Advancing Rural as 'Something More Than a Human Estate': Exploring UK Sheep-Shaping

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Abstract

Periodically, the topic of defining rural is addressed within rural social science scholarship but done so in overwhelmingly human terms. This paper engages with this observation, arguing the simple but axiomatic point that the rural is not solely a human taxonomic creation but expresses a space that integrally and intimately involves the more-than-human. Consequently, the latter should be strongly, firmly and richly represented up-front within the defining rural debate. Adopting an established if, to date, still anthropocentricised three-fold model of rural space, the paper argues that each dimension – localities, representations, lives – feature the more-than-human in both passive and active ways. Overall, bringing more-than-human perspectives much further to the fore consolidates the idea of rural as inherently co-produced, a 'baroque assemblage' containing many more-than-human living things. Accounts of animals within such a rural must recognise their emplacing from a diversity of foci, interests and consequences. The paper begins to introduce details of this diverse co-production with respect to one ubiquitous rural animal, the sheep. It illustrates the 'ensheeping' of rural localities, representations and lives, with the practical significance of this brought together and drawn out through two rival accounts of sheep within the Lake District National Park. Finally, the seemingly modest call for rural studies to embrace animals more fully is argued to be enhanced today by ongoing and potentially imminent experiences impacting strongly on rural places.

Key words

Rural; animals; more-than-human; sheep; production of space

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> ‘[E]arth is something more than a human estate… there are things not human yet of great honour and power in the world... remote from the parochialism of humanity’
> (Edward Thomas 1909: 34)

> ‘The point at which we begin to see our world from the perspective of the living things… that inhabit it is the point at which we can truly embark on a revolutionary shift in the way we interact with the world’
> (Hugh Warwick 2017: 7)

> ‘[R]ural life is in effect life with animals in landscape / place / identity’
> (Owain Jones 2013: 425)

1. Introduction: a more-than-human rural

1.1 Seeing a fuller picture

This paper has a relatively straightforward aim. It is that rural researchers should give greater attention to how the spaces we define as rural are co-produced by the more-than-human, not least other animals, and consequently for us to recognise more fully the active place of such forces within our definitions. Whilst this aim may not seem over-challenging, co-production now deeply rooted across social science scholarship, it remains an important step for rural studies still **to take more fully** today.

The paper’s structure is as follows. First, research on both ‘defining rural’ and ‘animal geographies’ is introduced, with the former argued to have afforded the latter less attention than one might have initially anticipated. Next is a call to recognise the rural as a ‘baroque assemblage’ which, when deconstructed, has within it the key presence of many more-than-humans, notably animals in the context of this paper. Accounts of animals within such a rural must recognise their emplacing from a diversity of foci and interests, with a diversity of consequences essential for fuller appreciation of the rural. The paper then indicates something of this diversity through the illustrative case of the 'ensheeping' of UK rural localities, representations and lives. An ensheeped UK rural 'baroque assemblage' is illustrated via two rival accounts of the animals within England's Lake District National Park. The paper concludes by reiterating the call for rural studies to embrace animals more fully, a need enhanced by ongoing and emerging experiences impacting on rural places today.

1.2 Beyond a purely human construct

For decades across rural social science scholarship, the topic of defining its subject - the rural – has often attracted specific attention. From Gilbert's (1982) observation that the 'rural' term had been in dispute for at least 70 years, to it featuring strongly in this journal's introductory editorial (Cloke 1985), through Hoggart's (1990) call to 'do away with rural' and responses seeking to retain but de-naturalise it (Halfacree 1993; Jones 1995), to a lived sense of the rural expressed strongly in collections such as Cloke (2003), rural scholars have demonstrated considerable reflection on their subject (also Cloke *et al*. 2006). Yet, all of this academic attention afforded to the rural has been predominantly in **human** terms. In short, social scientists (and others) have monopolised 'defining rural' debates from their own human perspectives, but at some expense of recognising how 'rural' is not solely Thomas's (1909) 'human estate'. Humans may be taxonomic drawers of lines and boundaries, producers of categories such as 'rural', but spaces so delimited are not just our domain. Instead, more-than-human forces co-produce them and merit more direct and focused attention.

