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Steve Hinchliffe [a]; Sarah Whatmore [b]
[a] Geography Discipline, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK
[b] Oxford University Centre for the Environment, School of Geography, Oxford, UK

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Living Cities: Towards a Politics of Conviviality

STEVE HINCHLIFFE* & SARAH WHATMORE**

**Geography Discipline, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK, **Oxford University Centre for the Environment, School of Geography, Oxford, UK*

Introduction

Against the cartographic opposition between cities and natures in modern western societies the idea of urban ecology has seemed little more than a contradiction in terms. But things are brewing in cities. The spaces and species that have been erased from urban visions and values now find themselves the subject of a 'greening' of urban policy that has gathered some momentum in the UK on at least two fronts. First, urban biodiversity is *starting* to be accorded the kind of conservation significance once reserved for rural and sparsely populated regions. So much so that the distinction between green-belt and brown-field land is no longer an automatic marker of ecological value. In this, scientific energies are being newly invested in the importance of so-called 'recombinant ecology' (Barker, 2000). This refers to the biological communities assembled through the dense comings and goings of urban life, rather than the discrete and undisturbed relations between particular species and habitats that are the staple of conservation biology. Urban wildlife groups, amateur naturalists, voluntary organizations, no less than the highly visible animals and plants that make their way in and through cities, have been key players in this realignment of urban spaces and conservation concerns. Second, there is a growing sense in the urban policy community of the importance of this 'recombinant ecology' to what makes cities liveable and to the attachments of civic identity and association. Critical here is the extent to which this ecological fabric is constituted as a public good or urban commons, including leisure spaces such as parks and allotments; feral spaces such as abandoned railway sidings and derelict land; and remnant spaces such as waterways and woodlands. This gathering of energies has found expression in unprecedented policy investment in what has become known as the 'urban green'. Good examples include, the report of the Urban Green Taskforce (2002) *Green Spaces: Better Places* (www.dtlr.gov.uk); English Nature's new magazine *Urbio* on 'urban biodiversity and human culture' (March 2002) and the Government policy

Correspondence Address: Steve Hinchliffe, Geography Discipline, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK. Email: s.j.hinchliffe@open.ac.uk

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document on public spaces *Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener* (2002) (www.odpm.gov.uk).

The research that we draw on in this paper is an intervention in this 'greening' process and, as such, stretches the terms of policy investments in the 'urban green' outlined above. In particular, through the notion of 'living cities' we want to articulate some significant challenges to the styles and practices of analysis institutionalized in scientific and policy procedures which characteristically presume and reinforce spatial divisions between civic and wild, town and country, human and nonhuman. To this end we are working towards a conception of living cities that resists this familiar architecture of urban analysis in at least three ways, by exploring how

- cities are inhabited with and against the grain of expert designs—including those of capital, state, science and planning;
- urban inhabitants are heterogeneous, made up of multiple differences mobilized through human and nonhuman becomings;
- urban liveability involves civic associations and attachments forged in and through more-than-human relations.

In the first part of the paper we expand on this list of challenges to the architecture of urban analysis, drawing on research on the spatialities of a number of urban inhabitants. We open up some of the possibilities to be found in re-working the city as a living environment and follow up some of the consequences which these have for the ways in which people and others map the city. The examples are drawn from one city in particular—Birmingham. They should be read as investigations of the assemblage of living realities through contingent and situated activities and not as instantiations of broader structural processes. In drawing these examples together we hope to raise the importance of working with a multiplicity of spaces and times in urban ecological work, and in so doing envisage this paper as an attempt to intervene in the process of working out what, in practice, an urban political ecology can *do*. In this sense we are developing approaches that others in Science and Technology Studies (see Mol, 1999, 2002; Law, 2004) have called ontological politics. The term is used to emphasize that realities are enacted, rather than pregiven, and are therefore not fixed or singular (and so politics is not simply about epistemology, or the best view on a single reality). It follows that there can be debates and struggles over which realities to enact and that these struggles will involve assemblages of human and nonhumans. Politics, in this sense, becomes a more-than-human affair.

This focus on the 'doing' of urban ecologies, on their co-fabrication, implies a shift in the terms on which scientists (including social scientists) engage with the world. No longer employed in unveiling the truth of the matter, or producing a singular account of the world, biologists, ecologists along with social scientists are rather involved in the work of making things matter, a process that implies all manner of relational work. Intervening in the making of realities is hard work, and as we will demonstrate is constrained but not determined by conventional political forces (including those that would make cities in one way rather than another). This paper involves many others, and is part of a number of alignments and involvements. It is part of a project that is less oriented towards critical analysis of city living than engaging with the work involved in forming collectives oriented towards recombinant ecologies. In this we have worked with urban growers and

volunteered on community garden schemes; liaised and collaborated with Wildlife Trusts to promote urban wilds, and joined with other activists involved in enhancing and/or protecting cherished urban sites (see Hinchliffe *et al*., 2003).

