships have been accused of "ethical passivity." We aim to consider the ethical implications and power differentials embedded in urban garden relationships by paying attention to the power dynamics in situations and relationships of care. Following Pitt (2018), we note that the motivations for caring for another are diverse and that tending to gardens often prioritises human goals over those of other species. To problematise the existing care scholarship, particularly the idyllic view of gardens as spaces of multispecies conviviality, we also consider examples of attentiveness used to exclude, eradicate, or care for one species, which entails conflict with other species.

Attentiveness and the art of noticing also invite us to explore care beyond human and more-than-human visible ethical relationality, where care is tied to visible entanglements and response-ability is extended within the scope of visibility. Attentiveness, understood as openness to ethical possibilities, can allow one to notice and acknowledge multispecies care that extends beyond visible relational economies, encompassing invisible and non-sensible "general economies" of relational ethics (Yusoff, 2013). Our research shows that care is often implicit and rarely indicated or conceptualised by human gardeners. Thus, the meaning of care (Hitchings, 2007) should be approached attentively when interpreting observations and collected material. That said, ethical and moral care factors are intertwined within the practice of care—the monotonous, repetitive, and invisible care work (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Paying attention to attentiveness, noticing it, and becoming attuned—while working with the notion that attentiveness is inseparable from the ethics and practice of care (Krzywoszynska, 2019; Tronto, 1993)—allows us to approach seemingly contradictory, exclusionary forms of multispecies care in gardens in all their richness, as they are lived and experienced from multispecies perspectives.

Following this, we address the counterintuitive form of care embedded in letting things be or caring without exercising control by human gardeners (Pitt, 2018). In our research, we identify such care as "care meanwhile," which can be described as relations and entanglements in which multispecies care is ongoing, with or more often without, the direct involvement of human gardeners.

The collaboration between the social anthropologist and the social scientist, using ecological observation, was established during the ideation and writing of this article. Agnese Bankovska's initial research sought to investigate multispecies care in gardens, while Karolina Lukasik initially set out to study more-than-human

conflicts in urban allotment gardens. However, they realised that these conflicts often arise when nonhuman beings challenge the human project of garden care. The two researchers met at a conference, where they discovered similarities in their research processes and findings on care in gardens. As a result, this article is an exercise in multidisciplinary collaboration in knowledge creation, interpretation, and representation.

Throughout the article, we use the terms "multispecies" and "more-than-human" to describe the complex and interactive care relationalities in gardens. Although there appears to be a trend in current scholarship towards the use of "more-than-human" in these debates, we find it useful for this research to work with both terms. In using the term "multispecies," we build on the scholarship that emerged from what was initially defined as multispecies ethnography by Kirksey and Helmreich (2010). In the context of our research, multispecies refers to the care, relationality, and entanglement between human and more-than-human. Accordingly, by "more-than-human," we mean actors of care that are not human, such as plants, animals, soils, fungi, and microbes.

Our article is divided into three sections. The first, introductory section lays out the theoretical and conceptual background for our research. The second section draws on important methodological considerations related to researching care in gardens and noticing and acknowledging different perceptions and experiences of care between human and more-than-human. The third section combines ethnographic descriptions and analysis by the authors, addressing the specific methodological attunement needed to assess, notice, and reflect on multispecies care in gardens. In the concluding part, we revisit the main findings and consider possibilities for future research.

2. Methodological Attunement: Becoming Attentive and Noticing

One of the themes in multispecies research involves moving away/beyond and problematising anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). In our research, this shift extends to experimenting with multispecies ethnographic approaches and daring to venture into speculative knowledge practice territories. However, the question of how close humans can come to understanding and, most importantly, evening out their relationships with other species remains open (Despret, 2016; Hartigan, 2021).

Immersion, attention, noticing, and attunement require slowing down and adopting a silent positionality while becoming intertwined with and experiencing multispecies relations. Slowing down and becoming silent (see Granelli, 2023; Mercier-Roy & Mailhot, 2024; Rautio et al., 2022) are ways of being while conducting attentive research in multispecies encounters. Drawing, slow observation, photography, and video can become powerful approaches not only to slowing down and becoming silent but also to notice and perceive the slow and silent ways (from the human perspective) of multispecies being and more-than-human temporalities (Gillespie, 2017; Lapiņa & Grum, 2024; Mercier-Roy & Mailhot, 2024). This seemingly counterintuitive slowness in methods, amidst the current sense of urgency to act and find solutions, can offer deep, embodied, and hands-on knowledge about multispecies being and the relationality of urban natures.

The ethnographic descriptions in this article have been carefully selected to illustrate and contribute to the methodological debate about the methods-care-methods nexus in gardens. This approach reflects our

hypothesis that specific methods can serve as tools for assessing various aspects of care in gardens. In turn, becoming attentive and noticing the diverse aspects of care opens up new possibilities for ethics and the practice of care.

