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(How) to grow a home for the many-legged

**A university campus in Berlin
as a project space for multispecies
care and sustainable green areas
in the city**

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(HOW) TO GROW A HOME FOR THE MANY-LEGGED. A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN
BERLIN AS A PROJECT SPACE FOR MULTISPECIES CARE AND SUSTAINABLE
GREEN AREAS IN THE CITY

Masterarbeit am Institut für Europäische Ethnologie der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

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1. Introduction

Some qualities of encounters with plants and insects, in alphabetical order:

Hurtful, yet entertaining: A friend of mine, on summer vacation in the south of Sweden, was stung into her lower lip by a hornet that crashed into her while she was riding her bike. Her lip swelled to an unconscionable size, and she told me afterwards that the pain was horrible. But what we are left with now is a very funny picture of her and an entertaining story about making jokes with Swedish doctors about Botox injections and what it is like to have a rubber boat in your face.

Loving: once, high on the beauty of nature, I walked around Berlin's Botanic Garden and gently complimented all the plants I came upon with the Latin word *vulgaris* as part of their botanic distinction. I told them they are not merely common, but beautiful and exceptional, every single one of them. I returned to them several times, and we became good friends, if only for that day.

Raunchy, if you may: A walk in a forest in Northeastern Germany, where a friend of mine used to come as a child when she visited her grandparents. We come upon two very large and old looking trees. They have taken an interesting pose: Growing parallel for most of their length, they are conjoined at around one third of their height from the ground. One of the two grew a massive branch that connects to the other trunk right below where that other one sprouts a massive branch, too, forming a bifurcation. That would be my attempt to describe it soberly and geometrically, but if you look at the picture below, it is easier to see than it is to describe in words why my friend said that their family used to call them the "sex trees".

Surprising, in ways both good and bad: One warm summer evening I was perched with a friend in the tall grass of the outstretched lawns of the former Tempelhof Airport in Berlin. Our enjoyment of the cozy temperature and soft light of dusk was cut short by a flying squadron of Junebugs launching attacks kamikaze-style, directed straight at our heads. It was unclear whether *any* large object would have been under threat, whether their flying was just a bit uncoordinated or whether they just really liked us. But from our perspective, aggressive little balls of fur and wings started rotating around our heads, leaving behind goosebumps, frantic arm-waving and little „whoosh!“-noises ringing in our ears.



Fig. 1: The “Sex Trees” in a forest around Biendorf, Germany.

These anecdotes help set the scene. Encounters with insects (and plants) are to be found everywhere, but catch most humans’ attention only for quick bursts. Apart from a loving interest brought forward by entomologists, ecologists and other insect aficionados, insects are otherwise seen as a nuisance only, at best. Based on an interest in relations between humans and insects, in my ethnographic field work I accompanied the Blühender Campus, an ecological activist project at Freie Universität (FU) Berlin. The project group works to transform the manicured lawns of the university campus into a wilder version of themselves, a version more hospitable to nonhumans beings – and, if you believe them, to humans, too. Though insects are often especially important for the group’s work, because of the project’s broad scope, my focus quickly expanded to more diverse relations between humans and nonhumans, especially to plants. But their activist work also involves

negotiations with human actors both institutional and individual, most prominently the university's technical administration which is responsible for the campus's green space, and its contracted landscaping company. This leads to the lawns becoming spaces in which many different beings with different demands and needs come together to negotiate how to live together.

Though the Blühender Campus, especially during my field stint during the early coronavirus pandemic, is an activist project small in scale, it is relevant because it stands for work that needs to be done, and is being done, at all scales of society. This leads me to the main question guiding me through this thesis: How does the Blühender Campus try to create a more sustainably inhabitable multispecies space, and which actors, relations and practices encourage or inhibit this process?

This thesis represents the journey of trying to answer that question by following and exploring different events, interests and irritations emerging during my time with the project – some of them more abstract, some hiding in the details of everyday practice. As a result, the analyses and essays come in different scopes and sizes. Let me provide you with an itinerary.

In chapter two I tell the origin story of this research. I talk about how my interest in multispecies relations came to be, and how it led me to work with the project. I want to share how I became involved, where I scurried around, what I experienced there and relate the action I took part in. It is also the strange story of doing ethnographic field work in the early, confusing stages of a global pandemic. Finally, I want to share some thoughts on doing multispecies research, and a few problems and limitations that popped up during my research.

Following this, chapter three is a short interrogation of the word and term that might appear most often throughout this thesis: the *lawn*. Without going into an etymological or historical deep dive, I want to swiftly point out both the difficulty and productivity of using it as a central focus of my research, albeit in slightly modified terms.

In Chapter four I draw upon Bruno Latour's concepts of *matters of fact* and *concern* and the *collective* to explore how the work of the Blühender Campus is one of doing more-than-human politics. It is filled to the brim with negotiations with many different types of actors regarding many different types of conflicts, which can be administrative, practical, or scientific. The most immediately visible ones I already mentioned: negotiations with social institutions run by and for humans. Looking at how the Blühender Campus negotiates the lawns' transformation with the university's technical administration and its contracted landscaping company, it becomes clear that nonhuman needs are being advocated against more purely human demands – that, in many ways, the Blühender Campus puts nonhumans first. As other examples will show, it is not just institutional practices that are negotiated, but also the usefulness or applicability of different kinds of knowledge.

I conclude the chapter with a look at a phenomenon that was constantly present, but rarely explicated: the importance of affectivity and emotional attachment in the project's

work. Though the project is run by biologists and geographers and driven by scientific knowledge, the sensual and emotional experience of being surrounded by life aplenty is just as important, which goes to show the often-inextricable link between knowledge (production) of and emotional connections to phenomena.

Chapter five acts as an intermission between the more epic reflections both preceding and following it. Inspired by Natasha Myers, I want to think about the effects of another actor rebelling against the former trimness of the lawns – the climate – and engage in a brief meditation on the life and death of landscapes exposed to a changing climate in late capitalism.

In the first part of chapter six, I will look at an adjective often mentioned during my time in the field: *wild*, as in *rewilded* lawns. For the Blühender Campus, *rewilded* never meant to manage a lawn less intensely or to not manage it at all, but to actively take part in enriching it – with more beings, more life¹. Considering the question if, and how, a space as micromanaged as a university campus can be wild is as complicated as the term itself is slippery. That consideration will be complemented by an exploration of a term often considered one of wildness's binary opposites: domestication. After pointing out how it is both a problematic and useful lens to look at my research with, I will show how the two terms have been overlapping all along and bring them together in the subject of the chapter's second part: home. Making a home for someone would lead one to think that wilderness is left outside the door, but I will argue that the opposite is the case. Analyzing the function and building process of different physical structures around the lawns, I want to point out how they exemplify the contributions made by both nonhumans and humans to create and protect spaces in which nonhuman life is able to flourish – for everyone's benefit.

Looking back *and* looking forward, I bring together all the different practices the Blühender Campus uses to enable the flourishing of nonhuman life one more time. In my conclusion, I want to look at them again and ask how the project goes about the hard work of meeting the urgent demands of current multispecies worlds. I want to think about what it means to not just bear witness to others' lives, but to get entangled with them, and how to make the world more hospitable for all.

¹ Just a quick note on the interplay between the two terms "to manage/management" and "wild/wildness". Wildness is often understood as the absence of human interference, which also implies an absence or lack of management. But that lack of human interference is in most cases intensely managed. Wildness and naturalness, while often romantically inferred to as unmanaged states of nonhuman abundance, are in practice just as often intensely managed states of forced human absence. Taking the human out of the wild might be an ideal, but is in contradiction to both how the world works and how it maybe should work to ensure that humans actively contribute to a more balanced well-being of all kinds of species. See chapter 6 of this thesis for a more thorough discussion.

2. Origin stories

„And the most beautiful thing you can do is to go into such a meadow when the sun rises and sit down in its midst and wait for the sun to rise above the horizon and slowly bath the blades of grass and herbs in light and warm them up and then you'll suddenly see the insects come out, all of them, at once. Until then, everything was quiet and still, and then it wakes up. A meadow waking up in summer is a wonderful thing." (Interview with Ola, translated by the author², 25th May 2020).

I have been accompanied by insects as a research topic for a while now. To be honest, I can't always tell you why, but I think it is a loving interest in those who are small, whose importance is often not taken seriously, those who live in the shadows of mainstream (human) attention. For my bachelor thesis, I spent a week interning with an extermination company – not exactly the most publicly visible line of business. I accompanied the exterminators during their workdays, and we drove around the city in deep cold winter. I was tasked to fold and hand out roach traps and to check whether there is still rat poison inside traps placed in opportune places along a yard's fence, the walls of large warehouses or the backrooms of bakery shops. Apart from getting a massive cold, I turned that week into a thesis on the triangular relation between humans, animals and (lethal) technologies. I investigated how humans fortify their own bodily integrity by disrupting that of other beings through the calculation and application of harmful chemical substances.

Afterwards, this interest of mine stayed dormant for a while, but once it was time to think of a topic for my master's thesis, it popped back in through the door waving, as though it had never left. It re-appeared on my radar when I noticed an increase in attention paid to a most contemporary problem – first in scientific, then in public discourse. The Entomological Society of Krefeld in Western Germany published a study that noted a massive decline in flying insect biomass across Western Germany throughout the last 25-30 years (Hallmann et al. 2017). As this study made the rounds, the society's lay entomologists turned into prophets of a doomsday development that has been written on the walls for a long time already. You know it's serious when the *New York Times* profiles a bunch of entomologists from a small German city on an epic scale (Jarvis 2018). It is not just mammals or fish or reptiles disappearing in masses anymore, but potentially also those whose presence has always been understood as a given, an unquestioned law of nature. It was not the first time I heard about a general loss in insect life, but the urgency with which it was widely reported was new to me. Having grown up between the forests and fields of the Western German countryside I noticed, like a Danish entomologist interviewed in the *New York Times* article, that I'm not being completely and annoyingly covered in flying insects anymore when I'm riding my bicycle in said countryside. An

2 Original quote in German: "Und was das Schönste ist was man machen kann, ist zur morgen- zum Sonnenaufgang auf so ne Wiese zu gehen und sich da reinzusetzen und zu warten, wie die Sonne über den Horizont steigt und so ganz langsam die Grashalme und Kräuter von oben nach unten in Licht getaucht werden und sich aufwärmen und man dann sieht- Dann sieht man auf einmal wo die Insekten auf einmal alle rauskommen. Vorher war alles still, und dann wird es so langsam wach. Und so eine wachwerdende Wiese im Sommer ist was total Tolles."

awareness of this loss came to me not just through knowledge produced to prove it, but also through memories and sensual experiences.

One evening during this time, while I was having dinner with friends, Ola, an acquaintance who is a PhD student in biology at Freie Universität (FU) in Berlin, told me about how she is involved in building up an activist group at her university that tries to claim the monotonous lawns of the extensive campus to turn them into rewilded lawns, to create a more hospitable environment for plants, insects, spiders, and other nonhuman beings. This caught my interest because an effort to claim insect life as a top priority and put it at the forefront of public attention seemed so timely in the light of the discourse I just described. This project's name is "Blühender Campus" ("blossoming campus").

At first, it seemed like an unusual effort in a place as urban and highly frequented as the FU's campus, though it is green and expansive and thus possesses a lot of potential for such an activist undertaking³. I asked Ola whether she would mind showing me around a bit on campus. We met there shortly after, and she shared her plans and imagined futures for these lawns with me with unbridled enthusiasm. Fascinated by both her love for small beings and her struggles with the university's authorities, I became attached as the project's unofficial social scientist from early spring to autumn 2020.



Figure 2 One of the large lawns, with a Blühender Campus sign against mowing hung on a lamppost

³ While walking across campus, it is not always immediately clear by whom certain lawns are administered. Some are actually public parks managed by the district; some belong to research institutions affiliated with the university, but not officially part of it; some are surrounded by fences but belong to university buildings and are open to the public. These distinctions are very important, as they either in- or decrease (up to a complete prohibition) the likelihood of a lawn/green space becoming part of the project.

Those were strange times, as that first meeting took place mid-February 2020. Three to four weeks later the coronavirus pandemic hit Germany with force and the university campus, like all public spaces, became deserted. That the strict lockdown brought university life to a standstill led to an amusing situation. Whereas normally the project would have had to constantly heckle the administration to change green space care and mowing regimes to allow for more growth, now the lawns were, at least in spring, mostly left to their own devices. Though it took me an hour to get there, I went to the campus regularly, often alone and sometimes twice a week, to take pictures and monitor the lawns' growth. I watched them grow slowly at first, then, once spring picked up speed, explode into a flurry of green interfused with colorful blossoms. The lawns became my small escape from domestic confinement during Lockdown. I barely met anyone around and on the lawns during those weeks aside from people taking walks and occasionally some teenagers or students relaxing together on the grass, positioning themselves two meters apart. I guess they needed to get out, too.

As time went on and some kind of new normal slowly emerged, I often met with Ola on campus. For a while, as everyone tried to figure out everyday life in pandemic conditions, she pushed the project forward more or less single-handedly. Because of the lockdown and social distancing rule, the university administration announced an embargo on mowing and most landscaping work, to last until May. That did not turn out to be true as lawnmowers and their workings were already seen again in April. But by being present, and with a little help of gentle but dogged commandeering, Ola often convinced the landscapers on the spot to do things her way, or to not mow certain parts of lawns at all.

As I said, times were strange, and while the campus stayed eerily empty the lawns peacefully grew closer to a state imagined as ideal by Ola and her accomplices. Backstage though, Ola was constantly negotiating with the university's technical administration office. I often asked myself what would happen once the regular university routine and crowds of students returned to campus. The potential of these lawns being turned into spaces primarily for plants and insects was heightened by the fact that there were so few humans around. At the time I'm writing this, university life is still partly shut down, so up to this day the situation, though feeling very normal after 16 months of reduced social life, could still be seen as experimental.

My role became part ethnographic researcher, part supportive intern. Most often I accompanied Ola on her missions. To help out, I went to the hardware store and bought short wooden stakes that we could hammer into the ground to demarcate the parts of lawns that should be, though not untouched, hopefully left unmown. Ola and I put up signs informing the public about the decrease of insect life, what it means for us and the environment, and about the project's goals. While we did all of this, occasionally people walking across campus would stop and inquire what we were doing. Ola, patiently but determined, would explain what the project is about. People were generally taken with

the project's goals and sometimes even asked for advice to apply to their own gardens. Occasionally, I would also accompany Tim, a geography student and resident butterfly expert, who became the project's other driving force over the course of the summer.

As throughout the summer physical meetings continued to be a very limited possibility, it was often just the three of us in action, something that only changed towards late summer 2020, when restrictions were lifted, and more people became involved in the project's activities on campus. As I was involved with the project most regularly during spring and summer 2020, the material I draw on in this thesis is focused on the project's earlier stages during the early coronavirus pandemic, when only a very limited number of people was actively involved. I therefore focus on the emergence of the project and the many small actions and negotiations Ola and Tim were constantly engaged in with official university parties and others during those confusing times, which were often spontaneous and initiated without too much planning,

Apropos confusing: It proved continuously difficult for me to have a general idea of which lawns belonged to the project, as they were a) as spread out as the campus itself and b) new ones kept appearing, and Ola would only tell me about those occasionally. There were not really any "proper" maps of the project's lawns during my time in the field⁴. I settled on making regular visits to eight different lawns, documenting their development over spring and summer by taking pictures every 3-7 days. Most of them are small, or ones that belong to specific buildings and were located behind fences. But the three largest and most important ones, and also the ones I spend most time on and around, are located very centrally on campus, and are completely open towards the public. These are adjacent to one another, shaped like a giant L (see Figure 3).

They are separated by a street and footpaths respectively, and surrounded by large and important buildings such as a canteen, the economics building, the library of the law department and an independent research institute for chemistry. I have been there regularly before the pandemic, and under normal circumstances, these lawns are both highly visible and highly frequented. During the summer the lawn next to the canteen is constantly packed with people reading, talking or having lunch. In times of pandemic desertedness, these are the lawns that most of the project's activities targeted during my time in the field. E.g., the large L serves as the official butterfly monitoring space for a long-going citizen science project. Tim does regular monitoring walks across the lawns, identifying butterfly species and counting the number of specimens. The numbers are then transmitted to the Helmholtz-Zentrum für Umweltforschung (Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, UFZ) in Halle, which oversees the nation-wide collection of data

⁴ Of the project that is. One thing regrettably missing from this thesis is a more in-depth look at the history of the FU campus as a physical space, to see a) how and why the lawns were incorporated and b) how its layout and look changed over the years, to be able to trace ambivalences in the transformation of its green spaces. Ola would occasionally refer to such transformations and changes that she heard about or that happened during the last years in her time studying and working there. I included references to those when applicable.

and conducts a longitudinal study⁵. Over the course of the summer, I joined Tim for a few monitoring sessions (I would say “assisted”, but I do not think I actually was of much use).



Figure 3: An overview of lawns acquired by the project between 2019 and 2021. The L-shaped main lawns are highlighted in the lower left center. Map provided by the Blühender Campus FU, based on Google Maps, 2021.

During summer, a new university gardening project took off in close cooperation with the Blühender Campus, and a few people involved in the gardening group also went on to join the project, which has continued to grow a lot since I became less involved in winter 2020/21. Before that, apart from the different actions during spring and summer (monitoring, fence building, organizational meetings etc.), I joined a few group meetings and other happenings such as themed explorations on the lawns open to the public (with topics such as grasshoppers, spiders, bees, etc.). I conducted two long interviews with Ola, one at the height of my field stint during summer 2020, one towards the end in summer 2021. I also got access to e-mail correspondence between the project and the administration, or mail sent by people working all over campus with ideas for how to grow the projects, with complaints about their lawns being cut down etc. A few extra-curricular adventures also made their way into my field work (though not always into this text), as I visited a similar project at another German campus university in a different city, visited an entomological conference and made an excursion to a touring exotic creepy-crawly animal fair set up in a circus tent next to a highway overpass.

⁵ See: <https://www.ufz.de/tagfalter-monitoring/index.php?de=41735>. Last access: 16th November 2021.

Since my time with the project and up to this writing, it has expanded both in area and in the number of people involved. A big new endeavor is a mentorship program through which individuals or small groups of people learn to take care of (parts of) rewilded lawns on campus on their own. This program is organized by a member of the project in cooperation with external ecological trainers who offer workshops on getting acquainted with the rewilded lawns' composition and how to tend to their needs. But simultaneously the struggles regarding negotiations with both the technical administration and the landscaping company continue. Just a few weeks before finishing this text, I got an e-mail from Ola detailing the results of a lot of unwanted and radical sessions of mowing that were in breach of what was agreed upon beforehand by the three parties involved (the project, the university's technical administration and its contracted landscaping company). Some of the lawns razed down weren't even meant to be mown at all so as to serve as spaces for insects to hibernate. The frustrations continue.

