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Published online: 16 Oct 2023.

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The Transformative Potential of Everyday Life: Shared Space, Togetherness, and Everyday Degrowth in Housing

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that everyday life in housing contains the possibility to shape and transform its material, cultural, and social conditions. Mobilizing a materialist ontology and insights from human geography, we examine how shared spaces manifest practices of togetherness which prefigure the enactment of socioecological degrowth. We draw on ethnographic fieldwork on a housing estate in Manchester (UK) to identify practices that characterize everyday housing geographies, including reappropriation, commoning, accepting limits, and territorializing tendencies. These constitute a therapeutic assemblage, facilitating wellbeing while simultaneously enfolded with(in) the political possibilities being realized on the estate to form a contingent, yet durable, instantiation of everyday degrowth. We thus contribute to revealing how transformative degrowth politics are sustained in everyday housing contexts.

1. Introduction

In this paper we leave the home, crossing its threshold to explore what happens outside. To be certain, housing scholars have shown interest in this question, with an established body of work examining the intersection of housing, culture, and society (e.g. McFarlane 2011; Aalbers 2016; Leaney 2020; see also critique by Rapoport 2000). These considerations, both distinctive to and inseparable from the home itself, reveal the way housing is constituted through wider sociospatial processes (Martella and Enia 2021). This paper joins such conversations, which connect everyday life in housing with resistance and activism (e.g. Soaita 2022). However, while important advances have been made in recognizing that "everyday lives are shaped by the material and social conditions" (Leaney 2020, 384) of places and activities outside the home, we explore how everyday life itself contains the potential to shape and transform the very material, cultural, and social conditions upon which it depends. We thus contribute to understanding housing as

a potentially transformative site and as fertile ground for both critique and affirmation in the context of growth-driven capitalism.

Scholars have already conceptualized how housing is enrolled in the spaces of finance (e.g. Aalbers 2016) and governance (McKee, Muir, and Moore 2017), as well as housing's interplay with the places and urban contexts (e.g. Leaney 2020; Martella and Enia 2021; McFarlane 2011) where social life occurs. Concurrently, an emerging conversation explores what socioecological transformation beyond capitalist growth means for housing (e.g. Nelson and Schneider 2019). This area of "degrowth" research recognizes the need to reduce the economy's material throughput in a democratic and equitable way (e.g. Schneider et al. 2010). Since gaining momentum in academic debates in the early 2000s, and closely linked to a social movement (Demaria et al. 2013), degrowth has migrated across disciplinary boundaries (Vandeventer and Lloveras 2021) – including into research on housing. Typically, such degrowth-oriented housing is framed in counterposition to "mainstream" housing (see Nelson and Schneider 2019), even when degrowth housing itself is problematized (e.g. Cucca and Friesenecker 2022). Our entry into this debate is different: we acknowledge the complexity of housing and its interwovenness with everyday life through a turn to ontology, examining how everyday degrowth is *performed* and comes to exist through material *practices* (Mol 2002) in the context of housing.

Building on new materialist relational thinking (Barad 2007; Braidotti 2006) and recent efforts to bring relationality into housing studies (Easthope et al. 2020), we theorize being-together as entailing more than "ontological sociality" (Nancy 1991; Schmid 2020) to encompass an ontological *materiality* whereby humans and other matter are relationally constituted (Fox and Alldred 2017). These "assemblages" of heterogeneous components (DeLanda 2016) (un)form in space, including via everyday housing geographies where different kinds of togetherness occur (Jarvis 2019). Taken further, everyday practices entail material assemblages of togetherness where, through the very act of assembling, an ethical and cultural orientation towards (ir)responsibility is enacted (Barad 2007). While certain practices of being-together resonate with degrowth (Jarvis 2019), we propose returning to interrogate this nexus of shared spaces in housing, the practices of everyday life, and degrowth through empirical examination of the everyday housing geographies on a housing estate in Manchester (UK).

Specifically, we focus on a housing estate known as "the Redbricks," where we conducted an ethnography over 13 months in 2017–2018. The Redbricks has approximately 250 apartments and is located on the periphery of Manchester's city centre. The estate's substantial shared spaces, medium density of homes, and topographical characteristics made it a suitable focus for our inquiry. As Moran (2004, 624), also writing in a UK housing context, notes: while some idealizations of the home privilege privatized, detached houses, there exist forms of housing that "have a much more visible relationship with a collectively experienced everyday life." It is this relationship, its manifestation of a degrowth culture, and their unfolding in shared spaces that we sought to reveal.

Before proceeding, we acknowledge that not all aspects of housing are degrowth-oriented. Indeed, just as alignment to some "true" form of degrowth is problematic (Vandeventer and Lloveras 2021), so too are there many variegated forms of housing and practices of everyday life therein – with more/less socioecological transformative potential. We are particularly concerned with how, in the case of the Redbricks,

heterogeneous collectives become entangled in the enactment of everyday life that is *oriented towards a more just future* (Barad 2007; Braidotti 2019), which we identify as housing's transformative potential in resonance with degrowth. So, while we examine how housing geographies and everyday life are organized through sustained encounters in the Redbricks' shared spaces, we mobilize degrowth debates to bring another layer of analysis by broaching questions of culture, the kind(s) of practices at issue, and their consequences. In doing so, the paper aims to unravel the degrowth politics embedded in the everyday housing geographies of the Redbricks.