Thus, Lukasik's ethnographic description and analysis in the third section of this article address the implications of using trail cameras to assess multispecies care in gardens, demonstrating how this method allows both researchers and human gardeners to notice care and become more attuned to its various manifestations. Lukasik's research shows that the range of multispecies care in gardens can be simultaneously loving and grudgingly nasty, bordering on outright conflict among species, as seen and experienced by human gardeners. Bankovska's application and experimentation with methodological slowing down and becoming silent, through immersion, drawing, and sketching, also opens up space for new care experiences in gardens. As described by Bankovska, this approach invites a reassessment and re-seeing of the care dynamics and hierarchies among human and more-than-human gardeners.

Lukasik's decision to gather video material using trail cameras was motivated by an interest in the presence of more-than-human animals in the gardens. Multiple species living in, using, or visiting allotment gardens make themselves invisible to humans through nocturnality, the tendency to avoid humans, or by hiding in areas inaccessible to them. Using trail cameras enabled Lukasik to observe these more-than-human animals in a way that did not bother them—the cameras were mostly ignored, occasionally sniffed or pecked, but otherwise did not appear to affect the more-than-human animals in any way. At the same time, the cameras provided perspectives that would otherwise be inaccessible to human observers, facilitating new ways of thinking about garden spaces. By placing the cameras low on the ground or high in the trees, Lukasik was able to observe the gardens from new angles, including tight spaces where humans could not easily move, expanding the multiplicity of garden opportunities, particularly in areas neglected by humans, such as overgrown spaces between allotments. Moreover, the infrared footage collected throughout the night provided information on the nocturnal activity in the gardens, capturing details impossible to see with the naked eye. Finally, camera mounting was a physical experience that involved considering multiple spots, climbing or crouching, brushing against plants, finding support for the camera, and numerous other actions that contributed to interacting with the garden in a novel way. Additionally, for Lukasik, ecological observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with the gardeners comprised an interdisciplinary study of more-than-human interactions and conflicts in urban allotment gardens. Throughout the five months of fieldwork, Lukasik revisited the gardens to check on the cameras, reposition them, talk with the gardeners, and review the footage together. This combination of methods provided more detail on the gardeners' relationships with their allotments and an embodied sense of more-than-human temporalities.

The methodological path for Bankovska was a conscious journey of attunement over two gardening seasons of fieldwork in 2022 and 2023. Initially, her fieldwork included a set of ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, deep hanging out, immersion walks accompanied by photographs and snapshots, and "tell me about your garden" conversations. However, throughout this process, Bankovska constantly questioned and assessed these methods, asking: Do these methods help me notice multispecies care in the gardens? Are these methods anthropocentric? Which methods would help me become more attuned and perceptive, enabling me to see and experience multispecies relations and entanglements of care in the gardens? The field itself guided Bankovska's choice of specific methods and taught her the power of silent and slow observation through drawing, sketching, photography, and a plant app. Silent and slow observation

creates space and time (Mercier-Roy & Mailhot, 2024) for attuning, being attentive, noticing, and seeing. In this way, writing, drawing, and sketching (example in Figure 5) in such a slow manner adds more layers to the constantly changing descriptions of multispecies life in the gardens. This approach involves seeing through noticing and being attentive as an active, embodied form of participation, rather than a static form of looking, which often engages only vision (Fijn & Kavesh, 2021; Kashanipour, 2021; Okely, 2001). Bankovska, for her part, works with written, audio-recorded, photographic, and drawn fieldnotes, intermittently applied and analysed in this article to contribute to the thick description of aspects of multispecies care in the gardens under study.

3. Care in Urban Gardens

The urban gardening culture in Finland dates back to the early 20th century. Historically, it has provided food and opportunities for various city communities to engage in active pastimes. With the extensive growth of urban areas in the mid-20th century, various gardening practices expanded and became a significant part of city dwellers' pastimes and communal engagement. As cities expanded, allotments that used to be on the outskirts became more centrally located, increasing urban pressures, such as light and noise pollution, on the gardens. This shift also created anxiety about the future of the gardens, which had become valued real estate by then. Today, the traditions of historically well-established allotment gardens and food plant allotments coexist successfully with more recent introductions, such as community-supported agriculture, box or sack gardening, as well as guerrilla and pop-up gardening initiatives in city parks, wastelands, and semi-abandoned areas. In addition, balcony, terrace, and rooftop gardening have become essential to urban communities across Finland (Hagolani-Albov, 2017; Mantila, 2021).

Our research was conducted during the 2022 and 2023 gardening seasons in the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area. We studied four types of gardens: food plant allotments (*viljelypalstat*), allotment gardens (*siirtolapuutarhat*), communal gardens (*yhteisöviljelmäpuutarhat*), and terrace gardens (*terassipuutarhat*). This article focuses on multispecies care in two types of gardens in the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area: two allotment gardens studied by Lukasik and two food plant allotments, one studied by Lukasik and the other by Bankovska.