But before getting to the detailed stories from the field, I want to add a few remarks on how I approached my analysis in this thesis.

It will seem that I use "Ola" and the "Blühender Campus" interchangeably at times as if they were one and the same. But due to the embargo on collective physical action during the early stages of the project in the pandemic, that was actually often the case, as Ola was often out on her own. Add to that her being a determined and very headstrong person, Ola often pushed both the Blühender Campus and my field research in the direction of her ideas – not that I didn't follow merrily. Therefore, material from my earlier field work is very much focused on Ola. But later in summer, as the project group grew and Tim and others became more engaged and involved, the group dynamic became more leveled, so that my later field work includes more diverse positions and activities.

As I am not much of an ecologist, I did not seek a detailed answer to the question of how much a shift away from the "manicuredness" of campus lawns actually increases their biodiversity. This is also due to the fact that the project itself did not yet have the capacity to monitor this. Though, alongside our activities, a master's student in biology ran a small-scale research for her thesis and monitored an increase in number of flying insects which were caught on two smaller lawns (and some other small ones that weren't or no longer are part of the project) between 2019 and 2020, that small sample cannot be seen as representative of the project's activities spaces as a whole. But this potential has been researched in many other places, and once moving through the lawns in summer, the answer is quite a self-explanatory physical experience. Still, there are many different potential species compositions, and not all of them equally desired.⁶

This thesis is informed by many years of being involved with multispecies ethnography and theory, a deep interest for the myriad ways in which human and nonhuman beings

⁶ For more insight into the relationship between rewilding lawns or meadows and biodiversity, see Norton et al. (2017), Chollet et al. (2018) or Aronson et al. (2017).

are involved with one another, and how these engagements are world-making practices for everyone involved. Exploring more-than-human relations is, in my eyes, often necessary to understand how human sociality works in the first place, a necessity that the pandemic threw into sharp relief all over again. But I should also add that I, although not completely clueless, am not only not much of an entomologist, but also not a botanist, or, more broadly, an ecologist – the list could go on. I was a constant bag of questions, regarding why certain plants are good or not good for a rewilded lawn (or at least the one desired by the project, though what that meant was often contentious), why butterflies prefer some plants over others, what difference which technique of mowing makes, etc.

Though my focus stayed on the quality of relations humans and nonhumans are engaged in, and how humans position themselves and act towards nonhuman beings and worlds, I had to discover and learn a lot about plants, animals, ecologies and sustainability guidelines and practices along the way. For me, it was important to balance my focus on relations with the knowledge that there are physical and very much material beings involved that are very different from each other, and have very different needs and preferences. Relations and their quality should therefore not be assumed, but discovered and followed as they emerge.

To quote Eduardo Kohn, I find it meaningful to “[seek] a gentler immersion in a kind of thinking that grows”, one that “begins with very simple matters so that complexity, context, and entanglement can themselves become the objects of ethnographic analysis rather than the unquestioned conditions for it.” (Kohn 2013: 14). He reiterates a point that sometimes frustrates me in ethnographic research and analysis, including my own: that complexity, context, and entanglement shouldn’t be presumed, but found.

I had valuable help with that. Much multispecies research focuses on larger animals that more strongly trigger human self-recognition and affection, such as mammals of all kinds; or entities too small to see and easily engage in physical immediacy with, such as bacteria or viruses. Therefore, I did not always find it easy to figure out how to approach insects and plants as subjects of relations and foci of research. I found inspiration for that in Hugh Raffles *Insectopedia* (2010) and its encyclopedia-inspired collection of ideas and stories of insect-world relations. Raffles taught me how to curiously approach living beings that seem too small, static, or irritating to engage with thoughtfully; and the many ways they are involved in how we make our lives in the world. More than anything else, *Insectopedia* and its prismatic collection of thoughts and stories, has shaped how I approach my research and especially the act of writing. In this sense, I understand this thesis as an act of analytical storytelling that is not trying to answer one overarching question. Instead, with the project itself being the glue holding it all together, I want to follow different beings, irritations, and inspirations I found in the field to the often-divergent places they lead me to, and to try to make sense of them with the help of both other peoples’ thoughts and my own. Some chapters are longer, some shorter, but each of them presents paths leading to different but connected stories and I hope you’ll follow them along with me.

3. What even is a lawn?

The term *lawn*, in regard to both its definition and the difficulty of using it, has haunted me repeatedly throughout the process of writing. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines a lawn as “an area of grass, especially near to a house or in a park, that is cut regularly to keep it short”⁷. In their article on the social and cultural role of lawns in Sweden, Ignatieva et al. add a little more complexity to this definition:

“There are many different definitions of ‘lawn’, but we define it here as an artificially created or modified plant community (phytosociological composition) consisting predominantly of grass (more technically graminoids), but it may have spontaneously occurring herbaceous species (which are also called ‘lawn weeds’).” (Ignatieva et al. 2017: 213).

What both definitions share is that a lawn consists mainly or completely of grass, and is controlled and/or modified by humans, e.g., created by them, located close to building, regularly cut short. I thought about these definitions because I kept asking myself whether I can keep calling the lawns “lawns” once they are successfully led to grow high and full of flowers and spontaneous weeds that happen to refuse to leave. The aspect of humans exercising control is somehow still there, as quite a bit of work and design goes into their wildness. But would one still call them “artificial” after all that? Are they too “natural” now? Or still too “near to a house or a park”? I grew confused and frustrated. Wouldn’t it be more fitting to call them meadows instead of lawns then, and to mark their change by using two distinct and separate terms?

I found this to be just as difficult, as the status of the lawns-turned-meadows has always been very fragile. They might have grown high and be filled with life one week, only to be cut short and dead upon my return a week later. It felt like even when they were tall and in bloom, they were always in limbo. When it is relevant to differentiate between those two states, I therefore chose to call the former “manicured” lawns, as they are cut short and worked on regularly, and to call their transformed and grown version “wild” or, more fittingly, “rewilded” lawns. The latter are built on the ruins of the former (or one might say the ruins that they always have been) and still embedded in the same systems – albeit with different, and differently intrusive, practices of control. Maybe not yet a fully satisfying solution to the problem of what even a lawn is, but the one I am (and I am sorry to say you are, too, by proxy) stuck with, for now.

⁷ See <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lawn>. Last access 16th November 2021.

What even is a lawn?



Figure 4 One of the smaller lawns in early spring



Figure 5 The same lawn, unmown, in summer

4. This lawn is my lawn, this lawn is your lawn. *The Politics of Nature* and being in this world together

Early on in my field research I made an observation that settled in: That shimmering through the activist work being done, and the way people talk about it, is the drive to provide spaces for otherwise neglected nonhumans. What the people in the project understand to be at stake here is the wellbeing of *many* different species sharing a space, such as a lawn on a university campus. They base their work on the perception and knowledge that a lawn that is good for bees, wasps, butterflies and/or spiders is also good for “us” humans. Such a lawn is beautiful in an aesthetic sense, with flowers blossoming in many colors and intricately patterned butterflies fluttering about. But, as will become apparent, it is also beautiful because growth and a diversity of color, shapes, and other sensual cues signify activity and life. This abundance of life replaces a formerly prevailing barrenness on lawns cut regularly and accurately short, a very different aesthetic that prefers order, controllability, and low maintenance effort to the presence of life aplenty.

Starting from these observations, in this chapter I want to shed light on something going on here that one does not often see: The act of humans (re-)claiming a space from other humans (and also, in a sense, from themselves) for the flourishing of nonhuman life. They speak and act for nonhuman others to enable their presence and their growth. It is not that there is no more ordering going on, but rather that that ordering goes into the creation of the chaos that nourished nonhuman life can be: a tall stem of grass, bent at its end by the weight of the bee clinging to it; spiderwebs covering flowers, and in those webs ensnared tangling flies floundering to get out. It dawned on me that I needed to find a framework that would help me to better understand the practices and processes of representation, contestation and negotiation that feed into this nourishment of life in my grassy field.

I found a guide in Bruno Latour’s *The Politics of Nature*, in which he develops a model of how a more-than-human democratic collective should work, which functions it needs to fulfill, how it should be structured, and on the basis of which premises and principles it should act. His goal is to build institutions and procedures that can guide us through contemporary earthly crises. It seems only logical that it would take Latour a whole book to develop such a model – more space than I have available here. But rather than seeking to simply apply his model to my case, I want to use what I understand to be its foundational idea. One that rang true to what I experienced the activists on campus trying to advocate for, realize and protect: That of the necessity of a more-than-human democratic collective.

Latour envisions a democratic political practice that seeks to bring humans and nonhumans together in the “progressive composition of the common world” (Latour 2004: 247) leading us to a “good common world” (Latour 2004: 93). By coming together and

negotiating in small steps who needs to be in- or excluded to live together sustainably, all beings and objects will create a world that is good for all. What might be understood as a crux is that humans are still at the center of creating (and thereby potentially dictating) the conditions for such a political practice, even as the outcome is supposed to be more-than-human. But Latour, instead of trying to evade any trace of anthropocentrism or simply giving into it, centers human responsibility to build democratic institutions for beings other than just themselves. How this works exactly, and what Latour helps us to understand, is one of the main questions I asked myself in the field: *What mode of human-nonhuman co-existence is sought after, and realized through practice, by the Blühender Campus?* As I said, I will not follow Latour's model all the way through the many terms and institutions he develops, but I want to use some of his key terms to argue that the Blühender Campus can be read as an example of a project that tries to change the practices by which public (green) space is being managed and distributed. I will investigate which actors and practices are involved in both negotiating the proposed shape of green space on campus *and* how to care for it. Furthermore, I want to explore through which practices the Blühender Campus advocates for such a more-than-human collective space. The project aims to help advocate for, establish, and defend claims on public spaces by nonhumans. It seeks to provide a home to nonhumans and re-configure the role of humans in a shared world to foster a sustainable co-existence of both humans and nonhumans.

I will begin with an introduction to Latour's thinking and the concepts which are important for my analysis, such as his critique of the ontological separation of human and Nature, his proposal of the more-than-human collective, and matters of fact and concern. These will be tools with which I firstly analyze how the Blühender Campus, the university's technical administration and its contracted landscaping company negotiate the state and care of the lawns. To do so, I will dive deep into a telling of one walking meeting between all three groups across the lawns.

Following this is an exploration of whose demands and needs are prioritized by the different negotiating parties, and how Ola and the Blühender Campus question established approaches to managing campus green space by prioritizing nonhuman needs over human demands. This is more complicated than it first appears, as not all species groups are advocated for equally, and not all forms of circulating knowledge understood to be equally conducive to the project's goals. I will round out this chapter by interrogating something missing from Latour's thinking, which is the importance of affective attachment to nonhumans as a driving force in multispecies activism. Throughout my fieldwork, it became clear that scientifically informed activism is not just a question of which knowledge to implement, or which beings to prioritize, but also powered by the emotional quality of the experience of being part of a collective of a multitude of living beings. But let us now start with Latour and his critique of the ontological divide between humans and Nature.

Bruno Latour and the problem with the moderns

Latour's main issue with modern society is what he identifies as the "established" Western conception of a unified *Nature*⁸. In it, *Nature* is made up of objective facts, and opposed to "Culture", made up of the social world of values, in which everything is relative and subjective (Latour 2004: 14). He calls these the two houses, as in legislative institutions forming a political system, that the moderns⁹ have been trying very hard to keep apart. *Nature* does not appear as an open and complex network of relations given room to speak and be (re-)thought, but as a pre-existing factual matter that is administered solely through budgets and policy papers. As long as human politics are stuck on speaking for a stiff, holistic *Nature*, either defending it from most (if not all) human influence or exploiting it for all its usefulness, they are not (yet!) able to rethink how to relate to nonhuman¹⁰ worlds sustainably. Consequently, humans run the danger of paralysis in the face of complex contemporary earthly crises such as a general and global loss in biodiversity, climate change, "natural" disasters, or pandemics such as the coronavirus. They might be deemed natural or physical phenomena, or phenomena that follow social actions in a simple dynamic of cause and effect. But in Latour's eyes they emerge from complicated, unsustainable, and damaging social relations between humans, and between humans and nonhumans, and cannot be broken down into straightforward causal chains.

Scientists are, traditionally, the only ones who can communicate between these two worlds: They are able to speak for factual objects of the natural world and use them (or make them usable for others) to "tame" the diffuse politics of a value-ridden social world. They speak for those who are "real" but cannot speak (for) themselves. But Latour's critique is that this strict separation of worlds, and who gets to speak, often leads to a definition of everything natural as essential, given and simply reactive to human action and politics. Ambivalences and disagreements in scientific and research processes are made invisible in favor of an indisputable and declarative factual outcome, so as not to complicate the political process. Non-humans are then both simplified and powerless

⁸ I will write *Nature* with a capital letter and in cursive whenever I refer to this unified and holistic understanding of the term.

⁹ "Moderns" meaning the rational and enlightened human subject who separates ontologically between nature and culture. For a more elaborate definition, see Latour 2004: 244.

¹⁰ I use the terms "humans" and "nonhumans" first and foremost in a descriptive manner to refer to either human or nonhuman beings. Latour writes that his usage of them is always meant in a negative sense. They are not his preferred terms by choice, but a useful and necessary replacement for "subject" and "object". He says that we should not use those latter terms anymore, but there still need to be words at hand to make clear that we don't aim to reproduce the exclusionary oppositions of the subject/object divide. See Latour 2004: 243.

without human representation.¹¹ This, in turn, can lead to solutions too simple for problems too complex, instead of acknowledging and working with the complexity of living with nonhumans of different and constantly changing forms (animals, the climate, machines, etc.). These solutions might take the form of merely reactive policy programs, which often focus on short-term technical fixes and/or a reaction only in the immediate, highly visible aftermath of tragedies. Or they take the shape of human initiatives too narrowly thought out to work out in the long run (e.g., I would think, saving the planet by financing the, barely monitored, planting of trees through consumption revenue).

To get out of this dilemma, Latour has a procedural politics in mind that is more-than-human, instead of a mere policy-driven human intervention into an ontologically separate natural world. As Latour writes: "We must get rid of the monolithic myth that is *Nature* before we can act in the world according to its complexity" (Latour 2004, 19). Instead of letting *Nature* and politics, facts and social values fight as rivaling systems, we should rather accept and work with the productive uncertainty regarding how beings and objects come into being and how, and defined by which characteristics, they relate to one another. One might justifiably argue that this rigid ontological separation is not as sharply drawn anymore as it was nearly 20 years ago, at the time of Latour's writing, as recurring and/or more urgently perceived socio-ecological crises across the world have since lead to a slow change in paradigms. But, as we will see when looking at my field research, this separation is far from being overcome and gone.

Latour thinks on a global scale, but as I will point out shortly, I perceive the negotiation of whether, and how to, rewild university green spaces as a specific but illuminating case of how difficult it is to try to even challenge local habitual human practices that are both founded on and contributing to the ontological separation of humans and *Nature*. The Blühender Campus's work shall serve as an example of the difficulty of solving ecological crises big and small around us, and of proposing new ways of living with nonhumans.

The lawns on campus as matters of concern

Latour writes that a focus limited to *matters of fact*, which are postulated by *Science*¹² to be unquestionably and objectively real, has to give way to one that includes *matters of concern*, which are things that emerge from *association*, meaning from being (put) in

11 Latour summarizes this as follows: "In this Constitution dispensed by (political) epistemology, how are the powers in fact distributed? The first house brings together the totality of speaking humans, who find themselves with no power at all save that of being ignorant in common, or of agreeing by convention to create fictions devoid of any external reality. The second house is constituted exclusively of real objects that have the property of defining what exists but that lack the gift of speech. On the one hand, we have the chattering of fictions; on the other, the silence of reality. The subtlety of this organization rests entirely on the power given to those who can move back and forth between the houses." (Emphasis by the author. Latour 2004: 14).

12 Latour differentiates between "Science" as a system of belief of the natural world as being made up of indisputable facts vs. the "sciences" as established sets of practices of knowledge production. See Latour 2004: 10.

relation with one another¹³. Latour is not immediately being very clear about their distinction, but finally points out that matters of concern are quite simply the rough-cut version of matters of fact. Matters of concern are facts in production. They include the manyfold associations of emerging entities when they are still being researched and argued over, full of ambivalences and contradictions. They are entities that bring concerned parties into new relations with each other, and these new modes of relation confuse and perplex, causing “us” moderns, according to Latour, to “talk about a crisis every time they emerge.” (Latour 2004: 24). But seeing these matters for their complexity, we can also discuss and negotiate the conditions of their emergence and possible change, how they come about scientifically and/or discursively, to try and solve the crises they represent. Matters of fact, instead, are the instituted product at the end of this process of negotiation in which matters of concern are sharpened, some of their relations discarded, their associations redrawn. We are then left with facts difficult to dispute that help to define and design a common world without having to be re-discussed constantly, without their existence being put into question every time they come up (Latour 2004: 96, 106). It is not that matters of fact are to be discarded completely then, but that the process of them coming to be should be made transparent so as to better work out which relations and concerned parties (of matters of concern) should have their place in matters of fact once they become undisputed.

How are these concepts useful to understand the Blühender Campus’s work? I argue that it is helpful to understand the lawns of the university campus as matters of concern. On campus, for years there has been a quite simple protocol that organized how to care for lawns: They are regularly mown from spring to autumn, around 9-10 times, with the intervals being shorter during summer when growth is at its most rapid. This kept the lawns short and neat. But the Blühender Campus questioned this being a universally accepted and practiced mode of what an urban lawn should look like. The lawns became entities that different actors are concerned with in different ways, and around which contesting, and often oppositional, ideas of design and use circulate. Though, apart from the occasional setback, things have progressed for the project since the end of my more intensive field research, I will focus on what happened before, during spring and summer 2020, a time in which a lot of actors with different and sometimes mutually exclusive ideas were involved in negotiating what these lawns should be like. Let me draw up a sketch of who these actors are.