In the second part of the paper we expand on this commitment to sketch a politics that attends to the 'leaks' and 'overspills' of primary forms of political alignment and organization, and disrupts the analytical and policy framing of what, and how, 'politics' are performed (see Rose, 2000; Tully, 1999). We do so by outlining three components of what we take to be intrinsic ingredients of a *politics of conviviality*. As will become clear in the second part of the paper, this is not the conviviality of Ivan Illich's 'tools for conviviality' (1979) nor of Zygmunt Bauman's *modus conviviendi* (2003), who restrict their concerns to how people accommodate one another in the everyday business of living together. It is rather party to the kind of conviviality gathering force in the name of 'posthumanism' [see, for example, the themed discussion in the journal *Environment and Planning A* edited by Castree and Nash (2004)]. In other words, it is a political project that is concerned with a more broadly conceived accommodation of difference, better attuned to the comings and goings of the multiplicity of more-than-human inhabitants that make themselves at home in the city than conventional political accounts. Again, our attempt to formulate such a political project here draws on our research involvements in the activities of living cities.

Living Cities

In the introduction we highlighted three ways in which living cities challenge the familiar architecture of urban analysis. In this section we move through these in turn, drawing on engagements with urban ecologies in Birmingham.

Living With and Against Urban Designs

Birmingham's Telecom tower marks the centre of a large city (see Figure 1) and a commonly held point of reference for a massive conurbation (incorporating Birmingham and the Black Country). The tower was recently repainted; a refurbishment that was tied to a host of other activities marking the re-birth of a much maligned urban area.

Barely a few months on from the tower's fresh coat of paint, the external purple walls of the tower are now streaked with easily visible white and grey lines. Less immediately obvious are the remains of animal and bird carcasses on the tower's uninviting ledges. The culprits, responsible for all this vandalism and carnage, are Peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), raptors that favour urban pigeon amongst their prey.

There's a sense in which the birds and the by-products of their inhabitation are out of place in the city. Their presence, obvious to the pigeons, a few 'twitchers' and the tower's proprietors but to few others, is unexpected. Indeed, the description of Peregrine in the Collins Bird Guide starts as follows:

> A large, fast falcon of *open country* with cliffs and crags for nest sites. Visits lowlands and coastal marshes in winter. A migrant in N Europe, a resident in the south ... (Holden, 1996, p. 79) (emphasis added).

The small map that accompanies the description and purports to show where Peregrine are likely to be found is reproduced in Figure 2. Note that the areas shaded omit most of

Figure 1. The centre of the city, also home to Peregrine falcon

England, with the bird being confined in the British Isles to upland and coastal areas of Wales, Scotland and Ireland, furthest from urban centres. Yet contrary to these descriptions, Peregrine have been resident in Birmingham for some time (sightings have been common in the last decade). They have also been known to nest on the tower and to over-winter in the city.

Figure 2. The shaded areas represent the Peregrine's breeding range, the area south or below the broken line is the bird's winter range

No one has directly encouraged the birds to make themselves at home here. The tower's smooth surfaces make nesting hazardous for adults and juveniles. Local 'birders' have supplied a nesting box to encourage breeding, but the company that owns the tower have so far failed to install the structure. Despite these hardships, it isn't difficult to reason why the Peregrines have settled in the city. Cities are full of food. Pigeons and other birds are present in number and are, perhaps, unaccustomed to predation from above. The micro-climate is warmer than the surrounding areas and the buildings afford a cliff-like topography, safety from predators and a wonderful view on the comings and goings of meals. Almost certainly too, in amongst this functional account of animal ethology, there are other becomings, other ways in which urban Peregrines 'enjoy' what cities can offer. Nevertheless, if we follow a more or less functional path for the moment (a path that is as complex as any other into animal culture) then we can start to tease out the heterogeneity and creativity of living cities.

What is surprising, perhaps, is that in amongst this thoroughly built and planned environment a raptor has made itself at home even as that environment continues to be evacuated in policy and scientific accounts of all but human life (Whatmore and Hinchliffe, 2003). The materiality of cities is by turns presented as passive and inert in which concrete is treated as the paradigmatically malleable material of the civic realm. In much urban theory, the only active participants in this urban world are the people who busy themselves beneath the tower and reach out from the tower to all corners of the world through its satellite dishes, computer networks and other devices of connectivity. Yet, the Peregrines suggest that there is more to city living than technology and culture or, more tellingly, more to technology and culture than human design.

