

Chapter 4

Cosmopolitics of Place: Towards Urban Multispecies Living in Precarious Times

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Introduction

This chapter aims to spur new imaginations in education by exploring possibilities for urban more-than-human living in cities. By working with the concept of cosmopolitics (Latour, 2004a; Stengers, 2010) as a device that creates hesitation by questioning assumed shared understandings without offering alternatives and solutions, the chapter assembles diverse elements in an attempt to create a cartography of urban place-making. For education and sustainability the overarching question that cosmopolitics poses is about assemblage: how can we learn to make places for living well, and sustainably, together with humans, more-than-humans, and vibrant matter of all kinds (Bennett, 2004; Duhn, 2012; S. Hinchliffe, Kearnes, Degen, & Whatmore, 2005)? Cosmopolitics in education problematises what it means to live well together by challenging the utopian desire for harmonious cosmopolitanism as an ideal (Todd, 2010b). Cosmopolitics as a tool for building places for diverse living together works by slowing down perception, opening up spaces for that which cannot yet be perceived, and persisting with ongoing open-ended engagement with difference as an ethical endeavour. Cosmopolitics offers the possibility of re-imagining place as an open-ended ethical pedagogical multispecies encounter where shared worlds are made (Bear, 2011; van Dooren & Rose, 2012).

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Re-imagining Place

In precarious times, which are precarious because they unsettle and shake up that which has been taken for granted, the traditional concept of place as safe, secure, and unchanging taps into a strong desire for certainty. However, Earth as ‘our’ ultimate place is in a precarious state, clearly evident in the rate of extinction of species, which may well include humans in the not-so-far future. Producing knowledge about learning to live well together in, and across, places and spaces is increasingly becoming one of the core challenges for the social sciences, including education (Dimitriadis, Cole, & Costello, 2009; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Inglis, 2004). An emerging emphasis on the ethics and politics of sharing spaces with others, including other species, in a globalised world, with finite resources, requires a re-thinking of what place is, and who and what makes places (Duhn, 2012; Steve Hinchliffe & Whatmore, 2006; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014; van Dooren & Rose, 2012). These studies suggest to conceptualise place as a complex and messy network, loosely bound by (local) histories, politics and cultures as well as by (global) mobilities, flows, and uneasy alliances. Living well together in a place-as-assemblage that is no longer defined by geography alone foregrounds ethics and politics as guiding principles for place-making. Beginning to imagine place-making as open-ended diverse practices that involve a commitment to cosmopolitics may well generate new possibilities for living sustainably, especially in densely populated urban environments (Dovey, 2010).

To embark on this work, this chapter considers possibilities for place-making as a multispecies event in urban environments. It engages with cosmopolitics as a theoretical perspective to investigate possibilities for new imaginings and actions for living well together in spaces that are dominated by humans, such as cities, while paying particular attention to co-habitation with other species. Taking Berlin as a site for exploration, the chapter entangles education and the art project *Berlin Wildes Leben* to focus on place-making as cosmopolitical multispecies practices in the Anthropocene.

Why Multispecies? Why Cosmopolitics?

Scientists are not only referring to the Anthropocene as an entirely new phase in Earth’s geological history (Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2011), there are also serious concerns that we are rapidly moving into the sixth mass extinction of species unless better ways of sharing the planet in sustainable ways for all are found. The scale of the challenges faced is staggering, as highlighted in the following quote from an article published in *Nature*, a prestigious science journal:

[T]here are clear indications that losing species now in the ‘critically endangered’ category would propel the world to a state of mass extinction that has previously been seen only five times in about 540 million years....The huge difference between where we are now, and where we could easily be within a few generations, reveals the urgency of relieving the pressures that are pushing today’s species towards extinction (Barnosky et al., 2011, p. 11).

An anthropocentric/human-centred perspective highlights the urgency of relieving pressures on the environment for animals and plants to avoid a human-induced mass extinction of species. As Barnosky et al. (2011) argue we/humans have the capacity to take action to prevent a slide into such disaster. This ability to take action seems to exempt humans from inclusion in the list of endangered species. However, as highlighted in the latest International Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC, 2014), humanity is now facing issues that challenge its ability to survive as a species which means that a potential mass extinction may very well include humans. After all, humans are but one of those species on a multispecies planet. The difference between humans and other species on a multispecies planet is that humans are not only affected but also responsible for these changes.

