Roadside “weeds” and other routinely overlooked aspects of urban nature provide a fascinating glimpse into the complex global ecologies and new cultures of nature emerging across the world. This unique collection of essays explores the botanical dimensions of urban space, ranging from scientific efforts to understand the distinctive dynamics of urban flora to the way spontaneous vegetation has inspired artists and writers.
The book comprises five thematic sections: „Histories and taxonomies,“ „Botanizing the asphalt,“ „The art of urban flora,“ „Experiments in non-design,“ and „Cartographic imaginations.“ The essays explore developments in Berlin, London, Lahore, Tokyo, and many other cities, as well as more philosophical reflections on the meaning of urban nature under the putative shift to the Anthropocene.

Cover: Fernand Léger, *Leaves and shell* (1927). Courtesy of the Tate Gallery.

The Botanical City

Matthew Gandy and Sandra Jasper [eds.]

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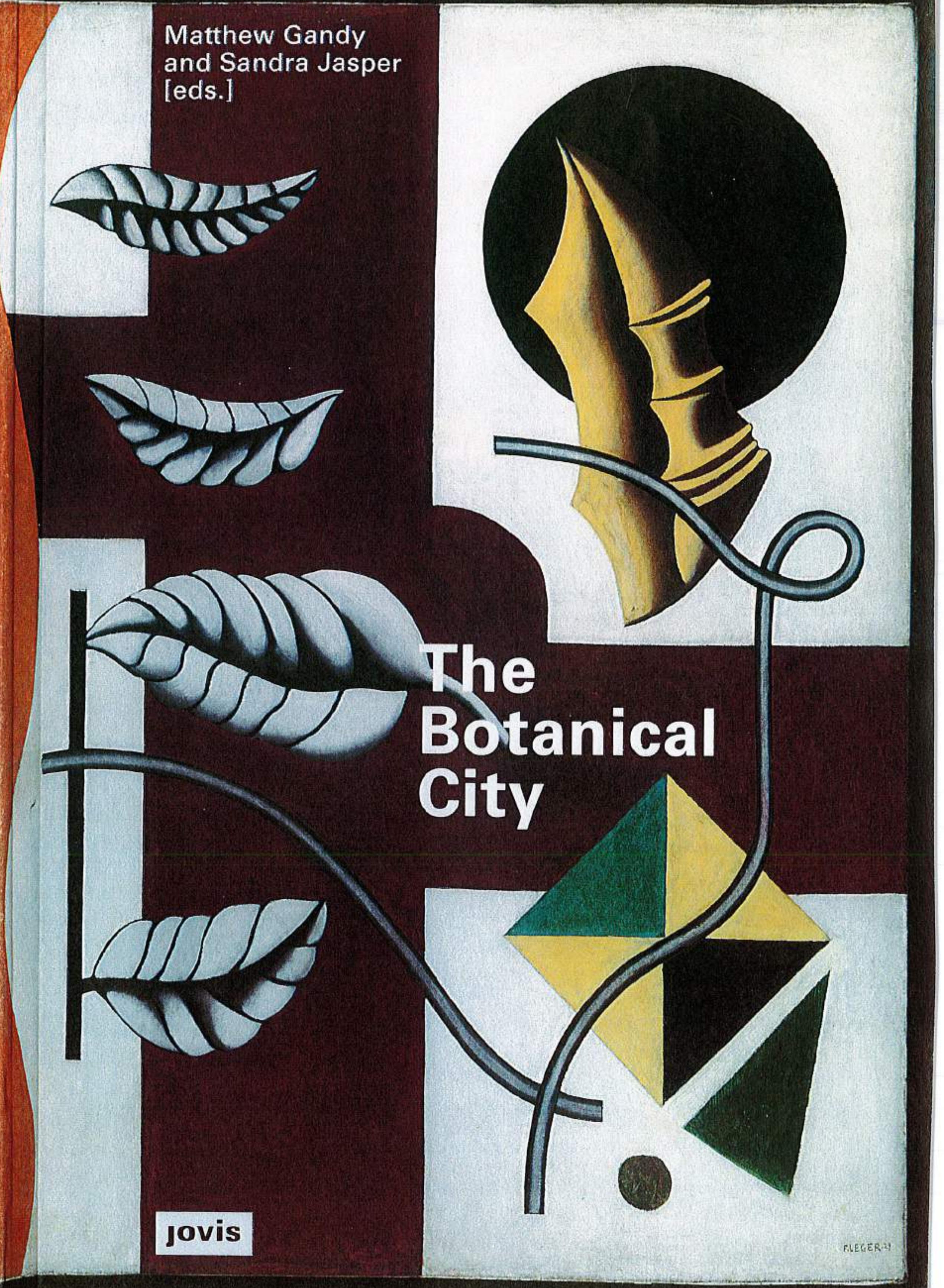

