

## Chapter 4

# The Landscape Concept as Rupture—Extinction and Perspective in a Norwegian Fjord

Hugo Reinert



Valdak (Photo by Hugo Reinert)

---

H. Reinert (✉)

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia  
e-mail: [hugo@tlu.ee](mailto:hugo@tlu.ee)

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015  
H. Sooväli-Sepping et al. (eds.), *Ruptured Landscapes*, Landscape Series 19,  
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9903-4\_4

**Abstract** Drawing on a case study of landscape-level protection measures implemented in a fjord in the Norwegian Arctic, this chapter takes the concept of rupture as a productive opening on the complex social, spatial and biopolitical dynamics of more-than-human landscapes. The argument examines a series of disruptions associated with the efforts of ecologists to protect a highly endangered migrant goose population breeding in the area. Measures intended to protect the geese alienated local stakeholders, and rising hostilities culminated in 2010 with hunters threatening to “reclaim the fjord” by exterminating the goose population. The argument moves through several framings of this conflict, before tracing it back to a conceptual ambivalence in the idea of landscape itself, an unresolved oscillation between landscape-as-ground and landscape-as-perspective. Framed thus, the conflict draws out a politics predicated on an ontological rupture between human and nonhuman actors, encoded and reproduced in the ecological sovereignty that the landscape concept affords to a privileged human subject-perspective. Closing on a more general note, the text offers up a discussion of the flyway concept as an alternative register of spatial thinking: one that is capable, perhaps, of enacting a figure-ground reversal that reframes common-sense notions of landscape, space and what it might mean to inhabit either.

**Keywords** Extinction • Rupture • Perspective • Human-animal relations • Nonhuman landscapes • Flyways

## 4.1 The Problem, Briefly Stated

The Valdak marsh is a coastal wetland located in the municipality of Porsanger in Finnmark, in the Norwegian Arctic. It sits on the western bank of the inner Porsanger fjord, just south of the Stabburselv River. The area was established as a nature reserve in 1983, receiving Ramsar designation in 1985. Today, the reserve is adjoined by a national park and a landscape protection area. The Valdak marshland serves as a key roosting site for a number of bird species, including the highly endangered wild Fennoscandian population of the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*). Every year, on their way from the wintering sites in Greece to their core breeding areas in the inland, these geese stop over in Valdak for a week, maybe 10 days: during this period, under the watchful eye of their mates, the females graze almost without interruption, bulking up and building the necessary fat reserves for the demanding task ahead. At the end of the summer, the marshes are the first stop of the fledglings as they descend from the inland plateaus to start their long first migration to the wintering sites. Through these migrations, as they are apprehended and conveyed by the humans that engage with them, the birds connect this Arctic marshland to other sites, other places: a lake in Hungary; a river delta on the border between Greece and Turkey; a national park on the western coast of Estonia (Tolvanen et al. 2009). As will become clear, this interconnected spatiality

places the birds at the very heart of the more-than-human controversies that the present chapter attempts to chart.

It is Saturday, at the end of May 2010, and a band of weary and hung-over men have assembled at the camp-site near Valdak, to “repair” after the excesses of last night: moonshine and cheap Finnish vodka flow freely. It is the northern summer, some of them have not slept for days or more—or so at least they claim. Walking over from my tent, I am introduced. The talk turns to the nearby geese and the ornithologists camped with them, up at the reserve: everyone has an opinion. One man in particular feels strongly. He works at the gas station down in Lakselv, some 10 miles or so to the south but, like many men in the region, he spends much of his time in the outdoors: hiking, hunting, fishing and harvesting. For years he has been collecting berries on the islands in the fjord, but with recent changes he is no longer able to. His upset is evident. Although he appreciates the urgency of conservation efforts, he feels strongly that the issues have been badly managed by the authorities. Two or 300 people pass through his station every day, he claims—joking that he has been conducting some informal interviews of his own—and he believes the discontent is widely shared. Local residents feel excluded from the process, and resent measures they consider infantilising: “They think we are stupid, that we don’t see the difference between small and large birds”.