The difficult task is to both decentre ‘the human’ to generate new spaces for multispecies engagements *and* to take responsibility for humanity’s historical attachment to human exceptionalism. The belief that humans are the crown of creation and thus separate from other species has legitimated politics that over time created massive change on a planetary scale (Feinberg, Nason, & Sridharan, 2013). Such politics continue to support the concept of humans as subjects who create change, in contrast to the Earth and all nonhumans as objects that are victims of human-induced change. Bruno Latour argues that the Anthropocene creates a completely new territory for all who share life on this planet. Accordingly, traditional ways of meaning making and knowledge production that arise from subject/object separation are no longer useful. The crucial task, he argues, is to “*distribute* agency as far and in as *differentiated* a way as possible” (Latour, 2014, p. 16, emphasis in original). Multispecies perspectives do just that – they search for difference by unsettling and circumventing the traditional subject/object divide which continues to re-inscribe humans as the only species that transforms Earth. However, cosmopolitics is not about multispecies agency as such but about the possibilities for the creation of shared worlds that allow for sustainable living for all.

Cosmopolitics as a theoretical perspective focuses on the interconnections of human and more-than-human encounters, relations, politics, narratives, and practices within our largest imaginable boundary, the cosmos (Latour, 2004a; Stengers, 2010). It provides a tool for critical engagement with challenges that affect all inhabitants of this planet and ultimately opens possibilities of an imagination of Earth as agentic:

The Earth is neither nature nor a machine. It is not that we should try to puff some spiritual dimension into its stern and solid stuff – as so many Romantic thinkers and nature philosophers had tried to do – but rather that we should abstain from de-animating the agencies that we encounter at each step (Latour, 2014, p. 14).

Latour emphasises that the challenge of acknowledging the agency of Earth which, from a scientific perspective is perceived as an object, floating in space, and following the laws of physics, is an enormous task. Cosmopolitics is about the coming together of all agents, animate and ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennett, 2010), in the ongoing making of a shared world. Isabelle Stengers (2010, p. 79) proposes ‘cosmopolitics’ as a perspective that allows for the unknown, for that which currently “does not have the ability to be considered” to nevertheless “mark the way we

present the present” (p. 79). Cosmopolitics is about the possibilities for imagining differences and thus for beginning to notice differences in the everyday making and transformation of our common world.

Differences Within the Human Species

Cosmopolitics as the search for differentiation and agency across species requires a closer look at the power relations that constitute species. Referring to species involves categorisation that disguises diversity within the domain. Referring to humans as one species is not necessarily useful because it creates a homogenous view of ‘us’ when in fact some of the current anthropogenic changes are felt much more acutely by some of those humans who contribute the least to increasing pressures on the environment. For instance those living in traditional communities or those living in nations with low carbon footprints are often those who suffer from the direct effects of climate change as one aspect of planetary transformation in the Anthropocene (Beck, 2008). Those who contribute the most to anthropogenic change by living in fossil fuelled economies, “whose lifestyles would require three or more planets if replicated globally” (Gibson-Graham, 2011, p. 2) remain relatively unaffected. As hurricane Katrina highlighted, even within highly developed nations such as the US, structural inequalities generated within rich nations, such as those produced by racism, create hugely different and unequal effects for communities within the same geographical area (Cuomo, 2011). It is also important to note that historically, women and nature counted for little in “the Empire of Man over mere things” (Plumwood, 2010, p. 38). This does not mean that women did not contribute to the current state of affairs. Women and nature share, however, a specific historical trajectory that intersects with other forms of domination, injustices and above all, identity politics that continue to define, ascribe, and de-value ‘the feminine’ (Cuomo, 2001; Irigaray, 2008).