Due to its geography, Finland is characterised by a relatively short vegetation season, which is reflected in garden care. The gardening season in food plant allotments in the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area can start as early as January, when plants are pre-grown indoors. The outdoor season lasts from the end of May to mid-October. Urban allotment gardens, which include a small cottage on each plot, are officially open from the beginning of May to October. During this period, these gardens are open to the public as part of the urban park system.

The food plant allotments (*viljelypalstat*), as researched by Bankovska, are situated in low-lying areas and border several significant territorial markers. On one side, the local manor and its surrounding parkland eventually extend into the forest. At the same time, the allotments are located relatively close to a highway and a suburban residential area, making them easily accessible to residents. These allotments were established in the 1990s, and some of the human gardeners in Bankovska's research had been gardening there since the gardens' inception. During the 2022 and 2023 gardening seasons, there were just over 190 plots. These gardens are known for the diverse cultural backgrounds of their owners; around 50% of the

plots are tended by people who have moved to Finland for various reasons. According to several participants in Bankovska's research, this diversity presents challenges when it comes to following one clear organisational and management path, leading to a tolerance for creative and varied gardening practices. In accordance with the city council and garden council rules, the proximity of the allotments to the local manor restricts the design (see Müüripeal et al., 2023), which affects multispecies care in the gardens. In general, the food plant allotments are highly care-work oriented. Care is more about functionality than visual appeal. The small plots lack proper seating and relaxation areas, and people rarely visit just to enjoy the gardens.

Data collection by Lukasik took place in three gardens within the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Two of these are allotment gardens (*siirtolapuutarhat*), where each plot includes a cottage. Electricity and running water are available during the gardening season. The gardens in this study were created in 1918 and 1936, respectively, and have a strong sense of identity reflected in local customs, such as raising the flag at the beginning of the gardening season, singing garden songs, and sharing celebrations and events, including sauna nights, Midsummer Night parties, and crafting events. In these gardens, caring for one's plot becomes intertwined with caring for the place as a whole, and there is also a concern that "bad" or poorly maintained gardens will reflect negatively on the community.

One of the two allotments is located in a basin of a former swamp in an area that was once on the outskirts of the city. Currently, the garden is surrounded by one of Helsinki's transportation hubs, including a major railway station and a bus depot. This location poses specific challenges for the gardeners: in spring and after heavy rain, water collects in the garden basin and needs to be pumped out. Many of the gardeners that Lukasik spoke with also mentioned poor soil quality. Furthermore, the high-rise buildings surrounding the garden contribute to a sense of being trapped, with Lukasik's interlocutors mentioning that the city looms over the garden.

The other allotment is in western Helsinki, near a seaside forest. Although urban pressure is less visible there, this garden has also been affected by local construction work, such as roadwork (the interviewees mentioned that the roadwork had driven rats into the garden). Its proximity to the sea also attracts more seagulls than the other gardens.

The third garden is more transient. Like the one in Bankovska's research, it is a food plant allotment: the land is leased from the municipality, but the lease is not guaranteed long-term, and the community is less tightly knit. The plots are smaller, and there are fewer opportunities to relax in the garden. The pressure to maintain proper garden care is reflected more in the giving of "good" advice (and subsequent annoyance when the advice is not followed), rather than in a sense of shared effort within the community. This garden is maintained by a small association in northeast Helsinki and is located between a main city road and blocks of flats. It is separated from the road by a row of trees and surrounded by a small forest. In conversations with gardeners, the topic of noise pollution often came up; nonetheless, it was frequently treated as an inevitable feature of the garden.

3.1. Overcoming "Plant Blindness"

Many care entanglements are ongoing between human gardeners and plants in the gardens studied in our research. Such care involves prioritising plants that are considered useful to human gardeners over other plant species. This multilayered process often involves killing or excluding certain species for the sake of

others. Depending on their contextual usefulness, a care hierarchy for different plants is also considered when deciding on the necessary care for the so-called ambivalent plants. These plants are often cared for by assigning them to specific places in the garden, cohabiting with them, or "making them useful" by repurposing them through composting.

The notion of "plant blindness" (Wandersee & Schussler, 1999) is one of the prevailing concepts in multispecies studies (Gibson, 2018), addressing more-than-human hierarchies and the attribution of particular value to different species, including plants (Myers, 2015, 2019; Tsing, 2015). Plant blindness has also impacted methodological advancements in research on plant–human relations in multispecies studies (Elton, 2021; Gibson, 2018). To dilute the possible effects of plant blindness, researchers have suggested that garden research and the methods applied should be conducted in the gardens themselves, where plants are visible and present, directly influencing the researcher's perception and providing a multispecies backdrop for research interventions (Hitchings & Jones, 2004).

Our research shows that becoming attentive to plants through slow and careful observation during immersive walks and drawing not only helps us notice the details and individualities of plants but also attunes our human gaze to acknowledge the agency of plants (Gibson, 2018). By acknowledging plant agency and moving beyond plant blindness, we can arrive at a plane that considers the mutuality of species in gardens, where plants influence and "garden" humans as much as humans garden the plants (Myers, 2015, 2019; Power, 2005).

