Dr. Vicky McGuinness: Welcome to *Big Tent, Big Ideas*! the live online event series from the University of Oxford as part of the Humanities Cultural Programme. My name is Vicky McGuinness, and I am head of Cultural Programming and Partnerships. *Big tent, Big Ideas!* brings together researchers and students from across different disciplines. We will explore some of humanity's important subjects and ask questions about areas such as environment, medical humanities, AI and technology, history of disease, as well as celebrating storytelling, music, song, and identity. We will have a live event every week until the end of June. Sign up to the TORCH newsletter to stay up to date. We are bringing you this event program online while we are all keeping safe and keeping our distance at home. We hope that you are all safe and well during this difficult time. We look forward to seeing you all again soon in person. Everyone is welcome in our big tent and we welcome you as we explore big ideas together. We thank our viewers for their ongoing support and for all the participants as part of this series. They have given their time, words, and their big ideas as we come together online. This series would not be possible without the support from so many people including the TORCH team, so thank you all very much. Now I turn on to our excellent speakers tonight. It is an honour to host and welcome two very accomplished and generous people from the University of Oxford. JC Niala is a doctoral researcher with an interest in how people's imaginations of nature affects the environment. With a focus on urban practice, she has worked on food sovereignty projects in Kenya. JC has used verbatim theatre as a tool for community engagement for both adaptation and mitigation strategies for dealing with climate change. JC's current ecological project, ‘Plant and Orchestra’, brings together her love for music and trees. Elizabeth Ewart is Associate Professor in the Anthropology of Lowland South America, her research with indigenous peoples in central Brazil where she has lived and worked the Pinará people. She is interested in the material and visual aspects of the Amerindian lived worlds including body adornment, beadwork, garden design and village layout, and is also interested in the anthropology of everyday practices, such as child rearing and gardening. More recently, she has been developing research in southwestern Ethiopia together with Dr Wolde Tadesse on local agriculture and food production. JC and Elizabeth, welcome to the big tent - thank you for joining us! Welcome.

JC Niala, Dr. Elizabeth Ewart: Thank you!

Vicky: So, this evening, for our live event, we are actually going to begin with a reading, and this will lead into a conversation between JC and Elizabeth, but for now, I will hand over to JC with her reading on guerrilla gardening.

JC: Thank you very much Vicky, and thank you for being here everybody, I hope that wherever you are you are safe and well. So, guerrilla gardening is a type of urban gardening that takes place in spaces that we tend to think of as public, but it does not have the same legal status as, for example, community gardens or allotment plots. Imagine for a moment that there is a crack in the pavement that is outside your home. Following adverse weather conditions, the crack widens to reveal soil underneath. Eventually there is a pothole and even though this pothole is an irritation, it does not warrant enough attention for you to call the council to complain about it. One of your neighbours, however, also notices this crack and decides to plant some flowers in it. You do not notice the seeds going in, but you do notice the seedlings as they begin to sprout out of the ground. Time passes. Eventually the flowers bloom. One day you are walking past the flowers with your young child and she reaches to pick one up and you stop her. You find yourself saying, “Leave the flowers; they look beautiful there.” Shortly after this, local elections are being held. One of the people standing to be a counsellor says as part of their campaign they will endeavour to make the council more responsive. The flowers now call attention to the pothole that they were growing in. The candidate wants these potholes fixed. They are a health and safety hazard, but when it becomes clear that those flowers were actually planted there by somebody, another issue arises: whoever planted the flowers did not have permission to do so. Suddenly, all the people who live near the flowers are made aware of the fact that the pavement and the road that they thought of as theirs, does not actually belong to them. This is not an unusual feeling. I am sure you felt a bit of a sense of annoyance when you're driving home and outside your house, there's somebody parked in what you think of as your spot. But actually, it's not your spot; it's a public road, it's available for anybody to use. It is in moments like these that the question of what public actually means to us in our day to day lives can come into conflict with what public means in terms of the structures that govern our lives. Like the flowers bursting through the pavement, these moments of rupture show what was previously hidden but also allow us to question what we thought we knew. Let us think about those flowers a little bit more for a moment. The plants that are growing in the crack affect people in the neighbourhood that they are growing in. For some people, they will see them as beautiful, other people may find them an inconvenience and find that they affect their accessibility to the pavement.