His own exegesis situates the problem within a long history of fraught relations at the national level, between centre and periphery, south and north, urban and rural—governing bodies “down south” are outsiders, 2,000 km away. Implicitly identifying environmental management with southern urban elites, his claims echo decades of critique from this periphery, arguments about mismanagement, ignorance, discrimination and internal colonialism, prejudice and exploitation. Building to a peak, his account draws in current world events, televised demonstrations of redshirts protesting the Vejjai government in the streets of Bangkok: “You can’t do anything if you don’t have the people with you. You see it in Thailand, you see it in Korea, you see it everywhere. Also here.” Through the absence of participatory governance, measures to protect the geese have not only alienated locals, generated hostility and led to feelings of criminalisation: potentially, they have also begun to turn the killing of endangered species into something like a prestigious activity. A faction of young male hunters involved with the local trade in hunting equipment and sports goods are particularly clear: “Let’s just wipe out that goose, once and for all. Then we’ll get our fjord back.” The men are well equipped and resourceful, he says: the threat is real. By their failure to enlist local residents, the authorities have thus ensured the failure of their conservation efforts—and the extinction of the goose. “In trying to protect it, they have sentenced the goose to death” he proclaims, with an expression I find difficult to read.

His drinking buddies are quick to distance themselves from his account, ridiculing it: concerned perhaps that as the “southerner” at the table, I will leave with some inherited prejudice about Finnmark confirmed. Nonetheless, the sentiments he expresses are evidently in circulation, echoed in informal conversations, voiced in local media and newspapers, across the Internet. A conventional anthropological framing might approach the problem in terms of a lack of democratic representation:

local stakeholders were not sufficiently involved in the consultation process, resented the intrusion of outsider “experts” and objected to being treated as “ignorant children”, experiencing themselves as caricatures in the eyes of outsiders and the state. A top-down and non-participatory approach to ecological governance has resulted in disenfranchisement, exacerbating the very problem it sought to address and accentuating existing tensions. This would no doubt be valid, and no doubt the observation was also made (and taken into account) by the parties involved: when I returned to the area a year later, representatives from the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Conservation (DN) were emphatic in their focus on establishing dialogue with involved local parties. Here, on the other hand, I am interested in another line of approach to the same material. Rather than a lack, I want to consider the situation in terms of an excess: specifically, a disruptive excess of representation. Establishing this point requires first some understanding of goose migrations, and the challenge they have posed to human researchers.

## 4.2 Pathways Through a Discontinuous Landscape<sup>1</sup>

Migration trajectories of the Lesser White-fronted Goose have been the subject of sustained investigation for several decades now (see Reinert 2012, 2013). The species began to attract public and scientific attention in the second half of the twentieth century, at a point when its precipitous decline was already well underway. Of the three populations considered “wild”, the Fennoscandian group is by far the most endangered: as per the 2010 census, they counted less than 15 breeding pairs. Tracking of the geese began in earnest towards the end of the twentieth century, with programs for ring-marking in several European countries. In Scandinavia, conservation work began in the late 1970s, with a reintroduction project led by the Swedish ornithologist Lambart von Essen (Andersson and Larsson 2006). The Norwegian Ornithological Association [NOF] started its own *Prosjekt Dverggås* [Project Lesser White-fronted Goose] a few years later, in 1985, and have been conducting regular monitoring of the Fennoscandian population on its breeding grounds in Valdak since 1990 (Øien and Aarvak 2008). The terms and extent of human engagement with the species took a dramatic leap in 1995, when the first satellite transmitters were mounted on four birds from the Norwegian population, to follow their autumn migration route to their wintering areas in south-eastern Europe. This initial satellite monitoring served to document a European migration path via the Kanin peninsula, through Hortobagy in Hungary to the Evros Delta in Greece, on the border to Turkey (Lorentsen et al. 1998). This work continued in 1997, with four more Scandinavian birds. In 1998, three breeding Lesser White-fronts from the neighbouring Western Siberian population were captured on the Taimyr Peninsula in Central Siberia. An alternative route continued east from the Kanin peninsula,

---

<sup>1</sup>This section builds on material already presented in Reinert (2013).

crossing the Ural Mountains and heading down the wide Ob valley to a staging area in northern Kazakhstan. Satellite tagging in the 2004–2005 season established that this route continues along the Caspian Sea, to wintering quarters in Mesopotamia, in Iraq.