It's not just people, Peregrine and pigeon that co-habit the designs of urban space. A few metres from the base of the tower one encounters part of Birmingham's canal network. This section was recently dammed and dredged in order to facilitate the re-development of canal-side buildings. Ten species of fish were recorded in this unpromising looking stretch of water. There's also now a very real possibility of otters (*Lutra lutra*) moving through the city's canals. They're not quite in the city centre yet but only a few miles away there are complaints from anglers that fish stocks are dwindling in urban canals, rivers and ponds, and otters have been caught on CCTV passing under road bridges and through culverts. It's widely agreed that it won't be long before otters pass this way. Meanwhile, across the road from the tower there is a derelict building and a piece of land currently used as a makeshift car park. Hereabouts lie a number of ancestral breeding sites for the Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), which is Britain's rarest bird.

We could go on with this catalogue. We haven't as yet mentioned the myriad of micro-organisms, plants and insects that make cities living spaces, nor have we opened up the question of what is and isn't living in cities. Our point here has only been to underline that cities are inhabited with and against the grain of expert design. But we can and will go further. For the examples we have mobilized so far speak only of co-habitation. On their own they do little to unsettle the bounded cartographies of technology and nature. If they do anything, they simply suggest that those cartographies exist on a different scale than that supposed by urban planners. We now want to argue that just as city living is not unaffected by this multiplicity and indefinable variety of inhabitations, so inhabitants are not unaffected by city living. Indeed, we want to suggest that nonhumans don't just exist in cities, precariously clinging to the towers and edifices of modernity, but potentially shape and are shaped by their urban relations. Nor do we see these inhabitants

as a threat to modernity as, perhaps and in more prosaic terms, the owners of the Telecom tower may view the Peregrine. Rather, we would like to suggest that the demography of the city, its populace of human and the nonhuman inhabitants, unsettles the geography of modernity and its forebears (see also Hinchliffe, 2003). This is then, an instance of what Latour would call an a-modern engagement (1993).

Urban Inhabitants

If cities are inhabited with and against the grain of urban design, such inhabitation also involves more than living with the city. It involves ecologies becoming urban, and cities becoming ecological. Earlier we mentioned ethology—the science of evolution or, more resonantly in the terms of our analysis, of becoming. We are not alone in suggesting that current reinvestments in the practice of this science are potentially creative (see, for example, Ansell Pearson, 1999; Thrift, 2000). Lives may not simply act out an internal script, checked only by external conditions. They may rather be material enfoldings of complex topologies of living and nonliving entities (see Whatmore, 2002). In other words, we might see urban inhabitants as more-than-human; more-than-animal; more-than-plant and so on. They are complex assemblages, mutually affecting and affected by their fields of becoming. This tack implies that urban ecologies are urban in more ways than their familiar guise as a set of obstacles or opportunities contrived by human technologies and human presence. They are more mixed up than that, as another example serves to illustrate.

Three kilometres (two miles or so) south of Birmingham's Telecom tower is a large area of land that is variously regarded by landowners and would-be developers as a brown-field or derelict site ripe for development. Through it runs a small stream known locally as the Bourn Brook that is bordered and crossed by canals and railways and that links up to a complex patchwork and network of urban land forms. Ecologists think that this is suitable habitat for water vole (*Arvicola terrestris)* and have found evidence of this small mammal even as it becomes increasingly rare in rural Britain. Indeed, outside a few urban areas, water vole populations have declined dramatically, leading some to suggest that water voles may be the next mammalian extinction in the British Isles. For conventional ecology, with its implicit and sometimes explicit hierarchy of spaces from the pure to the despoiled, this relative success of the urban water vole is a surprise. In this schema, cities are the last places to find refuge, and the first places from which nature has fled. Even more puzzling is the possible co-habitation on this site of water voles and a number of predators and competitors, especially the brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*). Perhaps, just perhaps, the entangled and multiple topologies of 'the site' which has been shaped by numerous human and nonhuman activities (from river courses, to quarries; willow trees to canal networks) affords the conditions of possibility for water voles to inhabit these spaces despite all the odds [see Hinchliffe *et al*. (2005) for a detailed analysis].

Water voles aren't the only mammal to be doing well in cities or to live and pass through this site [see Wyatt (2003) for an attempt to map the variety of Birmingham's mammal populations]. Badgers (*Meles meles*) in particular are successful in Birmingham, and there is growing evidence that their foraging ranges, their group sizes, in short their territoriality, is very different in these urban habitats than ecologists are used to observing 'in the wild'. Indeed, badger enthusiasts and naturalists are starting to accumulate

observations that suggest badgers are less likely to define territorial boundaries in urban areas and have larger foraging ranges than their rural counterparts (Wyatt, 2003). Their paths through the city seem to extend along linear features (especially railways and canals), a mapping more attentive to movement than to fixity and that articulates the spatialities of networking rather than of territory in the Euclidean sense (see Mol and Law, 1994).