During the first season of Bankovska's fieldwork in food plant allotments in 2022, she gradually arrived at using drawing as a slow and immersive observation method. This approach allowed her to calibrate her gaze, much like putting on glasses, to overcome her plant blindness, which was caused by the inability to see beyond the sensorial overload of the richness of the plant species represented in the allotment and communal gardens. Instead of simply looking at plants as objects, Bankovska wanted to be with the plants by adopting an approach akin to "dwelling with the plants"—what Holdrege (2013) refers to as "living thinking." This involves drawing and sketching plants as part of a methodological approach that emphasises fully immersive, interactive attentiveness:

> I have arrived at the gardens. I sit down and open my sketchbook. There is no particular plan; I just sit down and sketch what I see. First, I notice that I need to choose one "fragment" of the whole garden plot view. To define the frame of the picture. I also notice that I am drawn to depict something with more colours, not just different shades of green. However, green is the dominant colour in the gardens throughout the season. This turns out to be only partially true, though, as I continue drawing. This time, by focusing on just one garden, I still need to decide what to include and what to leave out. The garden I have turned my gaze to is on the border, and many garden materialities surround the actual plot and plants, such as a toolbox, wooden fence, some watering cans, and other common and shared paraphernalia like wheelbarrows, a shared seating area with benches, and so on. But I want to focus on the plants. I soon realised that by focusing on a specific garden plot and trying to figure out how to depict the plants in a way that makes sense, I need to make many decisions at once. Do I focus on colour? Would that be enough? Should I draw the colour freely and add details later with suitable mediums, like coloured pencils? How do I depict the plants so that they are recognisable? Is that even the point? I also realise that drawing is just a multi-layered way for me to learn about gardens, mainly about plants, how they are planted, how they grow, and how they position themselves in the soil.

> Through the colours of the garden "canvas," I can depict the connection points between plants, soil, and materialities that support or protect the plants. (Fieldnotes accompanying the drawing process in Figure 1, July 2023)

Figure 1. Sketch of food plant allotment gardens. Note: Drawing by Agnese Bankovska.

Throughout the 2022 and 2023 gardening seasons, Bankovska continuously challenged her plant blindness through immersion walks, slow and silent observation, drawing, and sketching. The mobile phone, an important research tool for taking verbal and audio notes and photos, eventually became a tool for "noticing and naming" (Tsing, 2010) with the help of a plant identification app. During slow observation sessions in the food plant allotments, Bankovska noticed that the app extended her relationships with "nameless," albeit somewhat familiar, plants by providing names for them, which helped her to recognise them on future occasions. Plants became more visible and three-dimensional in both sensorial and cognitive terms, claiming a more active presence and role in the gardens.

While building her relationships with the plant research participants, Bankovska used the app to avoid unnecessary hierarchisation and attribution of value beforehand, as she initially knew nothing about the plants she encountered. Each plant's "scientific" Latin name provided by the app allowed Bankovska to identify it within the broader taxonomy. As her perception and understanding of the plants expanded, the value and contextual hierarchies of the different plants became noticeable through her seasonal observations of the multispecies gardens and material structures, as well as the explicit and implicit stories that human gardeners shared with her about their relationships with various plants in the gardens.

3.2. Care With "Ambivalent Plants"

Relationships, power, resilience, and the contextual usefulness of weeds are well-researched topics in multispecies studies, particularly concerning urban natures (Myers, 2019; Stoetzer, 2022) and various forms

of care in urban gardens (Ginn, 2014, 2016; Pitt, 2018; Poikolainen Rosén et al., 2022; Power, 2005). In this article, we address cases of plant care that involve species often regarded as weeds. However, rather than discussing their "weediness," we shift our gaze towards their ambivalence in different care entanglements, showing that plant species change their placement in care entanglements contextually and situationally (Haraway, 2013).

One such plant is comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*; Figure 2), one of the main plant species in the food plant allotments throughout the 2022 and 2023 gardening seasons. Comfrey was part of several care entanglements. Firstly, it was generally well-tolerated and allowed to grow along the borders and pathways between individual plots, on abandoned plots, and around the edges of the garden territory, particularly near the water's edge bordering the plots on one side. Secondly, due to its balanced distribution across the plots, comfrey provided a steady food source for various pollinators, including different types of bumblebees, honeybees, other wild bees, and hoverflies. Thirdly, comfrey's convenient positioning, also close to individual plots, allowed it to be part of another care entanglement, serving as a green fertiliser, similar to those sometimes made from nettles. T (here and throughout the text, Bankovska's human research participants are anonymised and referred to using only the first letter of their name) was particularly pleased about the presence of comfrey, both because it attracted pollinators and because it could be used to produce fertiliser. Additionally, T told Bankovska about the plant's medicinal properties, demonstrating that its caring properties could be extended beyond the gardens.

Figure 2. Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) in the food plant allotments, July 2023. Note: Photo by Agnese Bankovska.