The next attempt at satellite monitoring proved something of a breakthrough, both scientifically and in terms of media and public attention to the species. In May 2006, three adult birds—one couple and a male—were caught on the Valdak marshes and equipped with transmitters. Through the involvement of WWF Finland, who ran a competition for names in a Finnish newspaper, the birds also received human names: the couple were named Finn and Nieida, while the male received the Hungarian name Imre—referencing one of the key known stopover sites in Hungary, on the migration route through Eastern Europe (Øien et al. 2007). This was not the first human encounter for the birds: Nieida had been captured and ringed previously, in May 2002, and field observations along the migration route in subsequent years had already provided crucial longitudinal data to the researchers—in particular, her data pointed towards the importance of breeding success in determining migration routes. In years where Nieida failed to breed—in 2002 and 2004—she had left the breeding grounds in Finnmark early, to fly east and undertake the long, complex and dangerous eastern migration route, “looping” from Siberia to Greece through central Asia. In years where she bred successfully—in 2003 and 2005—she was found to moult with her goslings in Finnmark and undertake a shorter, safer migration route to the wintering grounds in Greece, through Eastern Europe (Øien et al. 2007). Satellite data from the 2006 season confirmed this observation. None of the three tagged birds bred successfully that year: at the end of June, when the fledglings of successful breeders were freshly hatched, all three left the breeding grounds and proceeded east, on their moult migration to Siberia.

Their movements during the next few weeks are known in detail, thanks to the remote yet blow-by-blow intimacy enabled by satellite tracking technologies. Imre was the first to leave. On June 29 he left Valdak, arriving on the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia on July 6. En route, he stopped over at the Kola and Kanin peninsulas, at Malosemelskaya and Bolshesemelskaya, and the Gydanskiy Bay. He reached the Pyassina Delta, on Taimyr, on July 7, where he remained until August 21. Finn and Nieida, meanwhile, left the last roosting area in Finnmark somewhat later, on July 6, and arrived in Taimyr on July 8, at the Malaya Logata River. At the end of August 2006, the three birds started their autumn migration. All three chose the so-called Western main flyway, following the Ob River towards their staging areas in northern Kazakhstan. In mid-October, en route to Greece, they moved through the Volgograd region in Russia. Finn and Nieida were located in Ukraine on October 24, at the base of the Crimean Peninsula. On October 31, Finn was in Greece, at Lake Kerkini, one of the traditional winter staging areas for the species. In November, during a visit from the international EU-LIFE project team, Finn and Nieida were both observed in Kerkini, in a flock of 42 Lesser White-fronts. The two would rest in the area for some time, before undertaking their spring migration back to Finnmark. The signal from Imre, meanwhile, had begun to behave erratically. The blips that marked the path of his westward migration began to spiral, then they stopped. His final transmission,

on October 30, came from the back yard of a house on the outskirts of Bolsoj, a Russian village in the region of Volgograd. After that, only silence. Researchers were alarmed, the media notified, couriers and press releases dispatched: “Is Imre well? Or has the valuable device dropped off?” (Høyland et al. [nd](#): 6). Soon, Russian collaborators confirmed that Imre had indeed been shot, in that area, “in the last days of October” (Øien et al. [2009](#): 13–15). Imre was never seen (or heard from) again—at least, not alive (Reinert [2012](#)).

From the moment they were captured, the three geese passed from anonymity into the workings of a vast transnational assemblage—a machine made of labs, data-streams and satellites circling the earth, which reached across the Eurasian land-mass and into orbit. Novel forms of intimacy, enabled through their telemetric rucksacks, transformed the geese overnight into “international celebrities” and “important informants” for the work of conservation (Øien et al. [2007](#): 26; Reinert [2013](#)). In this context, the death of Imre confirmed researchers in their hypothesis that “the central Asian autumn migration route is far more dangerous than the European one, and that the threat from illegal hunting along this route is considerable” (Øien et al. [2007](#): 27). The more important information, however, came from Nieida. By indicating an apparent correlation between breeding success and choice of migration route, her data suggested that factors affecting breeding success in Finnmark (e.g. predators, noise, human disturbance) could determine not only the annual productivity of the population, but also the mortality risk of sexually mature adults. The survival of the adult population thus appeared to depend on a connection between spaces that would appear discontinuous to a human observer “on the ground”, in Valdak; strategic interventions in Finnmark—to enhance breeding success—would permit researchers to manipulate migration routes indirectly, with effects that reverberated through the entire migration system of the species. Successful conservation thus required researchers to imagine and grasp these relationships—and the “local” space of the marshes—from the point of view of the birds: in other words, successful intervention demanded that they learn to inhabit, at least temporarily, a nonhuman perspective.

