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Jumping up from the armchair: beyond the idyll in counterurbanisation

> 'Let us not take the study, the lamp and the ink out of doors, as we used to take wild life – having killed it and placed it in spirits of wine – indoors'
> (Edward Thomas 1909/2009: 132).

> 'In the overemphasis of cultural studies on the cultural forces beneath the landscape, it has lost interest in the landscape itself' (Mitch Rose 2006: 542).

Introduction: rural lifestyle migration

The rural features centrally within the wide spectrum of experiences that comprise the attempts to 'escape to the good life' that are signalled by lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). More specifically, though, this is a rural framed theoretically as a *social construction*, informed strongly by social science's late 20th century 'cultural turn' (Nayak and Jeffrey 2011) and its foregrounding of the role of the socio-cultural realm within everyday life. This perspective – the chapter cautiously labels it a paradigm[1], such has been its influence within rural studies from the late 1980s – has sought to articulate 'the fascinating world of social, cultural and moral values which have become associated with rurality, rural spaces and rural life' (Cloke 2006: 21). It is these cultural values that lifestyle migrants frequently seek to experience (for example, Benson 2011; Hoey 2005, 2009). However, this chapter argues that understanding the place of the rural within such lifestyle migration must not end with these values, even it may usefully start with them. Its place is argued to exceed any such socio-cultural framing.

Engaging aspects of a wider ongoing critical (re)evaluation of the social construction paradigm, the chapter examines the migration of people towards more rural areas, a set of practices corralled under the taxonomic label 'counterurbanisation' (Halfacree 2008)[2]. Following this introduction, the chapter presents three ways in which migrating towards the rural can be addressed. First, it discusses how counterurbanisation within the social construction paradigm became predominantly presented as a 'representational practice', underpinned in particular by the culturally inscribed attractions of the 'armchair countryside' of the 'rural idyll'. Such a reading firmly associates counterurbanisation with lifestyle migration, as already suggested. Yet, when this reading is reflected on, it is immediately clear that there exists mismatch between the geographical imaginary and 'real' rural places, a disjuncture which gives pause for thought as to both the explanatory adequacy of the representational perspective and even of how scholars

delineate 'migration' generally. Attention shifts, second, to recognising more-than-representational aspects to counterurbanisation, where the affective powers of the more-than-human rural environment, in particular, receive sustained attention. Whilst this 'environment' only becomes physically (as opposed to socio-culturally) 'active' following relocation, it is argued in the third reading that granting such attention can be justified by adopting a more 'event' perspective. The 'event of counterurbanisation' and the central place of the more-than-human world 'beyond the armchair' within this are illustrated in the chapter's second main section. This sketches two East Anglian case studies drawn from the 'new nature writing' literature. Following an event-ual framework, developed roughly from Schillmeier (2011), both migrations are shown to be societally every day occurrences that are not everyday for those involved; disruptive, which is both negatively and (increasingly) positively evaluated; and express strongly the emergent role of an active more-than-human rural environment. Finally, a conclusion both summarises the chapter's findings and reflects on their implications for examining lifestyle migration more generally. It also cautions that a key message is not that counterurbanisation or lifestyle migration scholarship should discard the socio-cultural paradigm but that careful use of more-than-representational, more-than-human and event-ual sensitivities extend its scope into what Ingold (2008: 1809) terms the 'creeping entanglements of life'.

Migrating towards the rural: beyond representational action

Counterurbanisation as representational practice

Jon Murdoch's (2006: 177) contribution to the *Handbook of Rural Studies* outlined 'a propensity on the part of more and more households to leave the city in search of a better life in the countryside… [a process that has] changed the character of rural communities and rural society'. This depicts well what social scientists have come to term counterurbanisation (Halfacree 2008). The term seeks to articulate, as its name suggests, a reversal in the demographic fortunes of rural and urban areas in the former's favour. It is thus set up in explicit contrast to urbanisation, a defining spatio-demographic feature of the modern age. Moreover, whilst this key socio-demographic phenomenon is typically represented as a process peaking in the Global North in the late 20th century, it persists strongly into the present. In short, notwithstanding detailed debates on how it should be understood and differentiated (Halfacree 2008; Mitchell 2004), counterurbanisation typically involves 'pro-rural migration' (Halfacree and Rivera 2012) or the net movement of people towards more rural destinations.

Focusing on the practice of counterurbanisation, as compared to its spatio-demographic outcomes, there has been a noted change in emphasis within scholarship over time. In the early years, reflecting cultural expressions such as Jeffersonian agrarianism and the 'frontier thesis' in the US (Bunce 1994), counterurbanisation could be positioned as an emerging 'natural' phenomenon. As overall societal prosperity grew and new transportation and labour saving technologies were adopted by large sections of the population, an 'instinct' to live in more rural settings became practically realisable. Thus, Berry (1976: 24) argued that counterurbanisation expressed a 'reassertion of fundamental predispositions of the American culture... antithetical to urban concentration'. The positivistic underpinnings of the then recent 'quantitative revolution' (Nayak and Jeffrey 2011) was, furthermore, able to give a degree a theoretical rigour to such explanations, with the urban-to-rural shift via counterurbanisation becoming a Ravensteinian 'law' of migration (Boyle *et al*. 1998: 59-60).