To accomplish this, a brief review of how everyday life and shared spaces come together in housing leads us to discuss the spatiality of being-together and ontological questions therein, distinguishing between multiple *kinds* of togetherness (Jarvis 2019) and their interconnectedness with degrowth. This motivates our empirical inquiry, which utilizes ethnographic methods to explore everyday housing geographies on the Redbricks. Examination of the estate is followed by a presentation of everyday cultural practices occurring in shared spaces. Finally, we discuss how these practices of being-together on the housing estate are linked with degrowth and wellbeing, which we conceptualize as "therapeutic assemblages" (Foley 2011), before offering concluding thoughts and directions for future research.

2. Everyday Life and Shared Spaces in Housing

Our paper emerged from an interest in the ways housing (such as the Redbricks) is a site of "everyday life," by which we mean the "modalities of action" (De Certeau 1984) that constitute the quotidian and habitual existence of "the everyday" while simultaneously the generative source of richness and complexity (De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 2014). Philosophers have long been interested in everyday life: Lefebvre (2014) was concerned about the encroachment of capitalist power through the commodification and privatization of everyday life, including its concomitant impacts on public spaces. Similarly, de Certeau (1984) explored how everyday practices ("tactics") can reclaim urban space *despite* the mechanisms whereby power asserts control ("strategies"). This emphasis on power's impact in everyday life, then, takes an interest in the shared spaces where its cultural effects can be traced. Other explorations make clear that everyday life is performed through continuous spatial enactments (e.g. Foucault 1980). These points of departure have led to an examination of how everyday life manifests in space as discipline, resistance, embodiment, and potentialities for change (e.g. Binnie et al. 2007).

Geographers suggest that space is characterized by difference and multiplicity (Gibson-Graham 2006; Massey 2005), arguing that to exist entails "being-in-common" with others (Nancy 1991). This, in turn, clarifies spaces in-common – shared spaces – as not only the site of everyday life, but also the precondition for togetherness. Such conceptual foundations enable scrutinizing *how* spaces are shared (Massey 2005) and *what* difference is encountered (Gibson-Graham 2006). A focus on shared spaces is also evident in housing research, where scholars have recently explored mundane aspects of everyday life, including cultural studies of the interstitial spaces between homes (Steele and Keys 2015), place-based identity formation of/in communities (Leaney 2020), and the situatedness of housing communities in urban life (Martella and Enia 2021). Such spaces are, by definition, communally experienced, although their extent in housing contexts

varies considerably (Moran 2004). Importantly, these raise questions about the nature of every-day connections forming between homes.

Thus, relating to phenomena outwith the home, we are concerned with the inherent connectedness of shared spaces with culture and everyday life as collective endeavours. However, everyday life is also constitutive of the *kind* of world we wish to inhabit: normative visions of how the world ought to be are made real in shared spaces. In other words, what cultural aspirations are real-ized in housing? Clearly, housing is not solely a reproduction of individualist consumerism – important though such cultural factors are in contemporary housing (Madden and Marcuse 2016). Rather, as the Redbricks demonstrate, elements of housing also embody the panoply of values under-pinning society's rejection of growth-centrism (Nelson and Schneider 2019), such as care, communality, conviviality, and simplicity (Demaria et al. 2013). Thus, housing provides an entry point into the complexity of everyday (de) growth geographies, which we return to below.

Therefore, examining everyday life outside the home, while nonetheless remaining intimately linked to the home itself, raises questions such as: How do shared spaces acquire cultural meaning? Which everyday interactions are consequential for sustaining them? And what ontological assumptions underpin these modes of being-in-the-world? We address these questions next.

3. Ontology and Everyday Housing Geographies: Shared Spaces, Togetherness, and Degrowth

A key question in housing scholarship has developed around the notion of "ontological security": that one's being is more/less secure through (lack of) access to a decent home (e.g. Madden and Marcuse 2016; Saunders 1986) – though it has also been argued that "ontological security" is problematic due to unreflexive (mis)use (Gurney 2021). Though rightly expressing a concern for wellbeing, ontological security is premised on an understanding that "the home," and typically home ownership, is the essential (i.e. ontological) level for understanding housing. Yet, is what exists outside not intimately related to the home? Housing scholars have shown how every-thing from urban activities and rituals (Martella and Enia 2021), considerations of weather (Steele and Keys 2015), public safety (e.g. Powell and Flint 2009), the prevail-ing political economy (Christophers 2018), or the shared spaces available to residents (Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2020) – such as in the case of the Redbricks – have profound implications for the nature of the home, and for housing as a process. It is in this way that housing as a "doing" becomes a practice of urban life (McFarlane 2011), rather than a scalar dimension or "layer" for analysis.

These theoretical developments, despite limited uptake in housing literature (Gabriel and Jacobs 2008), demonstrate how housing might be conceptualized as the product of relations that include, but also extend beyond, the home (see Easthope et al. 2020). But this move away from an essentialist ontology broaches additional concerns, such as the role of materiality in the reality-making process (DeLanda 2016; Fox and Alldred 2017). Indeed, this "ontological turn" is a broadly shaped event that includes, but also extends far beyond, an understanding of the world as comprised of relations. For our purposes, while conceptually useful, distinguishing between "the home," "housing," and "shared spaces"

on the Redbricks overlooks their interwovenness: rather than a single "layered reality" to the Redbricks, its realities are, in fact, multiple (Mol 2002) and belie hierarchical categorization. Through a focus on this case, we pursue our ontological account of the intersection of shared spaces, culture, and everyday life.