As our tentative vocabulary has sought to suggest, these vignettes of animal inhabitation fall short of being established 'matters of fact' and mark a neglected research topic. In the introduction to this paper we alluded to the ways in which urban ecologies are often treated as 'poor cousins' in the production of ecological knowledge. Established forms of knowledge practice have often eschewed ecological research in cities, observing the logic of cultural divisions between the social and the natural and their respective mappings onto urban and rural spaces (for exceptions see Hough, 1995; Mabey, 1999; Wheater, 1999; Matthews, 2002). But this uncertainty also speaks of something else, something that is beyond this anti-urban bias in expert ecological knowledge practices. It articulates an intensified indeterminacy, one that marks all ecologies, but that is perhaps simply more apparent in urban habitats. The ecologies glimpsed here are inhabited and enacted by beings-in-relation which may be better thought of as becomings that enfold human and nonhuman mappings. Rather than being matters of fact, these vignettes of urban ecologies are better appreciated in terms of what Latour (2004) would call matters of controversy, that is as matters entangled in all manner of ways and with all manner of things. Entanglements that make life more interesting than a series of smooth entities that furnish the world as matters of fact, once and for all. As entangled matters of controversy, they are lived realities that can and do demand responses and entail all sorts of obligations (see also Serres, 1995). It is to the style or technologies of these responses and obligations that we now turn.

Making Cities Liveable

Our third challenge to the architecture of urban analysis revolves around civic associations and attachments. This challenge may be more effective if it is posed as a question—how can civic attachments and associations adapt to the hectic comings and goings of living cities? We can suggest what is at stake by returning to the Bourn Brook. It is not at all obvious that water voles live here. Indeed, one survey of the site (independently commissioned as part of an Environmental Assessment on behalf of the developers) found no evidence of water vole activity, and questioned the presence of a whole suite of species that local activists and Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust ecologists had recorded (Babtie Group, 2001). Part of the problem here is the difficulty of reading any landscape for the life signs of creatures that are often subtle and transient (see Hinchliffe *et al*., 2005). But there is also the more complex issue of whether the question of something's being present or not is as black and white as it seems. Indeed, the mobilities of heterogeneous urban inhabitants are not always easy to map. Their spatial and temporal practices may well be more intermittent, durable and/or fleeting than is allowed for by conventional technologies of representation. This in turn raises questions on how best to form the kinds of associations that befit living cities.

Some of the answers to these questions are well known, or, we might more suggestively say, are well practised. Maps of species presence give way, *in practice*, to more nuanced understandings of urban ecologies [see Latour (2004) for a similar call to attend to the

practice of political ecology rather than its theorization, and Mol (2002) for a parallel project in medicine]. So rather than seeking the political short cuts that seem possible through legal structures and straightforward presence, there are more open experimentations in how sites like the Bourn Brook can be enacted in ways that are good for all potential inhabitants. This experimentation might at first seem fanciful compared to the more secure sounding politics of representation, but to those who are experienced in ecological practice it is recognizable as a familiar pragmatic and, sometimes, covert means of 'doing' urban ecology. This way of proceeding may simply need more ready experimentation in order to head off the potentially damaging consequences of relying politically on species or other entities being present in the landscape. If attention is turned instead to 'making present' then the work of fabricating or enacting the possibilities for living cities comes into focus.

Such experimentation is already evident in a variety of practices, misleadingly labelled as 'expert' and 'lay', but which are more tellingly cast as living 'inexpertly' in the manner of the Deleuzian formulation of the impossibility of expertise (see Baker, 2000). What we mean to say here is that all of these experimental activities involve elements of not knowing, the unknown and the unknowable. They *are* informed through experience, but they are also likely to throw up surprises and generate new configurations. This reformulation of ecological attachments as inexpert experiments can be illustrated by two examples from the species and spaces already mentioned. The first involves the Black Redstart, whose inhabitation of the city is not straightforwardly a matter of their presence in the city. As one of the rarest birds in the British Isles, it is very difficult to find Black Redstarts. They thrive in thermophillic environments, characteristic of shorelines and derelict land where ruderal plant species attract invertebrates, on which the birds feed. Such conditions were to be found most readily during the Second World War and in the 1970s and 1980s [courtesy of bombing raids and economic decline (see Davis, 2002)]. At that time there were something like 15 breeding pairs in the city. Since then ancestral breeding sites have been turned from canal side industrial dereliction to landscapes for human consumption. The loss of suitable habitat has very possibly contributed to a decline in the Birmingham Black Redstart population that is now thought to be something like between two and four breeding pairs (which is still 5–10% of the UK population). The low numbers, along with generic difficulties attendant to bird surveys in cities, including noise levels, uneven topography, poor access to sites and so on, mean that their presence in the landscape is practically difficult to ascertain.

