

Posthuman Existentiality of “Weeds” and “Plants” in Gardening Citizenship: Examining Relationality of Arrangement and Displacement through Photographic Practices

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Gardening can serve as a space for posthuman existential inquiry to understand and develop human and more-than-human relationships. However, the arrangement of popular houseplants, landscape gardening, and commercial plantations makes certain botanical species as desirable “plants” and others as unwanted “weeds”. A tidy and manicured garden often requires “weeding” as a recurrent practice where certain plants become the ideal non-human “citizens” while others might go through the violence of uprooting. The clearing out of a considerable portion of jungles, the collection of many indigenous plants, and the plantation of non-native plants can trigger the displacement of many endemic plant species and promote the growth of invasive species. This paper aims to develop gardening citizenship as a theoretical paradigm through photographic practices, critiquing the scope and politics of arrangement and displacement to depict how these acts trigger different possible co-emergences of plant-human-animal citizenship in the garden. In gardening aesthetics, as new plants often emerge into existence from gene modification, hybridisation, or cloning driven by human desire, they often take up agentic roles to mould humans in trans-corporeal engagements. Furthermore, this paper seeks to understand, question, and elaborate on gardening practices within diverse relations, such as possession, commercialisation, parenting, as well as contesting spaces for plantation—uprooting, domesticating—synanthropic desires, and other ethical grounds. Through posthuman and post-dual approaches, this paper will travel through various photographs in which wilderness

transforms into gardens and vice versa, analysing “natural-cultural convergence, comprehending the resonances, impacts, affects and effects of our being-in-the-world” (Ferrando 20) .

Keywords: Plants, weeds, gardening citizenship, arrangement, posthuman

Introduction

Arrangement and displacement are two sides of the same coin in the gardening landscape. The paper takes the help of photographs to substantiate the concept of gardening citizenship through a posthuman perspective in which plants-humans-animals co-emerge in different relational terms. In that context, this paper aims to incorporate and critique various possible gardening types, such as home gardening, commercial gardening, agro-gardening, and landscape gardening, by taking inspiration from personal photo archives stored in *Google Drive*. In that connection, it will relate the concept of digital environmental humanities in its praxis through photographic analysis in relation to how gardening habits might contribute to the making of both sustainable and unsustainable environments. The photographic practices can open up diverse spaces where the digitally produced and/or archived photographs can address different environmental issues, concerns, affinities, desires and fears. In their introductory note, Nikoleta Zampaki and Peggy Karpouzou argue for “new ways of understanding and taking care of various life-forms through digital environments” (275). In fact, photographs can be important tools for understanding, exploring and critiquing diverse platforms of environments. Thus, photographic practice to understand posthuman existentiality can manifest in various forms of photographic skills like macro photography, telephotography, astrophotography, drone photography, wildlife photography etc. However, my paper primarily focuses on simple point-and-shoot Smartphone photography to “underscore how the digital and the ecological are deeply implicated in the design and

production of various narratives, addressing mainly how the ecological mobilizes the digital and vice versa to create individual and collective digital ecologies” (275). Through a post-dualist approach, this paper aims to address how photographic practices can address various narratives centred on the garden. In fact, the post-dualist approach can critique any form of hierarchic relation. It is “based on the recognition of the existential dignity of human and other-than-human beings (from non-human animals and plants to technological beings and robots, among others)” (Ferrando 29).

This paper aims to include that the gardening space is not merely simple, flat space where the benevolent relationship among plants, humans and animals can be established. While this is a very important aspect, it extends beyond that by encompassing different sorts of relations such as possession, commercialisation, and parenting, as well as contesting spaces for plantation—uprooting, domesticating—synanthropic desires, and other ethical considerations. In order to explain these varied relations, this paper will specifically travel through various photographs. It will incorporate photos captured in especially two regions: my home garden and parks in Murshidabad (part of the plains of Bengal) and the Himalayan Hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The paper will critique how gardening practices can incorporate a self-reflective paradigm. It examines different ethical obligations, such as the violence of uprooting through weeding and the planting of non-native species, which can cause displacement of indigenous plant and animal species. It also considers how the (invasive) plants can outgrow and take over such regions, as seen with the spread of *Cryptomeria japonica*, a species of conifers in the Himalayan regions of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. These issues further can spark up different existential questions regarding what it means to be entangled with the garden in which anthropocentric/anthropomorphic desires of humans and synanthropic desires of plants co-emerge through relations of care, mutualism, competition, capitalist desire and other ecohorrific conditions that eventually lead to debates

of posthuman existentiality in gardening landscapes. In fact, posthuman existentiality can enquire, build and shape the idea of citizenship in a garden, sparking up debates related to “natural-cultural convergence” in which it can address “the resonances, impacts, affects and effects of our being-in-the-world” (Ferrando 20). These discussions lead to critiquing the formation and concepts of “ideal” citizens in the garden. The paper will build up its research paradigm through a post-dual approach by analysing the following photographs.

