

Community Garden Revolution Notes!

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Incommensurability, Land Use, and the Right to Space: Community Gardens in New York City¹

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Abstract: I examine the conflict over the community gardens in New York City. I argue that this contest was an example of Lefebvre's "trial by space," and that ultimately, the struggles concerned the right to space, or "the right to the city." The city, operating from the perspective of entrepreneurial governance, claimed that the gardens represented a loss of exchange value and potential housing. I contend that more was at stake: the gardens and gardeners represented a threat to the hegemonic project of the government to maximize exchange values and to beautify and sanitize the city. I also argue that the issues of commensurability and narrative were critical to the conflict. The city used the rhetoric of a market economy paradigm to dismiss incommensurable use values, thus restricting rights to the city within a demonstration of power and "reason." In response, the garden advocates resorted to "tactics" and other persuasive arguments.

"What happens when the dollar value of a benefit is underestimated, unknown, or impossible to calculate? Do we lose the twenty gardens ... to sixty townhouses because the value of (their) biodiversity is not possible to calculate in dollars, and

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