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18 The Senate's plans would violate the legal prohibition to disturb or destroy resting and breeding sites as regulated by the Federal Nature Conservation; see the report commissioned by the Berlin Senate: Gruppe F Landschaftsarchitekten, 2012, *Tempelhofer Freiheit Artenschutzrechtliche Folgenabschätzung und Konzeption zur Schaffung von Ersatzhabitaten für die Feldlerche.*

19 *Der Tagesspiegel*, "Das teure Tier von Tempelhof und Tegel," 10 July 2014 (last accessed 7 August 2019: https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/ausgleichsflaechen-fuer-die-berliner-feldlerche-das-teure-tier-von-tempelhof-und-tegel/10182018.html).

20 George Revill, "The lark ascending: monument to a radical pastoral," *Landscape Research* 16 (2) (1991) pp. 25–30.

21 See Julian Stallabrass, *High art lite: the rise and fall of young British art* (London: Verso, 1999). For urban and geographical work on the urban pastoral, see Ben Campkin, *Remaking London: decline and regeneration in urban culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013) pp. 146–148; and Andrew Harris, "Art and gentrification: pursuing the urban pastoral in Hoxton, London," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 (2) (2012) pp. 226–241.

22 See, for example, Joanna Kusiak, "Acoustic gentrification: the silence of Warsaw's sonic warfare," in Matthew Gandy and BJ Nilsen, eds., *The acoustic city* (Berlin: JOVIS, 2014) pp. 206–211; D. Asher Ghertner, "Nuisance talk: constructing eco-civility in world-class Delhi," in Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan, eds., *Ecologies of urbanism in South Asia* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013) pp. 198–219. On the idea of "green gentrification" that emerged in a North American context, see, for example, Melissa Checker, "Wiped out by the 'greenwave': environmental gentrification and the paradoxical politics of urban sustainability," in *City and Society* 23 (2011) pp. 210–229; Sarah Dooling, "Ecological gentrification: a research agenda exploring justice in the city," in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (2009) pp. 621–639; and Jennifer Wolch, Jason Byrne, and Joshua P. Newell, "Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: the challenge of making cities 'just green enough,'" in *Landscape and Urban Planning* 125 (2014) pp. 234–244.

There's life in dead wood: tracing a more-than-human urbanity in the spontaneous nature of Gothenburg

Mathilda Rosengren

On a hill in central Gothenburg lies a small, wooded area. With a magnificent view over the rooftops of the centre of the city, the wood is frequented by local residents, their children, and their other-than-human animal companions. It is a public space, but still informal enough to be one of those increasingly rare places in the city where humans and other-than-humans who find themselves on the margins of urban life are allowed to linger for a bit longer. Squeezed between some *funkis*-style residential housing blocks, a small public park, and some of the city's university grounds, the wood thus presents itself as a quasi-liminal zone of transition between different articulations of contemporary Gothenburgian life. In Sweden's second city, where the lack of housing and calls for urban densification are increasing by the year, this transitional space has also become prime land for both municipal and commercial developers. And yet, by and large, construction on the site has never really taken off. The wood has, as an urban planner at the municipal planning office put it, "somehow fallen between the cracks" during the past century's urban expansion.[1] Since the late 1920s, in lieu of a planned infrastructure, permanent housing, or an ordered park, what has crystallized here is an urban wood of nondescript, unassuming design, which emerged out of an intermingling of minimal municipal intervention (at times intentional, at other times unintentional) and informal, everyday socio-cultural and ecological practices.