### 4.3 Perspectives

Drawing on Latour and Deleuze, Jamie Lorimer suggests that ecological field practices involve certain transformations of the participating human subject—primarily by means of a progressive “tuning in”, or “becoming sensitive”, to the nonhuman other: through “protracted negotiations, aided by a host of technological apparatuses”, a “natural scientist strives to achieve a form of ecological proximity with and corporeal understanding of his or her target organism” (Lorimer [2007](#): 917). Generally, such an understanding also entails an ability to interpret the environment as the target organism apprehends it: an entrained, acquired and materially mediated form of empathy. This ability plays a vital role in conservation efforts that depend on understanding how a given animal or species operates

in its environment: its movement patterns and daily cycle, dietary requirements, predators and threats, responses to disturbance and so on. Such understanding arises as a composite achievement, an aggregation of field observations, analysis of physical specimens, embodied interactions, historical records, anecdotal material, statistical data, imaginative leaps and, as in the case of Imre, remote surveillance technologies such as radio and satellite telemetry (Benson 2010). Techniques, instruments, practices and forms of knowledge enabled ornithologists in Valdak firstly to approximate an understanding of the local space as it appeared to the geese, their “target organism”, and then secondly, crucially, to represent this understanding to other human actors: rendering the features of this space *intelligible* in a manner that approximated how it was occupied, utilised and experienced by the geese: among other things, as a complex patchwork of affordances, resources, threats and interdependencies, fundamentally connected to spaces “elsewhere”; spaces that would otherwise appear inaccessible and unconnected to most human observers.

Two distinct but related forms of representation were involved here (Latour 2004). Firstly, the conservationists *represented* the geese and their “landscape” in an almost aesthetic sense, by rendering them both visible: through guided tours, seminars, public lectures, media interviews, print and digital journalism, scientific publications, pamphlets and informational material. Secondly, they also represented the geese *politically*, acting as spokespeople in the Latourian sense: representing their interests, their investments in the local space, in terms that translated into political action—through measures such as the implementation of regulation plans, hunting bans and so on. Thanks in part to a close collaboration between the ornithologists and local environmental protection agencies, measures introduced in the Valdak area were rooted in an understanding of the area as it was (supposedly, presumably) experienced by the geese: regulations concerning human traffic and motorised vehicles were linked to observations of goose nesting behaviour, including their practices of nest abandonment; blanket seasonal bans on hunting followed from the fact that the Lessers often mingle in flocks of other species, and can be difficult to distinguish from other goose species common in the area. The satellite tracking data was particularly significant in this regard, as it demonstrated a relationship between conditions on the Valdak marshes and subsequent choice of migration route, with attendant effects on adult mortality.

By highlighting complex non-local connections, cascading as effects between sites, satellite data showed how Valdak could not be considered in isolation, but rather how the site must be understood as one element in a dynamic “migration system”—a delicately contingent assemblage, within which factors in one location might reverberate elsewhere and out of sight, thousands of miles away, with consequences that could spell life or death for the whole species but which might never be witnessed by a human observer. Following directly from the satellite findings, conservation efforts in Valdak and the nearby breeding areas were concentrated on measures that might increase breeding success and reduce hatchling mortality. Key among these was an eradication program directed against the local population of Red Fox (*Vulpes Vulpes*)—a locally invasive species that is supplanting the endangered and charismatic Arctic Fox (*Vulpes Lagopus*), and which also predates

significantly on nesting bird populations, including the Lesser White-fronted Goose. Over the next few years, state-authorized hunters “bagged” hundreds of foxes in the area—with dramatic (positive) effect for the Lessers (Reinert 2013).