In the example I just gave, the seeds there were planted, but this is not true for all the plants that grow in cracks in pavements. There are also examples where plants have seeded themselves and these plants can also have very big effects on human behaviour. There is a firm in San Francisco called CMG Landscape Architecture and they have won an award for their crack gardens. These are gardens that they say are inspired by the tenacious plants that pioneer the tiny cracks of the urban landscape. To have one of those gardens installed will also set you back several thousand dollars. Here in the UK, The Guardian newspaper gardening column, also taking its cue from nature, gives advice on crack planting. This is an interesting reversal. It is in these cases, it is the plants agency, its power to make a place for itself in a human-crafted landscape that is the trigger for human action. This agency parallels the behaviour that human beings show when they are making a place for themselves in an urban context. The street I was talking about where the plants and the pavements lie in tension with each other, is actually a human invention. Up until the mid-1800s streets as we know them did not exist. It was not until then that streets were widened, regularized, cleaned, and local improvement acts concerned themselves with paving, lighting, but also the policing of the streets as we know now, and especially with that very important demarcation of the line between what is private and what is public. Now no-one told plants in cities that the whole way in which we live, and the landscape was going to change. And just as the plants were ignorant of this, actually so were we as human beings. We are quite ignorant of the laws that govern these domains. Under English law, unless privately owned, all land belongs to the crown and is granted for use by the public by our local authority. This use, whether it is the pavements we walk on, the roads we drive our cars on, is so commonplace that it escapes our attention that we do not actually have any ownership over the public land on which we conduct our daily lives. It is only when this use becomes contested, for example when guerrilla gardeners take into their own hands actions to change the shape of the city, that we start to question the uses that land has been demarcated by the city authorities who are responsible for its management.

Especially if we think about the environmental times in which we are living now and climate change, it seems counterintuitive that the action of planting flowers, which are usually seen as beautiful and good for the environment, could see a citizen fall foul of the law. And I think generally we tend to agree with this because so far there have been no reported arrests of guerrilla gardeners in the UK, but still guerrilla gardeners remain in a precarious situation while they are doing it. Richard Reynolds, who is a London-based guerrilla gardener, described the incidents involving the police and he said, “Normally they're just confused but ultimately they let me get on with it. However, this time,” he says, “we had no plants or seedlings to back up our story. It led to the police uttering the immortal line, “Put down your tools or we're taking you in!”, and I did not want to get arrested so I went back to my flat, drank a bottle of wine, came back later, and finished up. But the fact that Reynolds could relatively easily evade arrest, demonstrates the law’s reluctance to apprehend what they know the public are likely to see as legitimate behaviour. And guerrilla gardening practices are even more likely to be legitimized if they are carried out on the types of land usually targeted by guerrilla gardeners. This is land that shows signs of neglect or decay, and these types of land become very visible in cities because cities within their histories often have an underlying blueprint of the way things are supposed to be. This blueprint, this authority implicitly or explicitly states the ways in which cities should be arranged so that they can run smoothly, but it also allows for human behaviour to be regulated. Guerrilla gardening at the same time draws attention to the fact that this land has been abandoned and therefore is unregulated, while bringing to the fore a kind of natural order that allows those who practice guerrilla gardening to align themselves with nature. And nature, as we know and as we are seeing right now, regularly demonstrates how difficult it is to regulate. This circularity echoes the gardening cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth, so in these moments of tension, of course it would be confusing for a policeman because by arresting Reynolds the policeman would be rightly enforcing a human-made law, but at the same time, he would feel the tension of violating what sometimes gets called a natural law. Natural law allows for different species to inhabit the same planet, and *that* we know is in effect beneficial to us all as human beings. So, I would like to invite Elizabeth now to come and join me in conversation, so we can reflect on some of the practices of guerrilla gardeners and what it means for all of us in urban context in our relationship with nature and culture.