On the human side, you have the Blühender Campus and its individual actors. You have students doing thesis research on these lawns, and biology classes who explore them to share and gain knowledge about recognizing species in the wild. There is also the university’s technical administration office, responsible for green space management,

¹³ This is an expression of a foundational aspect of Latour’s philosophy and curiosity – the gesture of the pointing finger: Something points at something else, saying: Look at that. Relate to that. I am not just me, but also in relation to you. Latour’s basic building stones of sociality and society are things (symbols) that point to, that relate, that enable relation, from which one can deduce how relating is done. (Schmidgen 2011: 182).

with a) its guiding principles of work and organization and b) individual employees who are more or less open towards the changes the Blühender Campus proposes. Furthermore, there is the private contractor landscaping company responsible for the actual work of upkeeping the university's green spaces. Depending on the day and who is working the grounds, they also can be more or less open towards differing ideas and practices of green space care. Then there are the people living in the neighborhoods around campus and those working in university buildings around the lawns, with their attitudes and opinions towards them, and their ways of (not) making use of them.

But it's obviously not just humans who are associated with the lawns – there are, of course, countless nonhumans involved, too. Plant species of different sizes, shapes, and constitutions which, depending on which actor you ask, can be hierarchized in different ways regarding their usefulness as a living space, insect food, environmental indicator, aesthetical element, or ease of management. There are insects and other nonhuman animals who live on, in and around these lawns. The most visible and interacted with are butterflies, because of the monitoring program, but one can also see bees, wasps, spiders, locusts, grasshoppers, bugs, and birds. They are born and live on these lawns, or they come to them to feed, or to make a home for themselves and their kin.

There are machines, technologies and built structures associated with the lawns: Different species of lawnmowers and tools to cut grass or hedges; fences, wooden stakes, footpaths, buildings. And let us not forget about “higher” forces which are themselves (like everything else, but maybe even more fundamentally) products of associations, such as the climate, or a pandemic that directly affected the lawns' mowing schedules, their shape and use! If you put the lawns at the center of a network of associations, you can follow their involvement in myriad directions and find many ways of all of the abovementioned others relating to them. As a matter of concern, they emerge from all those relations coming together. I focus here on one particular association forming through and around these lawns as complex and contested matters of concern: Negotiations between different (groups of) human actors, along with their particular tools and practices of how to care for campus green space. It stood out to me because it caused the most friction and was therefore highly visible. In these negotiations, a formerly self-evident practice, the matter of fact of the lawns being mown short regularly, becomes a matter of concern by being questioned through proposing different forms of knowledge, priorities, and urgencies. The former black box is opened up, its self-evidence criticized, to ask what the lawns should look and be like nowadays, and how humans should contribute to that. What else is at stake in these negotiations?

Living collectively

Latour states the necessity of humans working towards a unified human-nonhuman collective. I find this term helpful because it stresses both the political dimension of being in the world together and that human responsibility towards nonhumans is also a responsibility towards themselves, so as to be able to continue to thrive. But before continuing to throw the word “collective” around: What is Latour's definition of it? As

most conceptual terms in *The Politics of Nature*, *collective* becomes clearer only in bits and pieces. Latour writes that “The term collective does not mean “one”; [...] it means “all, but not two.” By this term, I designate a set of procedures for exploring and gradually collecting this potential unification.” (Latour 2004: 94). The collective is not “one” in that it is not yet, and never will be, finished in a way that one could call it a bounded and stable entity. It is not “two” because it shall not repeat the unproductive opposition of nature and society, or binarily oppose anything else. It is instead “all” in the sense of its potential: By Latour’s definition, the term collective highlights the procedure of its making, rather than its resulting outcome. The collective seeks, in a slow, circular process, to include all that need to be included to live together, a process Latour calls the “progressive composition of the common world” (Latour 2004: 247).

Collecting as a verb then describes the work being done of finding and negotiating the inclusion of preexisting or new associations. It means “that new nonhumans, entities that have never before been included in the work of the collective, find themselves mobilized, recruited, socialized, domesticated” (Latour 2004: 38). A worldly democratic collective for all necessarily involves diplomacy and negotiations with unsympathetic or even unknown (and maybe not fully knowable) partners, whichever form they may take (Schmidgen 2011: 168). In the process of collecting matters of concern are turned into matters of fact. During negotiations, it is decided which of their relations to prioritize, or throw out. E.g., it can be decided that lawns are meant to be cut short so as to present an orderly image and make them easy to manage, and their potential for growing wild is then, for a while at least, discarded. A lawn mown constantly is realized through practice, its necessity questioned less and less, and it becomes a fact, until a reappraisal of its factuality is demanded.

Apart from being a political program, I find this concept to be useful also as an analytical tool because it helps us understand what Ola and the Blühender Campus have in mind regarding the lawns, or green space on campus more generally: That their work can be understood as working towards the creation of lawns as small collectives of beings in themselves, and that urban green space “made wild” is a contested new association whose inclusion into the worldly collective (encompassing all, each and every thing) is being negotiated by different actors. How is the physical and ideal condition of the lawns negotiated in my case and how do they become settings of making different ways of shared human-nonhuman existence?

Negotiating green space

One of the main dynamics of negotiation I witnessed was that between the Blühender Campus, the university’s technical administration and the contracted landscaping company. There are different dynamics at work here, as each entity has specific relations to each of the other two, while there is also a triangular relation between all of them.

The technical administration and the landscaping company organize the management of the university’s green spaces between them in form of a contract that is renewed or changed regularly. The Blühender Campus and the technical administration

negotiate how much of what the Blühender Campus demands can be agreed upon with the university. The Blühender Campus and the landscaping company are not supposed to communicate much. Ola told me that the technical administration does not like things being worked out behind its back. But nonetheless Ola often sought out direct communication with the landscaping company, in order to make them change their practice so as to accommodate some of her wishes. She would call them or just walk up to a person tending to a lawn and tell them what to do, with mixed success.¹⁴

But at this point I want to take a more detailed look at a meeting I took part in in early July 2020 and in which I was able to witness the dynamics between representatives of all three parties at once. We walked across the largest lawns on the main campus and stopped at different points to discuss mowing schedules and other landscaping issues for the rest of the season. This meeting became an exhibition of diverging and conflicting ideas regarding how to care for the university's green spaces more generally. Taking part were Ola, Tim and me for the Blühender Campus; two university employees heading offices responsible for sustainability on campus (one heading an office funding and supporting different initiatives involving students and university employees, the other one heading the university's official sustainability office; both of them friendly with Ola and on our side so to speak); two men from the technical administration responsible for organizing green space maintenance; and two men from the landscaping company: the company representative responsible for their working schedule and contract negotiations with the university¹⁵, and one of their groundskeepers – nine people in all.

The question of whether the landscaping company would acquire a scythe mower (also called a finger bar mower) became an immediate and divisive point of discussion. The advantage of a scythe mower is that it is both easier to use for tall grass and that, unlike a regular lawn mower, it does not rip everything it mows to shreds. Instead, by using knives

14 To illuminate this unofficial push and pull, a small story from my butterfly monitoring session with Ola: "I make Ola aware of the man on the lawnmower who is driving his rounds. She complained earlier that the landscaping company managed to mow down everything they shouldn't (at least not before the new sickle bar mower arrives) while ignoring the edge of the main lawn they were explicitly supposed to mow. [...] As she turns around and sees him, she tells me to hold the net for a moment and I get on my knees and hold it tight while she runs off to explain to the man how and where he should mow, regardless of what he planned. [...] I can hear that it takes quite a bit of loud lamentation on her part to get him to notice her and turn off the vehicle. I hear bits and pieces of her explaining to him about mowing the edge of the large lawn, and to leave other lawns untouched. [...] Later during our walk, while we make our way across the large lawn, past the Institute and towards the street, the gardener stops his mower and approaches us because he seems to be unsure whether to mow the wider and larger part of the lawn next to the street, which is not fenced in, but where the wooden stakes, or in this case their absence, are hard to see because of the growth. I have to make Ola aware of him, as he talks rather quietly in our general direction whereas she remains focused on our task, completely oblivious. She simply tells him to mow it and gets back to work immediately. (From field note Butterfly monitoring with Ola, 4th June 2020).

15 I will not further analyze the gender and age dynamics in this meeting, but let's say that a difference in approach and power regarding the way of handling things between a) middle-aged men in decision-making positions and b) a young female student with a clearly expressed urge for systematic change was hard to ignore.

positioned like fingers along a straight bar, it cuts the grass cleanly at a certain height and then simply leaves the green waste laying on the ground. This way, beings living in the grass are not shredded to death and can escape from the green waste before it is collected. It is therefore the friendliest mechanical way of mowing grass if you care about the survival of those living in it¹⁶.

Ola is someone who cares about this survival a lot. She kept coming back to the necessity of acquiring and using a scythe mower throughout the whole meeting and refused to give up. She had to in the end because that idea was squashed repeatedly by both the technical administration and the landscaping company.¹⁷ The latter did not own a scythe mower at that time, and the technical administration did not want to provide one for them because they feared insurance issues, as it would be unclear who would cover damages if the landscaping company used machines that it does not own itself¹⁸. Instead, the men of the technical administration said that owning and using a scythe mower, if so demanded, had to be included as a condition for re-hiring the landscaping company in a draft for a contract renewal, which will probably be up sometime next year¹⁹.

Another point of contention was how much each lawn's specific needs can be considered before mowing. If one asked Ola, every lawn would be mown according to its inhabitants' needs at that exact point in time, which not just means that one should check the lawn before planning to mow it and figure out what to mow and what to leave standing, but to monitor its development regularly to be able to mow at the right time. The technical administration is not necessarily against that, as it does not care how exactly the work is being done as long as that works with the contract and is not too expensive. The landscaping company is reluctant to do this as it contradicts the way they work: the contract states that they are paid per square meter worked on, not per hour of work, and they would have to be extremely flexible to mow when the lawns "dictate" instead of following their preplanned assignment schedule. Contractual conditions were seen as unclear on whether they would be paid the same as they would mow less area in more

16 The favored and non-mechanical method would be to let sheep graze on the lawns to keep their growth in check and, through their movement, keep the ground open for terrestrial insects.

17 A side note to this meeting: The company representative tried to appease Ola by repeatedly stating that the landscaping company wants to mow in a way that can meet her expectations as much as the company's need for reliability of planning affords them to. In turn, she doubled down again and again on her urgency regarding the scythe mower until Tim stepped in and asked her to leave it. The representative also stayed patient when the Blühender Campus and sustainability people, in a tone not meant to be condescending but still coming from somewhere up the ivory tower, questioned whether the landscaping company has employees who are educated on the special mowing and care procedures necessary to encourage and manage regional and seasonal biodiversity on the lawns. He answered, not wholly convincingly if you ask me, that the landscaping company already takes care of similar projects, thereby vaguely alluding to existing experience and competence.

18 In Ola's eyes and mine, a bit of a dubious argument, considering the low cost of such a machine for an institutional budget, even in case of any damage. More dubious even when including the fact that the head of the sustainability office's offer to fund it from that office's budget was discarded immediately.

19 spoiler warning in case you wondered: another positive change since last year is that a scythe mower was acquired by the landscaping company, but as of this writing Ola told me it is used only spottily.

time. On the one hand, mowing and caring for a lawn, the way Ola wants them to, requires many more steps and more attention to detail. On the other, they would leave big parts of, or even complete lawns untouched, which meant that the size of the area tended to, their unit of payment if exercised strictly, would actually shrink. If one shreds everything the old-fashioned modern way with a riding mower with rotating blades, a clear and regular schedule is much easier to organize and uphold, and a lot more area is worked on. The latter, not the specificity of care for single (patches of) lawns, is what they are, until now, contractually obligated to do.

These were the two main points of contestation, but the whole walk made visible the different logics of practice each party pursues. For Ola, the goal is a lawn that is hospitable to any nonhuman that adds to its biodiversity in a sustainable way, and any human that respects that and helps to foster it. The technical administration does not seem to have any ideals concerning lawn conditions motivating their work. Instead, they seem to want to secure cooperation, clear and efficient procedures, and the least amount of bureaucracy (work in general, it seems) possible, in short: administrative workability. For them, a lawn is firstly a workload to take care of, and a potential nuisance in case anybody complains to them about the lawns' unkemptness.²⁰ The landscaping company wants to be paid as expected. For them, a lawn is first and foremost a resource of economic security, although they also seem to be willing to accommodate extra wishes they can reasonably fulfil. Also of importance are numbers and specifications, as the technical administration, and the landscaping company by extension, want clear specifications on the length in weeks of mowing cycles and the width in meters of parts of lawns to be mown, or not.

Thus, the lawns as a matter of concern relate many different actors to each other. In a negotiation regarding which kind of lawn to realize as fact, these actors bring with them differing ideas of what a lawn should be like and different practices to act with and upon a lawn. Making it a space in which human-nonhuman shared living can flourish²¹ is then only one mode of many. And certain relations will continue to exist: the lawns will continue to be a bureaucratic task to manage, a labor and financial resource, and a contractual obligation. That is part of the complexity Latour asks us not to diminish: A shift towards claims made on public space for the benefit and flourishing of nonhuman life has to not just be negotiated against the habits and preferential uses of humans in relation to the lawns, but also to the established logics driving them. Logics that, up to now, make little space for the needs of nonhumans and the wellbeing they could provide to

20 Which, if you believe Ola, they seemed to anticipate much more anxiously than they could provide actual complaints as evidence to back that up – especially compared to the amount of positive feedback the project gets for the rewilded lawns.

21 Following Ginn et al., I understand flourishing “as an ethic which enshrines life’s emergence and the prospects or conditions for life’s emergence as the good to be upheld or nurtured.” (Ginn/Beisel/Barua 2014: 114). But I extend it to not mean not just life itself but also the emergence of relations with other beings as a practice of making a mutually inhabitable world together.

humans, focusing instead on work, time, and money. In these logics, a lawn, itself a complex composition of many different living beings, threatens to become merely a thing, a singular object to be handled and worked on, a representative of *Nature*, a unified whole separate from humans²².

To summarize briefly, at this point: For Latour it is important to take matters of concern and the controversies they evoke seriously in times of crises. In my case, the state and shape of these lawns is both a small crisis on a local level, as they are contested and bring concerned actors in opposition with each other. But it also refers to larger crises: What are sustainable environments for humans and nonhumans? Or - to put it more urgently - how can we prevent nonhuman animals from dying out on us, taking with them finely adjusted and fragile, but indispensable, ecosystems? In this case, small-scale activism is but a puzzle piece of a larger struggle. Latour would advise us that we, as modern humans, can either wait (however long) for more pure matters of fact to hopefully clear up the mess, or we can accept the uncertainty and disputability of matters of concern as a characteristic of crises that we must work with and negotiate to move towards that point of clarity. (Latour 2004: 62). What activist practice, such as by the Blühender Campus, points out is that there cannot just be a passive wait for the undisputed outcome of scientific discourse to tell us exactly what urban lawns should look like and hope that it is then smoothly inscribed in binding legislation. Science is not a perpetuum mobile powering itself and working in mysterious ways to solve the world's problems. To get to solutions, new things at issue, meaning matters of concern, must be related to, advocated for, negotiated, experimented with, and adjusted. As I pointed out, this is neither a smooth process nor one of radical change. Instead, it is one of transition, as campus green space continues to be enveloped by bureaucratic management, money, and other relations. What is at stake here is the extent to which the flourishing of nonhuman life and its place in a collective human-nonhuman existence can be realized alongside such concerns. It is a question of who (humans, plants, insects) or what (money, human habits, sustainable biodiversity) is to be prioritized in a shared space.

Nonhumans first

At the time of the meeting, nonhuman life, in the form of rewilded lawns, did not gain much ground in the ongoing negotiations regarding green space care on campus, which is something that understandably frustrated the Blühender Campus and its allies, Ola especially. To expand an argument I made above, the different logics of relating to lawns also imply different priorities regarding whom they are meant to be for. What Ola is

²² History has done its part to show how the ontological separation these logics imply, a nature functioning by clear rules, to be managed against social concerns such as finances, schedules, exploitation etc. was always only imagined anyway, and e.g., the discourse on how to work (together) against climate change shows how barriers between the factual and the social are bulldozed down: neither pure reason, as represented by models and data, nor (often not fully informed) negotiations of power between social institutions will be able to make any progress in finding solutions to contemporary earthly problems.

fighting against, at least in part, is a prioritization of humans over nonhumans. The logics of practice of both the technical administration and the landscaping company that prevailed up to this point, meaning ease of bureaucratic administrability and security of economic resources and work scheduling, prioritize the habits of and ease of use for humans. A lawn is in effect a space to be managed by humans, instead of a space for (biodiverse) life. Bureaucracy, efficiency, and money saved or earned mediate the relations the two acting entities have to a lawn as a matter of concern. Ola, instead, is concerned with a lawn as a space of potential conviviality, one that can be rewilded and made to be more hospitable to many different beings. For her, nonhumans come first, and from that stance results a different logic than saving time, money, and work in green space care. She demands that a lawn, as a complex structure of many living beings, must be cared for according to the seasonally, or even weekly, changing needs and preferences of the specific beings that make up its composition. One cannot plan exactly what a lawn might look like when left mostly untouched for days, weeks or even months. How to care for a lawn should be custom-tailored to it under consideration of its environmental conditions, and of its constitution and composition at *both* that exact moment in time *and* as it is imagined to be in the (not so) near future. This only works if the needs of the lawn are prioritized over purely human demands, such as low cost and effort, and clean scheduling.

This is but one example showing that Ola's thinking's starting point is often nonhuman needs, and only afterwards does she integrate more exclusively human habits and demands. Her wish is not that humans should have no access to the lawns, or that they should not be able to design them, at least in part, in a way that also serves their specific preferences of use – quite the opposite. But those preferences, in a balancing act, must be weighed against nonhumans needs and take a step back if necessary. She is asking for a newly composed public green space, and to think of it as a collective space for both humans and nonhumans. As urban space continues to be dominated by structures often serving human demands instead of nonhuman needs, in ways both conceptually exclusive and, consequently, physically exclusionary, lawns such as the ones on campus become opportunities to balance out diverse needs and demands and to create hospitable spaces primarily for nonhuman life but also ones which humans can, to their own benefit, respectfully co-exist. By softening human influences detrimental to ecosystems and the climate and encouraging (the experience of) nourishing contributions instead, they also enable us to live on as part of a sustainable, multispecies collective.

The path to get there has proven to be stony, and there were examples for this balancing act with different levels of success. In some cases, Ola's wishes were accommodated as they seemed to not interfere with the logics of the other two parties' relations to the lawns, or did so only slightly. The implications of the "fence" Ola and I built with small wooden stakes is easy enough to follow, as it just partitions a lawn into two parts and indicates one part to mow, one part to leave untouched. We also paid for it from funds given not by the technical administration but the sustainability office. Getting the landscaping company to alternate mowing between these two parts did not always work, as the demarcations

went occasionally ignored, or forgotten, and parts were mown that should have been left untouched, and vice versa.²³ But apart from bouts of confusion (referenced on page 26), this practice mostly succeeded.