#### 4.4 Distributions

Let me pause at this point and make a short lateral move, to try and highlight how this material articulates more generally with the two key terms for this collection: *landscape* and *rupture*. Article 1 of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Council of Europe 2000: 3). The concepts involved here could be analysed at length: here, in a Latourian vein, I simply want to draw out one double-articulated disjunction that is encoded in it. The initial step of the disjunction identifies, separates and recombines two distinct forms of agency, “human” and “natural”. Landscape, in this view, appears as an outcome of interaction between human and nonhuman factors, a combined product of “human” and “natural” activities. This is relatively straightforward. Less obviously, a *second* term also separates “human” from “nonhuman”, within the Convention, but this time more subtly: this couplet operates at the level of perspective, and it leaves one half of the pair implicit.

In addition to its shaped “character”, the Convention also defines an area as a landscape when it is “perceived [as such] by people”—in other words, a landscape comes into existence through a perspective that is capable of constituting it *as a landscape*. Implicitly, relying as it does on the term “people”, this constitutive perspective is prefigured as human—and equally, by implication, nonhuman perspectives are configured as lacking this ability. In this sense, “landscape” comes to exist as a double-jointed articulation—simultaneously a material “area”, shaped by the interaction of “human” and “natural” factors, *and* a constitutive perception of that area *qua* landscape, by one or more subjects designated as capable of such perception. Landscape is thus simultaneously content (“natural and/or human factors”) and form (“perceived by people”): perceptible area, and field of perception. Within the operational space of this definition, humans play a double role—simultaneously material actors, determining the shape and content of a landscape, *and* carriers of a constitutive perspective that transforms “area” into “landscape”. This is an asymmetrical privilege, embodied in the human form: lacking the power to determine what counts as a landscape, nonhumans may only occupy and shape landscapes defined as such by humans.

Returning to Valdak, the Convention itself is not frequently invoked, whether in a conservation context or otherwise. As our friend from Lakselv outlined earlier, the local politics of space here draw on other terms: a register of rights and resources, entitlements, traditional use and conflicting interests that tends to pit northerners against southerners, centre against periphery, locals against tourists, Norwegians against Sami, reindeer pastoralists against recreational users and cattle

farmers, hunters against conservationists (Reinert 2008). Nonetheless, unpacking the European Landscape Convention in this way, as a kind of “ontological machine” that is continually at work to separate and classify and assign powers, gives us a template or exemplar that helps bring most of these perspectives into alignment around a shared feature—that is, their exclusion of nonhumans from any kind of *constitutive power* over the landscapes they inhabit, and their reduction to elements *within* these landscapes. Through the local efforts of conservationists, Valdak had become one challenge to this tacit but pervasive logic: an attempt had been made here to take in a nonhuman perspective (however mediated) as constitutive—that is, as capable of defining what a landscape *was*, what its borders or significant features might be, whose interests might determine how it was to be preserved. Insofar as this articulation was at odds with other human interests in the area, and carried on the back of State power, the ramifications were—as I outlined earlier—complex and unpleasant.

As advocates and spokespeople for the geese, ornithologists were attempting to establish a landscape in Valdak that was convivial to their “target species”: an hospitable space, managed and understood as part of a transboundary network of sites, linked by the flying bodies of migrating geese. With this they worked to counter, to smooth over, certain kinds of material rupture already in place: some produced by human politics, by institutions that cut through space, bisecting migration trajectories with borders, county boundaries, by lines drawn on paper; others, perhaps encoded in the landscape concept itself, born as it is for dense bones and flightless bodies, and embodied in the human affordances that inform the enactment of Valdak as a discrete, spatially bounded entity—perceived from the ground, encompassed by a human perspective. Addressing these ruptures however—smoothing, connecting, reframing—the bird-workers created other, more immediate ruptures in the fabric of local space: disruptions in the traditional use and practices of human stakeholders, who felt alienated and disenfranchised by the regulation of “their” landscape; dramatic reorganisations of the local wildlife, including the extermination of the red fox population in the area; and, as discussed at the outset, escalating tensions between humans and geese—culminating, as I described, in a threat of intentional extinction; unlikely, hopefully, but nonetheless all too plausible. At least for the moment, this threat remains unrealised; the disruptive bodies of the Lessers are still returning, from year to year, and the “other” Valdak that they constitute remains: no young men have gone out from Lakselv to destroy them yet—but the tensions are far from resolved.