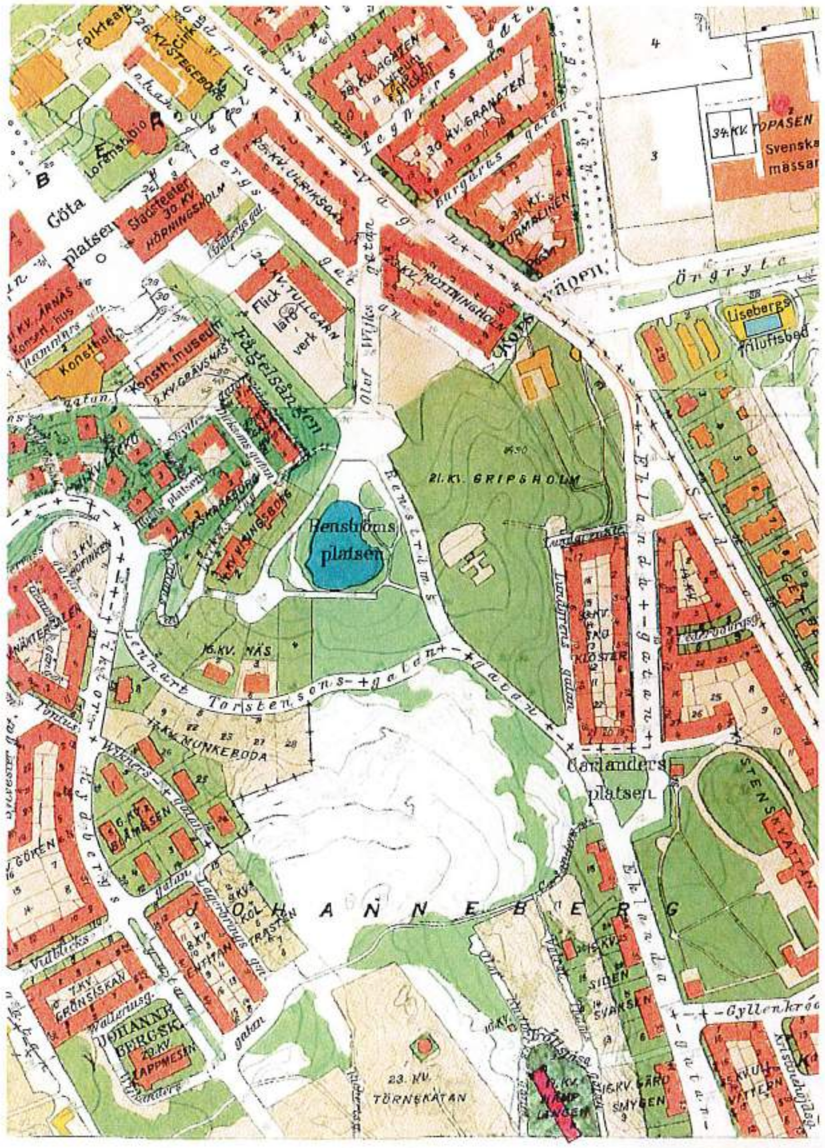
What seems to have primarily encouraged this development is the area's slippery nature, in terms of topography, shape, and name. Firstly, the slanting sides of the hill make for relatively demanding and costly building processes, and the inevitable levelling of the mountain, forces each developer to face the irreversibility of, and the local scepticism to, their proposed constructions. Secondly, the wood has few, if any, defined borders and boundaries. On its northern side, a residential dead-end cuts it off from the park below, yet the beginning of the park mirrors the shrubs and trees of the wood to such an extent that it is still hard to sense where the one

"Liv i död ved," one of several signs put up by the municipality of Gothenburg in order to inform local residents of the ecological potentiality of "dead" wood (2017). Photo: Mathilda Rosengren.

begins and the other ends. To the south and to the west, the greenery stretches further into the residential areas, ignoring the occasional fence put up a long time ago and the few asphalted pathways now rippled by the force of the roots of neighbouring trees. Thirdly, the name of the wood too is in flux: today, its official denomination is *Högåsberget*, although in the past, and in local parlance, *Trollspisberget* has been the most commonly used.[2] And, to confuse matters further, locals use the geotag *Johannebergsparken* (which in fact is another nearby park up on the hill) to locate the area online.