Composting is another way of caring for and with plants that can be considered ambivalent. Bankovska's research shows that noticing—and being attuned to the specific ambivalence of various plants that eventually go through the composting process—leads to becoming more attuned to care that extends beyond plants to include soil and fellow human gardeners. In this way, attunement to composting contributes to sustaining the intricate microcosmos of care in the gardens:

> Participant A has two compost boxes or heaps in her garden on the "loud" side. She says they are suitable for a rotation system. On one of them, which is already composted, zucchinis are growing. When these are finished, she will take the compost from the pile and use it in the garden. The freshly cut grass and piles of weeds in the fresh compost heap will then be transferred to the "old" one to compost. She says it usually takes about one winter for a "new" compost heap to form. (Encounter and conversation with A, August 2023)

The presence of a compost heap, box, or makeshift compost corner was one of the common rules that the food plant allotment gardeners needed to adhere to. As described in A's case, it was typical to have two compost arrangements, and hence the opportunity to witness the birth, life, and rebirth of plants, along with a good rotation and continuous system for the (re-)creation of soils in the gardens (Pungas, 2022; Wing & Sharp, 2023). In the food plant allotments, the requirement to have compost was largely a management strategy for organic garden waste, ensuring the distribution of this waste and creating a shared responsibility for each human gardener to participate in the care work across the plots. The infrastructural and design approach to the compost arrangements reflected the seriousness and depth of individual gardeners' engagement (see the collage of compost arrangements in Figure 3). It was an ongoing learning process that involved being attentive and noticing (Turner et al., 2024, p. 7; Wing & Sharp, 2023, p. 205). T admitted that when she started paying more attention to composting, she learned much more about gardening in the process. She proudly showed Bankovska the zucchinis she had planted for the first time in the 2023 season in her compost heap, expressing surprise at how well they were growing.

Figure 3. Compost at different stages throughout the 2023 gardening season in food plant allotments. Note: Photos by Agnese Bankovska.

Like Pitt (2014), Bankovska used photography to observe changes in the garden over time, taking photos of the compost heaps throughout the season. This allowed her to see plant life, death, and human participation in this care entanglement through composting in the gardens.

Thinking about time is essential for working with plants at all stages of garden care. Elton (2021) describes "plant time" as something that "changes speed because it takes shape in the relationship between human and plant." According to Elton, based on her observations in gardens in Toronto, "plant time" can feel slower for humans than for animals. However, it can also prompt humans to act quickly and react accordingly when a plant needs watering, harvesting, or any other form of care. The attunement to plant time occurs through the various acts of care performed by human gardeners, becoming visible through the visual changes in how plants develop in the garden space, for example, through flowering, growth, and the formation of fruits (Elton, 2021, pp. 100–102). Considering that plants are one of the key actors in the creation of compost while acknowledging that a whole array of multispecies care is involved in the composting process, plant time becomes incorporated into and aligned (Gan & Tsing, 2018) with compost time and, by extension, with the multispecies care times that are never linear and singular, but rather rhythms, periods, and continuities of multispecies care. The human aspect, as described by Elton (2021), is critical to the existence of compost deposits in food plant allotments. The times during which other species, plants, fungi, microbes, and animals work together and complement each other in the composting process are equally important.

In multispecies studies, environmental humanities, posthumanism, and similar fields, the separation between human and more-than-human time has been scrutinised while considering the broader climate emergency discourses. Bastian and Bayliss Hawitt (2023) argue that close attention should be paid to the "temporal mismatches" between social and environmental time. They call for scientists to take an approach that could provide better tools and strategies for understanding climate breakdown and biodiversity loss (Bastian & Bayliss Hawitt, 2023). In such endeavours, the art of noticing becomes particularly useful, allowing researchers to coordinate their gaze towards the polyphony of different entangled times (Gan & Tsing, 2018; Tsing, 2015).

3.3. Care Meanwhile

Another type of care can be seen as "care meanwhile" or "care by default." From a temporal perspective, this care is ongoing most of the time (without human presence) or almost always (even with human presence). These are multispecies care entanglements in which humans participate on the most even terms and in the least anthropocentric manner with other species. Humans become mere observers or should be particularly attuned to collaborate and become part of these entanglements. In broader terms, care meanwhile is present in almost all forms of care in the gardens, at least partially. In this section, we describe cases where the care is ongoing, mostly without direct human involvement. In care meanwhile, more-than-human species and material structures become gardeners in their own right, often unintentionally. In this context, human sociality dilutes into the broader multispecies sociality that is constantly ongoing in gardens—a sociality that becomes apparent when given due attention and hence consciously noticed (Hartigan, 2015, 2017).

One form of care meanwhile is represented in "accidental gardens" (Figure 4), which were prominent mainly in the food plant allotments in Bankovska's research.