According to Ola, an example for a successful balancing act of nonhuman needs and human demands, while prioritizing nonhumans, is the mowing of walkable footpaths through high-grown lawns; or mowing parts of them to make them accessible for use for events such as biology workshops for school children or for activities during the long night of the sciences in Berlin. That way, they could be turned into an adventurous playground, as they were made more physically accessible but still full of different forms of life to discover and learn about. In these cases, Ola's active involvement, her voicing of alternative ways of composing the lawns for many needs and demands at once, became physical reality.

My next step is to follow this act of voicing. For nonhumans to be present in collective negotiations, their speech has to be heard. Let us turn now to an examination of the different ways the Blühender Campus is representing nonhumans by speaking about and for them and how that relates to knowledge production and different forms and levels of scientific and/or public expertise.

How to be (which kind of) a spokesperson

To follow Latour more closely, we might ask *how we, as humans, can represent associations involving non-humans responsibly to collectively compose a good common world*. Or to de-jargonize this a bit, when do we need to put nonhumans (meaning not just animals, but also things, processes, ideas etc.) first? Because, even though Latour advocates for more democratic relations between humans and non-humans, the procedure he imagines is a human-led space of democratic negotiation in which certain human "experts" earn the right to represent nonhumans²⁴. To describe the width of representation between "I'm speaking on behalf of those I represent" and "I'm just stating facts that speak for themselves", Latour establishes the term *spokesperson* to be able to encompass the possibility of being positioned anywhere on that spectrum, but being a representative in all cases. The term simply means a person speaking in representation of another and helping to distribute that act of speaking across the collective. Latour believes there is no true democracy unless nonhumans get to speak too, with all the uncertainty and fallibility

²³ A complementary anecdote: Early on, these stakes were even repeatedly vandalized. They often appeared to have been kicked at or ripped out. The stakes were not the only victims. A janitor of one of the university buildings adjacent to the large lawns built a small, low wooden fence around a small dip in the ground that was meant to become a safe place for butterflies to hibernate in winter. Last summer, that fence was kicked in, stomped on and destroyed several times. Ola always assumed it was the local youth who did this, who she thought to be, in theory, wealthy, bored and, at that time, in lockdown. She joked that we should install a camera and declare it as a tool to document wild animal activity. Which animal's activity it was supposed to film she wouldn't say, accompanied by a wink. You make of that what you will.

²⁴ He states that "it will still be necessary to represent the associations of humans and nonhumans through an explicit procedure, in order to decide what collects them and what unifies them in one future common world." (Latour 2004: 41).

that implies²⁵ (Latour 2004: 69). They can be represented by a spokesperson, or several spokespeople. That can mean everything from more abstract practices such as an animal rights activist speaking out for an ethical need to promote animal rights, to a biologist referencing a graph she made representing a loss in number of different species, to a beekeeper who is personally affected and states with urgency how the negative effects of industrial agriculture and changing environmental conditions can be seen and felt in her daily life, to an energy lobbyist stating the necessity of growing more soy to generate “organic” fuel.

As indicated in these examples, the practical realities of being a spokesperson in the field are not without ambivalence. The following quotes and notes from my research shall illustrate that there are often contradictions and oppositions not just between different spokespeople but also within one spokesperson with a seemingly clear imagination of what she wants to achieve. Ola, even though she prioritizes nonhumans on the lawns, does not advocate for all of them indiscriminately or with the same intentness. Once, I asked her during an interview whether, apart from insect and spider hospitality, her goal would also be to maximize biodiversity in the composition of plant species on the lawns. She replied:

“Sure, that’d be good too- But it’s more complicated to get there. If we’d do it the way the Botanic Garden thinks is ideal, we’d have to remove all of the growth, impoverish the soil, sow a new mix of seeds. Then all that has to be rolled, watered, documented. And we can’t do that. But if you’d do that it would also be interesting for animal species of course. An upgrade, so to speak. (Interview with Ola, translated by the author²⁶, 25.05.2020).

Although both her and the experts of the botanic garden are to be considered spokespeople for the interests of nonhumans, regarding these lawns their imagined ideals are different. They have in common that, unlike the technical administration, their primary goal is to nourish life, but they would use different entry points to approach the lawn as a matter of concern regarding which beings and relations they prioritize. For the Botanic Garden, it would be a more diverse and regionally appropriate composition of plant species. Ola thinks that would “be good too” but is too much work. The advantages of a surplus of diverse flora are clear to her, but viewing it from her practical experience, she deems its

²⁵ “Democracy can only be conceived if it can freely traverse the now dismantled border between science and politics, in order to add a series of new voices to the discussion, voices that have been inaudible up to now, although their clamor pretended to override all debate: *the voices of nonhumans*. [emphasis by the author] [...] To use the notion of discussion while limiting it to humans alone, without noticing that there are millions of subtle mechanisms capable of adding new voices to the chorus, would be to allow prejudice to deprive us of the formidable power of the sciences (Latour 2004: 69).

²⁶ Original quote in German: “Na doch, das ist schon gut- Das ist halt komplizierter da hinzukommen. Also wenn wir das so machen würden wie der botanische Garten es sich z.B. als Ideal vorstellt, müssen wir die ganze Fläche abtragen, das Abmagern, dann ne ganz neue Saatgutmischung ausbringen. Das muss dann alles angewalzt, gewässert, dokumentiert werden. Und das können wir nicht machen. Aber wenn man das machen würde, wäre das natürlich auch für die Tierarten interessant. Sozusagen noch ein Level weiter darüber.“

implementation too effortful. It may be “interesting for animal species”, but maximizing plant diversity is not a necessary condition for their flourishing. Plants, though obviously important, are less of a focus in her work than animals.

But as I imagine Latour would insist quite intently, it is more complicated than that. One of the wanted outcomes of not interfering with the lawns too much is, to quote Ola, that

“new biocenosis can develop. Meaning new biotic communities, or new constellations of beings. Including species that conventional nature conservation would deem disruptive or something like that. Obviously, it is important that these systems function as autonomously as possible. Which doesn't mean that you wouldn't enhance it occasionally. That is a balancing act, and I'm not an expert in that regard. But because of that I'm happy that, when I walk across the lawns with someone from the Botanic Garden, they tell me “This soil is this way or that”, and “that would be appropriate for it”, and “these plants concentrate too much nitrogen, and could you maybe watch out for those”. You see, I'm not an expert for this stuff.” (Interview with Ola, translated by the author²⁷, 25.05.2020).

This shows a negotiation process regarding what kind of scientific expertise, and from whom, finds its way into action, and thus into Ola's practices for creating a space for a co-productive shared existence. She is the person most involved in speaking for insect and spidery nonhumans on campus green spaces, and also, at that time, the one most engaged in action. But while knowing that she cannot address all concerns regarding plant composition on the lawns, and that “renovating” it (literally!) from the ground up is both unrealistic and not a necessary condition to enrich the biodiversity of insect and spider species, she is still thankful for any botanical expertise coming her way that she lacks. She might speak primarily for insects, but to be able to do so, it helps to also involve those who speak primarily for plants, because botanical knowledge about soil and nutrient composition is valuable to her plan of fostering insect existence and diversity. Other people act as spokespeople for plants more elaborately, and therefore to them she turns.

For Ola, different forms of expertise have to be combined in the right way. At the same time, she states that one does not have to be as rigid as “conventional nature conservation” would be in deeming some beings strictly disruptive. One should also be open towards what an ecosystem, even one as small as a lawn, comes up with by itself. This openness further complicates things, but also opens up potential.

What becomes visible here is the trickiness for Ola as a spokesperson in balancing her need to act with the question of which ideas and areas of expertise are not just

²⁷ Original quote in German: „Neue Biozönosen entstehen. Also neue Artzusammensetzungen oder neue Konstellationen von Zusammenleben- auch von Arten, die vllt eigentlich im klassischen Naturschutz als störend oder so gesehen werden. Weil es natürlich wichtig ist, dass diese Systeme soweit es geht sich selbst überlassen funktionieren. Was nicht heißt, dass man sie nicht manchmal irgendwie aufwerten würde oder so. Das ist halt so ein bisschen so ne- so ne Balance. Und in bin halt in der Hinsicht überhaupt keine Expertin. Also deswegen bin ich froh, wenn ich mal da mit Leuten vom Botanischen Garten lang gehe und die sagen der Boden ist so und so, und dass wär eigentlich gut geeignet dafür, und diese Pflanzen reichern zu sehr Stickstoff an und vllt könnt ihr die ein bisschen- Deswegen- Da bin ich jetzt nicht die Expertin für.“

productive, but necessary, and, perhaps most importantly, realistic to implement. It comes down to what is useful for the ultimate goal, and actionable.

Lacking or conflicting expertise

This poses questions regarding which scientific (in this case most often biological) knowledge is necessary or, on the contrary, a hindrance to enabling a biodiverse and sustainably composed lawn. Addressing the fact that neighbors living on or around campus asked about joining in the “rewilding”-action in their own yards, Ola first approves, but then backpedals:

“The most important thing to do would be to lift certain restrictions, because there are a lot of requests from people living around campus who would love to do something like this in their own yards. To let these people do more and not dictate everywhere how things have to be exactly. But then there’s the problem that things are often being done the wrong way. Meaning that some people sow a wildflower seed mix from DM or Lidl that contains non-native species. Ok, I take it back, we don’t want everyone to do it on their own. I’ll start over.” (Interview with Ola, translated by the author²⁸, 25.05.2020).

Though she is in favor of lifting certain restrictions of how “wild” private lawns are allowed to be (in the university’s neighborhood they are often public facing), there are wrong ways to compose them. A lawn is a composition of many different species, and some of them are unwanted. It is not free growth for all. One has to know about local ecology to distinguish species that contribute to biodiversity from those detrimental to it, be it insect pests, poisonous plants, or ones so dominant that they eliminate others. A lack of that knowledge leads people to make a home for the wrong kind of beings, those not in tune with local ecosystems and therefore not to be accepted into a human-nonhuman collective²⁹.

Whereas before I talked about balancing a need to act with the question of which expertise is needed, here there is an ambivalence towards the combination of an urge to act with a lack of knowledge deemed necessary. It is not the only time a lack of knowledge is pointed out by someone. One Saturday morning per month during summer 2020, Ola and Tim offered a publicly accessible guided tour across the project’s lawns. Depending on

²⁸ Original quote in German: „Also das schöne ist- Das Wichtigste, was man machen müsste, wäre bestimmte Restriktionen lockern, weil es gibt ganz viele Anfragen von Bewohnern- oder Anliegern von Häusern die gerne bei sich irgendwas machen wollen würden. Das man einfach die Leute mehr machen lässt und nicht überall vorschreibt, wie es zu sein hat. Dann ist aber wieder das Problem, dass oft die Sachen falsch gemacht werden. Also dass manche eine Blühwiese aussähen und dann die Lidl-Mischung, oder DM-Mischung nehmen mit nicht-heimischen Pflanzen. Ok, ich zieh das zurück, das wollen wir nicht, dass Leute alle selber was machen, ich fang noch mal von vorne an.“

²⁹ One reader commented that this might pose the question of “how to avoid being the AfD for biodiversity”, of policing which life is worthy of being in- or excluded from a community. That is indeed a point not everybody agrees on. But I think there is a difference here between being selective in service of maximizing a harmonious biodiversity is different from harshly defining a definite list of unwanted species (though that is also not out of the question).

the month's topic (it could be bees, or spiders, or herbs) they were occasionally joined by an expert. The dates and themes of the walking tours were announced before, online and in a few local magazines. I took part in one of those tours, where we were joined by an older biologist (I would say in her early or mid-60s) and a colleague of Ola's who brought his prepubescent son along. The biologist mentioned that she studied biology on this campus decades ago, asking Ola about the conditions today. At some point the conversation turned to the state of nature conservation today. From my field notes:

"They talk about the problem that people don't or stopped paying attention to nonhuman life around them, and that there are less and less naturalists trained today, regarding both all-rounders and experts for specific species groups. The older biologist thinks it's especially telling that it took a group of dedicated hobbyists to put into facts what people have been seeing and discussing for decades, obviously referring to the Krefeld study." (on the loss of insect biomass in the last 25 years, as quoted on p.8) (Field note, Guided Tour across the lawns, 4th September 2020).

Tim, Ola, her colleague, and the biologist all agreed that, apart from a lack of naturalist knowledge in today's general population there is also a lack of experts specializing in smaller (regional) groups of species, or regional ecologies. They attest to an urgent need for a more thorough distribution of naturalist knowledge, be it general or very specialized. Not just animals are disappearing, but also, in our Western science-driven society, the humans that know them most intimately³⁰. The importance of these humans being spokespeople for nonhumans and representing their existence and needs is underlined here, again. Implicit in the biologist's statement is also a critique of hierarchical structures in knowledge production. "People" have been noting insect disappearance for decades, and in the end, it took the minute work of "dedicated hobbyists" to make the public aware of it. In this case, the (professional) scientists there are did not serve well enough as nonhumans' spokespeople. It is a call not just to be attentive, but also to make yourself noticed.

But apart from a scientist not being enough of a spokesperson, they can also be one of the wrong kind, as not all scientific knowledge regarding (urban) biodiversity is equally welcome. Sometimes, it is deemed far less useful and necessary than practical experience. During our first interview, I asked Ola about her PhD thesis set in the field of theoretical ecology, of which I knew that its emphasis on theory does not always delight her. Referring to said field, Ola questioned which knowledge qualifies one for properly taking care of biodiversity management, or to at least have a say in how it's done. She said:

"I think that sometimes scientists, ecologists specifically, tend to overestimate themselves and the importance of their research. Meaning that every paper about urban biotic

³⁰ Without being able to delve into this more deeply, on a side note: In these kind of conversations in my field, time becomes convoluted. There is a tendency to eulogize what has been, to estimate where we went wrong, what we are now lacking, and an often troubling and worried outlook on a, as of yet, undefined future. The lawns are supposed to be able to live in the now, but the concerned biologist is afforded no such luxury.

homogenization and beta-diversity starts with something like “We have to understand how this homogenization happens” or “We must do research on this to be able to do nature conservation in cities”, but in my opinion this is utter nonsense. Everyone with a basic idea of landscape protection knows how to do it much better than any theoretical ecologist! To promote biodiversity in cities you need a different skill set than being able to understand patterns of beta-diversity. And that’s why I concern myself more with practical things at the moment. Because those are the skills I think I actually need to achieve what I want.” (Interview with Ola, translated by the author³¹, 25.05.2020).

Though she would probably not deny the theoretical ecologists’ will to do good, but she distances herself from being too caught up in one’s research to see what is actually necessary. She questions the value of applying to practice abstract knowledge that mainly thinks in large scale patterns and is too removed from the practical realities of urban ecology, at least viewed from her platform of scientifically informed activism. Instead, she renews her plea for the importance of practical knowledge and experience on the ground.

Another case in which the Blühender Campus sees a scientific community as having the wrong priorities, and a recurring and controversial topic, turned out to be university politics regarding climate change and action. In one of the Blühender Campus’s group meetings people complained that although climate protection is at the top of the university’s leadership’s political agenda, their version does not sufficiently include biodiversity as a conjoined necessity. Instead, it often demotes it to be a less important contributor to fight climate change, even though an increase in biodiversity contributes substantially to reduced emissions and improved ecological footprints. Ola, as is her style, came up with an idea: To plant and grow a tiny forest on some of the lawns, a collection of different native tree species through which small paths are cleared, so that it can be used as a space to discover and experience urban nature. As always, Ola’s mind is faster than any university administration. But this idea is another representation of her imagination and will to grow a multispecies collective on campus, and to intensify relations between humans and nonhumans. This fits a recurring motif: Ola proposes something that sounds ridiculous at first, even though it makes a lot of sense once you take a moment to process it. Why not have a small forest between university buildings? Why not, as she would also love to implement, hire a shepherd to let sheep graze on the lawns, as a more balanced way of managing the lawns’ growth and composition? Why not include sheep as another meaningfully concerned party, one that loves to manage your lawn by munching it? From

³¹ Original quote in German: „Ich find, dass Wissenschaftler sich manchmal, grad Ökologen, sich so ein bisschen darin überschätzen, wie wichtig ihre Forschung ist. Also jedes Paper zu Urban Biotic Homogenization und äh Beta-Diversität fängt damit an Wir müssen verstehen wie diese Homogenization stattfindet oder- wir müssen das erforschen um Naturschutz in Städten machen zu können, aber das ist meiner Meinung nach vollkommener Blödsinn. Also jeder, der ein bisschen Verständnis für Landschaftsschutz hat kann das besser als ein theoretischer Ökologe! Man braucht halt einfach andere Kompetenzen um Artenvielfalt in Städten zu fördern als irgendwelche Beta-Diversitätsmuster zu verstehen. Und deswegen beschäftige ich mich gerade eher mit den praktischeren Dingen. Weil das die Kompetenzen sind, die ich, glaub ich, eigentlich brauche für das, was ich erreichen will.“

the vantage point of being used to cut a lawn accurately short, these ideas might seem strange and lofty, and they might be deemed unnecessarily disconnected from the reality of the project's progress at that moment. But they point towards an ideal I already identified as running through all the work the project does: it decenters humans' proprietary claim on campus green space.

As we've seen it is hard trying to be a good spokesperson for nonhumans. Following Ola's struggles, I pointed out that, whether you prefer insects or plants, free growth for all or managed entry for certain species only, whether you or society lacks the necessary knowledge, or someone unreasonably thinks their knowledge is urgently necessary – the complications abound. No one said that making a good common world for the collective would be easy. But what is not lacking, at least in most of the cases of spokespeople acting and advocating for nonhumans that Ola talked about, is the will to do good, and an emotional attachment to nonhuman others. *Why do people care for these lawns so much?*

Acknowledging feelings on lawns

Though a need to decenter and deprioritize humans in favor of nonhuman claims on campus green space is generally acknowledged, also by the technical administration and the landscaping company, how to do so only gets more complicated when it comes to the question of whether, and in what way, the lawns are also still to be for uses prioritizing humans. Continuing the quote above in which Ola speaks on the difficulty of not being able to foster plant biodiversity as much as that of animal species and prioritizing the latter, she goes on to say:

“But I'd say that's in no way an either/or situation. Including either humans or nature. Because my first answer would've been that we're doing it for the animals there. And by that I do not only mean insects, but simply that, when you listen closely to such a lawn you can hear how it sounds. And everywhere there are snails sticking to plants, and there are spider nests- the way it should be. Just like, e.g., an elderly man I met two days ago next to one of our signs. He looked at it and said that he felt reminded of his childhood, and that these were the kind of lawns that you rarely ever see anymore. And because of that it is certainly also good for humans. Though my innermost impulse is to do it for the animals. But the longer I do this, the more I think that this is also really important and beautiful for humans, too.” (Interview with Ola, translated by the author³², 25.05.2020).