The indefinability that such multifaceted slipperiness brings with it has rendered the wood close to invisible to an official urban imaginary. Throughout the past century, in planning proposals as well as newspaper articles, the area has predominantly been approached as an add-on, a margin, or a side-product, particularly of the public park in the north; very rarely is it dealt with directly, if at all. In a sense, it has become an unintentional, long-term experiment in non-design: allowing for moderately undecided urban becomings through a municipal "letting things be," but without completely subsuming to a more disorderly "letting things go."[3] And yet this "becoming of the unplanned" rather than the "being of the planned," also highlights a state of precariousness that may arise from the lack of a defined, human-made design. In the winter of 2016, when walking around the area together with one of the employees of the municipal Park and Nature Department (*Park och Naturförvaltningen*, PONF), the employee emphasized the predicament the

wood's borderlessness and namelessness put it in: "If we don't put an [official] name on it [the wood], it is very easy to come and nibble on it here. You see this [happening elsewhere], nature areas and parks without names have no identity and they are very easy to appropriate during a densification process."[4] And it is true that, when the wood has surfaced to the consciousness of official municipal



The map shows the state of the wood in 1923 at the time of the Jubilee Exhibition that year. Its steep topography and sparse vegetation is displayed in white. The green-shaded southwesterly slopes and dells indicate the considerably more wooded condition at the edges of the area. Copyright: Göteborgs Stad.

bodies or the general public, it is seemingly always in correlation with an emerging threat to its distinct non-design. If you dig a little in the city archives you will come across several proposals to build on the site. For instance, as an expansion of residential villas in the 1920s[5] or to accommodate new buildings for the Faculty of Philosophy in the 1970s.[6] Most recently, in the late 2000s to early 2010s, the wood was in danger of being almost completely consumed by yet another large-scale university redevelopment. In the end, after both protests from citizen initiatives and discontent voiced from within the municipal planning bodies themselves, the redevelopment was revised to only impact the stretch closest to the university campus.[7]

For each of these botched attempts to build on the grounds, there have been intricate, multifarious lines of (human-related) arguments for or against it—local politics blending with current national and international interests; individual needs mixing with larger socio-cultural trends, and so forth. Nevertheless, one argument for the retention of the wood throughout the past century has, simply put, been "wood" itself: wood as in *the wood*, an other-than-human constellation of urban life, gaining its spatial definition from trees, lichens, grasses, wildflowers, shrubs, brambles and other berry bushes. This is a spontaneous yet situated fusion of urban nature that one of the activists of a local citizen initiative referred to as "typical Gothenburgian nature."[8] However, it also means wood as in *the trees*, the lively beings stretching their branches over, and anchoring their roots in, the hilltop. They function as the ever-evolving core and structure of the hill's non-design, thus making *the wood* as an ecological constellation possible. And, finally, wood as in *dead wood*, where dying or dead trees pave the way for different expressions of living and foster new life for the future. Consequently, we see a world of versatile, interrelated "woods" unfolding here, making for the intriguing argument that this unplanned nature is inherently linked not just to the emergence of other-than-human life in the city, but also to the encouraging of specific eco-cultural practices in urban life itself. Today, the wood is of a predominately deciduous character, with a spontaneous mixture of oak, beech, ash, and common pioneer species, such as birch, aspen, and alder.[9] On the higher points of the hill, you can also find the occasional sessile oak tree in its local, coastal incarnation (the so-called *krattek*[10]). A recent zoning plan notes that the self-grown generation in the area is well-developed, with shrubs consisting mostly of hazel, honeysuckle, and young deciduous trees, with diverse soil conditions that allow for the flowering of wood anemone in the spring and the ripening of blueberry bushes in the late summer.[11]

When tracing the history of this specific urban ecological constellation, it makes sense to start in the 1920s, as this was arguably the last time when the area was heavily interfered with by humans in an official capacity. In 1923, the eastern section of the hill formed part of Gothenburg's extravagant, international Jubilee Exhibition celebrating the city's 300th anniversary. Previously, the area had been part of the edgeland between the rapidly expanding city and the farmed countryside around it. Now, it was included as a last outpost of the southern side of the exhibition area, and, in a sense, of the city itself. Conceived as a lookout point, a temporary lighthouse was built on the top of the hill, with a funicular to transport visitors up from and down to the freshly constructed public park below. Photographs from the time display a sparse vegetation on the slopes around the funicular railway, the smooth surface of the underlying stone of the hill being left clearly visible with only low bushes and very young trees growing in its crevices. This state, however, cannot be assigned to the construction of the exhibition alone. The reason why no greater wood had been able to establish itself in the area was most likely due to the fact that the poorer demographics of city dwellers used the hilltop vegetation as a source of firewood for their homes.[12] In the 1920s, the welfare reforms that would radically improve the general Swedish standards of living were still several years away, and the wood thus accommodated a way of life where making ends meet remained a daily struggle. This final major interference with the wooded area points to a different, now defunct, way of Swedish socio-cultural and economic (urban) life—one that would drastically change over the next decades, with the considerable strengthening of workers' rights and the ultimate establishing of the modern welfare state. Here, as social housing, central heating, and electric stoves (among many other things) came to signify the progress brought on by the implementation of the *Svenska Folkhemmet*—the social-democratic vision of a society with complete socio-economic equality—the previous reliance on urban wood dwindled.[13]