Building from a relational ontology (Massey 2005), geographical investigations conceptualize every-day existence in/through/as a spatial unfolding. Following Nancy (1991), Schmid (2020) describes this as being-in-common, or "ontological sociality," clarifying that *being* is a social, cultural, and spatial process (see also Gibson-Graham 2006). In this way, being-together, or *togetherness*, is a fundamental possibility that conditions housing's shared spaces. Importantly, togetherness is not strictly related to proximity, nor does it imply intentionality (Jarvis 2019) – although both have implications for particular kinds of togetherness. Nevertheless, togetherness *does* involve entities coming together. The relational connections established between distinct subjects/objects are the generative source of cultural meaning. Yet, there is an important sense in which this process is also comprised of matter: not only humans but also materials are relationally entangled in space (Braidotti 2019; Fox and Alldred 2017).

Therefore, what we call "everyday housing geographies" requires us to examine how togetherness involves spatial "assemblages" – processual "wholes" comprising combinations of heterogeneous parts (DeLanda 2016) – that come to exist in housing. Drawing on assemblage thinking, which studies the interactions or "assembling" of emergent formations in the world in order to grapple with their complexity (DeLanda 2016), allows us to conceptualize the outcomes of careful – yet contingent – spatial coordination on the Redbricks that includes *both* human and non-human elements (McFarlane 2011). Here, togetherness is extended via Nancy's (1991) post-foundational insights to encompass an ontological *materiality*, with being-together involving all manner of materialities including, but not limited to, bodies and social relations (Fox and Alldred 2017). Space, in this reading, is a "confluence of trajectories" (Massey 2005) that engenders a "thrown togetherness" (Jarvis 2019) of matter.

What, then, can a materialist ontology tell us about everyday housing geographies? As McFarlane (2011, 651) notes, "the processual everyday practicalities of dwelling highlight the very acts of assembling themselves." So, for our purposes, attention must be paid to the mundane acts that give rise to multiple spatial assemblages on the Redbricks. This builds from everyday modalities of action (De Certeau 1984) to make central the question of how cultural aspects of everyday housing geographies are *performed* through material practices (Gherardi 2019; Mol 2002). This, in turn, circumscribes our focus on the heterogeneous matter which comes together through practices in the Redbricks' shared spaces. This raises the question of the kinds of matter, spaces, and togetherness that are enacted therein: specifically, everyday practices in shared spaces can be assessed in terms of how they organize the world via (un)ethical engagements with it (Barad 2007). Distinguishing a normative dimension to these organizational geographies requires interrogating the value-laden relations contained in everyday practices.

Degrowth living is interwoven with the production of space (Lloveras, Quinn, and Parker 2018). In an important contribution, Jarvis (2019) distinguishes different kinds of togetherness into which space throws us, and how these map onto transformative cultural practices of degrowth. The resultant identification of "living," "thrown," and "intentional" togetherness helps delineate between aspects of housing. Though they

often overlap, each kind of togetherness aligns with housing contexts. "Intentional" togetherness links with the mode of existence purposively chosen by housing co-operatives, cohousing (Jarvis 2019), and so forth. The "thrown" mode of togetherness entails the emergent meanings acquired by spaces in the interstices of housing (Steele and Keys 2015) and between individualized dwellings such as private gardens. Finally, "living togetherness" might be most closely tied to the mundane coexistence of difference in the shared spaces outside of homes (Leaney 2020). Each of these modalities of togetherness – and of housing – is characterized according to the (more-than-)human practices comprising it, and how these generate particular cultural and normative orientations in/of the world.

These theoretical meditations, rooted in a relational understanding of housing, indicate how togetherness gives rise to assemblages with normative content, including the everyday degrowth practices which occur in the context of the Redbricks. Jarvis (2019) focuses on the kinds of housing that could be seen to embody degrowth values, finding that the most potential rests in the "intentional" mode. Yet, such categories for exploring degrowth in housing should not be accepted as fixed and immutable. Further, while others have explored degrowth in housing contexts (Cucca and Friesenecker 2022; Nelson and Schneider 2019), we resist the urge to make the conceptual leap that preconceived models of housing align with degrowth. Instead, commencing analysis with a concern for the shared spaces of everyday life (in our case on the Redbricks), enables asking: how do mundane practices give rise to togetherness? Analytical insights into their transformative potential can subsequently be made in terms of their potential to realize degrowth. In other words, rather than accepting *a priori* the manifestation of degrowth-in-the-world, we argue that multiple performances and practices constitute everyday housing geographies, which may (not) have implications for how economy, culture, and society can transform towards degrowth. As each performance of everyday life involves distinct qualities, modes of being-together, and spatialities, these must be identified through empirical analysis.

4. Methods

Fieldwork combined regular participant observation and recording of fieldnotes; 16 interviews with residents that were subsequently transcribed; taking photographs; and the collection of documents, archival, and online materials. We also conducted a photo-elicitation project (Rose 2016) with three residents, asking them to take photos in response to the prompt: "what is meaningful to you about the Redbricks?" These visual materials captured shared spaces on the estate, forming the basis for subsequent interviews, where each photo served as an entry point into a resident's attributions of meaning to matter. This method had limitations, including the power-full nature of the photographer's lens and its inherently exclusionary ability to determine what is (not) worthy of focus (Rose 2016). Nevertheless, by eliciting photos from *residents* – rather than relying solely on our own audiovisual data and materials – we sought to shift the power dynamic inherent to research.