Analytically speaking, the situation in Valdak brought into play a plenitude of ruptures, all potentially relevant: between state and public, urban and rural, past and present, centre and periphery, nature and culture, humans and geese. Here I have chosen to foreground a less obvious form of rupture, implicit in the conceptual structure of “landscape” itself and manifest in the ontological politics it performs: in the manner by which it severs content from form, human from nonhuman, through disjunction and privilege. With this I want to try and open the case at hand to a more oblique line of inquiry. For example: in what sense, to what degree and how might nonhumans be taken into account as participants, in the political

process of determining how the spaces that they also inhabit should be managed? In the language of the European Convention, what would happen if nonhumans were admitted into the human power to define a landscape, rather than merely shape its character? Might we then start thinking of how to flatten or dissolve this unspoken hierarchy of perspectives, of how to “open up” the human gaze—as a world-making, world-defining machine—and admit nonhumans into the privileged positions that it generates? Such questions are animated, in turn, by urgent and troublesome concerns: concerns regarding sovereignty, and the microphysics of human exceptionalism (Smith 2011); environmental justice, and the issue of its legitimate subject (for whom? for what?); and ultimately, perhaps, the vexed issue of interspecies coexistence, of the new and urgently needed forms of conviviality demanded of us, as actors, on an increasingly harried planet (Reinert 2014). Even only in the Valdak area itself, numerous other human-nonhuman “alliances” are at work, each generating more-than-human perspectival machines of their own: those of reindeer and their indigenous herders, for example, or of seals, fish and fishermen. These overlap and intersect, generating the spaces—the “scapes”—of Valdak, not as a given or singular totality, but as an open-ended, continuously negotiated aggregation of interacting and mutually mediating perspectives. In closing—in the spirit of an “ethnographic theory” that derives its terms of analysis from the conceptual objets trouvés of fieldwork (da Col and Graeber 2012)—I want to focus on one of these, the “Lesser-scape”, to explore its radical potential and ask what tools it might offer up: for thinking, for description and for critique.

## 4.5 Flyways

The argument so far has tried to illustrate certain limits I think are implicit to the landscape concept as an earthbound perspective, a “land-scape”, but also as a kind of ontological template, a predetermining structure that encodes the aesthetics of a specific, multiply privileged subject position: bipedal, human-shaped, flightless, verbally communicative and so forth. Read this as a call to fine-grain the heuristic of landscape, to engage reflexively with its implicit embodiments and explore alternative conceptualisations—particularly where nonhuman experiences of space come into play, in human affairs, in ways that make an anthropological difference; or equally, where human spaces, and experiences of space, resist reduction to the material affordances provided by only-human bodies. Conservationist efforts to empathically “move into” and inhabit a migrant bird perspective disturb the spatial imaginaries of the landscape concept, pulling its conceptual hinterland into view (Law 2004): pressing outward at the edges of a human experience of space, demanding new conceptual vocabularies of nonhuman space to supplement (or supplant) the earth-locked perspectival solidity of “land-scape”. This is something more interesting than wordplay. Consider, for example, the notion of *flyways* (Van Dooren 2014).

As an instrument of ecological analysis, the flyway concept arose initially in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, part of an effort to develop effective spatial management frameworks for migratory waterbirds. Its gift, at the time, was to render visible “the biological systems of migration paths that directly links sites and ecosystems in different countries and continents” (Boere and Stroud 2006: 40), enabling precisely the sort of translocal operations that were brought to bear, decades later, on the Lessers in Valdak. On its own, the term captures “the entire range of a migratory bird species . . . through which it moves on an annual basis” (Boere and Stroud 2006: 40), as well as operating on biopolitical scales below and beyond the species: from sub-populations within a species, through groups of related species, to unrelated species passing through broadly similar regions of space. Efforts to chart existing migration systems and aggregate them into flyways began in Europe in the post-war period, and in the Asia-Pacific region in the 1990s. Since their introduction, flyways have become an important instrument for establishing transboundary cooperation between states, nongovernmental organisations and regional entities such as the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). Today the concept remains productive, even radical, generating novel configurations and new approaches: both scientifically and as a kind of political template, an aspirational diagram of an alternate world, simultaneously future and present—a version of Earth re-territorialised entirely on the global motion of birds, aggregated into vast flows, borderless and fluid.