For education, the task of shifting deeply engrained human-centric practices, challenging power relations that subjugate otherness, and generating perspectives towards imaginings and pedagogies that are multispecies focused is not only urgent, if education is about learning to live well together, it also has the potential to contribute to creative and hopeful change by enabling difference to co-exist and flourish in a dissonant world (Todd, 2010b). Considering materiality and meaning-making (Washick, Wingrove, Ferguson, & Bennett, 2015) as core aspects of the complex entanglements of being human in an ultimately unknowable, lively world which is inhabited by multitudes of beings is a vital contribution to education at a time when human-induced change threatens life on a planetary scale (Barad, 2003; Heise, 2008; Panelli, 2010). So how can we begin to imagine and action multispecies difference in urban contexts? Who is contributing to place-making in the city? What are the possibilities for multispecies distributed agency? The second part of this chapter begins to look at these questions, starting with a very brief overview of cities as (human) places.

The Humanised City

Western cities are not only considered to be human-dominated spaces, they are increasingly seen as ‘urban living’ enclaves which offer a sophisticated post-industrial culture based on service-industries and consumption to those who can afford it (Wolch, Byrne, & Newell, 2014). Somewhat in tension with the gentrification of inner cities exists the understanding that cities are an important site for cultural innovation “where artists and ethnic diversity are seen as catalysts for vibrant urban centres” (García, 2004, p. 313). However, once identified as a vibrant new hotspot, these urban centres are then in danger of succumbing to commodification where the very people who contributed to the liveliness of a space cannot afford to live there any longer. Cities, especially inner cities, then become strangely purified and sanitised gentrified places where the diversity that made them in the first instance gives way to homogeneity (Zukin, 2009).

The current disappearance of diversity from many urban centres, often due to a new alignment of urban redevelopment, economic power and desires (Dovey, 2010), echoes the changes in city living that reshaped cities from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Public health concerns at that time focused on sanitation, on the development of a humanised ‘clean’ city and the eradication of animals from urban environments through reforms that linked animals to disease (Instone & Sweeney, 2014; Vuorisalo, Talvitie, Kauhala, Bläuer, & Lahtinen, 2014). Historically, humans and animals (as livestock) shared cities. For instance, keeping a pig or chickens in the backyard was not unusual and only became a problem when animal husbandry was identified as a hygiene issue in the ‘humanised’ clean city. By the second half of the twentieth century, western cities appeared to be pinnacles of human design with little consideration or space for multispecies co-habitation.

But even in the humanised city, animal others maintained a presence. In the case of animals with high visibility, these animal-others were increasingly identified as problematic. Pigeons, for instance, became symbolic as polluters of human spaces and eradication of these animal adapters to city life was an important aspect of the urban sanitation mission (Jerolmack, 2008). While pigeons have high visibility in cities, the presence of other animal city dwellers went unnoticed for long periods. The urbanisation of red foxes, which has been documented in Britain since the 1930s, is now a recognised phenomenon in Europe. With more sightings in cities, red foxes have become categorised as a twenty-first century ‘parasite problem’, with concerns that foxes spread diseases in dense urban environments (Deplazes, Hegglin, Gloor, & Romig, 2004). Like pigeons, foxes are considered as contaminated others in humanised cities. Finnish research argues that foxes may have been living in very close proximity to cities for at least since the nineteenth century, perhaps even since the Middle Ages (Vuorisalo et al., 2014). As Jerolmack (2008) points out, the fear that animals with high presence in urban environments are carriers of disease says a lot about human place-making by rendering nonhuman others as ‘out of place’ in urban environments.

Learning to Live with Others: Towards Multispecies Place-making

As we learn more about the animal others who share spaces with us, it becomes evident that the more we (humans) are able to let go of the assumption that humans are entitled to a special place in ‘nature’, and thus are the only creature that can create ‘culture’, the more open and unexpected the world becomes. Even thoroughly ‘humanised’ environments, cities, are brimming with more-than-human life. Hinchliffe and Whatmore’s (2006) case study of animal life in Birmingham highlights that cities are multispecies places – from the peregrines nesting in telecommunication towers to otters and water voles finding their way into the city waterways, once the gaze shifts from a focus on human place-making, it becomes very obvious that nonhumans are also making the city their place. Cosmopolitics is the practice of taking more-than-human place-making seriously “to produce a politics for urban wilds” (Hinchliffe et al., 2005, p. 643). This requires a re-thinking of how to begin to engage with urban more-than-human others in ways that invite difference to emerge. One way of doing this is to be creatively open-minded, sympathetic, and informed, which circumvents the difficulty of referring to *either* science/reason to make a case (the politics of conservation), *or* to become passionate and emotional (the politics of animal rights advocates). Politics of representation do not work for urban wilds – more-than-humans are currently not able to be included in politics because human politics are entirely anthropocentric. So how do we learn to engage with more-than-human others to distribute agency in as many differentiated ways as possible?