Data were analysed with an interest in the ways the Redbricks' shared spaces acquire meaning, the cultural (including "normative" and "ethical") practices of togetherness in everyday life, and their implications for society's (de)growth trajectories. Our analysis

drew out normative questions while remaining grounded in materialist ontology: we coded the data and identified particularly rich passages of interview text, but we also employed visual materials and fieldnotes, moving closer towards an embodied under-standing of the values imbued in matter and how be(com)ing-together unfolds in shared spaces through everyday practices (Gherardi 2019). Following an abductive logic (Dubois and Gadde 2002), we iteratively (re)worked our codes through engagements with degrowth debates, probing the extent of connections between everyday practices on the estate and degrowth-oriented values and normative orientations (Kallis et al. 2018). This analysis led us to identify cultural practices of *reappropriation* (Barca 2019) and *commoning* (Lockyer 2017) on the estate, as well as a recurrent practice of *accepting limits* when enacting such degrowth-oriented values. Another theme that emerged was how everyday life involved *territorializing tendencies* (Brighenti 2010) which catalyse residents' togetherness. To present these findings, we first describe the (more-than-)human geo-graphies of the Redbricks, then weave these together with cultural practices of everyday life therein.

5. The Estate and Its Geographies

The medium density of the Redbricks is typical of post-Second World War UK housing construction. There are six, three-story apartment buildings on the estate, which are split into a series of blocks (usually with six apartments per block). Between the buildings are either cul-de-sac roads or large communal gardens with walking paths. One garden also has open-air passages (or "ginnels") through the buildings to roads on either side. Several other shared spaces exist, including an office available to resident groups and a street along the north of the estate inaccessible to cars, which was pedestrianized following resident protests. Indeed, a GIS analysis of the Redbricks and surrounding area undertaken prior to our research showed that there is significantly more land "in-common" than is actually occupied by buildings (Beros and Rafailaki 2005).

This spatial layout results in many shared spaces on the Redbricks, constituting sites where being-together unfolds in the course of everyday life. We observed and partici-pated in a wide range of activities occurring in these spaces, from gardening and communal meals, film screening events and impromptu chats, a monthly exchange and reuse stall, a sewing group, and meetings of various residents groups – in addition to the other, more typical activities of a housing estate, such as building maintenance and repair, rubbish collection, deliveries and mail, occasional antisocial behaviour, and so on. Importantly, these inevitably intersect with mundane rhythms of private life: each block of apartments shares an exit onto a shared path and road, so dozens of doorways filter residents into and through the estate. In this sense, communal spaces are the necessary backdrop for everyday life.

In addition to these physical spaces, multiple virtual arenas facilitate coordination between residents. There is an intra-estate email list called "SHOUT," which has existed since the late 1990's. The estate has internet access from multiple providers, one of which is RIC (the "Redbricks Intranet Collective"), which offers access to the internet and hosts estate-wide intranet (a "closed" system allowing other connected computers on the estate to communicate) on a server within the Redbricks. Several social media sites affiliated with the estate – a Facebook group, Twitter and Instagram accounts – mediate

everyday life. Discussions on Facebook include, for example: upcoming events and gardening days; muggings, drug dealing, and police activity; wildlife spotted on the estate; items being offered for free; requests for household repair items; and an ongoing thread about cats on the estate. The Twitter account is often used to "retweet" local and national issues, projects, funding opportunities, and events – usually with (some) relevance to the estate. On Instagram, photographs of plants, fruit, and animals on the estate abound, and images of people gardening are also sometimes posted. Each employs text and visual media to associate particular objects and values with the Redbricks, while also initiating social exchanges ("likes," "comments," etc.) that enrol both residents and interested individuals in cultural activities on the estate. Thus, online and physical spaces work together: virtual activities coordinate place-based activities and encourage participation and communication among residents.

The Redbricks' communal spaces distinguish it from the contemporary trend towards privatization of public space (Christophers 2018), including housing developments where residents are frequently transient without substantial ties to place. Additionally, while social media certainly contributes to neighbourhood ties (Gibbons 2020), the density of virtual geographies connected with the Redbricks is noteworthy. We came to understand that participation in these physical and virtual spaces is heavily reliant on residents' length of tenure in giving rise to a place-based identity and concern for what happens on the estate.

The Redbricks further contrasts with the rapid changes in Manchester's city centre, including the growth and financialisation of its housing market – symbolized in the proliferation of high-rise apartment towers (Silver 2018) – although the estate is not unaffected by these changes. We heard many times that property price increases have led formerly active residents to "sell up" and move away, bringing an influx of young professionals onto the estate with fewer ties to the place. Consider also a recent advertisement, where a market rate apartment is described as being "on the popular Redbricks estate," invoking the estate as a local place brand. At the same time, the influx of investment and affluence into Manchester is deepening inequalities between the urban core and surrounding areas, including the Redbricks and the neighbourhood where it is situated.

Thus, the relationship of people to shared physical and virtual spaces is continually reconfiguring on the Redbricks, with cultural practices and everyday life asserting themselves alongside, against, and through dominant apparatuses, including the political economy of housing. These changing geographies are an entry point into the overlapping and conflicting modes of togetherness occurring on the estate.

6. Everyday Life and Practices of Togetherness on the Redbricks

Having examined the changing geographies influencing, and influenced by, everyday life on the Redbricks, we now present several practices found in the estate's shared spaces, which are imbued with normative and ethical dimensions.