³² Original quote in German: “Aber deswegen würd ich auf keinen Fall sagen dass das ein Entweder/Oder ist, in keiner Hinsicht. Auch nicht Natur oder Menschen, weil meine erste Antwort wäre gewesen Wir machen das auf jeden Fall für die Lebewesen, die da sind. Und damit mein ich jetzt nicht nur Insekten, sondern einfach dass wenn man in so ne Wiese reinguckt hört, wie es sich anhört und da kleben überall Schnecken und es gibt Spinnennester- So wie es sein muss. So wie z.B. der- so ein älterer Herr, den ich vor zwei Tagen da getroffen hab an so nem Schild und der dann da rauf geguckt hat und gesagt hat er fühlt sich an seine Kindheit erinnert und es sind halt Flächen- jetzt kommt ich zu der anderen Seite- die man ganz selten nur noch überhaupt so sieht, und deswegen ist das dann natürlich auch was wovon wiederum Menschen- also deswegen ist das auch für Menschen- Wobei bei natürlich der innerste Impuls so für die Lebewesen ist. Aber je länger ich das mache, desto mehr finde ich auch, dass das wirklich wichtig ist, oder schön auch, für die Menschen.“

This is an interesting statement because Ola changes her position several times and complicates her prioritization of nonhuman animals. These twists point to an ambivalence in trying to create a space for all. She states that though her first answer would have been that they're "doing it for the animals", she now finds that there is no "either/or situation" regarding who gets to be on the lawn and whom it is for. Interestingly, she elaborates on "animals" not by listing species or focusing on some, but by connecting it to atmospheric qualities, to sounds and images. A rewilded lawn or meadow needs insects that make sounds, the sight of "snails sticking to plants", and spider nests. It needs to be buzzing with life that you can hear and see. That's "the way it should be". To a spokesperson's scientific repertoire of speaking for nonhumans (data, graphs, images) she adds tools that I did not encounter while reading Latour, but whose importance became obvious: affection and emotional attachment.

This continues in the second part of the quote where she tells her anecdote regarding a man she met next to one of the Blühender Campus information boards, who told her that one of the lawns, in its "wilder" state, reminded him of his childhood and made him aware how rare this type of urban lawn actually is nowadays. Ola doesn't mention whether he continued to say more about the emotional state this put him in, but she rather strongly implies nostalgia and well-being by going on to say that statements like these are why she knows it is "really important and beautiful and for humans too", and that enabling these lawns is subsequently a goal worth pursuing. You can feel that in this quote, but it is even more present in the one that opens this chapter, where she explains why "a meadow waking up in summer is a wonderful thing", and how good it feels to be in the midst of that. The abundance of life and biodiversity is not just good viewed through the lens of more abstract knowledge about how to create a more sustainable living environment and the advantages of biodiversity for climate protection. Knowing you're doing good that way also *feels* good, and that good feeling is further enhanced by the beautiful aesthetics of a rewilded lawn busy with life in many different forms, by knowing one is connected to all that buzzing life in a shared physical experience³³.

These qualities of human-nonhuman relations are, in my eyes, sorely missing in *The Politics of Nature*. Latour is writing against an ontological separation of multiple human cultures and a singular unified nature. He mainly focuses on the opposition between

³³ As has been rightfully pointed out to me, it seems that none of the irritation insects can cause is acknowledged in our recultivation of or nostalgia for them. A romanticization of the feeling of being in "buzzy" nature seems to ignore that many insects can be really irritating or outright harmful to be around. But I don't think these irritations are ignored completely, just as I don't think that all insects are afforded the same admiration. Mosquitos, while maybe understood as a necessary ingredient of biodiverse environments, are still thought to be annoying and deployable in direct encounters. Knowing about the necessity of insect life for functioning ecosystems and feeling anxious about their disappearance doesn't contradict moments of irritation and rejection or even danger (malaria transmission etc.). I just think these ambivalences are rarely explicitly mentioned in the face of what is perceived as a crisis with threatening implications.

subjective, value-driven politics and objective factual Science, and he points his attention to a transparent and appropriately complex scientific practice as a means to overcome this separation. That, in my eyes, also constitutes a problem, as it often seems that he puts a “proper” scientific practice on a pedestal as seemingly the sole missing link in our dysfunctional treatment of, and relationship with, nonhumans. I believe there is a bit of tunnel vision in his singular focus on science being the solution, or at least the main tool to be used in a different political procedure. It’s not that the Blühender Campus is not doing that, but they are also going a step further. Making the ambivalences and contradictions in the process of scientific research transparent is one thing, and communicating its meaning for human life in a more-than-human world is another. But taking emotions and affectivity in relations to nonhuman worlds seriously is another necessary quality, and one that Latour rarely ever talks about.

Case in point, Latour says that “[h]alf of public life is found in laboratories; that is where we have to look for it.” (Latour 2004: 69). Though this makes sense following his argument that humans are at the center of building new democratic institutions for a collective world-making, I would disagree with his statement that the invisible half of public life is to be found in laboratories only. It seems strange to me to reduce that missing half solely to an enclosed space clearly marked as “scientific”. As we saw earlier, not all necessary scientific research takes places in labs, or in institutions labeled as academic. Going further, I would argue that public life can also be found outside in the world – where people are, or where they are not. It can be found in a hedge, in the grass, under the shade of a tree, or in a patch of dirt. It should not just encompass a public space that revolves around human activity and control, such as a lab³⁴. A negotiation of sharing space and living together also happens outside of humans’ attention, and often humans engage and negotiate living with nonhumans not primarily in a rational, but also an emotional way. It is valid to argue that a lot of what is done by the Blühender Campus is, directly or indirectly, linked to “proper” scientific research. But that would be missing the point of what strongly drives the activism, what makes the people involved passionate about engaging in more-than-human matters, what makes them crouch down and put their faces in the grass. Curiosity is one force, and affection is another.

My occasional frustration with Latour’s science-focused line of argument, combined with the practices and ideals in action I observed during my field work, made me keenly aware of that. Public life is also to be found where most humans do not (yet) listen, do not (yet) believe anyone is speaking. In Latour’s sense, you’d say that, if nobody chose to speak for a being until now, it is also not yet part of a collective public, because there is no spokesperson to represent it and it cannot be heard yet. I would say that the absence of humans, or broad human interest, does not make that life less public, but rather prevents whatever it already speaks from being heard, and thus it from being a recognizable (and

34 To be less strict on Latour, we could surely say that a patch of lawn, if monitored for research on changes in biodiversity, also counts as a lab – or at least an experimental setting adjacent to it. But that doesn’t change the argument in regard to all that happens on the far more numerous patches of lawn (or other comparable spaces) which are not monitored.

recognized) political actor. But this is where projects such as the Blühender Campus come into play. In the midst of a university, an institution that is not expressively political in function, but a place where political and scientific debates are meant to be valued and held up to high standards, there are spaces and pockets of public life and speech that simply went ignored for a long time. By relating to them in new and/or different ways, and speaking for and with them, the project collects these spaces into public democratic life and makes them part of a negotiation of how we should live responsibly with nonhumans, and with each other as humans – if anyone is supposed to be able to thrive at all, in the long run.

Being in this world together, revisited

At the beginning of this chapter, I posed the question “What mode of human-nonhuman co-existence is sought after, and realized through practice, by the Blühender Campus?” As it turns out, this is not one, but two questions with very different answers. The way I phrased it, it proposes there is one mode of how things are intended to be, and that how they are *intended* to be is by extension then also what they are *made* to be. If this sounds convoluted, it is probably not less convoluted than the reality of trying to create a rewilded lawn in a highly managed urban institutional space. With the help of Latour’s input from *The Politics of Nature* I was able to figure out that things are more complex than my question implied.

First, campus green space, especially in the form of large lawns, might be defined as a matter of concern central to negotiations between a whole range of actors, but it is not just the case that they are concerned with it in different ways. How they contribute to its making is also based on sometimes wildly different logics. Whereas the university’s technical administration office aims for low-effort and low-cost bureaucratic procedures, its contracted landscaping company aims for stable work schedules and economic security. Both center humans, and human demands and preferences, in their ways of associating with the lawns. The Blühender Campus, and Ola especially, center nonhumans. Their logic of practice seeks to foster nonhuman life, and by fighting to rewild the lawns, by being spokespeople for nonhumans and staking claims on space for them, they try to reshape how humans and nonhumans share their existence in public green space. With Latour, I understand the Blühender Campus’s actions to support a vision of a more democratic living together, in which urban space is distributed more equally between humans and nonhumans, while acknowledging that, in the end, we’re all in this together. Humans and nonhumans should live together as a sustainable collective and humans need to acknowledge their manyfold relations and dependencies with other beings. It is now humans’ responsibility to build a basis and enable such a collective living.

In practice, this is a scientific and activist process not free of ambivalence. It is not easy being a spokesperson for nonhumans, for more biodiverse lawns on campus. There are lingering questions of when to prioritize whose access to a space, who gets to speak for

whom and taken seriously when they do so, and which kind of knowledge is useful, lacking or even a hindrance in creating a sustainably livable collective urban green space.

Furthermore, it is important not to forget that interacting with nonhumans is not just a rational, but also an emotional affair. What I found out personally throughout my time in the field, but also a point that Ola made over and over, is the importance of the experience of being intimately and sensually engaged with nonhumans, of perceiving oneself as an interconnected and contributing part of a more-than-human world. It motivates people to act for the well-being of other beings, to be in the world and seek out the feeling of being part of a sensual experience both complex and immediate.

5. A grassy ballad of life and death

As an intermission before moving on to complicated discussions of weighty terms such as wildness, domestication and home, I want us to follow a sad little field incident to a short but stimulating digression that is the practice of gardening as a matter of life and death. In her article “From Edenic Apocalypse to Gardens against Eden” (2019), Natasha Myers asks what actually defines a garden or the practice of gardening, how gardens serve as cultural expressions, and interrogates different types of gardens in the Anthropocene. She connects that to a critique of that epoch’s fixation on apocalyptic doom and, in line with Ola arguing for the importance of humans experiencing themselves as a positive influence on their environment, the homogenization of human agency to one that is simply perceived as destructive, above all.

Myers recounts discovering Viennese artist Lois Weinberger’s artwork “Garden. A Poetic Fieldwork”, for which he placed a metal cage on an institutional lawn in front of a university building in Innsbruck, Austria. This cage was open to the wind; to seeds, small beings or things flying in (e.g., trash), but the bars were too close to each other to provide access to humans. With no human to stop it, over time, life started to explode inside the cage and overflowed, with plants reaching out through the bars like rebellious prisoners. Myers contrasts Weinberger’s subversive garden art with Singapore’s Gardens by the Bay, a massive educational and conservational enterprise, a kind of hybrid between a Botanic Garden and mass entertainment. In large domes made of glass and metal, high growing forests stand in for European flora and vertical gardens simulate that of different mountainous landscapes. Meanwhile, Myers recounts how she observed workers constantly pluck out dead or decaying plants, or plant new ones to practically maintain a spotless ideal of ever blossoming life. Plants and climatic environments from all over the world are exhibited and maintained through a very capitalist use of resources such as water, electricity or cheap migrant labor. Through these examples, she contrasts gardens as technological fixes, as efforts to conserve the aesthetics of an exploitative world, with gardens that let grow what wants to grow.

Regarding Weinberger’s cages, Myers comments that “this selectively porous infrastructure creates an affordance, or a clearing, in which other forms of life might take root.” (Myers 2019: 140). In many ways, this quote, and Myers’s discussion in general, reminded me of aspects of my field work. Even though I don’t recall anyone ever calling the lawns on campus “gardens”, what they represent and how people interact with them does, to me, not feel substantially different from what Myers provisionally defines as gardens, “as sites where people *stage their relationships with plants*.” (Myers 2019: 116). This is something very much happening in my field, though in my case, staging relationships with animals living in, on and around these plants becomes even more important – an aspect that finds surprisingly little screen time in Myers’s article. Obviously there is the more direct connection of Weinberger’s work with that of the Blühender Campus, of letting something wild and uninhibited grow in formerly rather strictly ordered spaces,

such as a manicured lawn on a university campus. There is also the connection between the cage and the lawnmower-adverse stake fence being porous boundary structures. Though of course Weinberger's cages are much more successful at keeping out human interference, which, in turn, is not the Blühender Campus's ideal of how humans should be able to interact with "their" green spaces.

But what stood out to me here was something else: The question of what gets to live and what is to die, and how visible these processes are (allowed to be). About Weinberger's gardens, Myers writes that in his "minimalist interventions" (Myers 2019, 139), plants themselves get the chance to stage their own growth, grow their own garden if you will, one in which there is space for both growth and decay, life and death. In Singapore's Gardens by the Bay, death and decay are, instead, made invisible through constant gardening work that seeks to reestablish an ideal of perfection and an everlasting purity of life in botanical technicolor. This reminded me of how during late spring 2020, one of the biggest lawns on campus died a sad death after being razed down completely by the landscaping company (see figure 6 and 7). This was done in disregard of agreements made with the Blühender Campus before to not do that. As I wrote in my field notes:

"Ola complained earlier that the workers of the landscaping company managed to mow everything they shouldn't have (at least not before the new sickle bar mower arrives), while ignoring the edge of the main lawn they were explicitly supposed to mow. I will see it with my own eyes later, as we walk across the lawns around the canteen, which are all cut down completely and now look brown, arid, and sad. Later, during our monitoring session, Ola calls this part the "Todestransekt" (transect of death)." (Field note Butterfly monitoring with Ola, 4th June 2020)



Figure 6 One of the large lawns before being mown



Figure 7 The same lawn (which Ola now calls “transect of death”) after being mown, 10 days later

After such a radical mowing, and with no follow through in the form of extensive and resource-intensive watering, the lawn was doomed to dry out and die without much of a fight: where there is barely any life left, nor dead biomass to decay, new life has a hard time sprouting and buzzing.

The formerly prevailing system of order, of cutting lawns short and keeping them trim and representative (of what even exactly? neatness?), crumbles once its conditions change and time-tested normality is undermined. These conditions do not necessarily need to include the emergence of a rebellious group of insect and weed lovers. It can also be an unusual period of consecutive summers of drought in Central Europe. Meanwhile, the work and intensive use of resources that has to go into maintaining a green manicured lawn against all odds, using up lots of water to keep that zombie of a lawn alive, is not feasible. Thus, it became a highly visible mummy of an ecosystem. I found it not entirely surprising, but still fascinating to see that the unmown lawn across the street, though a bit dry and spotty, looked very much alive, with plants growing high and insects buzzing about. Whereas the logic of practice of Gardens by the Bay is to prop up an ideal of overflowing green space and maintain its perfect shape through wealth and cheap labor, that is hard to imagine for the case of these campus lawns. Their regular order and shape died a quiet death once they were sufficiently disturbed by external factors. With no one willing to invest the time and resources needed to save it, that desertified lawn became what Anna Tsing would certainly call a ruin (which I will elaborate on soon) – a symbol for the destructivity and inflexibility of human capitalist business as usual.

But now it's time to move away from the question of how to establish a more-than-human collective, or how lawns live and die, to a, at first glance, very different approach to multispecies relations. I want to take you on a safari to explore the idea of wildness itself.

6. The frontier is where your heart is: Being wild together and making multispecies homes

Our safari begins with the question of the relevance of two terms that have served not just to understand, but also form human relations to nonhumans: wildness and domestication. I find these two fascinating because they're often used as concepts to explain and sort all kinds of relations with nonhumans, and to negotiate their proximity or distance, intimacy or difference, familiarity or strangeness. First, I will discuss the confusing variety of definitions and uses of different terms containing "wild", such as wilderness, wildness, and wildlife. With the help of Jamie Lorimer and Ola I want to find a different approach to what it might mean to not just be human among wildness, but to be wild *with* nonhuman others. I will follow that up with a discussion of domestication, wildness's well-behaved sibling. With the help of Anna Tsing's critique of the term domestication, I want to interrogate its usefulness for understanding what's happening on the lawns. Bringing her notion of *domestication-as-rewilding* (Tsing 2018: 247) into dialogue with my field research, we will see that wildness and domestication make for a binary whose ends overlap, and that wildness and domestication are inextricably linked.

This insight leads me to a term that is associated closely with domestication and will accompany us throughout the second part of this chapter: home. As a space of shelter to fulfil one's needs and to flourish in, home is a space that is more than just inhabitable. I will point out how both the Blühender Campus's and nonhumans' activities not just make the lawns inhabitable, but also hospitable and comfortable.

Practices of both human control and ordering *and* more-than-human agency play a role in making rewilded lawns more hospitable spaces and help turn them into multispecies homes, which are both wild *and* domesticated. Reflecting Latour's demand to build multispecies democratic publics, my goal is not to negate species difference (both in terms of power and needs or demands), but to question its power as a driving force of narratives of how we (don't) relate to nonhumans, and explore alternative ways of relating and living together sustainably.

I will conclude this chapter with a tour of actual multispecies real estate. Assisted by Tim Ingold's concept of dwelling and more-than-human homemaking, I will look at examples from the field to identify two types of building activities: one in which humans and nonhumans together create structures that enable nonhuman life to flourish, and one in which humans build structures meant to protect this flourishing against others' (mainly humans') harmful behavior. This exploration demonstrates the importance of both acknowledging nonhuman contributions to making a shared world and of human action to protect shared worlds against harm.

This chapter goes through a few more twists and turns than the one before. But these twists serve to point out the work that goes into changing both the narratives and materialities of how humans relate to nonhuman worlds. The work of the Blühender Campus makes clear that human relations to nonhumans should be characterized less by difference and exploitation and more by an acknowledgement of practices of shared

worldmaking that aim to contribute to mutual well-being. That means to be wild together, at home.