Highlighting complex interdependencies at multiple scales, dependencies that exceed and disregard human segmentations of the terrestrial surface, flyways present a vision of the planet as a looping, fluid whirl of flows and interconnected systems, where discrete “places” merge into each other, encompassed by vast circuits of motion—the slow whirls and gyrating eddies of a living planet. Giving primacy to movement over site, they operate a sort of spatial figure-ground reversal—a shift that renders any specific “site”, or “place”, epiphenomenal to underlying systems of movement and stratigraphic flow (rather than vice versa). In this sense, the flyway concept presents itself, potentially, as a kind of cornerstone, a hook, for an alternative *metageography*—as Lewis and Wigen originally defined it, a distinct “set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world” (1997: ix)—that enacts an alternative to that “mosaic perception of world-space” which still structures most human representations of the planetary scale (Taylor 2001: 114). In part, what renders this variant metageography trenchant is its fragility: a certain ephemeral quality inherent to its composition, brought out by the fragility of the bodies that compose it. Flyways are organic, irreducibly so, neither part of the geological stratum nor “fixed” elements in any landscape. They exist only as long as there are living bodies that materialise them, tracing and retracing their routes—frail, living bodies that gingerly occupy space, moving from place to place, bringing it to life. As such, flyways are also inherently mortal: they can die, almost as easily as the bodies that compose them. Space figures here, not as an inert container but as a strange alterity, unfamiliar but knowable, brought to life (and mappable) through its living bodies.

In an age of mass extinctions and unprecedented devastation, with the skin of the world dotted and crossed by human footprints, this version of space helps render apparent the vital truth of our shared earthly situation: a poisoned lake or a reckless hunter could extinguish a diminished species like the Lessers at once, in one place, like a light—and the Lessers would die out not just “here”, or “there”, but across every range state in their path. The Lesser that dies in Russia never arrives in Syria, or Greece, or Japan: along the flyway, their death extends through space like a cloud, delocalised, a loss that tears a hole in the living fabric of the planet—ragged gap and reverberating absence, bound neither by place nor human memory. Taken seriously, the notion of flyways thus helps overthrow the myriad tiny steps by which everyday space is localised, collapsed into manageable scales, the “heres” and “theres” and “far aways”, and by which tremendous events (extinctions, translocal oil spills, nuclear disasters) are brought down and bound to apprehensible scales. Suspending these shortcuts and simplifications, the full truth that flyways confront us with is that what happens “here” does not in fact stay “here”, can never stay here, can not in fact stay anywhere: that every death reverberates, rings across the taut meshes of a globe stretched ever tighter. This, perhaps, is what the Lessers could reveal to us, what they figure—and challenge us to think through—in their thinning flocks, as they criss-cross the Palearctic: that the nodes in their vast circulation can open to us like a trace, shuttle us into alternative conceptions of space, embedding us in ontologies of disturbance and reverberation, of interdependence and dispersion; that they might open us, in other words, to “something else”—to planetarity as a living condition, to worlds redrawn through the interconnection of nonlocal effects.

Here then, squinting on a planet redrawn, in the creeping shadow of extinction, in the fault-lines of an encounter between some humans and some nonhuman geese, I would like to discern not only a reordering of space, wrought through novel imaginaries that combine and reconnect the far-flung corners of the world, but perhaps also, analogously, the possibility of a new ordering of politics: a reorientation paused between the vaunted binaries of the modern constitution (Latour 1993, 2004)—and capable, perhaps, of suspending them entirely. Isabelle Stengers materialises her cosmopolitical project in the hesitation of the idiot, a Deleuzian figure who disrupts consensus by demanding “that we slow down, that we don’t consider ourselves authorised to believe we possess the meaning of what we know” (Stengers 2005: 995): generating cosmopolitics as a rupture in momentum, located in a sustained hesitation before the certainty of the given—a hesitation that turns apparent certainties into beginnings, into premises for exploration.