The 1970s was, of course, also a period where such spatial 'laws' and their positivist underpinnings were increasingly challenged by critical scholarship. Marxian accounts, stressing the central importance of the economic basis of society, linked counterurbanisation firmly to dynamics within the class structure of capitalism. This provided a 'wholly darker, more hard-edged, materialistic and realistic explanation' (Fielding 1998: 42). In contrast, humanistic critique took issue with the de-humanisation intrinsic to the idea of spatial laws and sought to investigate how counterurbanisers explained their behaviour. This work burgeoned, not least in the UK (Boyle *et al*. 1998: 143-8). It provided thorough insight into the complexity of the counterurbanisation process for its practitioners, whilst retaining the importance of class perspectives.

Uniting all of this scholarship, however, and to a degree weathering the storms of dispute between the various 'isms' that sought to make their mark on counterurbanisation, has been the central importance given to the role of spatial representations – imaginary geographies - of rural/rurality (and urban/urbanity). From Jeffersonian images of a 'true' America on wards, the importance of meanings of rurality 'put together in words, images, figures, graphs and tables' (Nayak and Jeffrey 2011: 99) was central. Notwithstanding the caveat that counterurbanisation usually requires some 'favourable' economic context for those involved (Fielding 1998) - from a job accessible from a rural residence, to having sufficient resources to buy a country property, to the potential for downsizing and/or downshifting - it has come to be seen as a *socio-cultural* practice or set of practices.

More specifically, what are termed in the migration literature 'environmental factors' are accorded considerable importance for the practice of counterurbanisation. Such factors extend

beyond biophysical attributes (temperature, topography, vegetation, wildlife, and so on) to incorporate fundamentally cultural expressions. For example, in a review of 'amenity migration', Gosnell and Abrams (2011: 306, 308, emphasis added) asserted that within 'the variety of factors operating at multiple scales [that] contribute to making the movement… possible', a key role is played by '*social constructions* of rurality and urbanity, and their effects on individual decisions to relocate'. Or, from Dirksmeier's (2008: 160, emphases added) German perspective:

> '[t]he *structure and situation of a rural area… are of little relevance* to the newcomers' motives. It is the *conception* of an idealized rural lifestyle which is crucial in determining the actions and attitudes of people at the time of their arrival'.

The present author's work has also made this same broad case (Halfacree 2008).

It is the central importance given to socio-cultural factors in drawing people into the rural that associates these expressions of counterurbanisation with lifestyle migration. The rural environment and what it is associated with existentially have come to feature prominently within the late modern 'projects of the self' (Giddens 1991). Migration to what seemingly promises to be a better way of life represents one of the 'escapes' (O'Reilly and Benson 2009: 4) that lifestyle migration signals. In contrast, other forms of counterurban migration, such as those undertaken for more explicitly economically instrumental reasons (Halfacree 2008), might be undertaken to improve quality of life and life chances but remain less focused on lifestyle; they are more about emancipatory than life politics (Giddens 1991).

Turning to the representations of rurality that seemingly underpin much lifestyle counterurbanisation, highly prominent are versions of a 'rural idyll'. Thus, with British lifestyle migration to rural France, Benson (2011: 1) illustrated explicitly how such an idyll not only 'inspired the act of migration... but also framed... post-migration lifestyle choices' (also Hoey 2005, 2009). However, this concept of a rural idyll is possibly even more slippery than that of counterurbanisation, similarly provoking academic debate on its content, analytical value and cultural importance (Bunce 2003; Nicolson 2010; Short 2006). For example, idyllic ruralities vary considerably geographically, culturally, socially and historically. Such diversity immediately raises questions of whether 'something' transcends the cultural representational dimension to explain more fundamentally associations made between the rural and the 'good life'. Rose's (2006: 545) suggestion of 'landscapes' gathering 'dreams of presence' through which one may 'attempt... to hold onto the worlds that always eludes our grasp' may have explanatory mileage here, as may associations between rurality and re-enchantment (Evans and Robson 2010), an issue briefly returned to later.

Crucially and highly appropriate within all of this intellectual 'chatter', the rural idyll is widely acknowledged as a product of a largely urban 'bourgeois imaginary' (Bell 2006: 150). As such, it suggests a potentially very powerful force within contemporary capitalist society. Pursuing this, Canadian geographer Michael Bunce in his influential 1994 text *The Countryside Ideal* coined the term 'armchair countryside'. This suggested a spatial imagination or representation thought up, fine-tuned, embellished, promoted and, of course, critiqued, if not literally in the comfort of an armchair located next to a warm, cosy open fire, then at least at the office desk and on the computers of largely urban cultural producers, arbiters and mediators (including academics).

A key recurrent finding that emerges from critical investigation of rural idylls, however, is how they typically present a 'mistaken view of the countryside as pastoral' (Nicolson 2010: 122). There is considerable mismatch between idyllic representations and academic accounts of actual rural places and people. For example, whilst the English rural idyll typically expresses Bell's (2006) artisanal pastoral farmscape, actual English farming landscapes include 'super-productivist' (Halfacree 2006) agribusiness spatialities that inscribe an everyday geography bearing very little relevance to any conventional idyll. More socially, British lifestyle migrants to rural France are soon forced to face up to a 'disjuncture between... expectations and the local culture' (Benson 2011: 61), whilst work within 'neglected rural geographies' (Philo 1992) presents a diversity of populations, including residents in considerable hardship, poorly mirrored within idyllic representations. Even for the counterurbaniser, '[d]rudgery, the daily grind, is not limited to the office. They await you in the countryside too' (Nicolson 2010: 123).