6.1. (The) Wild at Home

It doesn't really ring a bell, this so-called "wild"

What the campus lawns are supposed to become has often been referred to as "wild", as part of the German term "Wildwiesen" (wild lawns, or meadows). But "wild" as a descriptor of beings and spaces, and "wildness" as a general quality, are contested terms. First, let us check in with a political authority on the matter. On its web page, the Bundesamt für Naturschutz (BfN, Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) of Germany declares that it had a hard time coming up with a definition of *wilderness areas* that is not too influenced by the idea of an untouched primordial landscape³⁵. Therefore, they adjusted it to fit the very densely populated, and "intruded upon", landscape of Germany: "Wilderness areas, within the meaning of the NBS (National Strategy for Biological Diversity), are sufficiently large, (largely) unfragmented and use-free areas that serve to ensure that natural processes and cycles remain unaffected by humans in the long term."³⁶ To me, the cautious use of "(largely)" speaks volumes, in that it quietly and delicately questions the strictness of the definition surrounding it. The ideal of such an area is to be unfragmented and use-free, but the BfN does not seem sufficiently convinced by the possibility of a large space in Germany remaining so pure and unaffected by humans. Furthermore, it once more appears that nature and humans are ontologically separate forces, as "natural processes", on one side, shall "remain unaffected by humans" (who are somehow unnatural?) on the other.

But it is important to keep your terms separate. The BfN's definition concerns itself with *wilderness*, which is, of all the terms containing "wild", probably the least controversial one, in that it is most often based on a conservative (one could say conservationist) approach to wildness. Focusing on physical spaces, here referred to as *areas*, the "wild" in *wilderness* means to be as untouched, uncorrupted, and empty of human influence as

35 The BfN built its definition on that of Wild Europe, a pan-European cooperation of NGOs working in environmental protection and preservation and endorsed by the EU, which defines wilderness as such: "A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance." (<https://www.wildeurope.org/how-the-wild-europe-definition-of-wilderness-builds-on-the-iucn-category-1b-definition/>) (Last accessed on 2nd July, 2020)

36 Translated by the author. Original German version: „Wildnisgebiete i. S. der NBS (Nationale Strategie zur Biologischen Vielfalt) sind ausreichend große, (weitgehend) unzerschnittene, nutzungsfreie Gebiete, die dazu dienen, einen vom Menschen unbeeinflussten Ablauf natürlicher Prozesse dauerhaft zu gewährleisten.“ (<https://www.bfn.de/themen/biotop-und-landschaftsschutz/wildnisgebiete.html>) (Last accessed on 2nd July, 2020)

possible³⁷. *Wilderness* should not be mistaken for *wildness* though, a term much harder to define because it is used more diversely. Petorelli et. al note that “there is a vast diversity of perceptions of what the wild resembles and what natural means. These perceptions vary geographically and culturally, can be linked to people’s access to nature, but importantly are ultimately underpinned by clear social constructs [...]” (Petorelli et al. 2017: 7). This makes it even more confusing. If the wild is different depending on who you ask, does it still communicate something meaningful, above an individual level, and beyond an ontological separation of humans and nature? As I will point out, it is clearly a word both ambivalent and meaningful to Ola and the Blühender Campus, leading me to look for other, more specific, definitions.

I encountered a more complex one in Jamie Lorimer’s book *Wildlife in the Anthropocene* (2015). Lorimer emphatically separates wildlife and wilderness. He writes that

“there is a common assumption that the End of Nature equates to an end to wildness, a domestication of the planet. This is the case only if we accept the mapping of wildlife to wilderness, to places defined by human absence. Instead, wildlife lives among us. It includes the intimate microbial constituents that make up our gut flora and the feral plants and animals that inhabit urban ecologies. Risky, endearing, charismatic, and unknown, wildlife persists in our post-Natural world.” (Lorimer 2015: 7).

Lorimer, bringing “wildlife” (the terms do not run out!) into the game, makes a sweeping but fitting statement for why we are already living amongst it. Wildlife does not just refer to an elephant in the Serengeti, but also to a bacterium in your intestines. But while reading his definition a few more times, an irritation crept in. I double-checked and contextualized these passages again, but it did not help with clearing this irritation. When Lorimer writes that “wildlife lives” not just “among us”, but even inside us, and that it “persists in our Post-Natural world”, I wonder: Who is this “us” that is somehow still external to the wildlife it is so intimately entangled with? Am I not *wild*, even though the bacteria in my gut are?

Regarding this conundrum, Lorimer has something else up his sleeve. He goes on to write that

“Wildness can mean more than thought from outside civilization – the romantic residual in reaction to the alienation of modern life. [...] It demands political processes for deliberating discord among multiple affected publics. We can think of the wild as the commons, the everyday affective site of human-nonhuman entanglement. Politics in the wild involves democratizing science, relinquishing the authority that comes with speaking for a singular Nature. Multispecies, often urban, wilds are where political life takes place now that laboratories of modern science have taken over the world and we have all become caught up in the global experiment that is the Anthropocene.” (Lorimer 2015: 11).

³⁷ Not everyone defines rewilded areas, or how to go about doing rewilding, this classically. The word rewilding has become an umbrella term that fits any project from controlled experiments to reintroduce mammoths to abandoning former agricultural fields to themselves. See Jorgensen 2015.

First off, his demands – meaning a deliberation between affected publics and to place contemporary politics in multispecies and urban wilds – would not be out of place in the preceding chapter discussing more-than-human politics. But if the wild is “the commons”, is it still a meaningful move to separate a diffuse and suspiciously generalized human “us” from nonhumans we’re entangled with? Without being a hundred percent sure that I get his point, I see the seedlings of something more radically open in Lorimer’s statement. If the wild is “the everyday affective site of human-nonhuman entanglement”, humans are not just in the midst of the wild, but part of it. I understand the wild then as the dynamic nexus of human-nonhuman relations that make the world. The multispecies wild includes humans. One might say that I’m just shuffling words around here, but I genuinely think that how Western social discourse defines *wildness* is both indicative of how humans position themselves towards nonhumans and how they understand their potential for (inter)action with them. If we are part of the wild, as the commons in which we all, human or nonhuman, relate to the world, aren’t we both not the ultimate authority on that, while also bearing a responsibility towards others (and ourselves!) to act wisely and sustainably?

I scanned through Lorimer’s quotes so thoroughly because they help me to think of alternatives to frustrating definitions of *wild* and *wildness* that ontologically separate (and respectively homogenize) pristine nature and destructive humans, a separation that has never really existed in the real world. Lorimer’s thoughts also help to understand conversations I recall having with Ola in the field, in which these definitional struggles seem to vanish into an understanding of *wild* that also does not care that much about separating the human from it. Though Ola does not directly use abstract expressions such as “commons” or “relinquishing authority” – her perspective is most often that of an activist focused more on practicability than abstract meaning – her ideas about human-nonhuman co-existence to me seemed comparable to Lorimer’s.

As the two of us had conversations about the meaning of the term “wild”, Ola came up with her own definition of real and proper wilderness – also referring to an area. But from the way she phrases it and by the inflection in her voice it is easy to sense that what she means is *what she thinks is generally referred to as the ideal of wilderness*, similar to the BfN’s aforementioned definition of wilderness areas being (largely!) untouched and unaffected by humans:

“The way that, in our case, we control when and where to mow, that’s not real wilderness [...] It would really be proper wilderness if the ecosystem structure were such that everything was self-regulating through different trophic levels and if we had some herds of bison that moved through here and kept the areas open.” (Interview with Ola, translated by the author³⁸, 25th May 2020).

38 Original quote in German: „So wie bei uns gesteuert wird wann wo gemäht wird, also echte Wildnis ist das nicht [...] Richtig echte Wildnis wäre es, wenn das Ökosystemgefüge so wäre, dass durch die verschiedenen Trophiestufen alles sich selbst reguliert und wir hier irgendwelche Wisentherden hätten, die hier durch ziehen und die Flächen offen halten.“

She adds that she herself is not interested in creating these untouched (and untouchable) pockets of raw nature, which are not in the realm of possibility anyway. Focusing on this kind of definition of what is “properly wild” results, in her opinion, in staying partially blind³⁹. In an informal conversation, she tells me that she is pushing for a more complex understanding of what “wild” means, which would be, for her, a more balanced and less destructive co-habitation with other species. Ola’s intuitive definition falls in line with what Petorelli et al. (2019) are stating, in that there is no such thing as a universally accepted measurement of wildness. It is, instead, dependent on local or even individual perceptions of human-nonhuman relations. I understood that for her, *wild* describes not a group or state of beings, but a quality of entanglements themselves: to be entangled in mutually nourishing ways is to be wild. It means to let nonhuman beings and their modes of life permeate into each other’s and ours, and into built environments. Ola sees modern industrial agriculture as the main opponent to achieving that, as it makes landscapes uninhabitable for many nonhumans (and sometimes humans, too). Urban spaces therefore have a special potential in that they are less likely to be rendered life-threatening or unlivable by pesticides and the likes. For her, our responsibility lies in changing our ways of life to accommodate and integrate other species in any way possible, which is, in the end, advantageous to everyone involved, including humans.

While the material goal of Ola’s struggle is to change the shape of green spaces on campus, she also aims to change people’s perception of human-nonhuman relations and their own role in an environment that is to her, ideally, both urban and wild. Ola tells me repeatedly that, in her eyes, a big problem is the persistency with which people internalize the idea that their influence on the environment is inherently destructive and should therefore be minimized. She wants to find ways to make people realize and feel that they can also have a positive influence on their environment.⁴⁰

Bringing Lorimer’s and Ola’s ideas about *wildness* together, the wild is around us, in us, and made through us. To be in dynamic relation with other beings, especially of other species, means engaging in wildness and being wild together. Wildness can be found in a human gut, or, a pet peeve of Ola’s, in the cracks of pavements (if one doesn’t seal them off or kills everything in them to get rid of “weeds”). Both Lorimer and Ola make a plea for wildness as a positive quality of diverse, abundant, and interwoven life⁴¹. Humans should aim to be a productive part of such an (urban) wild, to seek out and experience mutually

39 She is, of course, not alone in thinking this. For an impassioned critique of the romanticism surrounding the term and practices of “wilderness”, and the role of frontier colonialism in shaping it, see Cronon 1996.

40 The mentorship program I mentioned in the second chapter, in which people are meant to learn how to care for a lawn of their choice responsibly and sustainably, is meant to provide an opportunity for people to experience themselves as a positive influence. As that program is still in its early stages, it could sadly not be part of my field research anymore.

41 I am aware that here lies a tendency to romanticize human-nonhuman relations. There are of course entanglements with nonhuman beings that are, from a human perspective, everything but positive. We can be annoyed, hurt, bitten, poisoned - encounters with nonhumans can surely be harmful or threatening. These relations are an unavoidable part of being intimate with nonhuman worlds. But what I think Lorimer and Ola are emphasizing is that there is an enriching potential in the face of this ambivalence, if we don’t separate ourselves from this intimacy systematically, as the moderns have been wont to do.

nourishing entanglements, and to feel both positively affected by their environment and experience that their actions can have positive effects on it.⁴²

Domestication stories

I want to supplement the discussion regarding wildness with a look at one of its binary opposites. Deriving from the latin word *domesticus*, meaning 'belonging to the house' or 'household', the concept of domestication became an integral part of a narrative of continuous progress, the story of human mastery over (wild, duh) nature. Humans settled down and build permanent shelters, they developed agriculture and tamed and bred animals to make use of them as sources of labor, food, clothes, and protection⁴³. The number and size of settlements grew, and the exchange and trade of goods developed into complex economic systems. This resulted in an exploitation of natural resources now recognized as excessive, and an industrialized and increasingly mechanized production. You know this story – it is, indeed, only a story, or a very reductive telling of a much more complicated history. "Manicured" grass lawns over time became a symbol for wealth and domination of space and can be understood as one of this story's material conclusions.

These lawns have long served as an aesthetic marker of economic wealth in Western Europe and North America. Having their origins in open lawns made up mostly of herbs and flowers that served as an open sight line to defend castles and mansions, front lawns characterized by accurately shortened grass, became a decorative feature for the wealthy, especially in 18th century France and England. Later on, along with a growing middle-class and a more spread-out distribution of wealth, they became an emblem of Americana. Houses with private back and front yards became affordable, as did paid lawn keepers or the time off work needed to maintain such a lawn. Expansive lawns also became common features of public parks and university campuses.⁴⁴ But the obsession with manicured lawns as symbols of middle-class virtue seems to dwindle. D'Costa (2017) attests that today,

"while green spaces are important, a large area of green grass seems to be a lower priority for many. With a growing movement that embraces a more natural lifestyle, there is a trend toward the return of naturalized lawns that welcome flowering weeds, and subsequently support a more diverse entomological ecosystem."

42 To quote Ola on that, she sees it as an important task to „help contribute to more biodiversity and a higher number of animals- to create a living environment in our city systems that both gives space to many nonhuman beings and also gives back to humans the pleasure of experiencing nature." (Interview with Ola, translated by the author, 25th May 2020.) Original quote in German: „Mitzuhelfen, dass wieder mehr Biodiversität und auch mehr Menge von Tieren in uns- Also grad in Stadtsystemen nen Lebensraum zu schaffen, der sowohl vielen Lebewesen, also vielen nicht-menschlichen Lebewesen nen Platz gibt, als auch Menschen wieder die Freude an der Naturerfahrung zu geben.

43 Though this development was not necessarily bad for biodiversity. Ola told me that around 250 years ago the local cultural landscapes were very rich in species. It is of course a different story in (post-)colonial landscapes which were, and in many ways continue to be, destroyed and reshaped for capitalist profit and control.

44 For more information on the development and (social) role of grass lawns, see, e.g., D'Costa (2017), Ignatieva et. al (2017), Sisser et al. (2016).

Though written from an US-American perspective, this quote describes very well the process I witnessed live in my field. What is happening to domesticated front and back lawns on campus?

In their introduction to *Domestication Gone Wild*, an anthology on the history and future of domestication as concept and practice, Lien, Swanson and Ween (2018) criticize the dominant and powerful narrative of domestication as progress and of its beginnings being the first stone used to build (civilized) society⁴⁵. They propose to decenter domestication by looking at a) its margins and b) its fruitfulness and sustainability as a concept in the first place. They ask what we can learn about humans and their entanglements in multispecies relations by not taking a straight-forward narrative of domestication, as a progression of human mastery over nature, for granted. Instead of just following narratives, it's important to look at practices of domestication⁴⁶, how it happens in and at the margins of public and scientific attention, and interrogate whether it can be a productive term today while carrying the baggage of colonialism and eurocentrism.

All this leads me to a few questions: Why, when it comes to the lawns as my subject, might it be meaningful to not just think about wildness, but also domestication? I think it is meaningful because the creation of lawns like the ones on campus was driven by the implications of the domestication narrative, of the ideal of humans gaining power and control over all kinds of space, of spaces serving as a representation of order and economic (and intellectual) prosperity.

Overcoming the lack of life and biodiversity on these lawns also means overcoming the narratives and practices that led to them being this way. Thinking both terms together can help to figure out how human involvement in multispecies worlds can contribute to a flourishing on both sides without falling back into narratives of human control and mastery of an ontologically separate wild nature. Part of this is a decentering, as Lien et al. propose in their article. In the Blühender Campus's practice, that means moving the lawns away from a simple logic of control through mowing at all costs to one that treats each lawn as its own little ecosphere that humans involve themselves in, and in which different relations have to be cared for in different ways at specific points in time.

The question also remains of how to balance the human control that still remains to be exercised over the lawns with the ideal of fostering less inhibited multispecies relations and an increase in biodiverse life and entanglements. Are *domestication* and *wildness* still doomed to be solely binary opposites? I would argue that the university's lawns are an example for the margins of distinct definitions, where wildness and domestication, chaos

⁴⁵ This is but a short input to their critique. For a detailed analysis of the history and effects of domestication narratives and practices see their full Introduction.

⁴⁶ It proved to be a little frustrating to not find an alternative (or at least provisional) definition of domestication in Lien et al.'s article". The closest I could find was "the many kinds of relations that provide continuity and livelihood for human and animal communities", and "the great variety of conditions in which how humans relate transform, and are themselves shaped by, their other-than-human surroundings." (Lien/Swanson/Wien 2018: 4). But their main undertaking seems to be to collect alternative stories from "the margins" of domestication that encourage its redefinition.

and control, uninhibited potential and careful management inextricably coexist. I will ask Anna Tsing for some help in elaborating this.

HIER

Domestication-as-rewilding, where two ends meet

Tsing, in the final article of the aforementioned anthology *Domestication Gone Wild* (2018), notes that "[u]nintentional cultivation and domestication-as-rewilding offer hopeful alternatives in imagining multispecies life with humans as a component." (Tsing 2018: 247). Domestication-as-rewilding, to me, does not just sound like wordplay, but also, in the context of my work, like a full-circle moment of bridging the tension between the wild and the domestic. What exactly does Tsing mean by that? I will get to that in a minute, but let us start with her critique of the concept of domestication.

Instead of taking the term domestication for granted, Tsing asks us to consider different examples and forms of more-than-human co-habitation and to think about whether we need to expand the term or keep its definition narrow to be able to critique and overcome it. She invites us to broaden our view and be attentive to human-nonhuman relations different from those we usually perceive as domestication. She asks us not to reduce domestication to pure narrative, but to see how this narrative, in tandem, also became material reality through practice:

"I don't think we can unfasten domestication and progress merely by telling a different story; the narratives we know today are figured into landscapes, bodies and social institutions [...] state and colonial expansion made use of the materials we now call "domestication", and, over time, their use created a dangerous landscape for multispecies life." (Tsing 2018: 232).

She asks why only a few interspecies relations, viewed from a perspective of human agency and power, are included in our accounts of domestication as a history of progress. The answer, she says, lies in which relations are included in a history of the political economy and (colonial) capitalism, which favors narratives of human mastery and perceives exploitation as productivity. As I wrote above, manicured lawns are in many ways representatives of this history, in that they became one calling card for civilization as progress.

Tsing writes that domestication, as a progress story and "a lens, has made it difficult to see varied interspecies relations involving humans" (Tsing 2018: 235) that are outside of the realm of this dominant telling of world history. To show practices of multispecies engagement that have been denied the designation of "domestication", she pulls from her own field research in the 1980s and 90s and lists all kinds of different relations between the people of the Meratus Mountains in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, with nonhumans in the forest and hills around them. The Meratus lived as "shifting cultivators who made small impermanent fields in the tropical rain forest" (Tsing 2018: 235) and lived next to them, before much of the forest was cut down by corporations. She writes that supposedly domesticated animals, such as chickens and pigs, lived freely and intermingled with, supposedly wild, relatives. Trees were tended to, and fruits harvested, and though they

were occasionally pruned or otherwise cared for, they were neither actively planted nor fenced in (and thus marked by humans as (private) property). She writes that humans engage in many different forms of intimate relations with other species which, in line with her general argument, tend to be ignored if they're not seen as being economically productive or an expression of human control. In the Meratus' practices the boundaries between wild and domestic very much blur, and she concludes by writing that

“such examples make it clear that domestication is not just one element in the description of human interspecies relations. It is a standard to which not many interspecies relations can rise. One reason we seem so limited in domesticates is that we don't count the many species with which we have other kinds of intimate relations.” (Tsing 2018: 237).