Elizabeth: Thank you, JC, for sharing your thoughts and reflections on gardening in unexpected places and thank you, of course, to all our audience who have joined us today. Now one of the things that our current situation seems to highlight, the situation of being confined in our homes, staying safe in our homes, is for me a heightened sense of noticing exactly the sorts of things that you have been describing. The awareness that allows us to notice flowers in little spaces where perhaps they are not supposed to be - on the pavement, in the crack of the wall. Thinking then, as a social anthropologist would, about these small things, about the noticing of things that for many people might go unnoticed, is something that of course you are doing as part of your project. Now, maybe this then allows us to rethink a little bit what kind of a space we live in, what kind of a city it is that we want to live in, and this then makes me think about city spaces and who, and what these spaces are for. Why should gardening need a garden? What if we were to think the other way around? And in many ways your reflections are just about that, are they not? Any space is a garden, perhaps, all it needs is things to grow in it. And of course, many plants grow themselves if they are left to find their own potholes, their own cracks in walls and their own crevices. Now, that then gets me thinking about the kind of language that we have been using around ideas of growing and particularly in relation to the guerrilla gardening that you have been discussing now, because in many ways warfare and extermination do seem to feature quite a lot, not least when it comes to public spaces. Guerrilla gardeners on the one hand, council workers exterminating weeds on the other, you can of course famously buy seed bombs. Now not all urban spaces are the same of course, public parks are different, these are maintained just as private gardens are cared for and permitted plants are nurtured and sometimes protected. So, for me, guerrilla gardeners, then, enable us to notice our spaces and to create gardens where perhaps we would not have expected them to be. It allows us to think of a pothole not as a pothole, but as a plant pot, a place for something to grow. Now these plants that find their spaces, these plants that find their cracks, that find their potholes, they do that in very quiet ways and guerrilla gardeners do their gardening in rather unnoticed ways; not by grand, powerful gestures of planning and rezoning, but just rather one pothole, one crack at a time and one seedling at a time, that recolours our places and that reconfigures the spaces that we live in and come to feel at home in. To me, that is a very powerful thing, which then makes me wonder a little bit about the very idea of power that you've talked about in your reflection, and how does power then fit into gardens? How does power fit into public and private spaces, and into cities more generally? Who or what has the power in guerrilla gardening? The potholes? The gardeners? The passers-by? The council? The plants themselves? I was wondering if perhaps you might want to offer some thoughts on that.

JC: Thank you, I love the idea of our city spaces being given different colours by gardening and I think about it as almost a nexus or a whole web of power which travels around between different actors at a particular point in time. One of the things that really struck me when I started my project is that I set out to research urban gardeners at Oxford and I was very much thinking about human beings, so I imagined I would locate myself and find an allotment site, and tend my plot and talk to my fellow gardeners, but I very quickly realized that actually plants were also gardeners and insects were also gardeners, and speaking to one of my fellow gardeners, *human* gardeners, on a site, he talked about how many plants do better in cities because they get warmth and are shaded by buildings. So, the city itself is also a gardener and holds in its own way a particular kind of power. So, it feels to me like we have moments when the power becomes a bit more visible through particular actions, but I would find it very hard to say that there was one more than another at any given time.

Elizabeth: Yes, and so I suppose that then brings me onto thinking a little bit about this kind of question of tenacity and clinging on, because we have talked very much in terms of finding a space to grow but we know of course that these plants find a crack, and then lo and behold somebody pulls up the plant and another plant has to find its crack, has to start again, has to cling on. If you walk along brick walls and you see these cracks with little flowers just hanging on in there and just that tenaciousness and that demand to find a space for themselves. That makes me think a little bit more about the idea of home and belonging and how plants and people find themselves at home, find themselves a space to belong in cities, which comes with ease for some and is incredibly difficult for others. I just wondered if you wanted to expand a little bit on that question of belonging - what is it to belong? Who belongs where? And again, who gets to decide? The plant decides, “this is my home, it's my pot, my space”. The council decides, “this is the pothole that needs to be filled”. A passer-by might decide, “this is the hole that tripped me up”. So those questions of who belongs where, and how we find a way of agreeing that both plants and humans can live alongside each other.

JC: I mean, I find it really fascinating, that question of belonging, because I feel like there is an interesting dance that goes on, particularly between plants and human beings, around that belonging. I'll think specifically about apples, because in Oxford there is a very intimate relationship of belonging between human beings and apples, so one way of looking at Oxford would be to look at a map of the city with its buildings and the colleges that are a very big feature, but another way of looking at the city could also be the old orchard lines, and it always strikes me in the autumn and around harvest time how many houses have baskets outside with the apples in them – windfall, there's too many for that particular family to eat - and I think the apple tree and Oxford in many ways show that dance of belonging. Apples originated from Kazakhstan and travelled inside humans and animals all through Europe, and yet they found themselves in the UK, in a place where they are now very much considered to belong with human beings and so intimately connected, they are that apple trees in the city of Oxford are doing better than in the surrounding countryside. Because as humans make their place and try and make beautiful places in the city they plant and choose to plant lots of flowers, which increases the number of pollinators, which makes it easier for the apple trees to thrive. So, I see it in terms of who gets to decide, for every apple tree that might get cut down to make way for a road another apple tree may be pollinated by its neighbour in a garden and therefore make a place for itself, so I see it as a dance of belonging somehow.

Elizabeth: Yes, and it is interesting, isn't it, to think then also about well, what sorts of plants belong in spaces. So, if we think of public parks and you, in your reflection, talked about the idea that flowers are colourful and they are beautiful and it's nice to have them around, but of course public parks could also be amazing spaces for more than just flowers or indeed flowers which are blossom that exactly then turn into lovely apples at the end of the summer. So, something that I often wonder as I walk through the parks is why are not more of the parks populated by lettuces and courgettes, beautiful as the daffodils are and as the daisies are, what is it about public parks which are for our enjoyment but apparently not necessarily to go and eat from?