This sense of mismatch between, crudely put, rural 'image' and 'reality' recently provoked the present author and a colleague to revisit the assumption of lifestyle counterurbanisation as so predominantly 'representational' (Halfacree and Rivera 2012). The revisit soon suggested just how much counterurbanisation frequently encompasses much more than can be explained by armchair representations. Moreover, widening the explanatory lens soon leads to critical reflection on the more general dominant epistemological and ontological scholastic framing of 'migration'. Migration, in sum, is about a whole lot more than relocating from A to B 'a self-contained object like a ball that can project itself from place to place' (Ingold 2008: 1807). In this it is about more than representation.

Counterurbanisation as more-than-representational

Within the social construction paradigm's framing of counterurbanisation, neat and simplistic accounts of the relocation process have increasingly been rejected. This is because the idea of

‘culture’ is fundamentally not that of any distanced and discrete elite Culture but of the more immediate, entangled and embodied ‘cultures of everyday life’ or ‘inhabitation’ (Ingold 2008). The present author, for example, explicitly rejected the usual possibility of being able to reduce relocation to a single reason, asserting instead that ‘[r]ather than look for one or two relatively self-contained reasons for migration we must expect to find several, some relatively fully-formed, others much more indefinite’ (Halfacree and Boyle 1993: 339). Furthermore, these multiple strands are regarded as often highly elusive and incoherent, relating as they do not just to discursively expressed (or even expressible) ‘decisions to move’ but in part to more subconsciously or even unconsciously embedded priorities, projects and proclivities (Halfacree and Boyle 1993).

Nonetheless, such complexity *within* a still predominantly representational perspective is no longer seen as enough. A focus on spatial representations within counterurbanisation ignores a recent growth in scholarship, associated in human geography with Nigel Thrift (2007) in particular, that has sought to downplay such quasi-cognitive emphasis within the practices of everyday life (Macpherson 2010). This non-representational or, after Lorimer (2005), more-than-representational perspective does not deny the importance of representations within everyday life. Instead, it builds, in particular, on Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/1962: xviii) assertion of how ‘[t]he world is not what I think, but what I live through’. In other words, it calls on researchers to de-centre the social construction and cognitive realms of representation when explicating everyday life in favour of attending to:

> ‘shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions’ (Lorimer 2005: 84).

It favours, in short, a focus on practice and action over thought and contemplation; embedded, entangled inhabitation (Ingold 2008).

Nonetheless and notwithstanding its usefulness elsewhere, the applicability of a more-than-representational sensitivity to understanding lifestyle counterurbanisation may not be immediately apparent. This is because, *as conventionally understood*, such migration as noted earlier is *defined a priori* as largely a representational instrumental action within a reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991). Unlike so much else in life it **is** ‘contemplative’ (Thrift 2007: 114). Lifestyle migrants typically seek ‘escape’ (O’Reilly and Benson 2009: 4) and rare are those who migrate, whether or not to the countryside, ‘by accident’ or without careful thought. Consequently, the relevance and certainly the prominence of any more-than-representational perspective is only likely to come into its own when the *experience* of counterurbanisation rather

than the relocation process itself is interrogated. It is of the 'lifestyle' more than of the 'migration'. In particular, it becomes important to help explain why counterurbanisers tend to stay in rural destinations, not least when they experience directly the frequent mismatch between represented (idyllic) and lived ('real') rurality noted earlier (Halfacree and Rivera 2012).

Specifically, and notwithstanding numerous other 'moorings' promoting spatial inertia that together explain why Moon (1995: 514) could assert that 'migration ought to be viewed as a contradiction to the usual endeavours for locational and social stability', adding a more-than-representational perspective enables a fuller indication of how the rural world of the counterurbaniser's destination can engage the migrant. In part, this entanglement will involve representations but its fuller significance can only be appreciated when a more-than-representational sensibility is prominent.

On the one hand, as discussed above, migrants have likely been engaged by representational rurality in the rationale for their move, and this connection carries on in subsequent lives. This includes attempts 'to resolve... disjuncture' (Benson 2011: 63) between actual and imagined as migrants seek to bring their dreams to fruition (Halfacree and Rivera 2012). On the other hand, the rural that is more-than-human (Whatmore 2002), in particular, can come into its own in a fuller and livelier sense following relocation. Rurality in the guise of landscape and nature becomes both affective and effective. It can 'scape' the in-migrant as it 'press[es] hard upon and into our bodies and minds, complexly affect our moods, our sensibilities' (Macfarlane 2012: 341). It may do this under several interlinked themes (Halfacree and Rivera 2012; Halfacree 2013):

- *Slowing down*, within a less outwardly frenetic landscape;
- *Feeling life*, notably becoming attuned to the rhythms of nature and the seasons;
- *Connectedness*, rhizomatic links with plants, animals, inanimate objects, or other people;
- *Place-based dwelling*, becoming and sensing embeddedness or rootedness within everyday life;
- *Learning by doing*, practice promoting a re-focused sense of one's life.

Whilst all of these themes are clearly open to representation (as the case studies outlined below will demonstrate), a more-than-representational sensitivity is required to appreciate more fully how the complex scaping of the migrant occurs.