This brings us back to the question brought up earlier: Is there no hope for the term domestication? Does Tsing provide an answer to whether we need to expand domestication to include human-nonhuman relational practices that accurately reflect the complexity of reality, or should our understanding of it stay narrow, precise, and focused on its problematic history, so that we can move on from it? Though she often seems to favor the latter, Tsing's not always clear on this. She (along with Lien, Swanson and Ween) turns the tables around by noting another important point that contradicts easy narratives of domestication as human mastery: It is not just humans who learned to benefit from other species. Humans are, in a sense, being domesticated as well for the purpose of survival or nourishment of other species. Wolves moved closer to humans to have safer food provisions, enabling the “creation” of dogs, just like many other species live close to humans for access to food. Bacteria proliferate in and around humans. This argument is actually not too far away from Lorimer's (urban) wildness as commons, as spaces of togetherness, community, and political deliberation. Maybe Tsing is not doing away with domestication completely. Maybe she demands non-hegemonic forms of domestication instead, forms that do not ignore the diversity of relations between humans and nonhumans.

But maybe her ambivalent stance and her discussion of the Meratus' practices also show that, for her, there are two points of discussion more important than the question of how encompassing a definition of domestication should be. First, she points out the difficulty of doing things different than in the hegemonic way that has been a powerful standard of domestication narratives and practices for so long. Second, she stresses the importance of acknowledging and taking seriously other ways of human-nonhuman relating that, in many ways and places, have been hiding in plain sight all the while, and to acknowledge nonhuman contributions to livable worlds.

I'd like to take a moment to come back to the question of whether wildness and domestication shall remain oppositional terms. In the practices of the Blühender Campus I find the contrary to be the case, and the two terms to be inextricably co-present. There is wildness in that Ola defines the state she pursues, of productive co-existence, as wild, and that informs her practices, as she comes up with countless ideas of how to accommodate

nonhumans on campus in ways that can help them to settle down⁴⁷. Wildness here means that humans and nonhumans engage with each other to make livable spaces outside of a system of human dominion. Instead, humans try to create spaces that have the potential to serve as living environments for nonhumans. I understand this as a kind of wild in a domesticated space – there is no simple “either this or that”. A space can be domesticated in that it is designed by humans who also exercise a certain amount of control over it, but also wild in that nonhumans there appropriate it to build a life for themselves, in constant relation with their environment and with humans as a part of that. The lawns are thus spaces both domestic and wild, and I’d say that this is probably not the only space in which the two ends of that binary have been overlapping in the background all along, a feature now brought into focus. How to analytically separate the human from the wild, or the domestic from the wild, is therefore not really the question that needs to be asked here. Instead, I think it is important to ask how a space is made to encourage nourishing entanglements between humans and others – what goes into these practices, and what results from them.

In fact, I witnessed these practices in my field and I think they are somewhat comparable to that of the Meratus that Tsing writes about. In both cases people take spaces already there and modify them for animals and plants to flourish in for not just their own benefit. They often add additional material care practices, such as pruning, “artisan” mowing techniques, etc. But they do not claim these spaces as exclusively human property, or as spaces to forcefully try to predetermine nonhuman behavior in. It is not that I would say that there is no domestication here at all – quite the opposite. But in the forests, just like the lawns, humans exercise control by modifying these spaces to serve as shelter and sources of flourishing not only for themselves. They act under the presumption that their flourishing is not isolated from that of nonhumans, and that one’s impetus should not only be getting out of its way but rather to encourage nonhuman flourishing, as a necessary part of maintaining a co-constitutive and livable world. They try to create what I would call a home⁴⁸.

47 An example that went unmentioned until now is the plan to have a lawn of permanent high growth to serve as a winter shelter, especially for butterflies: “While we hammer stakes into the ground, a woman walks past asking what we’re doing and about the project. Ola tells her about the change of the lawns and how one of them is even not going to be mown at all, so the plants they sowed out can grow freely to provide a winter home for insects.” (Field note, Fencing-in action with Ola, 17th April 2020)

48 It is important to note that Tsing sees the term home and its connotations critically. She understands it as historically being part of a system of subjugation of women and nonhumans. Tsing writes against the problematic history of domestication and “the inequalities and intensities of civilization and home” (Tsing 2018: 232) before proposing to subvert them. Civilization stands for the colonial project, whereas home (or the domus) stands for the subjugation of women to the position of homemaker, what she calls “the woman-and-hearth complex” (Tsing 2018: 239). Both of these also had (often adverse) effects on nonhumans. Forests were cleared to make way for plantations, cattle were strategically used as pawns to claim land from native people and to legitimate punishments against them if they harmed any domestic animals. Her critique is of course valid and should not be made to vanish. But to honor it in full would lead to a very different discussion, one that needs more space and depth than I can provide in the confines of this thesis. Instead, I want to refer to “home” as a space to settle safely, and look at more-than-human homemaking in the present.

If the lawns in their past states were meant to be homes, we now need different ones – ones that are more accommodating to more inhabitants, especially those with more than two legs. Tsing asks what would happen “if we redefined the “homes” we wanted to make with other creatures to include the worlds they make as well. Might we come up with better ideas than industrial ruins?” (Tsing 2018: 247). The manicured lawns on campus are not really (post-)industrial spaces, but if you ask me they sure are ruins in regard to their inhabitability. They lack the propensity to serve as homes, which I would define as spaces for the provision of shelter, nourishment and/or safe reproduction. Apart from the bare minimum of nonhumans still able to inhabit its soil, the lawns are turned sterile by consistently cutting them short and shredding much of the life that populates them. Most of the worlds and homes plants, insects and others contribute are constantly being destroyed and made invisible. But those ruins can become a breeding ground for something different.

As a potential remedy to such a wasteland of industrial ruins, Tsing introduces the term *domestication-as-rewilding*. Re-wilding means to her an equally accessible and shared making of livable landscapes. Domestication could then be a set of human practices that fosters this process, a homemaking without seeking control and mastery. Tsing says “the term I’m looking for, then, points to cospecies landscapes in which no species can be said to be in charge. Rather than alienation and accumulation, the point is multispecies engagement” (Tsing 2018: 247). Humans need to both support the flourishing of other beings in landscapes and to understand and engage with other beings’ contributions to making these landscapes inhabitable.⁴⁹ Though the term *home* surely is an emotionally laden and anthropocentric one, Tsing herself lends us the tools to recalibrate the term’s meaning to one that captures the potential and/or reality of a space that is shared and co-produced by many beings, often of different (and distant) species. It can provide a feeling of community, an experience of being a productive part of shared and more-than-human well-being.

It is surely not the case that, on the lawns of Blühender Campus, human control is thrown completely out the window. That aspect of domestication persists, albeit (ideally) much more carefully exercised. As I wrote above, the practices and schedules of care are much more attuned to the needs of the individual lawn’s inhabitants, but the regiments can be extensive, nonetheless. And it is clear that not everyone is welcome. Some species, especially when deemed invasive⁵⁰ and/or too dominant, are unwanted and kept away from or ripped out of the rewilded lawns. But all the while, the lawns are quite

49 As she says about Matsutake mushrooms and pines in Japanese forests, “they are our autonomous codomesticates, working our landscapes, making worlds in which we both can live. If we value multispecies life on earth, we might start by appreciating their help.” (Tsing 2018: 248).

50 Invasive species is a designation whose role was not without controversy in my case, and which carries with it problematic connotations of in- and exclusion and econationalism. While some actors in the field see most, if not any, invasive species as a generalizable threat to finely tuned indigenous ecosystems, others argue that invasive species should not be categorized so harshly, nor demonized and often indiscriminately fought against. But those discussions go beyond this thesis’s focus. For a critique of the term invasive species, see e.g., Subramaniam 2014.

intentionally thought of as sheltered spaces for nonhumans to live in for the betterment of all, including humans. As Tsing wishes, contributions from both humans and nonhumans in shaping a livable world for all are being recognized and encouraged.

6.2. Multispecies real estate

In this subchapter, I want to explore this idea of collective home- and world-making through contributions from both humans and nonhumans. For that, I will refer to my field research and look at actual physical structures that were built by humans and nonhumans alike.

This is meant to complement some of the analysis in Chapter 3, in which I talked about practices of advocacy for nonhumans. It is not just through advocacy that the Blühender Campus and its allies seek to support nonhuman flourishing on the campus lawns, but also through building activities. The Blühender Campus and comparable initiatives implore a combination of structures enabling nonhuman life with others that protect it from harmful human behavior. A nesting site for bees will help to better understand different actors' contributions to building homes. Looking at this structure through Tim Ingold's perspective of *dwelling*, it becomes clear that not every physical structure provided to nonhumans is also one they're at home in. Instead, a structure only becomes a home for nonhumans through their own involved building activity. Moving on to more "invasive" and less collaborative physical modifications made by humans, practices such as selective mowing and building fences point us to another kind of building activity: one that seeks to protect homes in the making, or those already made, from harmful human influence. But first I want to further my exploration of the qualities which characterize a multispecies home, and what makes these homes attractive.

Looking for a comfortable home to lay my eggs in

Tsing's call to redefine *home* to include and honor nonhuman contributions in a process of shared worldmaking made me rethink field encounters. During one of the butterfly monitoring sessions, I noted that

"during this last burst of monitoring activity, we take note of a couple of butterflies mating. Tim says that this gets special attention in the protocol, as it is a sign that they feel comfortable here. Or at least comfortable enough to procreate." (Field note Butterfly monitoring with Tim, 28th August 2020)

In my opinion, the term "feeling comfortable" (originally "sich wohlfühlen" in German) is very telling here. Tim, whom I experienced as a person very serious and sober about scientific work, didn't phrase his remark in a way that simply and scientifically posits the lawns as appropriate spaces that meet certain criteria to be inhabited by butterflies. It is important that butterflies "feel comfortable" in and on them, attached to them in a way that makes the lawns attractive spaces to procreate in. Or, to sort this example into my

more abstract reflections up to this point, to contribute lived-in-ness to communal world-making. My point here is not whether butterflies actually emotionally “feel comfortable” like a human might. It is rather to point out the human acknowledgement here that there might be more to a lawn as a multispecies space than biological functionality. That they can be attractive to nonhumans or not, and can be either chosen or rejected by them. The statement implies that humans do not just play a part in this process, but also own a responsibility to contribute to making spaces feel comfortable for nonhumans. It implies to me the assertion that it is important to ask whether a space is attractive to (desired) nonhumans, and how it can be made so if it isn’t yet. Does it provide for their needs, does it serve as shelter, can they live on and around it and reproduce there safely? In short: Can it become a comfortable home for butterflies to live in? Why not extend some hospitality?

Supported by my experiences in the field and Tsing’s thoughts, and to summarize again, I seek to reframe “home” as a term that signifies a safe space in which to flourish (together) and satisfy one’s basic needs: e.g., life itself, food, reproduction. One of the physical materializations of such a more-than-human home is a nesting site for bees on campus that is sometimes referred to as the “bee hotel”, though it actually functions less as a hotel than as a combination of womb, maternity ward, and nursery all in one. It is placed on a small lawn adjacent to one of the big ones that make up the large L belonging to the project. The bee hotel was not built or put there by the Blühender Campus, but they also care for it and its upkeep affectionately and see it as part of a combined effort of different groups for more biodiversity and sustainability on campus.

The bee hotel is a physical structure made of wood, clay, brick, and some string, designed to provide a space with many small holes and tunnels for bees to use as nesting sites to safely lay their eggs in and take care of their offspring. But this is not possible without them further contributing to its construction. Female cavity-dwelling bees⁵¹ sedulously haul up nesting material of their – often species-specific – choice, such as nuggets of clay, pieces of leaves or resin. Some even produce their own silk-like construction material. A bee chooses a tunnel and fills it up, alternating a layer of chamber wall, provisions (mostly pollen) with an egg put on top, and another layer of chamber wall, until the entire tunnel is filled with a set of provisioned egg-chambers. In turn, by collecting the nutritive pollen (which they mix with saliva and a tiny bit of nectar before installing it in the egg chamber) from often only a few – again bee species-specific – preferred species of plants, the bees provide world-making practices by helping disseminate plant beings through pollination.

⁵¹ Wild bees show a variety of nesting strategies, and while most of them dig tunnels and chambers into soil, others build their nests in hollow or pithy stems or in holes and tunnels nibbled or dug by beetles and other wood-eating insects. Some even cushion their offspring into empty snail shells, and in urban settings a few prosperous specimens are said to have successfully settled in abandoned water taps and drill holes. Thank you to Ola for lecturing me on bee behavior and for writing the blueprint for this paragraph.



Figure 8 An image of bees entering and leaving the bee hotel

This example shows that transforming a physical (or built) structure or space into a multispecies home is also a multispecies affair. With the help of Tim Ingold, I want to work out why it is important to see how both humans and nonhumans contribute to this transformation for mutual benefit.

Your house is not yet my home – Building a shared safe space

In his article “Building, dwelling, living: How animals and people make themselves at home in the world”, Ingold (1995) critiques an, in his eyes paradigmatic, ontological difference between forms built by either humans or nonhuman animals (Ingold 1995: 59). Animals supposedly build forms and homes by simply following plans “programmed” into their DNA, meaning what they build is, by extension, only a genetic expression. They follow patterns ingrained in them and fit those on or into their environment, with shifts in these programmed patterns only happening as mutations, on evolutionary time. Humans, instead, are architects, in that they conceptualize and visualize a form before

they build it. They plan and create and adjust it, building in dynamic relation to their environment. Ingold further criticizes the mission of archaeologists to find a "first hut" and thus what they understand to be a decisive step in the evolution from ape to human being and the cradle of humans as architects (Ingold 1995: 74). These theories feed into what Ingold criticizes as an artificial separation of a natural history of the evolution of forms instinctively built by animals from a cultural history of humans becoming architects – of a historical progression of forms rationally designed and built, from huts to skyscrapers. Reflecting Latour's critique of the ontological separation of human and Nature, Ingold exemplifies it by writing against an ontological separation of humans' and animals' building activities. This separation denies animals' building activities any historicity or relationality, while allowing that of humans all that and more, to then put them on a pedestal. Arguing against that, he writes that "we" all build spaces that we make our homes in different ways, be it a human settlement or a beaver's lodge.

Ingold references Heidegger who stated that not every structure beings physically live in is one they also dwell in. Ingold, following this, differentiates between houses as physical structures that need to be turned into homes as spaces to dwell in. That leads him to rephrase "Heidegger's question [...] as follows: what does it take for a house to be a home? Merely to pose the question in this form suggests that there must be more to dwelling than the mere fact of occupation. What, then, does it mean, 'to dwell'?" (Ingold 1995, 75). To dwell means to be in a nourishing relation with the world, a dynamic state specific to each individual. Building forms as an activity springs from that. It means "that the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings." (Ingold 1995: 76). A home is therefore not just purely a physical, built-up space of shelter, which Heidegger would only designate as a house. It is more than that: An intimate one in which to dwell, meaning to engage in relations with one's surroundings, a space in which to flourish in and with the world. By attesting to these qualities as defining homes,

"we can now see how, by adopting a dwelling perspective - that is, by taking the animal-in-its-environment rather than the self-contained individual as our point of departure - it is possible to dissolve the orthodox dichotomies between evolution and history, and between biology and culture. For if history be understood as the process wherein people, through their own intentional and creative activities, shape the conditions of development for their successors, then it is but a specific instance of a process that is going on throughout the organic world. And if by cultural variation we mean those differences of embodied knowledge that stem from the diversity of local developmental contexts, then far from being superimposed upon a substrate of evolved human universals, such variation is part and parcel of the variation of all living things, which has its source in their involvement within a continuous field of relations." (Ingold 1995: 77)

I have to be more precise from now on. Following Ingold's elaboration, a rewilded lawn itself, just as it is not a homogenous entity but a space that is a complex composition of

many beings, does not by itself automatically serve as a home. By enabling a rewilded lawn to flourish, the Blühender Campus is not making (as in building) a home for nonhumans, and by extension for humans, too. Instead, it creates a house: A space of shelter and safety and one with the potential for nonhumans to make a home in for themselves.

To add another point which I have to be precise about: When I say that rewilded lawns are only houses that certain nonhumans, like insects and spiders, can contribute to and turn into homes, I'm precluding contributions by other nonhumans already at home there. Plants, and other types of organism living in its soil, make the lawn a physical structure that insects and spiders can turn into homes for themselves. Concentrating on the part of the Blühender Campus's work that focuses on fostering animal flourishing, I do not want to fall into the trap of generalizing all nonhumans into a deceptively logical unity (something *Nature* has done for centuries). Just as humans do with building and installing a nesting site, plants, worms, microorganisms, etc. provide a dynamic base for other beings to work with, and they also make a home for themselves in sync with other beings on a lawn. The grass has always been there, like other plant species beside it (other species of grass, flowers, weeds), even when the lawn was being mown and left to dry, but they were kept from their potential for growth, for themselves and others.