Towards a Politics of Multispecies Presence

The chapter concludes with an example of cosmopolitics in the making in Berlin. So far, I have argued that cosmopolitics challenges anthropocentric practices that render animal-others as out of place in cities, because it de-centres humans and asks of us to pay attention to how we are interconnected with more-than-humans in our daily urban life. This means that cosmopolitics firstly aims to challenge a sense of human entitlement and human exceptionalism: who are we and who can we become in relation to the world around us if we take differentiated agency in multispecies encounters seriously? What unexpected perspectives emerge? What becomes possible when attention shifts from a humanised city towards shared multispecies urban living?

The issue around cosmopolitics this chapter explores – how to decentre humans in multispecies encounters that let the other speak for her, him or itself and thus generate spaces for differentiation and distributed agency, while also accounting for human responsibilities in having created potentially catastrophic planetary change – guides the search for cosmopolitics of place in the context of Berlin. This section

focuses on the entanglement of art, science, and education by working with the ideas of artists Susanna Hertrich and Michiko Nitta whose *Berlin Wildes Leben* (2011) exhibition invites cosmopolitical thinking about place-making in Berlin. The project *Wildes Leben* was one of the winners of the *Call for Future/ÜBER LEBENSKUNST (Art for survival)* initiative of the *Kulturstiftung des Bundes* und des *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*. The project ÜBER LEBENSKUNST explored new approaches and ideas suited to everyday life for a cultural transformation in response to the global ecological crisis. An international jury selected the 14 winners from more than 800 competition entries. Winning projects were funded for up to a year with up to €20,000.

According to Hertrich and Nitta (2011), the *Wildes Leben* series is aiming to generate utopian visions of future multispecies urban living. The project sits within the wider context of the *The Anthropocene Project* des Haus der Kulturen der Welt (2013–2014), which focused on cultural research that engages art and science to generate critical engagement with the Anthropocene.

Berlin Wildes Leben engages with multispecies presence as a matter of fact and as a matter of concern (Latour, 2004b) by aiming to interconnect scientific expertise with politics of place and an ethics of care for otherness and difference. The map of multispecies ‘city life’ in Fig. 4.1 provides a snapshot of Berlin’s urban wilds and the politics of place-making. Hertrich and Nitta (2011) explain.

Berlin Is Home to the Most Diverse Species of Any European Capital

Approximately 20,000 diverse species inhabit Berlin, and the number of new animal species migrating to the city is on the increase. This is due to the specific history of the city which allows a considerable amount of un-developed sites and empty lots to still exist in contrast to other metropolises where urban planning has sanitised the cityscape. In addition to the historic specificity, Berlin’s particular star-like settlement structure enables animals to migrate to the city centre.

The map is not a representation of species diversity. Instead it produces a cartography (Braidotti, 2002) of some of the power relations that are woven into the multispecies fabric of the city. For instance, the debate regarding hunting licences in Berlin is a complex political as well as social issue. When animals are powerful and thus potentially dangerous to humans, as wild boars are, the issue of how to live together takes on new dimensions. The cartography begins to explore dissonance of multispecies encounters in the city. The hunters loom large and, despite attempts to create visibility for animal co-habitation and multispecies cosmopolitics, as soon as animals demonstrate their presence and power in tangible ways the map turns anthropocentric. Ultimately it is the man with the gun who guards the city centre from animal invaders. This image plays with fears of human displacement by reinstating man as predator at the top of the species hierarchy while offering food for