Overall, therefore, a more-than-representational perspective indicates how the rural environment is not just an object, hopefully rewarding, for the migrant to negotiate, as it is itself far from passive. It presents an 'animated' (Rose 2006: 538) and lively 'zone of entanglement'

(Ingold 2008: 1807) with an 'atmosphere' that 'creates a space of intensity that overflows a represented world organized into subjects and objects' (Anderson 2009: 79). This may be linked, as suggested by Macfarlane (2010), to experiences of re-enchantment. Nonetheless, whilst cultivating re-enchantment might be important for explaining in part 'why people stay' (Halfacree and Rivera 2012), both more-than-representational and more-than-human perspectives may still be regarded as rather peripheral to the counterurbanisation *process*. This is unless how this process is conventionally delineated is itself subjected to conceptual reappraisal. Such re-scripting is the chapter's next task.

Counterurbanisation as event-like

Although frustratingly elusive to pin down (Anderson and Harrison 2010), the concept of the 'event' is a key component of non-representational theory (Thrift 2007). Axiomatically but perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, an event is understood as '*not* just something that happens' (Fraser 2010: 57, my emphasis), with major impacts perhaps but ultimately 'done and dusted' over a relatively discrete period, thereby making it relatively straightforward to signify and represent. Instead, the event provides a metaphorical gateway or portal to a radically different 'before and... after' (Fraser 2010: 65). Events provide 'new potentialities for being, doing and thinking' (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 19, emphasis removed) that exceed any purpose, logic or rationale that the action involved may initially express. Consequently, 'it is not the event itself that is the bearer of signification. Instead, all those who are touched by an event define and are defined by it' (Fraser 2010: 65). The event:

> 'has neither a privileged representative nor legitimate scope. The scope of the event is part of its effects, of the problem posed in the future it creates. Its measure is the object of multiple interpretations, but it can also be measured by the very multiplicity of these interpretations: all those who, in one way or another, refer to it or invent a way of using it to construct their own position, become part of the event's effects' (Stengers 2000: 67).

Events, therefore, whilst clearly being (usually) nameable and thereby capable of representation are not reducible to any such definitive legislation. They cannot be signed-off so easily. Indeed, following on from the action itself, any such 'initial' representation really only articulates the starting point of the event. As Rose (2006: 550) argues, 'representations initiate and provoke rather than constrain and tie down'. More generally, analytical attention needs to shift 'away from the objects, narratives, and performances where culture ostensibly manifests to the movements, inclinations, and desires for which those objects, narratives, and performances

provide direction' (Rose 2006: 538). Thus, the event may always be capable of (partial) representation but such practice has to be provisional and continuous as the event is a moving target and its scope indeterminate. Indeed, it is through indeterminacy or contingency that events may 'gain importance' (Schillmeier 2011: 516) and thereby actually become *events*.

Events are most usually seen and imagined as large in scale and scope. Noted examples include wars, 9/11, the fall of the Berlin Wall, nuclear disasters or global illness pandemics. However, they can also be 'small'; the quotation marks indicating how significance should not necessarily be related to size. Schillmeier (2011) includes such highly personal things as strokes, falling in love and the onset of dementia as comprising events for those it touches. It is from this more personal perspective that migration and, specifically in this chapter, counterurban lifestyle migration can be presented as a candidate for event-like status[3]. Attributing such a status to lifestyle counterurbanisation radically rebalances how it is to be interpreted and mapped out.

If counterurbanisation is regarded as having event-like qualities then the relocation and the reasons given for it are still of importance – Rose's (2006: 538) 'objects, narratives, and performances'. So, therefore, from the scholarship reviewed above, are representations of rurality, as they help to explain the presence of the person(s) in the rural environment. However, potentially this just marks the beginning of analysis. Attention then turns to how relocation opens a gateway to potential realisation of Rose's (2006: 538) 'movements, inclinations, and desires'. An event perspective leads to counterurbanisation being seen as 'distributed' into the future, as much as it is rooted in the past (Halfacree and Boyle 1993). It also makes it hard – if not impossible – to determine when, if ever, it is 'over' and therefore amenable to any final representational inventory. Event-ful counterurbanisation brings to the fore the unfolding of post-relocation (Benson 2011) and, within this, raises the effective 'definitional' potential of the more-than-representational and more-than-human effects and affects introduced in the last sub-section. These latter forces now *do* become, in other words, key 'persons of interest' within the lifestyle counterurbanisation *process*.

Touched by the event of moving to East Anglia

The movement of nature writers

To illustrate briefly some sense of an event-like unfolding of lifestyle counterurbanisation, the chapter turns to two short case studies. Both are migrations to rural East Anglia in England and are also linked by their writers being both friends and key figures within the 'new nature writing' (Cowley 2008; Mabey 2010a: 188-90). The latter is an essentially humanistic body of work that

foregrounds ‘a community of fellow beings’ (Mabey 2010a: 189), balancing the voices of the human and the more-than-human (Matless 2009). It is what Hunt (2009: 71) calls a psychoecology that combines intellectual traditions to present:

> ‘experiential and cultural accounts of the natural environment and living organisms, drawing upon autobiographical and travel narratives, art, literature and folklore as well as the many branches of natural history’.

In this respect, the new nature writing connects to earlier writings on ‘nature’ (for example, John Clare or Gilbert White). These heterodox studies, often in the form of journals, expressed well ‘affective moments’ where one is ‘unexpectedly “caught”, or “struck”’ (Mabey 2010a: 176). However, such ‘associations and resonances’ (*ibid*.) were displaced by the rise of more systematic scientific ‘fascination with the mechanisms of nature’ (Mabey 2005: 107) when intellectual division of labour became progressively entrenched through the 19th and 20th centuries.