If presence can be demonstrated, protection measures for Black Redstarts in urban centres like Birmingham and London are quite exceptional. The bird's national rarity endows it with such ecological importance in the traditional value system of established conservation that it receives as much legal protection as is currently attainable. There is a robust legal framework (including designation as a fully protected species on Schedule I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981). The legislation provides protection for the birds, their eggs and nestlings from killing or injury. It also covers the destruction of nests and any intentional disturbance while building or attending to a nest. All of this protection is fine if presence is recorded. However, as for the water voles (who are as yet not so well protected by legal measures), there is the risk that disputed presence can make legal protection impotent. On the face of it this seems correct, legal protection is of course dependent on establishing that there is something to protect. This is a pragmatic spatial mapping that can deal with all manner of ecological differences—as long as

they are easily marked in terms of presence or absence. However, as we have already mentioned, nonhuman mappings may take many forms, and in this case the uncertainties in survey techniques and the 'at best' flickering presence of inhabitants like Black Redstarts and water voles in the urban landscape point to other space-times [see Law and Mol (2001) on the topology of fire]. It would seem, then, that the legal topology of presence and absence is at risk of becoming a hit and miss affair in the business of conservation.

In the case of the Black Redstart, and in *practice*, a procedure has been worked out to cope with these complex spatial and temporal habits. A working category has emerged called 'likely presence', a term that is less of a hostage to the problem of securing presence that we discussed earlier, and which ecologists in Birmingham are now using in their dealings with would-be developers in the city centre. 'Likely presence' is enough to require that a survey be carried out. Given the costs of surveys, developers are now more inclined to opt for mitigation without establishing once and for all (if such a thing were possible) the presence or absence of Black Redstarts. It can turn out to be cheaper to act as if there was presence, and/or to be seen to be advancing the potential for nesting, or to experiment with different forms of landscaping and building, than to go through the drawn out surveying and legal procedures that may or may not determine presence or absence. Thus, developers in Birmingham and London are now installing relatively intricate nesting boxes (Black Redstarts like many other birds prefer particular built forms which nest boxes need to mimic in some fashion), re-using hard core and other 'waste' as low nutrient substrate for plantings of ruderal species, and, increasingly, constructing green roofs. All of this work is experimental, aiming to generate suitable habitat at the same time as yielding potential cost savings.

It is of course easy to be cynical here, and cite these developments as nothing more than minor concessions to a political lobby group that can do little in urban settings other than argue for mitigation measures. While it is certainly important to keep these measures in perspective, this should not obscure the point that a shift is occurring here from a concern with the clearly present towards one of experimentation in urban ecologies, and from a closed politics of ecological states of nature, towards a more open politics of things, of living as others. Our second example takes this point a little further.

This reconfiguration of ecology, away from statements of fact to engagements with possibilities, shifts the status and location of expertise. Rather than unveiling the truth of the ecology at hand there is a turn to those involved in the co-fabrication of living cities. There is a re-distribution of expertise, or a re-definition of expertise so that it includes lay engagements with place, gardeners as well as horticulturalists, amateur enthusiasts as well as professional ecologists. So, for example, engagements with a place on a day-to-day basis, or through less frequent but recurrent visits, can generate a sensibility about, or intimacy with, ecologies of place. Increasingly, this kind of intimate knowledge is being harnessed to fill the gaps in the space/times technologies of formal ecological knowledge practices, such as quadrants; grid squares and fieldwork periods. Thus, city residents familiar with a particular site can act as the eyes and ears of ecological record centres, and in so doing can add much needed longitudinal data to site records (Hinchliffe *et al.*, 2003). Civic attachments and associations are also likely to take many other forms, forms that will produce different kinds of knowledge. From the routines of walking the dog or working an allotment to planting a tree or constructing a pond, all these activities involve or en-fold people and a myriad of living and nonliving things. En-folding lives in the way we are suggesting here is not so dependent upon co-presence. More complex

times and spaces are part of the ways in which these actions are understood and the ways in which they evolve in practice. We would call all these kinds of attachments, including those that are formally part of ecological expertise, experimental or as we have described them elsewhere as 'vernacular ecologies' (Whatmore *et al*., 2006). Means and ends are often blurred, either or both can change shape as intentions develop in the course of working out a procedure. Take just one example.