Care, Nurturing and Parenting: Existentiality in Posthuman Family

One of the most important aspects of the gardening is its connection with the care ethics. This care ethics is a critical elaboration and practice related to parenting. Therefore, this notion of care is not simply built on the idea of “maintenance” but possibly a mutual co-emergence.



Fig. 1. Tohidur Rahaman, *(Re)generating, Gardens*, 2025.

The care aspect associated with this form of nurturing opens up a familial space that is not only centred on humans but also includes more-than-human agencies. The act of caring reinforces the context of how gardening is a space that is not defined by human control. The act of growing flowers and fruits requires nurturing from human ends. This care is a trans-

corporeal process in which the plants' growth, survival often influences the mental health of the gardener.

Weeds or plants? (Trans)nationality of Gardening Citizenship

Whether to consider a botanical entity as a “weed” or a “standard” plant is a matter of anthropocentric designation. It often manifests as a result of utilitarian thought approaches of human beings. A manicured garden often needs weeding as a recurrent practice so that desired plants can possibly flourish and fulfil human desires. Therefore, the love for plants in gardening is not always simply an act of caring and nurturing. It may include the (violence) of uprooting, trimming and training. Yet, somehow some “weeds” become successful in resisting, thriving, blooming and growing alongside the manicured garden. Figure 2 shows how “weeds” grow in my home garden and make the gardening practice a challenging space. Both figures 2 and 3 show how some “weeds” thrive and bloom in the Motijheel Park, Murshidabad.



Fig. 2. Tohidur Rahaman, *Plants and Weeds, Gardens*, 2025.



Fig. 3. Tohidur Rahaman, *Blooming (un)desired*, *Gardens*, 2025.



Fig. 4. Tohidur Rahaman, *Weeds or Wildflowers Blooming*, *Gardens*, 2025.

In fact, the garden is a place for self-reflection where different possible existential relationalities can co-emerge. In that connection, the choice for houseplants, popular for foliage, flowers, fruits, etc., can bring out the transnational fervour in gardening practices.



Fig. 5. Tohidur Rahaman, *Plants across nations*, *Gardens*, 2025.

For example, in the Bengal plains, different flowering plants that gardeners often plant are not usually local, indigenous and endemic species. They thrive, compete and might also cooperate with native species. Figure 5 shows how flowering plants belonging to different groups, such as *Calendula officinalis* L., *Oxalis corniculata*, *Catharanthus roseus* (Vinca), and *Haworthiopsis limifolia*, grow and co-emerge in the same garden. The photo shows how foreign and native plant species co-emerge in the gardening citizenship. In fact, the garden is a place where flowers native to different parts of the world find a place to suit the gardener's aesthetic practice. The following list includes common examples of gardening plants that have transnational and transregional connection:

Regions	Plants
Mexico and Central America	Cosmos, Dahlia, Marigold, Cactus and different varieties of Succulents, some varieties of Orchids, Sunflowers, Bougainvillea
Mediterranean Europe, North Africa and Western Asia	Calendula, Pansy
Southern China and the Eastern Himalayas	Chrysanthemums, Tea (<i>Camellia sinensis</i>), Lychees, some varieties of Orchids
Southern Africa	Lithops, Gazania, Haworthia
Arabian Regions	Adenium or Desert Rose

Arrangement and Displacement in (Post) natural Gardening Citizenship

When certain botanical species become desirable “plants”, they may often turn into resources for the arrangement as popular houseplants, landscape gardening, and commercial plantations. However, this desire for the choice of houseplants is not a simple process. It involves years of human involvement in hybridising and cloning plants. Not only does this process open up the scope for eliminating or displacing heirloom varieties of plant species but also animal species that depend on them to thrive. However, in many other cases, the plantation can also attract pollinators, birds and different animal species.



Fig.6. Tohidur Rahaman, *Feasting, Gardens*, 2025.

Figure 6 brings out how the gardening space might become a feasting space for them to thrive, procreate and survive. The following photos give glimpses of plants arrangement.



Fig. 7. Tohidur Rahaman, *Reading Arrangement, Gardens*, 2025.



Fig. 8. Tohidur Rahaman, *(Im)possible Garden, Gardens, 2025.*



Fig.9. Tohidur Rahaman, *Hybrid Dendrobiums in Blooms, Gardens, 2025.*

The other important aspect of gardening practice is its (post)natural elaboration. Figure 8 shows how orchids and succulents are growing in (post)natural gardening space of the balcony. Both orchids and succulents require different environments to thrive. However, the balcony gardening creates a space where these plants can receive the required temperature, sunlight, and humidity. Here, the “artificial” setting co-merging with the “natural” setting becomes an ideal ground for growing plants belonging to two entirely different categories. Today’s garden is no longer filled with heirloom varieties of plant species. Constant efforts have been made to hybridise plants and grow them through tissue culture to propagate the maximum number of plants for business purposes. Figure 9 reflects how hybrid and cloned

dendrobiums thrive in the balcony space. The garden is also a practice through which business thrives, supporting people and leading to the propagation of plants.