In practice, these plots were either abandoned or in a liminal state between owners. These accidental gardens made the plot structure rich in species mutualities, mainly due to chance. None of the plant species could be seen as useful, ambivalent, or weedy in these patches. They just were. According to the time and seasons, accidental gardens that appeared among "real garden" plots were, from a human gaze perspective,

Figure 4. Accidental gardens in food plant allotments, 2022 and 2023 gardening seasons. Note: Photos by Agnese Bankovska.

more ruderal (Stoetzer, 2022), weedy, and unruly (Tsing, 2017). More nature? According to whom? Austrian artist Weinberg, in his reflections on such "accidents" in cities in unexpected spaces that might not necessarily be gardens, calls them "potentiate ecologies" (potentiated ecologies), emphasising the "potency, energy and force in plants" (Myers, 2019, p. 138) that often perform their own "gardening" work beyond or alongside the human:

> I see Weinberger's weedy aesthetics as a disruption of proper "forms of visibility and intelligibility" (172). As Kregg Hetherington astutely notes, these works also invite "aesthetic rejection of the chronological terms that the Anthropocene marks." They are thus a lesson in learning to read infrastructures differently: if analyses of infrastructure tend to focus on function and assume progressive, linear temporalities, a shift to analyses of infrastructures' aesthetic forms, especially the modes of dissension possible within artists' gardens, opens up space to see other temporalities in-the-making. (Myers, 2019, p. 143)

Several human gardeners in Bankovska's research spoke about last, this (the time the study was conducted), and next season, addressing the "problem" of accidental gardens. Thinking through these marked seasonal rhythms allowed them to maintain a sense of control, at least in their minds. Meanwhile, the accidental

gardens were tolerated and left to their own devices. Some gardeners even admitted that the "untamed" beauty of these plots was incomprehensible, but they recognised their importance in attracting different species, mainly pollinators.

Figure 5. Colours and patterns of plant species in food plant allotments, autumn 2023. Note: Drawing by Agnese Bankovska.

3.4. Multitudes of Care

Lukasik conducted their study on multispecies conflicts and conflict resolution in urban allotment gardens as part of the Helsinki Urban Rat Project research programme. While the human–rat conflict played a prominent role in the study, other species—animals, plants, and fungi—were also mentioned. Moreover, it quickly became apparent that the motivation driving such conflicts is often care. Removing weeds, killing fungal spores, or building barriers were actions driven by the need to care for the desired plants or the garden as a whole. Plant and animal species became antagonists (hares, rats, and dandelions) or allies (pollinators and pest-repellent plants) in the project of care.

To protect the gardeners' privacy, interviewees will be referred to by randomly assigned letters in the following sections, both when quoting and paraphrasing.

Tending to a garden—urban or otherwise—requires multispecies communication: an implicit process in which the gardener notices the health of the plants (or lack thereof), the status of the soil, the trails of animals, and the presence of other species. This can be understood through the perspective of multisensory reading and writing (Boonman-Berson & van Bommel, 2023), a concept that highlights the interpretive aspect of multispecies communication. Whenever a person notices an animal's presence in their surroundings, it is interpreted through the lens of their previous experiences, knowledge, and narratives about specific animals. Although receiving those messages is multisensory, humans rely heavily on visual cues. Looking, noticing, photographing (Figure 6), and videographing are methods of becoming attuned to one's garden and can aid or guide care practices. Therefore, this and the following sections focus on the visual messages of garden care.

Figure 6. Examples of trail camera placement. Note: Photographs by Karolina Lukasik.

During the interviews, numerous participants mentioned having Instagram accounts dedicated to their urban gardens, particularly garden plants. The accounts documented the care given to the gardens and served as visual aids. By photographing the garden, the gardener captures moments of gardening triumph and successful care that can be used for reference later. On the one hand, such documentation suggests an aesthetics-focused approach to one's garden. On the other hand, it speaks to pride taken in ensuring care: beautiful blooms or lush foliage that reward the gardeners for their work. Photography also requires attentiveness, finding a satisfying angle, and interaction with the photographed subject. In the case of nature photography, this process depends on weather conditions and the amount of sunlight exposure. The gardeners become entangled with their gardens in a new way through their photography. However, it is important to emphasise that the photos shared by the gardeners exclusively depict beauty and success. There are no images of destroyed plants or the early work carried out in the garden. One participant, for example, had a photo album dedicated to rebuilding the cottage in their allotment and redesigning the garden, but this too was framed as a success story. While the gardeners are keenly aware of the effort required to maintain the garden and the risk of plants dying, they are more interested in capturing—and projecting—their aesthetic triumphs.

Many participants were interested in and motivated by garden aesthetics. B focused on gardening with visually pleasing plants, noting that the colours made them feel better. The beauty of the plants was the main criterion for choosing what to add to the garden. The gardeners spoke about unusual colour varieties and cultivars they had planted or would plant in their allotments. They had also participated in the garden's open days, showing their plots to visitors.

Caring for the plot also created conflict between B and the city rabbits. B said that they hate the rabbits for eating the plants. According to garden regulations, their plot was surrounded by chicken wire to keep the rabbits out. Weeds and other plants that competed with the planted flowers were plucked out—using herbicides in the garden is forbidden, although, as Lukasik later learned, not all gardeners adhere to these regulations.