6.1. Reappropriating Virtual Spaces

Virtual space is playing an increasingly vital role in the everyday life of Redbricks residents. Many opportunities to come together, either purposefully gathering or unexpectedly encountering each other, now occur online. The rules established in these spaces underpin expectations and behavioural norms. For example, part of the "signature" text appended to each message on the intra-estate email list reads: "SHOUT is our consider-it-public, post by-subscription-only estate email list." Here, a virtual means for communication is simultaneously public and restricted to subscribers. Carefully signposted, this navigates a balance between public participation and privacy. Similarly, the description on the estate's Facebook group reads: "LET'S BE TOLERANT AND POSITIVE ABOUT BENTLEY HOUSE AND LEAFY ST!...", plainly laying out the values expected of participants. Residents thus put tools for virtual interactions – e.g. email and social media – to their own use and purposively direct them towards participation in virtual everyday life. These everyday practices in virtual space attest to the increasing role of digital communications and social media in organizing cultural life (Gibbons 2020); they also involve forms of togetherness that are value-laden and imbued with normative expectations.

While virtual participation encourages forms of togetherness that are communicative, these can be somewhat detached from the estate itself. This, however, belies the fact that mundane virtual interactions necessarily spill over into physical space. Virtual organizing often catalyzes activities, such as gardening, meetings, parties, or visits from the employees of the estate's landlord. Facebook is also used as a way to recycle furniture, bicycles, household items, and other materials amongst residents, generating a space where reuse is regularly practiced. Sustained over time, exchanges in virtual spaces fosters a place-based connection whereby residents demonstrate a concern for each other, and for the Redbricks. This reinforces a culture of care and solidarity characterizing everyday life by virtue of their ties to the estate's physical materiality. In these ways, virtual organizing on the Redbricks is a tactic involving the *reappropriation* of social media's strategies for capturing and commodifying time, repurposing virtual spaces and putting them to use in a repeated process of place-based participation.

6.2. Practices of Commoning

While virtual and physical spaces are part of everyday life on the Redbricks, ongoing work is required to maintain both – but particularly the materiality of the latter. For example, the practices of sharing and reuse on Facebook also take form in the monthly "Bentley Exchange" give-and-take stall, where residents bring clothes and household items they don't want and freely take those they do. The Exchange is communicated through email and social media to remind residents and encourage their participation, but manifests in the monthly transformation of a "ginnel" on the estate into a communal space to encourage reuse of everyday materials. This stands in contrast to the prevailing use-then-dispose model of consumerism, while also purposively creating a space for regularly being-together. Other groups and activities (e.g. sewing, bicycle repair, communal meals, composting, gardening) involve similar tactics of asserting the collectivity of spaces on the estate, which can be considered cultural practices of *commoning* that mobilize

Figure 1. Parade with lanterns, troches, pyrotechnics, and music (Author's own).

materials to enact values of reuse, ecological care, and a shared responsibility among residents for their collective future.

The multiple modes of commoning that unfold through everyday mundane practices imbue communal spaces with politics, making their very existence a legitimation of claims that difference can thrive. While the Exchange and other activities regularly occur, others take place more occasionally, including a night-time parade through shared spaces during our fieldwork that featured lanterns, torches, pyrotechnics, and music (Figure 1). A resident later describes this:

> I remember we carried torches, lit torches round the estate, which I thought was really nice. And then came here for the fireworks, for the band, for – we had mulled wine and, you know, the whole thing was just a very good Redbricks event. And like all biggish Redbricks events, pulls in other people as well. And there were a lot of people there that used to live on the Redbricks and things like that.

For this resident, this example of commoning not only consolidates the communal use of shared spaces, but also helps to deepen ties between residents, former residents, and "other people." Interestingly, others described how participating in everyday practices, such as gardening or the Exchange, brings them closer to the place: "I kind of slowly faded into [the Redbricks] from, um, – I think that the Exchange was kind of like my gateway, if you like, because from doin" that, from doin' the Exchange, I got to know people.' Practices of commoning thus constitute a tactic for bringing others into the community, creating multiple pathways for participation.

Perhaps the most enduring manifestations of commoning are the permanent communal spaces – the large gardens, the shared office, and pedestrianized street – which uphold the estate as a mode of housing that is resisting capitalist enclosure (Christophers 2018). We learned about multiple commoning processes setting out to protect or expand these permanent spaces, including efforts to transform grassy areas into gardens, the installation of DIY play and exercise equipment, and mobilization to defend a garden on the estate threatened by an adjacent redevelopment. All such cultural practices must reckon with competing claims to space by

Figure 2. Swing and bench (Resident-taken).

prevailing power-laden actors, from the landlord and City Council to opportunistic muggers at night, demanding residents' resilience and endurance in the face of an uncertain future. Indeed, organizing everyday life in and through the continual commoning of shared spaces allows for prefiguring a future in-common *despite* such uncertainties.

6.3. Accepting Limits

While the above cultural practices of reappropriation and commoning reveal modes of togetherness in the shared spaces of everyday life, they also face limits. For example, there are boundaries to the *kinds* of commons which manage to emerge on the Redbricks. As part of the photo elicitation project, a resident captured one of the few seating areas and places for temporary rest on the estate (Figure 2), later describing how this social infrastructure only exists as a result of sustained struggle:

> there's very little space where we can sit on the estate. It's, what do you call it, hostile architecture. Hostile design. And the punks sort of get squeezed into that corner [*indicating photograph*]. I like the swing there, I like the fact that they aren't technically allowed to have swings anywhere because they're a health and safety risk and blah blah blah. They've taken them down in the past, and they just get put up again … It's just a little triumph over – [*pause*] and like another swing's appeared, and now they've been like, "Okay, you can have them."

