

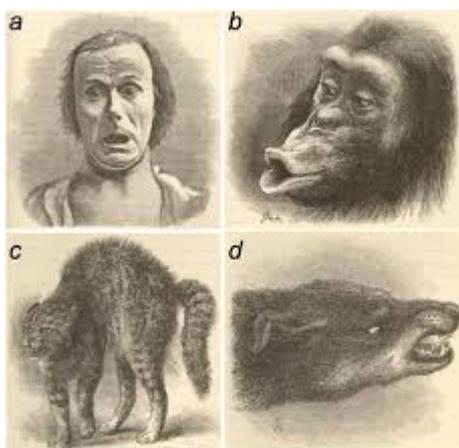
## Digitally enabled, co-created multi-species ethnographies for (e)co-flourishing future cities?

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The opening proposal in this paper is that non-human becoming and personhood is articulated in particular, affective, precise, spatialised, relational embodied practices – particularly so for some animals – but more generally for a wider range of organisms. The affective, embodied practices of individual life-worlds are differently materialised and socialised in the life narratives of individual non-humans, as well as sketched out in their genetic repertoires. Non-humans enact - non-humans are - affective spatial becomings. Thus geography, as the spatial science, has an intellectual, moral and political duty to reveal their lives. Their life is geography's trade - dealing with/in space.

The affective 'turn' in the social sciences and beyond (Thrift 2008, Anderson and Harrison 2010), which emphasises the salience of relational, emplaced, material, non/pre cognitive nature of human becoming, should ensure that no great distinction now remains between the qualities and values of human and non-human becoming. Affect kills, or should do, human exceptionalism and the stick of anthropomorphism that has been used to beat those who chose to talk about non-humans in 'human' terms (Ingold 2000). There are of course gulfs of difference between various forms of both human and non-becoming – but there are also threaded of shared evolved (Haraway 1992), affective life. A stretching body is a stretching body, be it a human, a cat, or a fly; and so for hungry, thirsty, angry, anxious, happy bodies. This then links back to Charles Darwin's third great, but much less referred to work, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).



(Charles Darwin, 1872)

The city, it has been pointed out (Amin and Thrift 2002), is, more than anything, a ferment of affect – often in bitter entanglements – or even toxic entanglements, but also in more positive sum game, cosmopolitan, human-nonhuman, entanglements (Hinchliffe *et al*, 2005). It can go both ways. Not as a dualism – but as an entanglement itself within urban spaces – with topologies and topographies of eco-social toxicity (ecocide) interlacing with those of eco-social flourishing. As Nigel Clark put in in 2000,

contra theorists of risk society, fusion of complexity theory with cosmopolitan aesthetics raises the possibility of conceiving of runaway biological and technological events as both creative and destructive. (2000, 12).

Within the city, dealing with space for non-humans (perhaps animals and some plants particularly), can be very challenging. For example, the basic natures (forms) of the city - impermeable hard surfaces; violent transportation systems; enclosed water catchments etc. – create alien, hostile habitat. But also there are many opportunities for new forms of cosmopolitan, flourishing hybrid natures, both engineered (e.g. roof and vertical wall habitats) and otherwise (e.g. waste grounds). Indeed, it has been pointed out that biodiversity in many modern cities can be richer than in the industrially farmed rural hinterlands that sometimes surround them (Jones 2009). And thus urban wildlife (including species like bees, and the plants they forage on) are the focus of much attention – and highly innovative positive action. So too is the area of urban wildlife gardening and food production which can create highly eco-social productive topologies and topographies into life. Alternative urban movements of this kind offer some of the most vivid examples of (local) anti-ecocide action. For example urban food projects in Bristol which work with female refugees and asylum seekers in growing food, caring for nature and creating new spaces and networks of home, sociality, and ecology (Gorell Barnes 2018).

The idea of, and developing practices of, smart cities can clearly be brought to bear on the whole question of urban ecocide and countering efforts of eco-flourishing. To move towards participatory methods with non-humans in this kind of endeavour would be a *major step* in terms of making urban space more just, more co-liveable, more co-flourishing for humans and non-humans. But it is also challenging in the prevailing mechanism of modern politics, knowledges (sciences) and ethics. The normal procedures of co-creation and participatory research, which are based on notions of cyclical conversation, and the flattening of power relation differentials, have to be significantly adapted to bring non-humans into the process. We need to develop the excellent work already done under the auspices participatory research studies, animal / non-human geography (and related subject areas, such as multi-species ethnography) by stressing various aspects of the affective, spatialised, embodied becomings of non-humans in the city.

In particular, in order to answer the still very challenging questions - how do we 'hear non-human voices' and 'bring them into our methods as others' (Philo and Wilbert 2000) - the proposal is – to return to the opening section - to pay very close attention to their affective, embodied, spatial narrative-becomings, for here is their very being. This is arguably one way of bringing them into participatory processes. People can act as loving witness, as advocates as spokes-people. Getting close to non-humans, and observing them attentively, can be done through ethology, multi-species ethnography, philosophy, literature, popular natural histories, and artistic practice.

I will suggest that all this is articulable and enhanceable through smart city systems, but only if: a) they are seen in a wider ecology in which the questionable divisions between the virtual and the real; the material and non-material; nature and culture; and so on, are dissolved; and b) the technological innovative effort that goes into their development is enframed in wider ambitions of democratic, post-human, collective-creative, politico-ethical innovation. To develop this I will use examples drawn from the 'Towards Hydrocitizenship' project (<https://www.hydrocitizenship.com>) <https://www.hydrocitizenship.com> work on eels, and

related hidden ecologies in the waterways of the city of Bristol (UK), and related art/action work referred to above.

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## **Short biography**

Owain gained an MSc (Society and Space) and PhD in Cultural Geography at the Department of Geography, University of Bristol 1993-1997. Conducting post-doctoral research at Bristol, Exeter, the Open University, he has done funded projects on many aspects of nature-society relations, landscape, place, memory and the environmental crisis. He has conducted research projects on trees, place and landscape; floods, communities and memory; food chains and ecology; tidal landscapes; animals and society; and children, nature and place. He recently led a £1.5 million Arts and Humanities Research Council Connected Communities project involving eight UK universities, community partners and artists in four case study areas across the UK. This project sought to creatively explore and transform connections within and between communities, and communities and nature, in relation to water. Owain was appointed as the first Professor of the Environmental Humanities in the UK at Bath Spa University (2014). He has co-published over 75 scholarly articles and three books - Participatory Research in More-than-Human Worlds, Routledge (2017) with Michelle Bastian, Niamh Moore and Emma Roe; Geography and Memory: Identity, Place and Becoming (2012) with Jo Garde-Hansen; and Tree Cultures (2002) with Paul Cloke. He is currently supervising four Environmental Humanities PhDs with art practice.