For the remainder of the twentieth century, with urban wood losing its value as a (human) necessity for living (at least for the poor), the utilizations of the woodland have circled around its recreational capacities and aesthetic qualities. As early as 1936, a newspaper article celebrating the scrapping of the plans to build the planned villas on the hill makes grandiose reference to the wood as *den vackra naturparken*, "the beautiful nature park," which together with the public park forms an aesthetically "unrivalled" and "rare" park landscape.[14] This valuing of spontaneous nature aligns well with the particular Swedish notion of *friluftsliv*, which promotes the virtues of an outdoor recreational lifestyle that actively encourages a "physical experience of nature."[15] The concept of "nature-based outdoor recreation," which started to seep through all levels of society in tandem with the introduction of the universal Annual Leave Act, continues to define the general Swedish conception and utilization of nature to this day.[16] However, though it does encourage some recreational aspects closely related to this notion, the wood in central Gothenburg does not fit neatly into this approach to nature. While the passage of time has allowed the trees to grow older and taller and has also allowed the vegetation around them to thicken, a human visitor cannot lose herself in the wood in that complete and idealistic manner. The wood is small and the built urban is, literally, always just around the corner. Simultaneously, as mentioned above, the spontaneous wood also gently queries the urban form itself: it queries how human urban dwellers occupy and make use of it, and its inherent relation to the other-than-human. As the spatial structure does not follow a human-made pattern, the urban dweller's engagement with the space becomes an interaction of an explicitly more-than-human kind. In a sense, an everyday, eco-cultural engagement emerges where modifications of the space are entwined with the temporalities and life cycles of *the wood* itself. Oftentimes, when the worst of winter is past and the grounds are bare again, children build cubbyholes out of old, dead branches. In the bright summer evenings, when the long days make up for the lack of street lights, couples and smaller groups gather on the cliffs of the hilltop–the wood in full bloom giving each glade a natural shielding from the outside world. One chilly autumn, someone had built a sauna on the highest point of the hill, using materials locally available and a live birch tree as support for the whole construction. Leaving very little trace behind, these are all temporary, informal additions to the wood, adapting to its physical and temporal rhythms rather than aiming to permanently shift the spatiality of the place. As such, they enable an utterly different experience of the everyday urban, void of the planned urban surfaces' dictates of interaction. And this, in turn, allows for another kind of (human) urban citizen to emerge, testing and perhaps altering her socio-cultural practices through her engagement with, rather than her controlling of, the other-than-human. Maybe what best describes this daily eco-cultural engagement, is the impassioned statement of a local resident opposing the redevelopments in the late 2000s: "The nature around Näckrosdammen [the pond in the middle of the public park] is wonderful all year round. On the slope above Näckrosdammen, ... we dam up brooks during the periods of rain. In the winter, we skate on the pond. We trace signs of spring. We delight in the magpies above Humanisten [the university]."[17]

Thus, the spontaneously growing trees continue to 'protect' the area from exploitation, partially by enabling the general cultural cherishing of the ideal of 'wild' nature, but also through making it possible for ordinary, everyday interspecies relations to play out in the unplanned environment.