On the derelict Bourn Brook site, just south of the centre of Birmingham, a willow figure is shaped partly by design (the group had a rough drawing to describe the main structure at the start of the day) and partly through interweavings of people, clay soil, willow wands and osiers (see Figure 3). The rationale for the living sculpture is, like the figure, both determined and undetermined. Determined in the sense that people are here for something, in order to affect something. They are determined in that they want to be involved in doing something to express their anger that despite all their efforts it seems as though development will go ahead on this site with little or no attempt to secure ecological potential. They are local residents, activists from the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust, people who grew up near the site. They are all trespassing,

Figure 3. A willow man constructed by activists who refuse to see the surroundings as ripe only for built development

as this is private land, even though they have used it for years as a place to watch wildlife, to walk in and through, to climb trees, to look upon from home and the nearby allotments. But no-one here is quite sure what the action will precipitate, what shape will emerge from the works of hands and hearts. So like the willow figure, the intentions take shape in action. It/they are formed in and through actions that are beyond the design of any one component. To be sure, the structure will not withstand the bulldozers that are set to move on site any time now. In this sense you could say the day's work is an act of senseless beauty (MacKay, 1996).

But there is more to ecological attachment than vain gestures. Attachments are forged in action, in this action and in a host of other activities that take place on site (the tree planting, the hedge construction, the tending of allotments, the walks, the fires . . .). It is almost a cliché to suggest that attachments are forged between people and growing plants as those people take responsibility and care for the seedlings and saplings that they have had a hand in cultivating. Perhaps a less telluric way of expressing this is to say that these shared embodiments of people and things heighten awareness, or form a 'biopolitical domain' (Thrift, 2000). This is far from being an ahistorical form of attachment, with certain privileged kinaesthetic spaces and practices having long and complex evolutions that enfold all manner of nature–culture investments (walking for its own sake being a good example). Suffice to say that biologies and politics both have histories, histories that are entangled with each other and with many others. Biopolitical domains are therefore the products of multiple entanglements. So while it is surely right to say that human bodies are set up or configured in the world in particular fashions, the fashioning of those worlds can amplify or otherwise these configurations. The attachments are therefore part of a mutual pushing that can produce a '*feeling* life (in the doubled sense of both a grasp of life, and emotional attunement to it)' (Thrift, 2000, p. 46).

Let us underline again that talk of push and attachment should not be read as a return to an unproblematic sense of present presences. Nor should it be read as a romanticism of local becomings. This is a productive relationship whereby presence and absence can only form part of the story. The feelings and passions that are co-produced in these and other activities are tolerant of be-comings and goings, of likely presences, and are experimental in that no-one is quite sure of what will come of the attachment. They are as magical as they are material (and as material as they are magical). Indeed, these and other engagements are perhaps 'best understood as a form of magic dependent upon new musics of stillness and silence able to be discovered in a *world of movement*' (Thrift, 2000, p. 49—emphasis added). In this sense, the willow figure is neither passive nor strictly active, but the figuration of something that moves in another voice (Harrison *et al*., 2004). Indeed, it embodies the passions of those who have come to value this site and all its connections and movements and who refuse to see it or practice it as dead space awaiting urban renewal.

We have argued that cities are inhabited with and against the grain of urban design, that inhabitants are not static beings but entangled in complex processes of becoming, and that attempts to engage with urban heterogeneity require re-alignments of people and things, in ways that are responsive to uncertainties, indeterminacies, materialities and passions, charm and magic. We have suggested that an ecology that is founded on a straightforward notion of species presence, or what Latour (2004) might call a metaphysics of nature, ill serves the aim of making living cities more liveable for people and a multiplicity of others. It is these political implications that we now want to amplify.

Towards a Politics of Conviviality

The notion of living cities fleshes out a sense of ecological co-fabrication in which the life patterns and rhythms of people and other city dwellers are entangled with and against the grain of expert designs and blueprints. This conceptual shift from built environments (as they are termed in conventional Town and Country Planning) to living cities is allied to a realignment of the politics of nature such that cities are appreciated as 'ecological disturbance regimes rather than ecological sacrifice zones' (Wolch, 1998) in which people are no longer considered inimical to nature, nor natures antithetical to cities. Living with and against the grain of design, becoming and learning to live among and as others mark out some of the contours of what we are calling a living city. These challenges to urban analysis call for a re-engaged politics, one that refuses the old settlements between society and nature, between humans and the rest, between matter and mattering: a political reengagement that we style here as a politics of conviviality that is serious about the heterogeneous company and messy business of *living together*. This is a politics gathering momentum through an alliance of urban wildlife and conservation organizations that have gained leverage in the policy process in consequence of the statutory requirement on all Local Councils to produce Biodiversity Action Plans (Harrison and Davies, 2002). Just as importantly, however, it also signals a shift in the politics of knowledge in which expert designs on urban space (including those of conservation science) are more liable to be contested and resisted by city inhabitants (of all kinds) whose ecological vernaculars have been learnt and honed through their everyday practices of making themselves at home in the city. We have already suggested that the matters of controversy, the likely presences and the absent presences or urban ecologies, index a fraught political ecology (Latour, 2004; Hinchliffe *et al*., 2005).