New nature writing’s stepping-away from the latter ‘disenchanted’ (Macfarlane 2010) perspective has parallels with the jumping out of the office armchair to study counterurbanisation advocated in this chapter. It appears especially powerful at expressing more-than-representational and more-than-human sensibility. It consistently ‘reinvigorates the quotidian aspects of commonplace surroundings habitually unnoticed due to familiarity’ (Hunt 2009: 72) and specifically, within these surroundings, expresses ‘an awareness of the provisional status of scientific truths with *an overarching confidence in the existence of the more-than-human world*’ (Stenning 2013: 46, my emphases) and its agency.

The two writers’ accounts of personal relocation and its aftermath may thus not express definitive examples of lifestyle counterurbanisation but are ideal resources for illustrating three key themes within what Schillmeier (2011: 515-6) terms ‘cosmopolitical events’. These themes are:

1. The specific type of event may take place every day but it is not everyday for those it touches;
2. The event will ‘disrupt and alter the normalcy of social reality (cosmos)’ (hence cosmopolitical), potentially in two directions;
   a) Negatively - ‘often abrupt, unexpected, alienating and endangering’;
   b) Positively - ‘freeing, liberating and emancipatory’;
3. The event increasingly foregrounds ‘the contingent but specific effects... that make up their complexities’.

It is under the latter two themes that the more-than-representational and more-than-human assert themselves, with third theme in particular being central to making the event event-ful.

Every day but not everyday

As one would expect from the discussion so far in the chapter, the spatial relocation that took place in both examples was clearly not an everyday experience, even if the academic literature has demonstrated how every day such migration now is (Halfacree 2008, 2012). This observation, of course, qualifies the argument made earlier of how any migration is rarely undertaken 'thoughtlessly'. Richard Mabey's migration expresses this excellently. His memoir, *Nature Cure*, begins with how he had come to the conclusion that he had to move away from the Chiltern Hills of southern England where he had lived all his life. Although a highly respected and successful nature writer, Mabey had 'drifted into a long and deep depression, couldn't work, used up most of my money, fell out with my sister – my house-mate – and had to sell the family home' (Mabey 2005: 4). He had become 'clotted with rootedness' and like a bird needed to 'flit', a 'word [taken from nature poet John Clare] that catches all the shades of escape' (Mabey 2005: 1, 2, 1-2). Consequently, whilst not 'chosen or planned', he 'caught a chance' (Mabey 2005: 4) and relocated to rooms in a friend's farmhouse in remote East Anglia, a location with which he was, however, familiar from frequent visits.

Mark Cocker's memoir centring on his intimate interest in corvids, *Crow Country* (Cocker 2008), also begins with an account of the non-everyday character of his move. This time the relocation is more clearly lifestyle counterurbanisation, albeit only over a short distance of about 10 miles from the city of Norwich to the Yare Valley. Ostensibly provoked by the need for space for his work and family, but clearly underpinned by his love of nature and the countryside, the migration proved *in practice* to be far from instrumentally 'mundane... heavily institutionalised in and through facilitating networks' (Halfacree 2012: 212). Instead, relocation to the run-down, damp and litter strewn – yet affordable – *Hollies* was described as expressing 'a suppressed trauma' (Cocker 2008: 7). Indeed, unlike Mabey, Cocker (2008: 13) rejects any idea that human migration can be described as 'flitting', asserting instead how:

> 'when humans move house, they don't migrate. They're thrown into turmoil. There is no handrail of tradition or inherited understanding to steady the journey. There is no homing instinct to guide their passage across it. There is just the unfamiliar and the muddle of the unfamiliar.'

This account, in short, thus diverges dramatically from a social construction framing of lifestyle counterurbanisation as following the lure of the culturally-emplaced 'handrail of tradition' that is the rural idyll.

However, working through the 'muddle of the unfamiliar' - this every day that is not everyday - can ultimately prove highly rewarding. For Cocker (2008: 10), '[p]erhaps it was part of the wider madness of that year of moving house that we eventually decided to buy the Hollies. Not that we have ever regretted it. We love it. It's changed our lives'. To explore how lives changed, attention now moves to the post-migration everyday.

Unbuttoning normalcy

Disruption and its 'unbuttoning of normalcy' (Schillmeier 2011: 530) were strongly apparent within both accounts of migration to East Anglia. For Mabey (2005: 10), the move raised key existential questions: 'Where do I belong? What's my role? How, in social, emotional, ecological terms, do I find a way of *fitting*?'. The ornithological flitting metaphor was continued in how he saw his move as 'the thing I've been scared of all my life: the rite of cutting the cord, leaving the nest, spreading one's wings' (Mabey 2005: 5). In residential terms, one might say that Mabey's reflexive project of the self was only now beginning. Immediately though, the importance of the rural place came through:

> '[u]p in the East Anglian borderlands I know I'm going to have to comfort the daily realities of country life in a way I never have before. The weather, for a start [wind, rain]... big farming [the landscape of agribusiness, anathema to his ecological vision]... this bare [treeless relative to the Chilterns] and quintessentially watery place' (Mabey 2005: 10-1).

Likewise, Cocker could perceive an appropriate incongruousness in toasting the family's move with warm champagne, since it expressed 'a celebration of estrangement' (Cocker 2008: 14) rather than any arrival at a rural idyll. He further noted how it took his elder daughter a year to overcome her dislike of the new home and how:

> 'we were all overwhelmed by the experience [as] the comforting routines of our Norwich life had been *demolished overnight*, and... we had all been *cast up on the shores of uncertainty*' (Cocker 2008: 13, my emphases).