Finally, it is not only in their "live" manifestation that the trees assume a protective role. In fact, today, it is as *dead wood* that they are particularly valuable for those who wish to appropriately manage green spaces in the centre of the city, like PONF, or save them from the most intense densification pushes, like the local citizen initiatives. After all, letting old trees "be" and allowing them to live and die of their own accord has granted the area the somewhat protective status of a "bird biotope."[18] Red-listed bird species, such as the lesser spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*), frequent the area in their foraging for bugs and larvae—insects that are known to proliferate in just the branches and dead trunks of older deciduous trees.[19] Here a third and most current shift in human relations with the urban wood may be detected, a shift that brings to the fore an articulated importance of biodiversity in the city. This comes at a time when the scientific claims of the potential urban green spaces in terms of fostering new, eclectic clusters of biodiversity—a capacity rapidly decreasing in the farmed, monocultural landscape outside of cities—have begun to trickle down to also inform municipal bodies in Gothenburg.[20] The spontaneous urban wood is thus projected as an important space not only for recreational activities, as an aesthetic backdrop, or as alternative cultural expressions of urban living, but rather as an essential platform for life itself. In a recent public scheme to highlight the ecological importance of dead or dying trees in Gothenburg's green areas, PONF has started to put up informative signs on trees in various states of demise.[21] On the outskirts of the wood, there are several trees carrying such signs, stating: "Life in dead wood. Here, tree trunks have been left to benefit the biodiversity. Many insects, fungi, mosses, and lichens depend on old dying or dead trees for their survival."[22] According to the PONF employee, after local residents have read the signs, they become much more willing to accept an urban landscape displaying a certain degree of disorder—that is, a certain degree of non-design.[23] Then, as notions of biodiversity and narratives of ecologically threatened, yet thriving, areas are gaining in strength among the public and municipality alike, they have started to intermingle with the above mentioned socio-cultural concepts of nature.[24] And the wooded area, unassuming at first glance, is a good example of how such entwining may look in reality. Its right to existence being continuously under renegotiation, it offers a reflection of how a spontaneous, more-than-human non-design may query both the passages of time and being in an urban context: where spatial appropriations are in a constant flux, where temporality can be cyclical rather than linear, and where death does not signify the ultimate end but instead the continuous relational becoming of urban lifecycles. And this, in turn, provides a starting point to examining everyday, though rarely documented, social and cultural expressions of a more-than-human urbanity.

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1 Interview with an urban planner, City Planning Office, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2015.

2 Participant observations at urban planning meetings, Radar (architecture office), Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016; interview with a landscape architect, Park and Nature Department, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016; interviews with activists/laypersons, citizen initiatives, Gothenburg, Sweden, January–February 2017.

3 The wood is still managed by the municipal Park and Nature Department; however, due to limitations in staff numbers, economical means, and so on, there is little interference in the area, Interview with a landscape architect, Park and Nature Department, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016.

4 "Om vi inte sätter namn på det så är det väldigt lätt att komma in och knapra lite på det här. Ser man ju, naturområden och parker som inte har namn, dom har ingen identitet och dom är väldigt lätta att ta i anspråk när man förtätar." Interview with a landscape architect, Park and Nature Department, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016 (author's translation)

5 Einar Hansson, et al., *Carlandersplatsen. Renströmsparken. Kulturmiljöunderlag* (Gothenburg: Melica, 2012) pp. 7–11.

6 M. Hirsch, "Grävskopornas nya arbetsplats: NÄCKROSDAMMEN!," *Expressen*, (17 February 1973) p. 9.

7 Conversation with an urban planner, City Planning Office, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016; interview with a landscape architect, Park and Nature Department, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016; interviews with activists/laypersons, citizen initiatives, Gothenburg, Sweden, January–February 2017.

8 Interview with an activist/layperson, citizen initiative, Gothenburg, Sweden, February 2017.

9 Stadsbyggnadskontoret, *Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Carlandersplatsen och Renströmsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg, Johanneberg i Göteborg* (Gothenburg: Stadsbyggnadskontoret, Göteborgs Stad, 2012) p. 6.

10 Perfectly accommodated to an environment of strong winds and little shelter, the krattek (*Quercus petraea*) is a relatively small oak tree that grows in a bush-like manner,

with a bent and twisted stem and branches spreading horizontally and sparsely outwards.

11 Stadsbyggnadskontoret, *Detaljplan för bostäder och verksamheter vid Carlandersplatsen och Renströmsparken inom stadsdelen Lorensberg, Johanneberg i Göteborg* (Gothenburg: Stadsbyggnadskontoret, Göteborgs Stad, 2012) p. 6.

12 Conversation with a landscape architect, Radar (Architecture office), Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016; conversation with a landscape architect, Liljewall (architecture office), Gothenburg, Sweden, June 2017.

13 Interestingly, the correlation between urban wood and simple heat would not resurface until the 2000s (albeit in a somewhat reversed scenario). Today, in the arguable era of the Anthropocene, scientists are touting the urban wood—in its live and breathing "tree" form—as a potentially vital actor in the cooling down of "heat islands" within the inner area of the city. See, for example, Sten Gillner et al., "Role of street trees in mitigating effects of heat and drought at highly sealed urban sites," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 143 (2015), pp. 33–42; and Janina Konarska, et al., "Transpiration of urban trees and its cooling effect in a high latitude city," *International Journal of Biometeorology* 60 (1) (2015), pp.159–172.