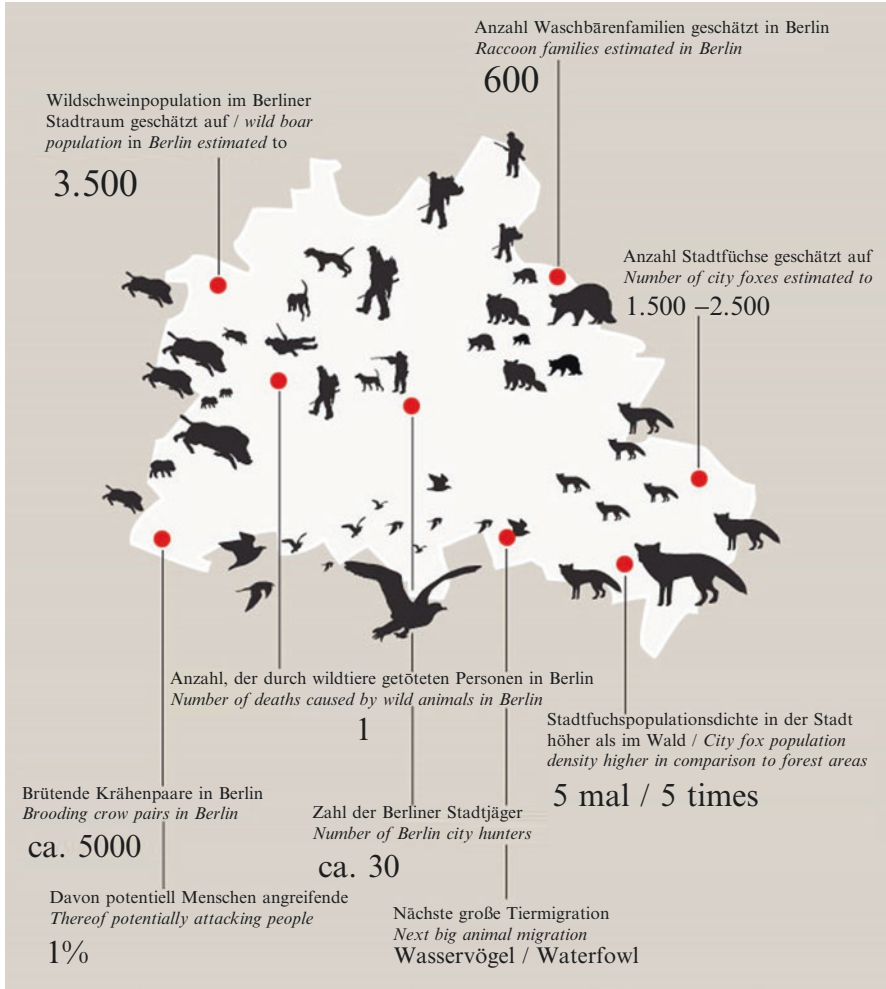


Fig. 4.1 Map of multispecies city life in Berlin (Reproduced with permission from Hertrich & Nitta, 2011, text in original)

thought in the form of succinct scientific-like commentaries in the lower part of the map. Perhaps the cartography is a utopian vision of antagonistic cosmopolitics in the making (Todd, 2010a)? Distributed agency in “as differentiated way(s) as possible”, as Latour (2014, p. 16) suggests, is not a soft option. We are not doing well when it comes to living with human diversity, which raises questions regarding humans’ ability to let go of the paradigm of exceptionalism and human entitlement (Pedersen, 2010). Globally, the at times cruel and inhumane treatment of refugees highlights that as long as there is a sense of entitlement which then enables decision-making about who else is worthy, or not, of having access to resources, it is unlikely that cosmopolitics will re-shape our common world.

A Cosmopolitical Invitation

As a final take on cosmopolitical futures in the city, one of the sculptures that has been created by Hertrich and Nitta (2011) opens another glimpse into action. The sculpture is titled ‘Parasitic architecture for racoons’ (Figs. 4.2 and 4.3).

The sculpture sympathises with the plight of racoons who are not natives to the city or even to Germany. The current community of 600 Berliner racoon families was established by racoon escapees from fur farms on the outskirts of the city. The sculpture offers a gesture of reconciliation for past wrongdoings by inviting racoon families to settle in large custom-made willow cocoons that protect racoons from potential predators, while also making their presence in the city visible. Hertrich and Nitta (2011) invite imaginations about a successful multispecies co-habitation of urban spaces. Why not be generous and allow parasitic co-living with racoons (or whoever else wants to move into the cocoon)? By combining expert scientific knowledge, urban planning expertise, and the traditional craft of willow weaving, the sculpture is an educational event as well as an aesthetic statement. It is cosmopolitical in the sense that it generates visibility of otherness by highlighting potential presence.