However, in both cases these negative experiences of disruption – aspects of a liminal condition commonplace within lifestyle migration (Hoey 2005) - were soon displaced by 'freeing, liberating and emancipatory' currents. Both writers, as one might expect from naturalists, found these elements in large part from experiencing the diverse more-than-human inhabitants of the

East Anglian landscape. This landscape, as Lorimer expresses it with respect to Mabey (Merriman *et al*. 2008: 197) but which is also the case for Cocker, 'throb[s] and hum[s] with activity... creating... [a] richness of effect, and affect' in both memoirs.

Mabey (2005: 74, 102), for example, reflected how disruption and confusion was transcended as what he termed his temporary 'lair' became home:

> 'I came to mine [home] almost by reflex, with as little thought about what I was doing as a migrant marsh harrier returning to the fen – "naturally", if you like. If I'd consciously had to plan and choose where I was going to go in what was, for me, the most momentous change in my life, I would never have made it. That dithering between equally desirable alternatives would have been quite paralysing, a sure route back into my state of immobilising anxiety. ... [However,] I'd fetched up, as a fledgling, in a situation I'd never dreamed of, in the simplest possible habitation, in a lair that felt, symbolically, like the primeval shelters humans made in woodland clearings. But it worked. I grew up fast. I got out of the house. I was being about again. ... Less than six months after moving to East Anglia I felt back in touch, in control of my life again, grounded'.

However, one must not over-state the role of the more-than-human. Mabey found his emotional grounding and emancipation not just through the shelter of 'nature' but also in an intimate human way. This was through what developed into a new relationship that came out from the migration via his East Anglian friendship network, namely with his now partner Poppy. A Norfolk-raised Childhood Studies lecturer whom he had met years before and bonded over a mutual 'love of plants' (Mabey 2005: 61), Poppy was to become more than 'companion and comfort' (Mabey 2005: 102). Overall, one sees how Mabey's 'encounters with his local environment are both parochial *and* sociable' (Stenning 2013: 46), including a vital importance given to 'social dimensions of natural events' (*ibid*.) such as the coming of spring. In sum, a whole new environmental-emotional everyday reality was coming into existence.

In the Yare Valley, a strong emancipatory atmosphere was also soon sensed by Cocker. The environmental contrast is less strongly noted than for Mabey, as Cocker was more familiar with the East Anglian landscape, flora and fauna. However, as he begins in the book to muse on how the landscape of the Yare Valley increasingly imposed itself upon him, a kind of rapture is suggested. Furthermore, Cocker also reflects on how the role of the migration had begun to become 'extended' beyond any initial represented instrumentality:

> '[t]he proximity of a natural landscape had been carefully considered when we made the decision to move... Yet the feelings I encountered as I made my way down to Hardley Flood

> and, more often, as I walked back to the car with dusk blossoming all around, was *far more than simply the pleasure of convenience* [for a nature writer]. Equally the *sense of elation* seemed *out of proportion to the landscape around me or the experience it afforded*' (Cocker 2008: 17, my emphases).

In short, the migration enabled, as with Mabey, a new environmental-emotional everyday reality within the Yare Valley to emerge. This finally aligned Cocker (2008: 66, my emphases) squarely with his beloved rooks:

> '[b]y the time we moved to the valley... my own needs were aligned to the ecology of my sacred bird. I felt deeply jaded by the congested terraced streets of inner Norwich. *I wanted to break free*. I wanted an airborne cradle of sticks from which to scan the world passing below, wide horizons to stretch my gaze, and the open space with its faint breath of the steppe to fire my imagination.'

Event-ual outcomes

With their relocations to and within East Anglia, both Richard Mabey and Mark Cocker thus eventually found their requisite experiences of holistic well-being and space, respectively. Nonethless, the significance of these migrations does not end here. By the end of both memoirs, both relocations can be seen as inadequately and even rather insipidly represented by this pair of reasons. Indeed, the memoirs would be very much shorter if there was not much more to tell within the overall relocation narratives. It is this 'excess' that gives the migrations most clearly event-like / event-ual characteristics.

After Rose (2006), the relocations provided direction for movements, inclinations and desires to develop, not least via the 'contingent but specific effects' of more-than-representational and more-than-human experiences of rural East Anglia. These experiences, furthermore, provide not just the means for a new everyday reality to emerge but are also more agentic, as Rose (2006: 542, my emphases) further suggests when he speaks of how landscape 'solicits and provokes, *initiates* and connects... *engenders its own effects* and affects'; the affective can be effective. Notwithstanding the already-noted importance of Poppy's affectiveness and effectiveness for Mabey, it was these active rural place experiences that emerged quickly and strongly through the migration that rapidly asserted themselves within both memoirs. The initial relocation is rapidly displaced, dissolved and potentially effaced. In particular, entanglements with contingent but specific more-than-human natures increasingly enchant both writers.

Within Mabey's migration from the Chilterns to East Anglia, it is the windiness and the wetness of the area, in particular, that comes to feature especially prominently as a component or ingredient of his everyday life. It is a status he muses on considerably (also Mabey 2010b) and ultimately with a degree of inconclusivity one might perhaps expect of an 'inhabitant' who makes his 'way *through* a world-in-formation, rather than *across* its preformed surface' (Ingold 2008: 1802). First, the wet weather stimulated an all round re-birth:

> '[i]t was the sense of possibility that set me right. The floods that [first] autumn were like a second spring, quickening the place, pulling strings, jerking earth and vegetation – and me – back into life' (Mabey 2010b: 36).