These clarifications lead to an important point: Making spaces such as the rewilded lawns multispecies homes has always, and continues to be, a more-than-human effort – the result of collaborative practices of collective world-making. This also applies to the nesting site. Bees continue to build (in) it if they find it to their liking, and modify it to make it serviceable as a home for themselves and their offspring. As a result, it is a physical structure built by humans and bees alike. Humans provide a built structure that bees turn into a home for themselves, with the help of plants that provide pollen, wood, and leaves, and by adding other materials such as clay. The nesting site is a multispecies structure through which humans and nonhumans relate to each other and co-shape a world to live in collectively.⁵²

Ingold's thoughts tie in with Tsing's call to acknowledge and value nonhuman contributions in world-making as homemaking for all of us. Nonhumans contribute their share of making a communal environment an inhabitable and hospitable home and to create environmental conditions for others to flourish in. What I find so helpful about bringing Tsing and Ingold together here is how both of them stress that world-making practices and making environments livable is a multispecies enterprise, and has been all

⁵² Not everyone cares this much. At some point after my stint in the field, Ola broke the news that the bee hotel was vandalized and has to be rebuilt. Apart from the question of where the money will come from and who would be able to rebuild it, there was also a sense of loss, and of frustration regarding the lack of value other humans attribute to bees, and other species and their environment in general. This frustration has been a constant companion, having attached itself to the activities of the technical administration and the landscaping company before, and to the anonymous person(s) who repeatedly destroyed the small fences around one of the lawns. The destruction of the bee hotel made this disregard for collective world-making even more palpable. It is probably the instance I experienced Ola at her most disappointed and disillusioned.

along – but they without a radical change in worldview. Instead, they explicate something that often felt implicit in discussions inside the Blühender Campus, or with other human actors involved. Tsing and Ingold simply but determinedly demand us to pay attention to what is already going on, reflect on how human exceptionalism stood in the way of seeing that and prevented us from honoring other beings' contributions, and therefore demand a reconfiguration of humans' role in and responsibility to engage productively in such a shared world-making we all depend on. Bringing the two of them together is, in my eyes, a helpful synthesis of approaches to understand the relevance of the feeling of "We're all in this together (human and nonhuman)" that the Blühender Campus tries so hard to make available to the public. They do so not just through abstracted knowledge (in form of written material or signs), but also physical and affective experiences – through mentorship programs, walking tours, workshops and building activities.

The latter I want to return to. Apart from the bee hotel, which other human-led building activities took place in the field, and in which ways were they contributions to such a shared home- and world-making? To take a closer look, I ask you to join me at grass-level, with your nose down and your hands dusty with soil.

Fences with holes in them

A wild, or rewilded, lawn, if it is not shredded regularly and made to signify human dominion over the nonhuman, can provide shelter and food to many nonhumans, the possibility for them to meet and reproduce, to blossom, to collect pollen, be pollinated, build nests, lay eggs, and grow. But the safety of such a space is very fragile and has to be protected: on campus it used to be regularly (and still occasionally is, regrettably) bulldozed completely, by human force. To change that, the Blühender Campus employs a combination of advocacy and physical modifications. I already covered advocacy in chapter 3, here I turn to physical modifications. There were, generally speaking, two types of built structures used to enable a flourishing of nonhuman life. The bee hotel is representative of structures that serve as a physical base for nonhuman home- and world-making. Nonhumans interact with them directly and use them for their own continued building practices. Some of these were successfully installed by the project, such as chunks of dead wood for insects to lay eggs in, while others were planned but not realizable for various reasons, such as tunnels below garden fences for hedgehogs or setting up hornet nests in trees. These built structures are very much in line with my analysis above, as they provide houses to nonhumans to turn into homes for themselves. But during my time in the field, another building practice became visible: that of building physical modifications which are meant to protect multispecies spaces, the lawns especially, from harm inflicted by humans. Instead of providing structures to build a life in and around, these structures serve to protect spaces housing this life from being destroyed, from (again) becoming something akin to Tsing's industrial ruins.

One such structure is a belt of conventionally mown grass at the edge of a lawn. A professor whom Ola consulted about the project told her this mowing practice works as a strategy to raise public acceptance. It is meant to signal a concept behind the “unkempt” look of the rest of the lawn beyond the belt – that the “overgrown” character is intentional, and cared for.⁵³ This strategy led to funny negotiations between Ola, me, the lawns, and an imagined public; as we tried to figure out on the fly how wide a “Toleranzstreifen” (tolerance belt) we should leave outside the stake fence (another structure I will come to in a minute). You could see that Ola was torn – she would have loved to not leave any belt at all. She told me once that you should never ever give space away just like that. When I think of it, the belt reminds me of a sacrificial metal anode put on, e.g., a ship’s hull or a pipeline’s exterior wall, which are meant to be eaten away by rust so that the hull or pipeline itself stays unimpaired. Let this part of the lawn work as a sacrifice to be eaten by the shredder so that the rest can live on peacefully, and grow dynamically. Leaving a tolerance belt was a strategy not unique to the Blühender Campus, as it was also used by the other campus project I visited. Both of those groups felt this to be an irritating process. Not just because it feels like a lost battle to mow down a space you want to enable to grow, but also, I felt, because creating such a belt partially holds up the old system of order and diminished biodiversity the groups are fighting against.

The tolerance belt has not been the only strategic physical modification I witnessed. Ola and I practiced some landscape design throughout late spring 2020. I assisted Ola several times in “fencing” in a few of the project lawns. For that we used cheap, short, and pointy wooden stakes we bought at the hardware store. We knelt on the ground, its top layer consisting of dry powdery dust after two summers of drought, and tried to dig in the stakes using circular motions, to then hammer them in further with another stake. We did not have actual hammers, but you do the best you can with what you have. (The first time we did this, I didn’t even have any gloves on, and I had to constantly pick splinters out of my palms – pure professionalism. One could say that my hands were just as open and penetrable as the fence we built). I remember being curious already back then: On first glance, it seemed to me to be a weirdly ineffectual method to demarcate a border, and I was not alone in thinking this.

⁵³ Ola again: “Mowing this edge let’s people see that someone is taking care of the lawn, that it is intentional. And those are the two things that we try to keep in mind. And that’s something that we- that I always watch out for. And as long as we do that we don’t really get any negative reactions to the project.” (Interview with Ola, 25th May.2020)

Original quote in German: „Und das andere, mit diesem gemähten Saum, dass die Leute sehen, dass jemand sich um die Fläche kümmert und eben, dass es gewollt ist. Und dass waren so die zwei Sachen, die wir jetzt auch immer versuchen zu beachten, dass man bei jeder Fläche erkennt, dass das so sein soll. Und das ist halt was, was wir, was ich- wo ich immer sehr drauf achte, und solange wir das tun kriegen wir auch eigentlich keine negativen Reaktionen aufs Projekt.“

One day, as we were hammering stakes into an especially dry and shadowy small slope behind the law department's library,

“a man appears out of the building and walks towards us with a look both apprehensive and slightly displeased. He asks us what we're doing here, in that tone of voice middle-aged German men in positions of authority use to make clear that you should better come up with a good explanation for whatever you're doing, because otherwise you'll be in trouble. He is obviously referring to our strange little stake-hammering enterprise. Thankfully, Ola immediately gets down to business by calmly and convincingly explaining to the man that this slope is to be part of the Blühender Campus, that we seek to prevent it from being mown, that insects are going to love this etc. – her way of handling any disruptions in general: technical but passionately. He is won over quickly but expresses doubt whether our small stakes will actually stay in the ground for long and asks whether we couldn't get them in any deeper. We agree that sometimes they might have to be put back in place, but that it will be alright. He leaves us to it.” (Field note *Fence-building action with Ola. Part Two*, 17th April 2020).



Figure 9 A ground-level image of the stake fence Ola and I build around the slope

Though this man was skeptical (even a bit antagonistic) at first, this encounter is one of many examples for how those people nearly always agreed with the project's goals once they were sufficiently explained to them. Understandably, he noted the flimsiness of the fence. And sure enough, it was a spontaneously improvised structure and paid for from a tiny budget – the flimsiness was not a conscious choice but a product of constraints. But the fence's *penetrability* was (and still is) part of the concept: It is meant to be an open fortification. It signals “no blade-equipped shredding machines allowed beyond this line”. Ola told me that building this type of fence was another idea she got from said professor, who told her it signals the special status of these green spaces without making them seem off-limits to the general public. As Ola says:

“Firstly, by using the stakes there is a visual demarcation from this wild area, but it is not locking people out – It is not a fence or something like that, not caution tape. Just simply visual, but not – It is somehow psychologically important that it is not a fixed border.” (Interview with Ola, translated by the author⁵⁴, 25th May 2020).

The fence acts as a visual cue, saying “We know this looks like some kind of demarcation, but you can still totally walk over it! But please: Do not mow!” It shows that, unlike the human-sized, brick- and concrete-walled houses around them, the lawns as more-than-human spaces are designed to stay perpetually open.

But then my vocabulary turns out to be dysfunctional once again because Ola says that what I called a fence up to now is actually “not a fence”. Actually, as I understand her, it is not meant to signify a border of any kind proper. Or rather just a border exclusive to only one cyborg-y formation – the stakes are not meant to keep anything from going out or in except for lawnmowers destroying what's in their path indiscriminately, and the humans attached to these machines.⁵⁵ Apart from that one restraining order, the lawns are supposed to be places inviting for insects, spiders, and plants – and ones that potentially provide spaces for them to make a home in, in Ingold's sense. Simultaneously, they stay open for humans – apart from those in the business of reckless mowing of course.

The (not a) fence joins the tolerance belt in being a modification that humans built to protect a multispecies space from other humans' harmful behavior. In contrast to structures serving as nonhuman homes that are built by both humans and nonhumans communally, such as the nesting site, this kind of building activity appears to be a human-only affair. This complements Tsing's and Ingold's plea to not diminish or forget to

54 Original quote in German: „Einmal durch diese Pflöcke ist ne visuelle Abgrenzung zu dieser wilden Fläche, aber es ist keine Aussperrung der Leut- Das ist kein Zaun oder so, oder kein Absperrband. Sondern das ist einfach nur visuell, aber trotzdem nicht- Also irgendwie ist es psychologisch wichtig, dass es keine Grenze ist.“

55 Not even that was always guaranteed. Once the plants around them grew high enough, the fence at its message threatened to disappear: “Later during our walk, while we make our way across the large lawn, past the MPI and towards Van't-Hoff Str., the gardener stops his mower and approaches us because he seems to be unsure whether to mow the wider and larger part of the lawn next to the street, which is not fenced in, but where the wooden stakes, or in this case their absence, are hard to see because of the growth. I guess we need higher stakes then?” (Field note Butterfly monitoring with Ola, 4th June 2020)

acknowledge nonhuman contributions to world-making. Structures such as the tolerance belt and stake fence are built as cautionary measures because we should obviously also not diminish or forget about the power imbalance between humans and nonhumans still characterizing a space as tightly controlled by human agency as a university campus. Only a combination of structures both enabling nonhuman life and protecting it from harm works to ensure that it can flourish.

6.3. Making homes together in the city, Inc.

The rewilded lawns and other project spaces are ones in which wildness and domestication meet. They serve as commons for wild entanglements, and if humans are willing to engage with nonhumans and assist in their flourishing, they become part of the wild, too. That humans and nonhumans can be equally entangled in wildness doesn't negate an imbalance of power that favors humans' ability and agency to not just create, but also disrupt or even destroy these kind of spaces. Through different practices, be they radical mowing or gently cutting plant growth by hand, human actors exercise control over the lawns (manicured or rewilded) and shape them in certain ways – in an ongoing push-and-pull process of simultaneously and inextricably rewilding and domesticating green spaces on campus. The question remains how open human publics are to engage in wild relations, and which role and responsibility humans see for themselves in shaping and controlling more-than-human spaces, to contribute to making them sheltered homes to be wild in, together.

These homes, both domestic and wild, are being provided and protected by structures built by humans and nonhumans. Let's take the (not-actually-a) fence and tolerance belt as examples to point out the role envisioned for humans by Ola and the Blühender Campus in these urban green spaces. No longer using them primarily as spaces for leisure or symbolism only – there were often disagreements about which understanding of ecology the aesthetics of the university's green space should represent – the role of humans in these spaces is extended to and prioritizes experiencing and fostering community with nonhuman worlds, both physically and emotionally. The lawns represent spaces for learning about nonhuman others by wading, ducking, sniffing through.

I think that, funnily enough, the combination of rewilded lawn, stake fence and tolerance belt somewhat makes for a pretty regular single-family home. There is the chaos of multiple life inside, framed by a built structure keeping it safe from some of the elements outside. It is also surrounded by a yard of mown grass that presents it to the world outside, but also puts some distance between it and the world.

Mind you, it is of course much more open to the elements and the environment than the brick-and-mortar houses around it. The analogy is not free from heavy-handedness. You and I would probably not be very welcoming to random people wading through our homes, sniffing around, ripping off and tasting things as they go along, or trying to catch us with nets. But the analogy might help to bring home (please excuse the pun, as it is

intended) the affective and material dimensions of a lawn as a more-than-human home, a communal effort of shared-world making. It takes humans, and plants, and insects; it takes processed wood and physical force; it takes machines with blades and laborers and (breaking through) habitual care practices. What we are left with is a controversial structure, one built through, and often around, negotiations of what nonhuman others and public urban green space (do not) mean to us as humans.

To exaggerate a bit and get a bit polemical for posterity's sake: Do we want to cut these lawns short and treat them as decoration? Continue to stage them as model homes in a model settlement of interchangeable structures that anonymous humans wade through, a 21st century grass version of Levittown⁵⁶ (which, ironically, was itself "decorated" with lawns like these?⁵⁷ Or are they to be real homes for all, at least potentially, regardless of how many legs, wings or leaves are on one's body? Though not without trade-offs, both the Blühender Campus's advocacy for the necessity of sustainable multispecies relations and the built forms and physical structures they (help) implement seek to create spaces for beings to dwell in and relate to the world. Human and nonhumans build homes that become contributions to making a shared world, one for manifold beings to flourish in, and all these differing contributions are being acknowledged, valued, and protected. I think Tsing, Ingold, and the Blühender Campus would come to the conclusion that yes – let's build some real homes together in the rubble, each one a tiny communal world in itself but part of a bigger one shared by all.

⁵⁶ Levittown was built as an affordable post-World War II model suburban housing development on Long Island, east of New York City. It was characterized by the uniformity of its built structures, the symmetry of its urban layout and its affordability. It later also became a stand-in for racially exclusionary (and thus explicitly racist) housing policies, white flight from the inner city and the uniformity of American middle-class politics. For more information, see Galyean 2015.

⁵⁷ A question whose relevance is fed by the slightly satirical rumor (whether true or not), one Ola told me about at the end of writing this thesis, that it has to be confirmed whether the lawns being manicured is officially part of the landscape architecture concept the layout of the university campus is based on, and thus rewilding them and letting them grow a legally corrigible infringement on this design.

7. Conclusion: Greener minds and the makings of a more hospitable world

“That’s the trouble with people, their root problem. Life runs alongside them, unseen. Right here, right next. Creating the soil. Cycling water. Trading in nutrients. Making weather. Building atmosphere. Feeding and curing and sheltering more kinds of creatures than people know how to count. A chorus of living wood sings to the woman: If your mind were only a slightly greener thing, we’d drown you in meaning. (Powers 2018: 4).

Richard Powers’ novel *The Overstory* begins with a woman sitting in a park who begins to hear the trees talking to her. It turns out later that (spoiler alert, sorry) this scene is actually set at the chronological end of the novel’s timeline. It shows Mimi Ma, living in freedom while the other members from her former ecoterrorist posse went to prison for arson, destruction of property, manslaughter and domestic terrorism after an attack gone wrong on a logging facility, in which one of their own got trapped and died. Mimi managed to disappear into a new identity, and none of the others mentioned her when they were caught and interrogated. Finally finding some kind of inner calm in the face of this sacrifice, she starts being able to listen to trees. The quote above is what they say to her. They tell her to be attuned to trees’ ways of being in and making the world, to have a slightly greener mind. We as humans would discover a more-than-human world that is different from what we generally identified as *the world* before. We’d drown not just in meaning, but in messages; in wisdom, appeals and rightful demands.

One of *The Overstory*’s main messages is that trees bear witness to their environment and to human lives quietly and patiently, bound to a different time. Our lives happen around them, to them, and through them. Trees bearing witness, being affected by the world, and communicating with it, is a constant thread in *The Overstory*, and I think Latour would argue that to bear witness, to see, note and communicate is part of democratic collective living and world-making. It is not just trees that bear witness: we all do, to each other’s and many other beings’ lives. It is a starting point to a connection to the world that acknowledges that living sustainably involves many beings’ contributions, that making multispecies homes for oneself and others is, and always has been, a communal undertaking.

The Blühender Campus started its work by bearing witness to what it perceived as a lack of hospitality to nonhuman life on many green spaces on campus. At the beginning of this enterprise, I asked how the project tries to create a more sustainable multispecies space, and which actors, relations and practices encourage or inhibit this process. Along the way, with the help of Latour, Tsing and others, I discovered that the project tackles demands of living in a multispecies world that are more urgent than ever: how to foster nonhuman life and robust biodiversity, how to do politics for more beings than humans, what wildness and domestication mean in a world that has been rendered increasingly inhospitable by human behavior and control, and how to work on solving all these problems from the ground up.

The practices of the Blühender Campus exemplify in different ways how to go about meeting these demands. In their negotiations with the university's technical administration, the Blühender Campus advocated as spokespeople for nonhuman needs and voiced their appeals and demands, such as sustainable growth, a need for spaces to lay eggs in, flowers to collect pollen from, etc. They fought to prioritize nonhuman needs over human demands. They gathered and applied scientific knowledge, but stressed the importance of practical experience and emotional well-being when working with more-than-human environments. They rewilded lawns, which became spaces both wild and domestic – multispecies homes in which to be wild together. Spaces in which to get entangled in the experience of being with the abundance of nonhuman life, and to have a positive influence on it. Together with nonhumans, the Blühender Campus and its allies build and guard structures, such as nesting sites for bees and open fences, that enable nonhuman life to flourish, and ideally protect that flourishing from human harm.

It is only one of many projects like it at universities all over the world. Since my time in the field, projects like this in Germany have become increasingly connected, both nationally and internationally, to be able to network and exchange experiences and advise. The project itself became much more diversified, bringing in more people and engaging in many programs of environmental education. In my neighborhood, rewilded lawns started to appear in parks and on cemeteries. There is potentially much more research to do on how different people, in different places and with different practices, tackle the demand of making a more hospitable world for both nonhuman and human beings. Not just the trees are bearing witness anymore – it seems that more and more minds are becoming greener things.

I want to leave you with a little wishful little prophecy that Anna Tsing concludes her article with. I want to let it speak for itself, because, *both* in spite of *but also* because of its pathos, it beautifully encapsulates what Ola and the Blühender Campus, and many others, make clear needs to be done. Hoping for the action of what she calls the CAR, the Cospecies Accommodation Revolution, Tsing writes that historical narratives written in the future might note that

“when capitalism left us in ruins, the CAR helped save a few patches of livability. Here were new forms of domestication, also known as rewilding, in which humans deferred to their multiple companion species as to desirable landscape modifications. In contrast to Noah's domestication on the ark, in the CAR many species built these not-very-homelike landscapes through their intersecting activities. Life on earth continues to exist because of these common efforts.” (Tsing 2018: 249).

Amen.

8. Literature

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