Within rural studies, however, centre-staging of the more-than-human has been hindered by one of the key motivations for the aforementioned 'defining rural' scholarly outpouring. This is the need to challenge the culturally well-established and historically longstanding urban-rural dualism that both reinforces and is reinforced through an association between urban and 'culture' and between rural and 'nature'. A now widespread challenge to this divide includes recognising 'nature in the city' (for example, Hagan 2014) and humanising and enculturing the rural. The latter is reinforced further by broader (quasi-)Marxian emphasis on 'production of space' (Lefebvre 1991) as a predominantly human process rooted in specific (human) modes of production.

A consequence of this emphasis on human production is that when the more-than-human does feature in 'defining rural' discussions it tends to be treated with some caution and to remain a rather remote object of a distanced human gaze (after Urry 1992; but see Woods 1998 or Jones 2013 for notable exceptions). Animals are certainly there but they form just another element within multi-dimensional rural representations that typically focus on more social elements (Halfacree 2016). More-than-human rurality may even be largely 'safely bracketed-out' from further social science discussion as a consequence of an 'epistemological purification that… gave up the animal [and other more-than-human life] to the natural sciences' (Buller 2015: 375; Tovey 2003).

Challenging such intellectual delineation and ultimate dismissal, recent decades have, of course, seen critique of the 'rural-nature' and 'urban-culture' dualism taken further through increasing doubts as to the stability of the very nature-culture divide itself. For example, as articulated in Whatmore (2002), Latour's (1993) exposure of '[t]he stabilities of nature and culture… as illusory' (Philo 2005: 824) takes direct issue with 'the "modern" impulse to cleave apart the world conceptually into neat boxes' (*ibid*.: 825). As one consequence, a desire for 'radical "enlivening" of geography' (*ibid*.: 828; also Spencer and Whatmore 2001) has emerged. To necessarily cut this long debate short, 'animals – and other living (and maybe even certain non-living) things… [return] to the fold of social science and cultural studies' (Philo 2005: 828).

Influenced by this broader academic climate, by the 2000s there was an increasing feeling within rural scholarship that there was more to its spatial category ('rural') than just that defined by human taxonomy and anthropocentric practices, and that a more-than-human 'excess' merited fuller appreciation. Such realisation also came via renewed analytical awareness of rural places. For example, consider Figure 1's three-fold model of rural space, which not only encompassed the very humanly defined dimensions of rural as represented (conceived) and as directly perceivable locality but also proposed a third dimension: rural as lived (Halfacree 2006; Halfacree and Rivera 2012). Whilst 'rural lives' were predominantly introduced in human terms – not least somatically, in terms of what people personally, often quite idiosyncratically feel in rural places – an inherent grounding not only frequently encompasses direct encounters with other living things but can bring these other lives to the fore in their own terms. This is abundantly apparent, for example, within the now highly buoyant personalised 'new nature writing' tradition (Cowley 2008; Smith 2017). An emphasis on groundedness or dwelling (Ingold 2011; Johnston 2008) forces academics up from Bunce's (1994) 'armchair countryside' to more fully engage with co-present rural lives that are not all human (Halfacree 2014). An 'excess' to rural humanity lets animals (back) into overall rural understanding in a very active sense.

<Figure 1>

Taking realisation of the animalised rural further, Figure 1 can be further de-anthropocentricised (*sic*.) through more fully recognising an active presence of animals and other living things **throughout**. The 'rural locality' dimension may be defined and definitively mapped by humans (Hoggart 1990) but animals, plants, etc. also have their own expressed ecosystems and spatial niches meriting delineation (as, of course, is done by ecologists and others). Even 'rural representations', most clearly seen as a human cultural product (Halfacree 1993), may have animal 'versions' in terms of how specific species understand their world (Lorimer *et al*. 2019).