JC: That's a good point. I do think it’s interesting what uses we see of space and the idea of productivity as well. The full title for the allotment society is the ‘National Society for allotments and leisure gardens’, and the reason I mentioned it in relation to parks is it is actually a point of tension. Some people feel that allotments should be just for growing food and if leisure gardens should therefore be like parks and they see that as a split. Yet for other people if you're *growing*, whether it’s food or whether it’s more for aesthetics, they shouldn't necessarily be that split. But I do feel that it's interesting the choices that get made, because if we're saying that something is beautiful and that flowers are beautiful, well what about a row of, as you mentioned, vegetables or is that not a type of beauty as well?

Elizabeth: I suppose then the question of property inevitably starts sneaking in and I can hear in the back of my head voices saying, “but the person who put the work in is rightfully entitled to the row of carrots, not the leisurely passer-by who pulls one up. So, as you know, I suppose we can't really think about these things without then also starting to think about regimes of property and who owns what. And one of the very exciting things to me about guerrilla gardening is that it sort of evades that question of property. Flowers grow, things grow, but there is not a clear sense of well, ‘whose is this?’. I think that's a powerful thing and probably something that all of us need to think more about is the processes of growing things and producing things without tying them to, “I grow my vegetables on my plot - these are mine and nobody else's”. Because lo and behold, as you described, at the end of the summer we've got too many apples and we put them out for our neighbours but yes, certainly that question of property I think rears its head for better or worse.

JC: But I think it is so strongly held, the idea of property, and particularly to come back to English law, your home is not your home because you own it, the right that you have is the right to exclude people from your property. I mean, when I learnt that through my research, I found that quite profound, but actually it's about who you keep out more than actually who is let in, and I see this when in the course of my research I've spoken to several people who actively grow fruit in their front garden to invite people to take from it. But people find it very hard to do that, even if there's no fence and even if there's a sign saying, “I am growing this fruit for you - do help yourself!” They report that there's something that actually stops people and, you're right, what guerrilla gardening reminds us is of that idea that you can do it for others to enjoy and it's not about even this invisible line that people don't dare cross over.

Elizabeth: I suppose those questions of boundaries and walls and fences encroach then on the question of the public and the private that you were talking about, and again, one of the beauties of guerrilla gardening seems to me to be that these boundaries get transgressed and get broken down both by the act of sprinkling seeds where they were not expected but also by the plants themselves, who just find their way through these fences, or find their little crack in the wall to grow in, and just break down a little bit some of the boundaries between what's mine and what's yours.

JC: Well, I think plants are always really good at doing that. Anybody who has a garden will invariably know that they have some part of their neighbour’s plants within their own garden. I love the way that they just ignore our fences.

Elizabeth: That's right and of course, for better and worse, right? So, it's marvellous my neighbour’s jasmine spilling over into my plot but what about the knotweed, for example, spilling through on the fence? And, of course, that for better or worse I say because, of course, if nothing else, it certainly makes us strike up conversations with our neighbours, hopefully to celebrate the jasmine but perhaps also to complain about the weeds that keep coming through, the fence that's leaning over, and so on.

JC: But I think it's also interesting when a boundary is brought to an attention, what else it could do. There was a wonderful situation on an allotment site where there was a plot that had been divided into two, and on one half the person hadn't been tending it very well and there were all sorts of brambles growing very high, and the person on the other half had been complaining and complaining, and eventually the person who hadn't been tending their plot moved on and the new allotmenteer arrived and cleared everything away, and the person who had been complaining suddenly realized that their plants were worse off because they hadn't been sheltered by all of these brambles that were growing and so boundaries don't always do what we think that they do, and sometimes by having that brought to our attention we get to see other ways of being.

Elizabeth: Yes, and so exactly, there's that opportunity, isn't there, to just rethink or perhaps see afresh the world that you're living in. So, the thing that looks like a fence or a wall turns out to actually be a shelter; the pothole that looks like a trip hazard turns out to be a plant pot; and so, there’s an opportunity there, isn't there, to look at the world through eyes that are shaped by another set of categories, if you like, another way of looking at the world, and that again seems to me to be a rather powerful thing.

JC: Very much so, and something that can actually change the way that we do things. I was talking to somebody today who shared with me daffodils that she planted as a guerrilla gardener that were avoided by a verge-cutter and to think that actually a daffodil has the power, essentially, to make somebody decide that they will not cut them down, what they recognized in that moment is really quite powerful.