In a later conversation, after the camera had been placed in the participants' plot, they were most interested in seeing footage of hares or rabbits entering their plot. The video material helped them build new barriers to keep the animals out. Some damage, however, had already been done; the tulip buds had already been eaten. Using video material as a guide for care was common among the participants in this study.

C compared the video footage with material traces left by animals in the garden: a plastic bowl that had been nibbled on and droppings found under a tree. Another gardener, after seeing a bird trying to eat Styrofoam on camera, went to where the camera was located and put the Styrofoam in the bin. The cameras prompted the gardeners to look at their plots differently and to consider what happened when humans were absent. By connecting the traces of more-than-human animal presence with the video material showing said animals, the human gardeners became more attuned to how other animals were affecting and changing their gardens. For some of them, like D, the camera footage became an extension of their garden observation.

Lukasik also observed many instances of care being enacted through experimentation. Numerous gardeners spoke about their lack of formal training in gardening, and hence their reliance on experimentation and observation. This experimentation referred not only to planting seeds and waiting to see what took root, but also to their attitude, liking the freshly grown plants, finding them easy or difficult to maintain, and seeing how they fit within the garden. For some participants, like E, not caring became a method of care: they forgot about what they had planted and subsequently enjoyed a pleasant surprise. As in the descriptions of care meanwhile and care by default observed by Bankovska, here too, care took the form of relinquishing control over the plants.

When removing unwanted plants, gardeners apply various categories: for example, ground elder is unwelcome, but horsetail is beautiful, and nettles are edible. As a result, these "weedy" species are not destroyed but are instead maintained if they grow too tall. They become cared for and incorporated into the garden.

F described their approach to gardening as "painting with plants." Their plot does not contain many edible plant species, save for two raised beds. The participant emphasised that gardening is a visual art that requires not only knowledge but also attentiveness to the surroundings:

> Well, actually, garden design is a visual art. Or partly. It is also a practice where you have to know a lot about biology, nature, plants, the soil and, of course, the particular, you know, surroundings because they have changed a lot. When I started here 23 years ago, none of these buildings were around. As you can see, they are pretty new. That has changed the light and the wind. The winters and springs are also much wetter than they used to be. (Interview with participant F, summer 2023)

F considered some events in the garden, such as water accumulation after winter and the ageing of apple trees, to be forces that interfered with their plant painting project. As such, the effects of weather, pollution, and disease had to be mitigated. The aesthetic value was important: the participant wished that there were more "attractive" birds in their garden and bemoaned the fact that insects are "very ecological, but very ugly." The participant used the signs in the garden to deduce information about the animals living there. For example, more buds on roses and lilacs suggested that the rabbit population had decreased. Camera footage was used to obtain additional information about the presence of animals and a sense of control over who had access to the plot (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Stills from the trail cameras.

For Participant G, gardening represented freedom: "You could also do nothing in a garden." They described their plot as "bohemian," planting a mix of vegetables, herbs, berry bushes, and decorative plants. Their guiding principle when choosing new plants was visual—they chose nice-looking species. They accepted that some of their plants would be eaten by rabbits. Recently, they had been trying the no-dig approach to the flower beds. Observation was the key to their self-described amateur garden practice, as well as to their acts of care meanwhile. A similar approach had been taken by I and J: "Everything usually goes off," they said, laughing about the unpredictability of their garden.

For Participant H, the garden meant work. Having a "clean"-looking garden was important. "This is my paradise but also my work camp," they said. They watched YouTube videos on gardening and followed a well-known Finnish biologist, Leena Luoto, who offers gardening advice. Spending time and effort on garden care became a point of pride. Their care was also reflected in "defending" the garden: they killed snails by collecting them in a bucket with instant coffee and pouring boiling water on them. In the anthropocentric garden, human gardeners exerted power over nonhuman entities to eliminate what kept them from achieving their ideal garden. From this perspective, controlling or killing individual beings was justified by caring for the garden as a cohesive aesthetic whole (Power, 2005).

Although the caring approaches ranged from meticulous planning and killing unwanted nonhuman others to caring meanwhile and experimenting, they all shared a strong visual component. The participants described how something looked (beautiful, healthy, ugly, or unkempt) and how they observed changes in the garden. While gardening is a multisensory activity, the visual aspect appeared particularly informative: care was often pictured, whether literally in the form of taking photos or in the descriptions provided. At the same time, the presentation of the garden became both a source of pride (such as during "open gardens" events, when everyone could visit the plots) and a means of control: gardens that did not look "good" were scrutinised, and the lease of a careless gardener could be terminated.