This alternative formulation of urban political ecology is a form of diagramming in the Deleuzian sense which insists that 'besides the points which social practices connect up, certain relatively free or unbound points, points of creativity, change and resistance are always implicated' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 66). The kinds of feral spaces that we are investigating as sites in which more than human attachments and knowledge practices are forged speak to what Cary Wolfe calls 'the materialist promise' of Deleuze's (and Foucault's) work in that 'it foregrounds the *outside* of any diagram [. . .] as a reservoir of complexity and difference' (Wolfe, 1998, pp. 150–151) that actualizes and proliferates creative possibilities. To this end we are working towards a conceptual and political style of research that is avowedly and unavoidably a form of intervention in the world, opening up rather than pinning down, the possibilities of city living in play and in prospect. This style, or what we are calling a 'politics of conviviality', derives from, and informs, a triangulation of several theoretical impulses that supplement one another in productive ways and are all variously in evidence in the heterogeneous passageways and co-habitations explored above in Birmingham (see Figure 4).

The first of these impulses concerns the recent reworkings in political theory of the Deleuzian register of 'minotarian' politics associated with his distinction between micro and macro political levels of analysis; levels that mark significant differences in the kind, rather than the scale, of social attachment and collective action (see Deleuze and Parnet, 1987; Deleuze, 1995). Picking up on his insistence that the dynamics of capitalist culture are uneven all the way down and always already in process, these reworkings point to the proliferation of concrete practices and spaces in which the politics of resistance and

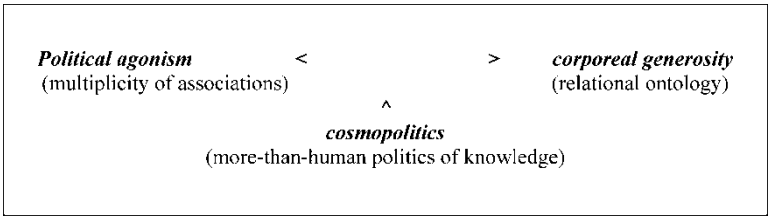

Figure 4. Towards a politics of conviviality

difference inhere. This is a politics of association rather than structure in which other possibilities, with and against the grain of any design (or diagram), are always being generated. Notable here is the work of Nikolas Rose (2000) and James Tully (1999) who have elaborated a notion of *political agonism* in which they define 'citizenship as a capacity to act in relation' (see Osborne and Rose, 1999, p. 758); a capacity that is not produced or determined by any one social identity or political alignment but in the multiplicity of relations through which civic associations and attachments are woven. As Rose puts it

> . . . political agonism is not a traditional politics of the party, the programme, the strategy for the organised transformation of society or the claim to be able to implement . . . better government. Rather, these minor practices of citizen formation are linked to a politics of the cramped spaces of action on the here and now, of attempts to reshape what is possible in specific spaces of immediate action, which may connect up and destabilise larger circuits of power (Rose, 2000, p. 100).

In this vein, the politics of conviviality implicated in our analytical shift towards a 'living city' demands that attention be paid to the diversity of ecological attachments and heterogeneous associations through which the politics of urban nature is fabricated, rather than reading the political ecology of the city off *a priori* or abstract social divisions.

But of what does 'acting in relation' consist—how does a politics of association take, change and lose shape? The second theoretical impulse that is important to our project is that associated with the efforts of feminist philosophers to elaborate ethical frames that refuse the disembodied and rationalist ontological precepts of liberal individualism (see Whatmore, 2002). Notable here is the work of Rosalyn Diprose who draws on Merleau-Ponty (among others) to posit an ethics of be-coming in the world that is thoroughly relational and corporeal, theorizing an openness to others through which the self is constituted in association as a necessary and unavoidable condition of social living—what she calls *corporeal generosity*. This condition of being given in/to others furnishes the kind of relational ontology that our politics of conviviality demands such that 'civility' is reconfigured in terms that rely less on excluded social kinds being 'made present' in the civic realm than on the practical intercorporeality of civic association in which particular kinds or individual entities thrive in combination with others whose capacities and powers enhance their own. In these terms, our politics of conviviality share her insistence that the political is ontological (Diprose, 2002, p. 173), placing the onus on the dual role that bodies play in the formation and transformation of civic association and attachment in both the constitution of different kinds of subjectivities

and the situating of these subjectivities in relation to the bodies of others that we live through. Instead of placing the political in the realm of conscious judgement and knowledge, here politics is extended to the 'hinterworld of affectivity'—where intercorporeality exceeds the consciousness of 'I think' and the 'said' of language (Diprose, 2002, p. 175).