Elizabeth: Yeah, that's an interesting example isn't it, and I suppose it then makes you come back to this question, well, a daffodil which wasn't meant to be there, by virtue of its presence, has established a space for itself, you know? I think we see that with paths that cut across parks where you shouldn't have a path and people just walk. Maybe it's a short-cut and you walk across the park on this path that's not meant to be a path, and over a certain amount of time, lo and behold it becomes a path and it becomes a legitimate space in which to walk, if you like.

JC: I think it gives me a lot of hope that we *can* actually shape our cities and we can be co-creators with different species to do that. I think cities (I mean, I'm biased, I'm an urbanist!), but cities I think get a lot of flak for being quite hostile or unyielding places, but actually I think what guerrilla gardeners remind us, is that we do have the possibility to co-create our cities. We don't have to feel that the structures that we find ourselves in are fixed to a point that we have no form of entry or conversation with.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I think that's right. Now let me just play devil's advocate just for a moment on that, because I absolutely agree with you that there is a sort of message there of co-creation and coexistence, which is very beautiful. I wonder, is there a risk of becoming almost too starry-eyed about that and in co-creating these spaces are we risking locking some people out, some species, some particular kinds of plants? Do we have to be careful to keep that conversation very open, so as not to fall from the power of the planners to some other kind of power which also excludes one or other constituency?

JC: Well, I mean it comes down to weeds, doesn't it, and the whole idea of a weed being a plant out of place, and the decisions that are made around what is a weed? What do we decide is beautiful and what is acceptable? And I think you briefly mentioned Japanese knotweed and I find it really fascinating how in Victorian times it was given as a gift, ended up in Kew Gardens, won prizes, was seen as this amazing beautiful plant, has now become a plant that can completely devastate a neighbourhood socioeconomically; if it's found it's been declared an invasive species; if it's found in your house it can destroy the value of your home; and this is the same plant that we're talking about that has now been categorized differently, but then most recently, again, there's been a chemical within it that has medicinal potential, and so all of a sudden the same plant has been taken into a different category where, so long as it's very strictly controlled and guarded in labs, it's now a plant that could be seen to have a use and therefore shouldn't be completely eradicated. And what I find interesting in this very same plant having very different life cycles, is it shows us also how we can do that with human beings and how we can have certain human beings that could be initially exoticized in a particular country, goes through a period where they're seen as taking over and therefore not to be seen as being wanted, but if they are seen to have a special gift then, or a special skill that can benefit that country, they can then be regulated, so I think that plants can also teach us about how we treat each other.

Elizabeth: Yes, that seems a pretty important point to make, of course the history of inclusions and exclusions both of people and of plants is one that we do well to pay attention to, both for the sake of living together as human social groups, but surely also for the sake of the maintenance of diversity, that it's not just one kind of plant that we'd like to have in our gardens, and as you mentioned, as cities have now become places of heightened biodiversity, more bio-diverse in many cases than the countryside, so that too makes me then think well cities clearly do have a very important role to play as sites of biodiversity in the future. But also, I suppose, as sites of food production in the future - through allotments, through back gardens, perhaps through public parks.

JC: I mean, wouldn't it be amazing to have public orchards and places where, yeah, people could just go and pick and eat! I mean, but they exist in, you know, you did a lot of work in lowland South America, essentially it would be great to hear an example from your work of how that works.

Elizabeth: Well so that's right, so that did make me think a little bit about that and about the value of collective work as opposed to individual work, and I think it's really important to emphasize that in the case where I work in lowland South America with indigenous people who are very keen horticulturalists, who grow their own food and who do that in part through collective labour, through working together, nevertheless the idea of who owns the food is very strongly entrenched, so it's not really a matter of people being able to walk into each other's gardens and help themselves - quite the opposite! Quite the opposite, it has to be said, so collectively working together, on the other hand, is very, very highly valued and that's something that perhaps we also could learn from and think through and I know that happens in neighbourhoods, that people help one another out and so on, but perhaps not quite on the sort of formalized level and widespread level that you see certainly in the context of Panará people, who are indigenous people in central Brazil for whom working together collectively is part of what it is to be a good person, to lead a good life. Yeah, so there are certainly, I'm sure, things there that we could learn.

JC: I mean, I think there are, as you said, examples in the UK certainly on different allotment sites. One of the really lovely things I'm seeing happening at the moment is that there are people who are looking after other people's plots, if they can't get to the site because of the current restrictions, and that has really emerged quite spontaneously as a way to ensure the continuity of that plot, so what I love about researching allotments is they tend to bring out the best in people during points in crisis. They tend to really demonstrate that possibility of what can happen in points of crisis, of how people can support and work with each other.