14 Morgontidningen, "Näckrosdammen med omgivning förblir park: Ändring av stadsplanen föreslås," *Morgontidningen*, 9 September 1936.

15 Thomas Beery, "Nordic in nature." *Environmental Education Research* 19 (1) (2013) p. 96.

16 Thomas Beery, "Nordic in nature," pp. 96, 100.

17 "Naturen runt Näckrosdammen är underbar året runt. I branten ovanför Näckrosdammen … dämmer vi bäckar under regnperioder. På vintern åker vi skridskor på dammen. Vi följer vårtecken. Vi gläds åt skatorna ovanför Humanisten." Stadsbyggnadskontoret, *Samrådsredogörelse—Program för bebyggelse vid Renströmsparken och Carlandersplatsen, inom stadsdelen Lorensberg i Göteborg* (Gothenburg: Stadsbyggnadskontoret, Göteborgs Stad, 2009) p. 9 (author's translation).

18 Interview with a landscape architect, Park and Nature Department, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016.

19 Naturcentrum AB, *Inventering av biotoper för mindre hackspett kring Guldhedsdalen, Göteborgs kommun 2011. Underlag för detaljplan* (Gothenburg Stadsbyggnadskontoret, Göteborgs Stad, 2012) pp. 6–8.

20 Park-och naturförvaltningen, *Göteborg: Grönstrategi för tät och grön stad* (Gothenburg: Park-och naturnämnden, Göteborgs Stad, 2014).

21 The department strive to leave the trees as they are or, if they may pose a danger to humans walking by on the outer edges of the wood, they are cut down to an appropriate level and then parts are left at "safe" places in the wooded area. (*Grova träd. Råd och riktlinjer för hantering av grova träd och almved i Göteborgs kommun* (2011) Rapport 2011: 2. Park- och naturförvaltningen. Göteborg Stad).

22 "Liv i död ved. Här har stockar lämnats för att gynna den biologiska mångfalden. Många insekter, svampar, mossor och lavar är beroende av gamla döende eller döda träd för sin överlevnad" (author's translation).

23 Interview with a landscape architect, Park and Nature Department, Gothenburg, Sweden, December 2016.

24 There are even recent studies emerging (where the sampling of data in form of surveys were conducted just in Gothenburg) that argue for a connection between a human individual's increased aesthetic and aural appreciation of a green space and such space's levels of biodiversity; see Bengt Gunnarsson et al., "Effects of biodiversity and environment-related attitude on perception of urban green space," *Urban Ecosystems* 20 (2017) pp. 37–49.

From undead commodities to lively labourers: (re)valuing vegetal life, reclaiming the power to design-with plants

Marion Ernwein

Concepts of "gestion différenciée," "gestion harmonique," and "zéro phyto"[1] are ubiquitous in Francophone urban green space management. Sparked by changes in legislation, innovations in landscape architecture, and the diversification and intensification of park usages, all insist on the need to let go of dominant "horticultural" approaches to urban parks, and instead experiment with "rural," "wasteland," or "wild" aesthetics and forms of "ecological" management.[2] They involve new ways both of *designing* vegetal landscapes and of engaging with the spatialities and temporalities of plant life in everyday *maintenance* work. In this essay, I draw on research conducted in Geneva (Switzerland) to examine the forms of enrolment of plant life that respectively undergird the horticultural and ecological traditions of urban greening. I argue that they constitute two singularly distinct modes of valuation of plant life, the former predicated upon displaying *undead* vegetal commodities, the latter upon putting to work plants that are *lively* and capable. I discuss how value is ascribed to plant life and who has the power to do so, and, using two examples, argue that ecological *convivial experiments* should be conceived as a reclamation of the *power to design-with* plants, contrary to the horticultural industry's hold on the variety, forms, and modalities of vegetal life in cities.

Within the horticultural paradigm, urban greenery is predominantly designed as a *still life*,[3] with annual and biannual flowers among its most important features. Purchased from horticultural firms by green space services at various stages of their life (from seedling to adult plant), these are watered, fed, repotted, re-repotted, and trimmed, until they reach their adult stage. At that point, referred to as "finished" or "completed" plants, they can be transferred outside of the polytunnel, and into their final destination is a flowerbed. Gardeners leave enough room around each individual plant for a final spur of growth, after which the design is