In contrast to the ample green spaces, this commons is only "little" because of the practices that might unfold there (socializing, drinking, drug use, etc.). The resident

dismisses claims that benches or swings are a "health and safety risk," calling attention to justifications for their removal. Nonetheless, other factors – such as the communal space's situatedness on a roadside corner – surely help: it can be passively surveilled by passers-by and cars. But the resident's sentence trails off when articulating who, or what, the bench is a "triumph over," revealing the nebulous nature of the power geometries that sanction or prohibit practices of commoning.

If power is (reluctantly) acknowledged as upholding a degree of spatial determination, other limits are more amorphous. Take the changing makeup of residents. As a volunteer in resident groups explains:

> Yeah, there's a sense of community about here, but there's also a lot of people ... they just have normal lives, what I mean normal life is they do nine to five, they don't really care. You know what I mean? They don't care about the community. They don't – well maybe they do, and they just don't have the energy or the time, maybe they've got a family, they've got other commitments.

Consequently, there is an inevitable limitation to a sense of care for the community, which is attributed to "normal" life and regular working hours. Another resident goes further, explaining how the changing demographics of the estate result in multiple communities, including " ... refugee, asylum seeker background people, post-working class people. White, black, Asian. Maybe people who aren't particularly politicized, who would be suspicious of white middle class hippies talkin' about herbicides and sustainable light bulbs..." These communities are perceived in contrast to residents advocating changes to behaviour and practicing reappropriation and commoning. The attitude, however, is not so much lamenting these new residents but rather accepting the reality of wider societal changes that are manifesting locally on the estate.

An interesting intersection of these different uses of space and the kinds of participation occurring on the Redbricks involves the Exchange, where some residents' contribute to enacting the shared space of the "ginnel" in ways that do not adhere to the underlying intentions of the project. A volunteer reflects on this:

> I try to ask people not to leave certain stuff, so it can be challengin' as well, you know, cuz people will want to leave rubbish there or they want to leave books. I've turned books down loads of times. But yeah, you know, it, it's good.

Here, limits are set to what kinds of objects can meaningfully participate in constituting the Exchange. In this sense, normative boundaries are embodied in cultural practices, which are not self-evident; rather, these properties of the commoning process only become determinate through the ongoing re-enactment of the Exchange. Further, such boundaries are themselves limiting and, by definition, exclusionary by marking what is (not) appropriate (Barad 2007).

Consequently, *accepting limits* involves recognizing that power, demography, and (certain) objects are implicated in everyday life, which does not have a predetermined direction. This prevailing attitude – what one resident calls "acceptivism" – can certainly have negative effects. For example, when injection needles are found, they are (usually) disposed of in the safest way possible – typically an empty water bottle, and sometimes an off-estate needle disposal box. We also came across needles during fieldwork, solidifying how the Redbricks is woven together with the acceptance of some heroin use – and demonstrating that accepting limits on a collective's ability to control behaviour can give rise to unpleasant and dangerous matters. These effects also exist in other ways: the lack

of participation in activities – sometimes simply due to lack of knowledge of them – or residents' unwillingness/inability to participate precipitates diminished cultural ties and a weakened sense of community among residents, which leads to less participation, and so on. Yet, recognition of such negative possibilities appears to reflect the ongoing, re-combining process characteristic of assemblage. And one means for address such limits is a tendency to (re)make spaces into territories.

6.4. Territorializing Tendencies

A final practice we found giving rise to modes of togetherness involves creating territories: demarcating space in ways which entail not only defence, contestation, and conflict, but also more mundane acts of marking the materiality of the estate to distinguish it as *here*, not *there*. Over time, these become sedimented and are generative of further territories.

While this process of territorialization is not mutually exclusive with the cultural practices highlighted above, it also involves unique characteristics. Perhaps most importantly, it asserts control over space in the organization of everyday life. Territories on the Redbricks are the result of ongoing work, such as maintaining the two large gardens. But gardening activities also involved incrementally converting *more* of the estate to gardens, including when gardeners removed a section of grass, extended a plant bed by creating a log border, and filled it with bulbs (Figure 3). Such regular territorializing spawns additional, often unexpected, activities. One day, for example, a resident not involved in gardening removed overgrown ivy that was encroaching on a newly-created plant bed. Other autonomous initiatives frequently take responsibility for shared spaces, including
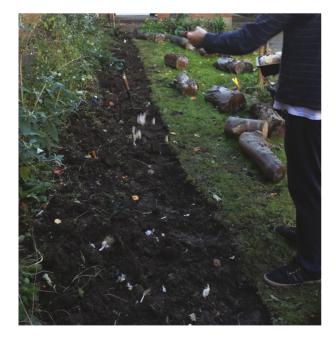

Figure 3. Removing grass and extending a plant bed with a log border (Resident-taken).

minimally coordinated efforts to look after composting bins around the estate or a "little library" along the pedestrianized street which enables free book swapping.

In contrast to the gardens and other static territories are mobile and temporary ones. For example, during the aforementioned parade, a mobile territory was asserted and a spatial claim to ownership made through walking, music, and torches (recall Figure 1). Unbeknownst to some, this echoed another mobile territory over a decade ago to "reclaim the estate" in response to a series of muggings. In an interview, a resident recollected this prior procession:

> . . .it was amazing, it was really, really empowering, there were flaming torches and music and placards and, and visiting all the places people felt unsafe, so people could be together and feel safe and like, yeah, just walk on our estate.