Elizabeth: Yeah, which is a very beautiful thing to see, isn't it, and then perhaps now more than ever, I think, we're seeing some of those qualities of people reaching out to one another and being there to support one another really coming to the fore. So perhaps it would be nice on that positive and hopeful note to move to a question-and-answer session.

JC: Yes, that would be great.

Vicky: That's where I come back in, so, thank you so much both of you, JC, for your reading, and Elizabeth and JC, both of you, for that really interesting conversation. I know I certainly have learnt a lot, you know, I had an idea as to what urban gardening and guerrilla gardening was, I now have a better idea. I also have some questions of my own and as I am here in person, I would love to ask those questions of you both. We also have a number of questions that have come through on social media, so I will ask those as well and thank you to those who have sent those questions. If you still have questions feel free to put those to us on the YouTube chat and we will pick those up and hopefully we will make time for those too, so thank you very much. What we heard today was a really interesting outline of how urban gardening, and guerrilla gardening as part of that, can touch on so many areas there. You have spoken about inclusion and exclusion; you talked about identity. A really important question I think everyone seems to have and there's a thread, is about ownership - that's really interesting to see - if you put so much time into this, of course, who then can take the daffodils or the lettuces, as you say, Elizabeth, in those public parks? And something I'd like to say is ‘food versus flora’. That seems to be a quite interesting point that you both made there, of course, and again it goes back to that point you have also made about value. So, coming over to one of our first questions is related to that, that idea of ownership and public space. One of the points that was made on social media *was* about people planting things on verges, and the balance between accessibility, of course, and maintenance. You mentioned potholes quite often and I have visions of my own street, by the way, which is full of potholes – I’ll have to drive around daffodils instead of potholes, but perhaps if we can come to you Elizabeth first of all, you know, what are your thoughts particularly on that balance of public and accessibility and, of course, maintenance?

Elizabeth: Yeah, and of course the question of accessibility is a huge one. When you mentioned, though, having to drive round the daffodils, I'm immediately thinking, well, traffic calming measures?

Vicky: Could work!

Elizabeth: Using sleeping policemen and other kinds of ways to slow down the traffic, so I’d think about accessibility and break that down into, well streets, pavements are for people to occupy. There always are these debates, are there not, about is it the cars or the cyclists or the pedestrians and so on I'm not sure we've got enough time.

Vicky: That's another show, Elizabeth!

Elizabeth: But on the question of accessibility, well, there is clearly a difference between planting an entire pavement full of daffodils and then you can't walk through because, let's face it, when the daffodils aren't there and it's wintertime in the UK it's going to be very, very muddy. That would seem to me to make the space less liveable, rather than more liveable. On the other hand, if we thought about ways of calming the traffic with planting zones for daffodils, that might be more viable.

Vicky: Interesting. JC, what are your thoughts?

JC: Well, it was interesting. I was thinking actually more when you were talking about food and flora, because also a lot of what we're talking about today are categories and plants move between them. So, what we think of as the wonderful English dahlia, started off as a food in South America. There it was a tuber that was eaten there but when it came here it turned into flora. So, I think, again, to kind of come back to what I think guerrilla gardening does so well, is it shakes up all these categories, it reminds us that what we think about as one particular category actually it can move, it can change shape and it might not be what we think it is.

Elizabeth: It’s interesting, if I can come in on that also, I mean, we have to remember that these are not mutually exclusive things, so the apple tree that blossoms beautifully turns into food later on, so of course we can have things that both flower and feed us all at the same time.

Vicky: This is true, yeah, and if we could stay on the food aspect - you can tell my keen area here! - I think it's also interesting what you pointed out about the social aspects, because, of course, we talk about urban gardening and you both spoke about what makes a garden - not everyone has a garden, and I'm just conscious that we're in this particular period where we're told to stay at home, and that question about outside space? We don't all have it, and that is quite often a social thing, and also thinking about the different foods that quite often make the humble crumble, is what I was thinking: your apples, your rhubarb and your blackberries. My family, quite often, and friends we find those in public spaces. I don't think anyone - does anyone consciously grow blackberries, I'm not sure? But it's quite interesting how food is so interwoven into that social aspect and you touched on that earlier, I wonder, JC, if you had any more thoughts on that?

JC: On the sociability of food? I mean I have an obsession with the apple tree but what I love about trees is that they remind us that they are never meant for individuals or even individual families, you know, that's why the baskets are outside of the doors; they remind us that actually, regardless of who planted or tended it, there are people who are going to benefit who did nothing towards that, and I kind of like that because I think it also reminds us to look after each other. One of my favourite apples is from a tree that is on the edge of a car park. I have no idea what species it is but, I mean, the apples are just divine.