At the campsite by Valdak, in the circle of hung-over men, discussions turn back to the geese, to the disruptions they brought and those that were brought on their behalf. Gradually, the arguments coalesce. No one is endorsing extermination . . . But still. Why do they care so much, the ecologists? Are they mad? They’re just geese, after all: what about people? Don’t people matter more? Why are they coming up here, interfering? Who protects the human? What about the seals breeding in the fjord, eating all the fish, depleting stocks, ruining the regional fishing fleet? And so on. Just under the surface, other questions flow: Whose fjord is this? Who makes claims? Whose claims are legitimate? Who should even be there, exist there, be

allowed to exist? Who counts, who matters, who matters more? Who are the beings that count? Me, I just sit there, at the end of the table: swatting away mosquitos in the bright northern summer, witnessing the terms of the settlement being made and remade, with little to offer but questions: my own discipline embodied, at least for the moment, in the hesitation of the idiot.

**Acknowledgements** The chapter is based on research supported by the Estonian Research Agency (ETAG, grant MJD3).

## References

- Andersson Å, Larsson T (2006) Reintroduction of Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* in Swedish Lapland. In: Boere G, Galbraith C, Stroud D (eds) *Waterbirds around the world*. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, pp 635–636
- Benson E (2010) *Wired wilderness*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore
- Boere GC, Stroud DA (2006) The flyway concept: what it is and what it isn't. In: Boere G, Galbraith C, Stroud D (eds) *Waterbirds around the world*. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, pp 40–47
- Council of Europe (2000) *European landscape convention*, European treaty series, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, vol 176
- da Col G, Graeber D (2012) Foreword: the return of ethnographic theory. *HAU J Ethnogr Theory* 1:vi–xxxv
- Høyland T, Ekker M, Tolvanen P (nd) *Lesser White-fronted Goose: Anser erythropus*. WWF Finland, Helsinki
- Latour B (1993) *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press, London
- Latour B (2004) *The politics of nature*. Harvard University Press, London
- Law J (2004) *After method*. Routledge, London
- Lewis M, Wigen K (1997) *The myth of continents: a critique of metageography*. University of California Press, Berkeley
- Lorentsen S, Øien IJ, Aarvak T (1998) Migration of Fennoscandian Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* mapped by satellite telemetry. *Biol Conserv* 84:47–52
- Lorimer J (2007) Nonhuman charisma. *Environ Plan D* 25:911–932
- Reinert H (2008) *The corral and the slaughterhouse*. PhD thesis, Cambridge University. <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/214796>. Accessed 7 Oct 2014
- Reinert H (2012) Face of a dead bird—notes on grief, spectrality and wildlife photography. *Rhizomes Cult Stud Emerg Knowl* 23 (no pagination)
- Reinert H (2013) The care of migrants—telemetry and the fragile wild. *Environ Humanit* 3:1–24
- Reinert H (2014) Entanglements—intimacy and nonhuman ethics. *Soc Anim* 22(1):42–56
- Smith M (2011) *Against ecological sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
- Stengers I (2005) The cosmopolitical proposal. In: Latour B, Weibel P (eds) *Making things public*. MIT Press, Cambridge, pp 994–1003
- Taylor P (2001) Visualising a new metageography: explorations in world-city space. In: Dijkink G, Knippenberg H (eds) *The territorial factor*. Vossiuspers, Amsterdam, pp 113–128
- Tolvanen P, Øien I, Ruokolainen K (eds) (2009) *Conservation of Lesser White-fronted Goose on the European migration route*. WWF Finland, Helsinki
- Van Dooren T (2014) *Flight ways: life and loss at the edge of extinction*. Columbia University Press, New York
- Øien IJ, Aarvak T (2008) Dverggås i Norge: Kunnskapsstatus og Forslag til Nasjonal Handlingsplan. *BirdLife Norway*, Trondheim
- Øien IJ, Aarvak T, Ekker M (2007) Imre er død—Leve dverggåsa! *Vår Fuglefauna* 30(1):26–28

Øien IJ, Aarvak T, Ekker M, Tolvanen P (2009) Mapping of migration routes of the Fennoscandian Lesser White-fronted Goose breeding population with profound implications for conservation priorities. In: Tolvanen P, Øien I, Ruokolainen K (eds) Conservation of Lesser White-fronted Goose on the European migration route: final report of the EU LIFE-nature project 2005–2009. WWF Finland, Helsinki, pp 12–18