

# The challenge of ecological citizenship in anthropocentric epicentres

Taylor Hood

Taylor is a Scottish naturalist and writer who holds degrees in literature and wildlife ecology. His research advocates for ruptures in the normal functioning of our self-centred society, seeking to reopen a world that has become insulated against non-human claims. He is an Associate Editor of *The Ecological Citizen*.

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I have often thought I should not speak on matters urban, since I am fortunate enough to have always lived and worked in quiet semi-rural areas – close to the coast’s enlivening breeze, in sight of rugged hills, near rich expanses of heathland and beside bluebell-suffused ancient woodland. Today, the long green arm of the Chilterns National Landscape protects me, as it were, from the influence of London. Whenever I venture south, I must mentally prepare myself to cross over into a world-within-a-world, in which the surrounding landscape is cut off, wild beings go unseen and opportunities to be touched by the *other* are few and far between. After braving London, or any major urban centre for that matter, my mind often replays conversations I have had with people expressing a more well-founded sense of unease, even despair, about the ‘concrete jungles’ they struggle – like their nonhuman counterparts – to inhabit. Although I am not an architect or urban planner – another confession – my background in ecology, alongside engagement with cultural and philosophical questions, has shaped how I understand these concerns. It was a desire to help articulate what is wrong with metropolitan existence that led to proposing this semi-themed issue.

*The Ecological Citizen* has addressed a wide array of themes relevant to the built environment, such as overpopulation, economics and rewilding, and human habitations have occasionally appeared as spaces to be confronted. Moreover, one of our main topic areas is that of *urban life and its ecological potential*. Yet we have never explicitly examined this domain in full force. It is important to do so because domination and management of the Earth, driven by anthropocentrism, are clearest here. Developed locales concentrate the flows and demands of energy, materials and infrastructure, magnify the

consequences of human–nature interactions (or reinforce their absence) and act as arenas for testing ecological interventions. Indeed, if the city in particular has been thought of as the locus of civilization (the word derives from the Latin *civitas*, meaning city) then this publication gets to the heart of where ecological citizenship arguably matters most.

It is within this context that the present issue’s contributions emerge. My offering conceptualizes the city as an apparatus of enclosure, whose organization diminishes the exposure and vulnerability through which presence arises, with implications for how we perceive changes to urban conditions. Elsewhere, Petroselli’s non-utopian account draws on Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke* as an imaginative lens for understanding cities as sites of multispecies conflict rather than idealized harmony. In an article that explores conflict in the city with regard to impacts on avifauna, McFarland argues that looks can be deceiving: the façades of seemingly ecologically oriented buildings endanger birdkind, a problem she addresses through bird-safe glass. Turning to wider framings of accessibility and spatial justice, Battersby interrogates how the built environment is modelled on assumptions about embodiment and belonging that produce patterns of inclusion and exclusion across both human and nonhuman life. Meanwhile, the legal and regulatory dimensions of civic ordering are brought to bear in de Tróis’s case study of a destroyed wooded block in Osasco, Brazil, which shows how land-use and environmental legislation renders mature ecosystems legally invisible.

The pieces gathered here differ in register and focus, yet they all converge on a shared preoccupation: the extent to which the built environment remains arranged around human terms, even amid rising awareness of nature’s plight and increased sensitivity to ecological problems. This stance is a natural consequence of the journal’s championing of ecocentrism, which necessarily entails thinking beyond human-centred designs. And yet in challenging metropolitan governance and the excesses of city life, I feel it is important to insist that none of us is writing out of anti-urban zeal, or from a broader anti-civilizational outlook. Ours, after all, is a journal of pragmatism in negotiating the tensions between human and nonhuman claims. We are inclusive of humanity – and urban spaces *are* homes for the human animal – even as we support the flourishing of other Earthlings.

By way of inviting the reader to engage with this issue, I wish to draw upon the words of an author I return to often – a writer of both country and city whose critique of industrializing modernity is inseparable from an emphasis on the imagination as a force for change: “Come with me, ladies and gentlemen who are in any wise weary of London: come with me: and those that tire at all of the world we know: for we have new worlds here” (Lord Dunsany, 1912: preface).

## References

Lord Dunsany (1912) *The Book of Wonder*. William Heinemann, London, UK.