Vicky: Oh, I wonder!

JC: I don't know who planted it and it's just…! But I think in terms of thinking about the people who don't have access to the outside, let's remember that we also do live with a lot more plants and we forget about it. We forget about all the plants that are in our homes very often, we don't think about the fact that they also are breaking a particular boundary. They're plants but they're inside our homes, and whenever you speak to keen gardeners, they will tell you that the gardening season is also in their house because they will propagate, you know, germinate seeds in their home, they will tend them and only when it's actually safe for the plants to go outside will they move outside.

Vicky: True. We have another interesting question that has come through on the chat; somebody has asked what is the cultural history and origin of the term ‘guerrilla gardening’? I know this is a question I need to ask as well, so, yeah, which one of you would like to start on that one?

JC: Like with all these things, it's very contentious. There are some who say it came out of a women's movement in the 70s and 80s, and this would have been in North America, and it was purposely co-opting the language of war to talk about something which is otherwise seen as nurturing and being carried out by a gender that is often associated with nurturing. More recently, as I said, there are people like Reynolds, who I mentioned, in London, and there are also other prominent guerrilla gardeners in Canada who have said that it was them that came out with that term. But, for me, the one that I do lean towards is the 70s and 80s women who took over abandoned bits of urban land, because I can really see how they would have used that term for the fact that it was such a strong juxtaposition.

Vicky: Interesting, okay, great. We have another question that has come through, and I think this is very apt, particularly for your research areas, particularly you Elizabeth as well: “Among some communities in Ethiopia, Gamo, for example, passers-by along fields are allowed to take a bunch of unhusked, green peas or broad beans from plots if they needed to eat”. I think that's a really interesting concept. It touched on what you were saying actually, JC, with that idea of boundaries and feeling allowed to go into particular spaces, and your, it seems to be ‘campaign’, Elizabeth, for public parks and food plots! I wondered if you had any comments to add to that?

Elizabeth: Yeah, I think the reason, in Gamo, that it's okay to take a bunch of peas as you pass by is because people know that that's as much as they're going to take, so this also speaks to the sort of morality of sharing in that sense, you know? We don't live in a world of scarcity unless we make it so, right? The world becomes scarce when we hold on to all the things we have and hold on to them for ourselves. Okay, so questions of the distribution of food globally (and so on) would be a great example in another space and time to think about, but that question of the generosity that's built into that. Now, it might sound like a very romantic idea, but it does seem to me that there is nothing to stop us from sharing with each other generously, as long as people understand that what they take is a small bit, what they need, as it were. We've just had the whole debate about hoarding and in supermarkets, which would be a real example of where that does absolutely not manifest itself, but there are certain parts of the world where taking something because you know that you're not going to take everything, forms the real weave of social life; it’s what holds people together, it's what gives people confidence as part of a community, and that's something that I think we've got everything to learn from.

Vicky: Yeah, that's great, thank you. JC, any thoughts?

JC: No, I think Elizabeth described it really well and I think that, for me, what it speaks to are the things that kind of hold the glue of a society together. You know, in the same way that there are some things here around what we know in the UK that we would not transgress, there might be a different example of that and so, I think these are where sometimes it is useful to learn from other societies, but also be aware that, as Elizabeth said, it is woven into their way of being, which can sometimes, if you're looking from the outside, make it quite difficult to understand.

Vicky: Definitely. I think that leads in nicely to another point that was made, which was about defining what we mean as urban and in the context of neighbourhood first. Somebody has messaged about some neighbours don't talk to each other very much or at all, so of course, then, what can this do? It sounds like, from what you're saying already, sometimes it very happily breaks boundaries?

JC: I mean, the question of what is urban is a bit like the definition of guerrilla gardening; it's hotly debated. But it often tends to come down to the density of people in a particular place and within the city context, so it then becomes various amounts of densities as to how *urban* a place is considered to be. But I think in terms of talking to neighbours, when I did some ethnographic work in Summertown, I'll never forget speaking to a resident who said that they had been living in a village in Oxfordshire and felt more isolated and knew fewer neighbours than when they moved into a street in Summertown, and because you leave your front doors at the same time and have certain rhythms that are more in chime with each other, she got to know a lot more people and found it much more friendly. So, I think sometimes the preconceptions we may have of interactions in cities are not always played out in reality.

Vicky: Thanks, that's really interesting. Elizabeth, do you have any more thoughts to add to that?