Second, out of this renaissance came a new awareness of his own networked agency. This was especially prominent in the fenlands, with the consequences reflected upon through an explicit social science lens:

> '[t]he fens, in Bourdieu's words, are a habitus, a field of play and natural possibility... And walking in the fens this summer, I've felt, in the most flattered way possible, water-shaped myself, caught up in the current. I'm momentarily one of the company. I ferry seeds, stuck to my shoes. I make brief openings in the reed canopy every time that I peer across at a pool. Whenever I step onto the peat... tiny efflorescences of moisture spread round my feet, and I have the feeling that yards, maybe miles, further on, I'm squeezing water out onto some slumbering aquatic growths' (Mabey 2005: 186).

In summary, acknowledging how 'boundaries between self and nature are easily breached' (Stenning 2013: 50), Mabey (2005: 74) muses that finding 'a way of "fitting" seems... no more likely to come from deliberate choice than from accepting a degree of drift, from tacking with events, going with the flow' and how finally, again also foregrounding the role of other human and non-human agency:

> '[w]hat healed me… was… a sense of being taken not out of myself but back *in*, of nature entering me, firing up the wild bits in my imagination. If there was a single moment when I was 'cured' it was that flash of loving inspiration by Poppy, that sat me down under the beech tree in my old home, and made me pick up a pen again. … The physical rejoining came later, and my translation from the depths of forest country to bright and shifting landscape of the fens was a huge metaphorical support. *I really did have to listen, and look up*' (Mabey 2005: 225, latter emphases mine).

Mark Cocker, too, building on the earlier quote on the sense of rapture he felt returning to his new home, suggests throughout his memoir how the more-than-human in the guise of the

landscape, with its atmosphere and diverse agencies, is implicated in remaking his everyday existence. First, it works towards building a similar sense of home to that expressed by Mabey. Specifically, the psychoecology of the landscape promoted a 'consubstantial' relationship between Cocker and the Yare Valley, whereby there develops a 'spatial relation… between beings and a place, such that the distinct existence and form of both partake of or become united in a common substance' (Gray 1998: 345). For example:

> '[t]he Yare valley was now [becoming part of my identity]. We'd opened our lungs and breathed it in. For the first time the Yare valley had enveloped us and sampled our presence. It seemed a perfect consummation. For only the second occasion in my life [the first was his Derbyshire childhood] I felt truly home' (Cocker 2008: 18).

Or, reflecting further how specific '[l]andscapes impose their own kind of relationship' (Cocker 2008: 18-9):

> 'I've... learned to love a different register of features. Subtly and unconsciously they have become embedded in my experience. For instance it is a first task on arrival at any point of the marsh to scan the five-bar gates and their curious adjunct in this incised landscape, the fence extensions that lean into the dykes at an angle... I have learned equally to treat each dyke like a hidden valley that you inch towards and... scan quickly'.

In summary:

> '[t]he space all around seems a part of such close encounters. It particularises the moment. Things seem special. I could be wrong. The background conditions may be far more prosaic. It may be that I am simply trapped by the sheer impediment of the river, and I am just making the most of the wildlife that's to hand. But I don't think so. In the Yare valley so many of the things that I had once overlooked or taken for granted were charged with fresh power and importance. It gave rise to a strange and fruitful paradox. I had come home to a place where everything seemed completely new' (Cocker 2008: 24).

Second, this sense of a consubstantiated homeliness also saw Cocker revisiting in the memoir the rationale for the move to the Yare. The migration begins to be picked apart and representationally reassembled differently. The lived reality of which the migration is a part itself has changed and its 'interpretation... become[s] part of the event's effects' (Stengers 2000: 67). As Cocker (2008: 20) muses:

> 'I sometimes wonder whether, in my passion for the Yare and its rooks, necessity wasn't the mother of invention. The real origins of my obsession were those regular slow-flowing crocodiles of cars, traffic light to traffic light, through the heart of the city' (Cocker 2008: 20).

This negative experience was increasingly 'abandoned' (Cocker 2008: 20) as the modest River Yare 'asserted itself with subtle power' (Cocker 2008: 19) and 'hemmed' (Cocker 2008: 20) him in. Finally, though, a central agentic role must also be accorded to the corvids:

> '[r]ooks are at the heart of my relationship with the Yare. They were my route into the landscape and my rationale for my exploration... Yet when I look back it seems bizarre to recall how little they once meant to me. Before we moved I gave rooks no more thought than any other bird. Rather, I gave them less. They seemed so commonplace' (Cocker 2008: 25).

The migration has now become, in short, less for family space than for *Crow Country*.

Conclusion: rethinking lifestyle migration

This chapter has argued that confining scholarship on lifestyle-orientated counterurbanisation to the representational study, lamp and ink (Thomas 1909/2009: 132) of Bunce's (1994) armchair countryside is frequently overly restrictive. One must instead sometimes jump up from this armchair, exit the metaphorical study and acknowledge how a fixation on such 'cultural forces' (Rose 2006: 542) as the rural idyll neglects roles played by other components of the rural scene. Particular attention has been called to the importance of the more-than-representational within counterurban relocation, especially as expressed through the more-than-human landscape. Moreover, if a lifestyle counterurbanisation can be seen as meriting (quasi-)event status then an armchair perspective becomes still more inadequate. Counterurbanisation-as-event *foregrounds* post-migration entanglements and experiences rather than according the act of relocation and its denoted rationale *a priori* status of 'privileged representative' or 'legitimate scope' (Stengers 2000: 67). Specifically in the two nature writer memoirs noted here it was argued that the more-than-human had a powerful affective and effective role that 'construct[ed its] own position' (Stengers 2000: 67) in excess of anything anticipated or expected, even from two nature writers!