Finally, the third theoretical impulse that threads through the politics of conviviality advanced here challenges the residual humanism that is differently inflected in both of the foregoing contributions. It draws on the work of those philosophers and sociologists of science, notably Isabelle Stengers (1997) and Bruno Latour (2004), who are seeking to recast the terms of engagement between science, philosophy and politics, an endeavour which Stengers calls *cosmopolitics* (see Hinchliffe *et al*., 2005). At least two aspects of this recasting are of importance to our project. First, the emphasis it places on knowledge as a co-fabrication in which all those (humans and nonhumans) enjoined in it can, and do, affect each other in the knowledge event or practice. This involves, as our engagement with Black Redstarts, the Willow man and others has illustrated, 'the management, diplomacy, combination, and negotiation of human and nonhuman agencies' (Latour, 1999, p. 290). Second, the shift it seeks to make is from a problematic that presumes a gulf between science and politics even as it sets about bridging it, to one that takes their entanglement as given and redirects attention to the democratization of expertise (see Whatmore, 2003). Here, it is a question of inventing apparatuses such that the 'citizens of whom scientific experts speak can … pose questions to which their interest makes them sensible, to demand explanations, to posit conditions, to suggest modalities, in short, to participate in the invention' (Stengers, 2000, p. 160). As Paulson summarizes;

> The crucial point is to learn how new types of encounter (and conviviality) with nonhumans, which emerge in the practice of the sciences over the course of their history, can give rise to new modes of relation with humans, i.e. to new political practices (Paulson, 2001, p. 112).

If, as these moves suggest, we accept that research as a knowledge production process is always, and unavoidably, an *intervention in the world*, then the politics of knowledge at stake here extends to the activity and credibility of social scientists too, demanding that we invest more of our energies in intervening in the terms on which city residents and other urban constituencies are invited, and enabled, to engage in the policy-making process. It obliges social scientists to ally their research efforts and skills in order to experiment with others (humans and nonhumans,) in making new political configurations possible, in bringing new ecological associations and knowledge practices into being. Such alliances are hard work, take time and often have to work through suspicions about the intentions and relevance of social science practitioners. But we think that such interventions in a politics of conviviality are vital to producing politically engaged but 'a-critical' social science. To be clear, a-critical does not mean irrelevant, or even unable to make judgements. Rather what we want to work towards is a style of research practice that is less hasty in terms of condemning, judging or looking for the real motivations of people and others. Those motivations, just like the blueprints of organisms, are unfinished expressions that are affected by the actions they partially initiate. How to find, work at and contribute towards events and ethologies that shift the game slightly, that turn presence into likely presence, nature into natures, has been and is our aim.

Conclusion

Our aims in writing this paper have been to demonstrate a little of the wealth of political ecological practice in cities, and to offer first glimpses of how this practice might be engaged by social scientists. We are suggesting here that the heterogeneity of living cities is different in kind to the cartographies of modern cities and urban theory, for three related reasons. First, cities are inhabited with and against the design of cities. We demonstrated this through a number of examples, all of which it should be said conform to particular cartographies of the living and the valued in contemporary ecology (especially in terms of macrofauna and the rare). We have mentioned in passing the multiplicity of nonhumans that inhabit cities, but there is of course more to be said here [see Mabey (1999) on this, and Dion and Rockman (1996) for a quirky transect through the urban jungle]. Second, cities are not simply inhabited but co-inhabited, in ways that are multiple, entangled and disrupt established ethologies and ecologies. Animals, plants, microbes, and the multiple relations within and between these temporary stabilizations, become urban, often in ways that are surprising. Thirdly, engaging with these inhabitants and becomings requires political and scientific experiments, relaxing the co-ordinates of presence and absence so dominant in scientific and legal conservation theory, and so ungainly in practice. In the final part of the paper we have suggested three overlapping but by no means mutually consistent strands of theoretical practice that can offer unfinished resources for engaging living cities. We have drawn on understandings of political agonism, corporeal generosity and cosmopolitics in order to point towards a different kind of politics that may well be more suited to the ecologies we are tracing. By interweaving empirical work with humans and nonhumans, and re-readings of political and social theory, our aim has been to highlight the difference of, and to make a difference to, living cities.

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