Elizabeth: Yes, so just thinking about the definition of ‘urban’, I mean I’m not going to go into how one might define the urban, but certainly one thing that I think is worth thinking about is that, the boundaries of the urban and thinking about people who live in urban settings versus people who live in rural settings, it's not necessarily the most helpful way of thinking through how many people in the world live, who might spend some time in urban settings but move back to the rural areas and go between them or families. For example in southern Ethiopia, where I'm working with Wolde Tadesse, we work in a rural setting but every farmer’s household, pretty much, has one or two sons who've gone to the capital, to Addis Ababa, to work there and they will at some point come back; they've migrated to the city, they'll at some point migrate back, somebody else from the family will go. So there's a sort of sense in which there’s a permeability between the rural and the urban and there's movement between them, and some of the practices that people learn in rural settings, they may bring with them and in fact grow some food in tiny little plots where they’re living in Addis Ababa. So, as so many of these categories, they kind of defy their boundaries. The moment you focus in, you think, ‘well, but there's much more permeability there’, and just like those urban dwellers who we imagine never speaking to their neighbours, well, one day maybe you bump into each other in the lift and you *do* strike up a conversation, and you *do* realize that perhaps there's things to talk about, you know. So, I think we have to think about these categories very much in terms of permeability and flexibility.

Vicky: Yeah, I think that’s a really good point. We've had another comment through, rather than a question, I think it’s a really important point, going back to one of our earlier questions about accessibility, that actually we should ensure that we “include the needs of those with disabilities when they're navigating the streets and discussing accessibility”. I think that chimes with what you were saying in your response there. It is great to be able to do whatever we can, but of course there's always the issues we find as well - you were talking about pavements are for people, but I often find a lot of cars parked up on pavements, so it is a real issue whether you have a buggy, or you have access needs of various different kinds, so thank you for that point Hannah. Then we have time for one more question, if that's okay; “Given that many people feel a natural unwillingness to pick what they haven't planted, how might precedents of traditional or contemporary gardening give us a guide to create access for community projects?” I think what we're talking about there is your point, JC, about people *offering*, but still, there's a cultural barrier almost there, isn't there?

JC: I mean, I think some of it is possibly through the media, to be quite honest. Gardening has been hugely affected and impacted by things that people have seen on TV, on YouTube increasingly, and online, so I think if people begin to see examples of it and if they see it demonstrated for example, ‘No-dig’ gardening at the moment is increasingly popular, and that has been largely through a lot of media, a lot of YouTube videos and big personalities showing their practice, because especially to see ‘No-dig’ gardening on traditional allotment sites, where double digging was just the path of the course, shows that there can be big cultural shifts that can happen in even the most, quote-unquote, “traditional” settings.

Vicky: If I may ask, and it shows my ignorance here, what is ‘No-dig gardening’? How does this work?

JC: It is exactly what it says, you garden without digging! Yes, so the idea is you have your piece of land and you put mulch down, and compost, and you build up the soil without actually turning it over, and it is becoming increasingly popular which, as I said, is a big cultural shift because when we think of gardening, everybody thinks get your shovel out and that's the way to do it, but this starts from a completely different place, so I do think it's possible for there to be cultural shifts.

Vicky: Interesting, okay, any further thoughts on that, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well, just thinking about no-dig gardening, I mean, of course it's not very good news for people for whom that kind of you know, heavy-duty labour is a bit of a therapy, so there's nothing greater than spending your day at the desk at the computer and then going out into the garden and digging over a good old plot and feeling like you’ve finally achieved something in the day. So, I think like all these things there’s space for all kinds of gardening, all kinds of gardens, all kinds of plants, and just the very last thing I was thinking about in relation to your question, well, how do we get these cultural shifts that make it okay to take a little bit? It's a little bit like back in the day, museums were there for us to look at things but never to touch anything, and of course over the space of perhaps a generation now, I'm thinking, well, if I take my children to the museum now it's very different with lots of interactive things, there are lots of things where you're actively encouraged to touch and pick things up. So, if we can do it for museums, I think we can do it for gardens too.

Vicky: That's a great point for us to finish on there, I think the ‘Please Touch’ and the ‘Please Take’ signs are probably what we we’re advocating for, aren’t we? So, what that leaves me to do now is to say thank you both so, so much for being so generous with your time and your thoughts, and your words here today. I've certainly learned a lot and judging from the questions, we've had a really interested audience too, so thank you both very much, JC and Elizabeth. What that also leads me on to do is to say that this series will be live every week, we will have one live event up until the end of June. Our next event is next week on Thursday at 5 o'clock. We would welcome you all to come along and see us again then. Thank you so much, this has been the Big Ideas series, part of the Big Tent, as part of the Humanities Cultural Program. Thank you all very much.