The emphasis is on human habitation and place-making which then serves as a base for a parasitic addition. This may be a ‘soft’ engagement with difference because it does not raise questions about whose place this really is – the title says it all.

Fig. 4.2 *Berlin Wildes Leben. Parasitäre Architektur für Waschbären*
 Material: basketwork, steelframe, pinewood pole, fluorescent paint (far shot).
 Dimensions: ca. 4.0 m H × ca. 1.80 m W × 1.50 m D
 (Reproduced with permission from Hertrich & Nitta, 2011)



Fig. 4.3 *Berlin Wildes Leben. Parasitäre Architektur für Waschbären*
 Material: basketwork, steelframe, pinewood pole, fluorescent paint (close-up). Dimensions: ca. 4.0 m H × ca. 1.80 m W × 1.50 m D.
 (Reproduced with permission from Hertrich & Nitta, 2011)



But maybe this is one of the anthropocentric ways in which living with difference can become normalised and thus create openings for a first unsettling of the human-as-centre of the universe paradigm. Racoons invite sympathy for several reasons: these racoons have a tough history which speaks to the German sense of being accountable for suffering caused in the past; racoons are recent immigrants and Berlin itself is a multicultural city with a large Turkish-German population; racoons appear vulnerable and exotic, unlike rats or foxes which have been around for longer. This makes them a novelty and easy to ‘like’.

The work of Hertrich and Nitta explores what happens when the focus widens to make space for animal others in the city. They engage creatively with urban wildlife to suggest how to live well together with difference and perhaps even with dissonance (Todd, 2010b). Working with scientists and experts to create sculptures that invite engagement, both from humans and ultimately from more-than-humans, this is a cosmopolitical ‘gesture’ towards multispecies living together in the shared city.

The cosmopolitical gesture of beginning to consider more-than-human others as intimately entangled with city living – which, looking at the multispecies map of Berlin is not as ‘humanised’ as we may have thought it was – may only just touch on what may be involved in de-centring humans. Imagining difference across species and within species opens possibilities for doing difference. Making our multispecies natures visible in unexpected ways is a powerful gesture. It invites engagement (Fig. 4.4).

This chapter has explored imagining education in precarious times as being about re-thinking urban places, including the politics of who makes places. Cities are the ultimate human-centric environment, yet changing perspectives towards who-else lives in cities opens possibilities for ongoing re-imagining urban environments as complex, entangled multispecies sites.

While it is significant to consider the precariousness of our times, I am also reminded of Foucault’s (2010) warning that we do:

Fig. 4.4 Hertrich and Nitta, *Berlin Wildes Leben* (Photo credit: Michael Burton. Reproduced with permission from Hertrich & Nitta, 2011)



...not allow ourselves the facile, rather theatrical declaration that this moment in which we exist is one of total perdition, in the abyss of darkness, or a triumphant daybreak, etc. It is a time like any other, or rather, a time which is never quite like any other (2010, p. 6).

This time invites us/humans to be generous and open and to let go of a sense of entitlement. Instead of being placed *on* the world, the perspective may shift towards new ways of becoming *with* the world (S. Hinchliffe et al., 2005). In a multispecies context of place-making, cosmopolitics replaces the emphasis from humans as the dominant species that creates and shapes places towards humans as one of many species involved in inhabitations (S. Hinchliffe et al., 2005). With an emphasis on politics as power relations that involved humans, more than humans and vibrant matter of all kind, cosmopolitics requires a close look at power as a force that shapes how places are made, who makes them and who is affected by place-making. This chapter has begun to look at possibilities for engagement with multispecies urban place-making as pedagogical cosmopolitical practice. Rather than offering alternatives and solutions, pedagogical cosmopolitics slows down perception, creates space for the yet to be perceived, and thus enables new imaginings to emerge. The cosmopolitical issue that *Berlin Wildes Leben* raises may be how to perceive racoons' perspectives of what it means to live well and sustainably with humans in Berlin. This question opens spaces for new imaginings of radical difference and perhaps it helps all of us to live better *with* the world.

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