These conclusions have implications for the study of lifestyle migration more generally and, in particular, for how one understands 'lifestyle' within this broad spectrum of migration experiences. For Giddens (1991: 81), in a key formulation, lifestyle was 'a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity'. The

argument developed in this chapter calls for researchers to scrutinise this definition[4]. Three issues, in particular, present themselves.

First, Giddens (1991) expresses lifestyle as largely constituted through the everyday choices a person makes (and the routines that consequently emerge). Whilst not refuting the role of (albeit constrained) choice (agency) within the 'strategic life planning' (Giddens 1991: 85) of the late modern self, as Benson (2011) has demonstrated for Britons in rural France and as Mabey and Cocker experienced, this does not mean that chosen 'reasons for moving' necessarily come to inscribe or represent the new lifestyle. Indeed, there may be much dissonance, even if a 'good life' is still attained.

Second and related, lifestyle must not be seen as overly fixed but as inherently mobile, mutating and evolving as the event of lifestyle migration plays itself out. Notwithstanding the central importance of routines and their role in promoting integration, the project of the self is, as Giddens (1991) emphasises, *reflexive*, immediately indicating the possibility of agent led change.

Third, lifestyle involves more than just this latter representational reflexivity, however. The 'narrative of self-identity' within lifestyle migration is not just in the reflective hands of the lifestyle migrant. Instead, a more-than-representational and more-than-human sensitivity appreciates both how a whole host of other forces, potentially both human and non-human, work to shape this narrative, again in often unexpected and dynamic ways. The extent to which a lifestyle is thus in the hands of a lifestyle migrant is always provisional and uncertain, seemingly 'waiting' for a Poppy, spring flood or murder of crows to come along.

Overall, whilst in Giddens's (1991) terms, counterurbanisation and other forms of lifestyle migration may be highly 'commodified' – articulated through the market, embedded within networks of migration, engaging mediated and encultured forms of idyllic rurality – they are also 'personalised'. However, this personalisation is not overly auto-biographical (Thrift 2007: 7-8) or voluntarist (Atkinson 2007). It is indeed the case that 'commodification does not carry the day unopposed' (Giddens 1991: 199) but challenging commodification's dominance is not just undertaken by reflexive, representing human agents but also comes about through the often subtle and elusive plays that comprise the broader 'creeping entanglements of life' (Ingold 2008: 1809) in all its forms.

The chapter concludes with three further qualifications. First, all lifestyle migrations should not be seen as events, even where they have major consequences for those involved. As Fielding (1992) recognised, migration does tend to be a 'big deal' but often much of this significance gathers closely enough around the relocation itself that it can be effectively and

legitimately – if never completely - represented by it. In other words, lifestyle migration can certainly be 'transformative' (Benson 2011: 1,3) without being an 'event'. Deciding whether or not a migration is event-ful, in other words, is always an empirical and longitudinal matter.

Second, the examples of Mabey and Cocker should not be seen as 'representing' the event-like playing out of counterurbanisation in general, even in East Anglia, or even for male nature writers moving to rural East Anglia. Multiplicity is central to the idea of the event, as 'all those who are touched by an event define and are defined by it' (Fraser 2010: 65), indicating an irreducible degree of uniqueness and specificity. Thus, whilst Mabey framed his migration as being in tune with natural behaviour, Cocker stressed its unnaturalness. The role of landscape and the more-than-human is equally multiple such that, for example, talking of an East Anglian atmosphere 'risks reification of the inexhaustible complexities of affective life' (Anderson 2009: 80). Mabey, for example, drew attention to windiness and wetness but it was noted how their roles remained somewhat unresolved and a similar sense of irresolution is apparent in Cocker's memoir. Once again, event-fulness is always an empirical and longitudinal matter.

Third, this chapter is not a call for either counterurbanisation or lifestyle migration researchers to abandon the social construction paradigm, even if one may reject paradigmatic status. It took intellectual struggle to establish the validity of this perspective and it remains vital for understanding the initial 'escape' that the migration expresses, even it is less good at representing the subsequent quest for a better way of living (O'Reilly and Benson 2009). The chapter thus ends with Mabey's perspective on this issue, channelled by Anna Stenning (2013: 50):

> 'Mabey considers whether our reliance on language is likely to "estrange us from nature", and admits that words obscure our sensual immediacy. Yet [language and imagination are] "also the gateway to understanding our kindedness [*sic*.] to the rest of creation... to become awakeners, celebrators, to add our particular 'singing' to that of the rest of the natural world" [Mabey 2005: 37]'.

Sometimes, in other words, we *do* also need to sit back down in those comfortable office armchairs...

Notes

[1] There is substantial critique of the Kuhnian concept of the scientific paradigm. The unfolding of this chapter implicitly articulates aspects of this critique.

[2] In many other areas of migration research other paradigmatic perspectives, notably a political economic focus on the 'economic', remain more dominant (Halfacree 2004).

[3] Other forms of migration, such as flows of refugees and otherwise displaced persons, might fit into the 'large' events category, however.

[4]There are, of course, many critiques of Giddens's conceptions of lifestyle and the reflexive project of the self. These cannot be gone into here but a good start is with Atkinson (2007).

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