On the other hand, however, relying on visual information can be highly limiting for humans, thus creating new spaces for the more-than-human. This is particularly striking in the case of insects, which are more difficult

to see and therefore become visible to gardeners only as a vague class of more-than-human. Similarly, in the interviews conducted by Lukasik, microbes and fungal spores were regarded as elements of compost or poor soil, rather than being conceptualised as garden entities in their own right. However, this does not align with Bankovska's observations in other gardens. More-than-human animals choose times out of human sight (dusk and night) and places beyond human view (under leaves, close to the ground, or in the bushes). Similarly, the edges of plots are spaces where plants such as dandelions, ground elder, and wildflowers can grow.

3.5. Notes on Methods

Walking around the garden led Lukasik to download a plant identification app. Like Bankovska in her research, Lukasik took pictures of plants and tried to identify them. The app helped them situate the species in the context of Finnish gardens, and to ascertain whether they provided suitable conditions for the plant and whether it was native or introduced.

Working with trail cameras also affected how Lukasik perceived the garden space and became attuned to other temporalities. From their perspective, the first placements were largely unsuccessful: the cameras were obscured by leaves or pointed towards spaces not frequented by animals. Sometimes, between mounting the camera and checking the memory card, a neighbouring plant had grown tall enough to block the lens, which required attentiveness to the plant's rhythms. Lukasik started looking at the garden from the perspective of the opportunities it posed for other animal species: spaces for forage and rest, safe passages, and abundant nesting material. They became attuned to times when animal presence in the garden was most visible.

A similar process occurred among some of the participants. One of them exclaimed that during the summer of 2023, they had seen three different animal species that they had previously thought were entirely absent from the garden: a fox, a squirrel, and a lizard. While these animals had most likely already been visiting or living in the garden, the gardener became more attuned through participation in the research. Joining the project could consequently be viewed as a collaborative experience of attuning to the more-than-human and using the camera footage to consider the garden a source of opportunities for other species.

However, Lukasik also noted instances of rejection of attunement among some participants. When Lukasik asked a gardener who owned a trail camera whether they had seen any animals in the footage, they said no and added: "No anacondas." Commonplace animals, such as rabbits, rats, or house sparrows, were not considered interesting enough to attend to. While the person had an overall positive attitude towards the more-than-human world, they also seemed more interested in rare or otherwise "charismatic" species (Lorimer, 2007). This attitude was also reflected in other gardeners—the sighting of a fox in the plots became an important event in the community. Overall, responses to the research project and camera footage were mediated by each individual's motivation (curiosity and the need to control one's space) and their attitude towards gardening.

4. Conclusion

Care in urban gardens is a complex and constantly changing combination of ethical predisposition from the perspective of human gardeners and practical care work entangled in both visible and less visible multispecies interactions. Our research shows that attentiveness, the art of noticing, response-ability, and curiosity do not

in themselves guarantee a relationship in which humans assume the responsibility of caring. Openness—as Pitt (2018) writes—might just as easily facilitate exclusion. Drawing on Lukasik's study of multispecies conflicts, we observed that intentional care often pursued a specific goal, which was particularly clear in the case of aesthetics-focused gardens. When another entity, such as a wildflower or a snail, interfered with this goal, gardeners would kill it. Urban gardens, while inviting to many more-than-human species, remain ultimately anthropocentric spaces: human gardeners exert more power over the space than other species. Eradication and killing thus became incorporated into methods of care. Nevertheless, we also noted how unwanted others could thrive in the margins, in spaces inaccessible to humans, and in potentiated ecologies. Even in situations where humans choose to exert control, its scope is limited.

Our research shows that care in gardens is more often invisible than visible to the human eye and general bodily and cognitive comprehension. Spatially, it is ongoing, often hidden underground and among abundant plants. Temporally, care is ongoing in human time—daily and seasonally—and along many trajectories of multispecies time, most often outside human perception, alluding to multispecies polyphonic time (Gan & Tsing, 2018). We found that by slowing down and becoming silent, that is, through careful attunement of our embodied and cognitive perception, humans can acquire extended attentiveness that might lead to ethics and practices of care that are less human-centred and more multispecies-attuned. Similarly, an attentive application of different visual and mixed methods, such as trail cameras, plant identification apps, photos, drawing, and sketching, can offer new perspectives on how researchers and research participants, both human and more-than-human, perceive, experience, and manifest care in the gardens.

Finally, our research adds to the growing scholarly debates about the value of multispecies care in urban gardens at the intersection of climate emergency and biodiversity loss (Sandilands, 2018; Wittemans et al., 2024). Looking at care in gardens through the methodological and analytical lens of the art of attentiveness and the art of noticing showed us that the gardens in our research displayed significant potential as spaces of both cultivated and accidental biodiversity, where care entanglements intertwine and function in polyphony or cacophony (at least to the human ear). Thus, by further investigating the complexities of multispecies care in urban gardens, researchers can contribute to the broader debate on the climate emergency and biodiversity, as well as the role and importance of urban natures.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The publicly available ethnographic data, in the form of ethnographic quotes, fieldnotes, photos, and drawings, is presented in this article. The rest of the research data collected by both researchers is not publicly available due to the safe data management guidelines for qualitative research.

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