Synanthropic Desire in which plants take up human places

The following photos elucidate how plants can also in turn take up agential role and impact human spaces. I refer to this tendency of plants as synanthropic desire, which allows plants to thrive in human-occupied or constructed spaces while also validating, moulding and resisting fantasies about human-constructed reality. Plants that resist human spaces through synanthropic desire might sometimes shape discourses of horror.



Fig. 10. Tohidur Rahaman, *Fern in the Lamppost, Gardens*, 2025.

Figure 10 shows how a species of fern dismantles and takes control of lamppost constructed by humans.



Fig. 11. Tohidur Rahaman, *Sprawling Ivy, Gardens*, 2025.



Fig. 12. Tohidur Rahaman, *Morgan Ivy, Gardens*, 2025.

Both figures 11 and 12 depict English ivy with synanthropic desire. Common or English ivy is a species of plant that has actually originated in Europe and Western Asia. Therefore, it is not local or indigenous to the Himalayan region. Yet, the outgrowths of the species defy its endemic status in relation to how it can thrive in other cooler regions as well. The planting of English ivy simply does not always showcase love and appreciation of that plant but also perhaps may bring out an occidental desire. The readings of English ivy, as represented in many British literary writings, may create a fantastic view of the Occident, and the plantation of these plants might sometimes result from an occidental desire where the West could serve as a space for fantasy for many non-western people. However, during the colonial period, planting ivy by the British might have served different purposes then. Figure 12 shows how the creeping ivy over the Morgan House would perhaps play heterotopic space or a portal to rural England or Ireland.

Conifers Belonging to Genus Named *Cryptomeria japonica* turning into potential weeds/pests/invasive plants



Fig. 13. Tohidur Rahaman, *Cryptomeria japonica*, *Gardens*, 2025.

There is no clear-cut explanation why the forests of *Cryptomeria japonica*, or commonly referred to as “pine” by many people, have been planted in the regions now occupying the districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayan region. However, it is generally conceived that “Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*) plantations were extensively established to produce the timber required for railway construction and the tea industry, but at the expense of native forests” (Rai and Schmerbeck). Therefore, however visually appealing the woods of *Cryptomeria japonica* might appear with its misty, moist and secluded environment, it created an adverse impact on the flora of this region, compromising its diversity. In fact, it is important for us to understand that beyond “its native habitat, *Cryptomeria* can be invasive and may readily regenerate from seed and by layering” (Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh). Over the course of time, the invasive nature of this gardening did not only exceed its commercial outcomes but also contributed to the process of making a unique “wilderness” by not allowing other plants to flourish. This instance of agentic roles played by this species of plants aptly testifies to synanthropic desires in which

the “commercial gardening” is constantly turning into a “wilderness” of its own along with impacting human-animal-plant relationships.

Darjeeling Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) as a Commercial Gardening



Fig. 14. Tohidur Rahaman, *Tea Garden, Gardens*, 2025.

The plantation of tea gardens in Darjeeling started as commercial gardening in colonial times when the British found the Himalayan regions of Darjeeling suitable for growing the Chinese variety of *Camellia sinensis*. The plantation of this variety of camellia is one way, a colonial enterprise, and in another way, it adds to a transnationalist fervour that eventually comes to define this region’s identity. In that process, it turns into a commercial and capitalist venture for this region’s economic structure. The constant strikes and protests made by the tea workers expose how the “exotic” promotion of Darjeeling tea not only buries the pains and sufferings of tea workers but also adds to the high prices of this tea in both the Indian and international market (Rajeshwi Pradhan). This nature of gardening exposes the complex narratives of this practice, where it is not simply a benevolent act but many possible things

that constantly redefine human and more-than-human relations and existentiality on an affirmative note.

Conclusion

The paper argues for a reflective analysis of gardening practices where these habits are not simply manifestations of care. The garden might incorporate anthropocentric desire, in which it may serve as a commercial means. This desire might promote the clearing out of many indigenous species as well as promoting the growth of invasive species, which may eventually turn into potential weeds. Along with this, the gardening habit is not always a space of control. The desired growth of plants requires frequent weeding as a recurrent practice. Today's gardens are, in one way, a space for developing human and more-than-human relationships through caring, nurturing, and empathy, as well as, in another way, the result of histories of colonisation, collections, gene modification, capitalism, orientalist/occidental ventures etc. Photographic practices are not always "selfish" portrayal of subjects detached from the onto-existential world. They can develop an appreciation for human and more-than-human relationships in gardening habits as well as pinpoint various problems, politics and complex issues of gardens in contemporary times.

Limitation and Scope of this Study

This study is limited to point-and-shoot photographic analysis of gardening practice, but the critical elaboration of the work opens up scopes for a better analysis of gardening habits through various types of photographic practices, such as macro photography, telephotography, astrophotography, drone photography, wildlife photography, etc.

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