In this way, the parade can be viewed as a reterritorialization of this past cultural activity, projecting from the past into the present a powerful moment of being-together. This projection, in other words, is the means by which the prior territory reverberates in the present. The cultural meaning, however, has changed: by invoking a past action – while accepting that some present might not be aware of this – a sense of empowerment in the face of danger is remoulded into a sense of pride in the estate itself.

Another territorializing practice unexpectedly emerged when a garden and communal green space faced the sudden possibility of demolition (or being substantially reduced) due to proposed roadworks. In response, residents organized to save it. A particularly consequential moment involved ascribing the garden a name – "Rockdove Gardens," after the street nearest it – that had not been regularly used previously. In this sense, naming the garden involved materially inscribing it as a territory (Brighenti 2010) in order to rally support and protect it. This both demonstrated *and multiplied* the affective significance of the garden to residents, making the space a durable territory imbued with pride – further consolidated when the campaign was successful – that both reinvigorated the ongoing territorialization of the other gardens and will surely spur future activities. There is clearly *work* required to generate and maintain such territories: through intentionally directed interventions of being-together (involving both bodies and other materials), claims on space are made that can spur subsequent activities therein.

These and other *territorializing tendencies* have been catalysed on the Redbricks, where everyday practices imbue spaces with meaning, triggering further practices in an ongoing pattern of cultural activities. Of course, such territories should not be seen as complete; they inevitably undergo moments of rupture, resulting in disruption, and, potentially, dissolution. However, these reveal the territoriality of everyday practices of togetherness, and their interwovenness with the materiality of the Redbricks. Further, this tendency to territorialize occurs in conjunction with practices of reappropriation, commoning, and accepting limits, creating a recursive process that exhibits a tendency towards deepening ties of togetherness.

7. Discussion: Assembling Everyday Degrowth

We now take up the question of how these everyday practices of togetherness assemble and hang together, and their consequences for materializing the potential of everyday degrowth in housing. The Redbricks' medium density, topographical features, and virtual spaces are conducive to encounters among residents, providing rich contexts where

mundane cultural practices of togetherness occur, from spontaneous and planned activities to informal gatherings and purposively organized events. Through these repeated comings-together, residents of the estate get to know each other and deepen ties. In this way, and building on Jarvis (2019), it is *through* living togetherness that intentional and thrown togetherness can occur. This reveals the ways in which "encounters" rely on the material circumstances of everyday living (Wilson 2017). In fact, encountering both people and other materials is an overriding requirement for shared spaces on the Redbricks to become invested with meaning.

Yet, it was clear that many residents do not all feel "close" to each other, even despite the material possibilities of encounter. This gestures towards the practice of accepting limits to (some) residents' knowledge, particularly regarding previous activities. Indeed, the memories of the past motivate – and help to re-territorialize – practices like the continual commoning of the gardens or the historical "reclaim the estate" action. Interestingly, the latter features on the estate's website, revealing an effort to use virtual shared spaces to address the limit of "closeness" arising from lack of shared memories. This dynamic captures, as one of our reviewers noted, "how memory becomes entangled in place and especially shared spaces." Indeed, notwithstanding the limits to shared memories, communal spaces allow for a kind of "public familiarity," kinship that arises through the very act of humans-and-matter collectively being-together in a shared space – a process generative of urban communities (Blokland 2017). So, complementing research on everyday activism and resistance in housing (Leaney 2020; Soaita 2022), the Redbricks emerges as a case where the ongoing work of togetherness is performed (and remembered) through cultural practices in the course of everyday life.

What, then, are the outcomes of these sustained, mundane practices? Importantly, although reappropriation, commoning, accepting limits, and territorializing are interwoven in a local context, these are articulated with(in) the increasingly globalized spaces of social media, cultural changes defining "normal life," urban development, and so on. There is an important sense in which the Redbricks *requires* such a movement between local practices and global trends. Indeed, while togetherness on the Redbricks shows evidence of degrowth practices of localism (Rees 2015), the estate's local-global iteration demonstrates how both already-existing and utopian forms of place-based togetherness are navigated. By embodying these simultaneously, the Redbricks gives credence to arguments for the place-based transformative potential of degrowth (Lloveras et al. 2021) via spatial (Massey 2005) and territorial (Escobar 2008) material markings of difference. In other words, the estate's geographies provide the backdrop for transforming everyday life and realizing degrowth. While the Redbricks certainly is entangled with growth logics, our analysis reveals how degrowth manages to insinuate itself in the spaces of growth. We return to this subsequently. Thus, in contrast to cases where degrowth is identified in intentional communities (Jarvis 2019) or other marginalized modes of living – such as squatting, tiny homes, nonmonetary living, etc (Nelson and Schneider 2019) – degrowth is also (always) already unfolding in everyday life of housing communities.

Further, our findings illustrate how normative meanings for what the estate is (and/or ought to be) help navigate the contradictions within which it exists. These cultural values – ranging from care, reuse, and responsibility to tolerance, pride, and solidarity – materialize through everyday practices and memories of previous

activities to coalesce as a place-based ethics beyond economizing imperatives of growth (Lloveras, Quinn, and Parker 2018; Schmid 2020). In an important way, the Redbricks actually *facilitates* residents' wellbeing – their being-well-together – through togetherness arising from the materialities of everyday life. The estate emerges as a "therapeutic assemblage," a heterogeneous collective giving rise to therapeutic effects (Foley 2011). Our materialist ontology emphasizes that well-being emerges as "the tentative expansion of possibility and capability, in a meshwork of relations" (Smith and Reid 2018, 822) – captured perhaps most clearly in territorializing tendencies. This consolidation of disparate relations and trajectories (re)makes the Redbricks as a site of directed possibility, constituting a kind of "catalysis" (DeLanda 2015 in Smith and Reid 2018) that we might speculate marks a phase shift in materiality. To the extent that everyday practices articulate with each other and deepen, a therapeutic politics is sustained that is simultaneously transformative and mundane. The Redbricks has the potential for crossing a threshold and becoming a zone of intensity (DeLanda 2016) where qualitatively different togetherness, participation, and degrowth politics occur.

We therefore argue that practices of being-together on the Redbricks, standing against the surrounding area, constitute processes of assembling everyday degrowth. At the same time, the estate is itself an assemblage, comprised of multiple other "sets" of practice assemblages (DeLanda 2016). The therapeutic effects of these assemblages are enfolded with the political possibilities materializing on the estate, which interlace to form a contingent, yet manifest, enactment of everyday degrowth. Of course, the acceptance of limits and other tensions inevitably play out on the estate: more/less involved residents is a clear example of this, as are other pressures (e.g. rising housing prices, deteriorating buildings) which test the durability of the assemblages' constituent parts. Yet, accepting that limits exist in the Redbricks' case – including the inability of one housing estate to overcome the challenges of involvement, capital accumulation, or material degradation – does not undermine its claim towards an experiment in difference. On the contrary, degrowth-minded activism "infuses urban life with noncapitalist processes and logics" (Lloveras, Quinn, and Parker 2018, 188); accepting and respecting multiple limits is a core proposal of degrowth (Kallis et al. 2018). In fact, there are multiple de/growth practices – and multiple realities – being enacted on the estate (Mol 2002), which a focus on materialities helps uncover.

By extension, while we have conceptualized the Redbricks as a degrowth assemblage, other growth assemblages – more compatible with incumbent systems – exist and are proliferating on the Redbricks, and elsewhere. There is therefore a need to recognize the growth/degrowth interpenetration arising in housing contexts, such as tensions between financializing housing and accelerating material use in housing developments on the one hand, and multiple assemblages of resistance on the other. We have contributed to showing how the latter are, in everyday life on the Redbricks, transforming the always-incomplete power configurations of the prevailing capitalist-growth regime (Vandeventer, Cattaneo, and Zografos 2019) through practices of reappropriation, commoning, accepting limits, territorializing, and others.

8. Conclusions

This paper has shown how everyday degrowth emerges through multiple modes of togetherness in the shared spaces of everyday life on a housing estate. In doing so, our work proposes an understanding of everyday housing geographies as a "dynamic, generative, and rhizomic *production* and actualization of the world, in which both matter and meaning play a part" (Fox and Alldred 2017, 26, emphasis in original). We have sought to activate new ways for thinking ontologically about the politics of everyday life, and the multiple cultural practices of being-together, in housing contexts. Theoretically, we contribute to rethinking the presumed ontological hierarchization of "the home" by building a relational understanding of housing (Easthope et al. 2020) through a concern with the practices that unfold in everyday life. Drawing on new materialism and assemblage thinking, we encourage housing scholars to recognize that multiple materialities conspire to generate a multiplicity of encounters and varieties of togetherness in everyday housing geographies, where things may yet be – or indeed, have always been – otherwise.

As the world deals with wars, worsening inequality, mass extinction, climate breakdown, and the seismic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, these destabilizing changes have rippling effects on communal spaces, from housing communities to urban centres and elsewhere. The need for organizing therapeutic assemblages becomes clearer and more urgent than ever. Facing such changes, the kinds of practices we have located on the Redbricks will inevitably evolve, respond, and mutate to generate novel manifestations of degrowth in everyday life. We therefore urge housing researchers to identify further instantiations of everyday degrowth cohering in novel therapeutic assemblages across the vast array of housing forms that exist – from cooperatives, co-housing and other collaborative housing initiatives (Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2020) to social housing (Leaney 2020), or even how degrowth assembles in the capital-infused housing developments transforming urban space and skylines around the world. It falls to researchers to shed light on the therapeutic assemblages in these contexts and performatively further their reproduction. Thus, we hope this paper helps scholars to conceptualize, catalyse, and memorialize practices of everyday degrowth capable of accommodating and adapting in/to a world undergoing significant cultural, social, and environmental change.

Finally, our paper's arguments challenge housing scholars to look anew at questions regarding the materialities of everyday life, and how these shift attention to other, hitherto unrecognized practices unfolding in housing contexts. Insofar as the notion that matter participates in practice assemblages allowed us to elaborate the implications of housing geographies in terms of degrowth and wellbeing (e.g. Smith and Reid 2018), future work might build from ontological materiality to examine other ways housing is implicated in well/illbeing and (de)growth. For example, scholars might mobilize the critical potential of degrowth to examine how everyday life in housing is contingent on wider practice arrangements (e.g. legal structures, political economic systems, reuse, and demolition); the other materialities – from steel, concrete, and glass through to waste infrastructures and rubble – involved in changing housing's shared spaces (and indeed urban life); or the roles of further actors – such as architects, construction companies, urban planners, and policymakers – in (re)making housing spaces conducive to (de)growth. Ultimately, housing cannot be conceived without its material underpinnings, which are equally remolded and acquire new meanings in realizing the transformative potential of everyday life.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure Statement

Funding

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