1.3 Towards re-animalising rurality

Overall, recognising more-than-human perspectives consolidates the idea of **rural as inherently co-produced** and encourages scholars of rurality to engage more fully with animal research across the social sciences. The latter is now, of course, lively and buoyant (Buller 2014) and steps have already been made towards such engagement. For example, Evans and Yarwood have foregrounded animals in much of their scholarship, not least in original and informative accounts of stock animals (for example, Evans and Yarwood 1995; Yarwood and Evans 2000). This body of work, overviewed in Sellick and Yarwood (2013), also brought a cultural emphasis to previous political economy dominant approaches to animals, challenging any understanding of them (which can amount to their effective dismissal) as (solely) 'units of production', '"internalised" in agriculture' (Tovey 2003: 200). Instead, attention is paid to 'how… livestock and their roles are culturally constructed to fit into different human spaces' (Yarwood and Evans 2000: 104) and hybrid production of 'cattlescapes' (Sellick and Yarwood 2013). Work goes on to link interest in rare breeds, for example, with a resurgent animal diversity that mirrors rural space's emerging 'post-productivist' (neo)diversity (Yarwood and Evans 1999).

Notwithstanding this seemingly open door and noted progress, an ongoing debate within studies of animals must be recognised. This comes from noting how social science's engagement with animals has remained overwhelmingly focused on animals **in respect to humans.** As Tovey (2003, after Voske 1989) noted, it tends to be 'human-animal' rather than 'animal-human'. Or, as Lorimer *et al*. (2019) recently reiterated, it remains more Philo and Wilbert's (2000) 'animal spaces' than their 'beastly places' (Hodgetts and Lorimer 2020). From 'animal' used metaphorically in human cultural discourse, through recognising 'real' animals in human economic and cultural spaces, there has been a rather 'unchallenged anthropocentric historical, cultural, taxonomic and moral placing… of animals' (Buller 2014: 312). Social science scholarship arguably fails **fully** to reach 'animals as animals' and animal agency (Hodgetts and Lorimer 2020; Jones 2013; Lorimer *et al*. 2019).

From this perspective, there thus remains a need to engage more with how animals think and act **as animals** and for fuller expression of 'beastly natures' (Johnston 2008: 633). Such engagement with their 'otherness' would seek:

> 'to recognize and demonstrate impacts of the purposefulness and agency of animals… to… destabilize hitherto accepted dualistic approaches [to human-animal]… and… to create a more radical politics that might accommodate all this complexity' (Buller 2014: 312).

In short, social science's animal scholarship simply (*sic*.) 'requires the very cry of the nonhuman to be heard' (Johnston 2008: 636) more fully. It must engage more with animals' self-defined territoriality and 'atmospheres' (Lorimer *et al*. 2019), 'and to refrain from binding animals rigidly to our own spatial orderings' (Buller 2014: 314; Philo and Wilbert 2000), where 'detail', such as specific breed (Hall 2019), is too often overlooked.

This argument is itself not without cautionary qualification, however. In short, it is perhaps wise for social scientists not to stray **too** far in what Hovorka (2018) terms 'hybrid' scholarship. First, one may question just how much obtaining additional insight from 'animals as animals' **is** really the task of social scientists, as compared to that of biologists and ecologists. Second, it is vital to avoid treating non-human animals as somehow 'equivalent' to humans in terms of agency and ability to produce space and society (Lefebvre 1991). Not only must anthropomorphising animals – commonplace in everyday culture, as observed later - be avoided but animals' power to produce must clearly be acknowledged as at least often constrained by Anthropocene authority (Johnston 2008).

From this debate, we suggest that whilst accepting 'possession of… humanity is not essential for inclusion within society' (Tovey 2003: 211, after Ingold 1988), within ongoing development of (re-)animalised ruralities it may be best to:

> 'take the inalienable difference between humans and nonhumans as… point of departure, and from there explore the ways in which relational understandings might develop as a result of daily experience, learned practices and shared events' (Johnston 2008: 643).

Or, as Sellick and Yarwood (2013: 415) conclude: 'Although efforts to privilege animal perspectives are worthy, it is important to remember the structural constraints of livestock [and other animals]. Paraphrasing Marx, animals… make their own history but rarely under circumstances chosen by them'.

2. Placing animals within a baroque rural assemblage

Having made the case to pay more attention explicitly to animals when 'rural' is conceptualised by social scientists (within an argument for the more-than-human more generally), the paper now suggests how this may be done. Immediately when rural is understood through Figure 1's three dimensions, however, it is clear that considerable diversity of animalistic elements may emerge and converge to make rural 'what it is' at any one place and time. This reinforces a dominant trope within rural scholarship today that emphasises our subject as far from fixed but inherently relational. Rurality resists being reduced to a few 'definitive' elements, even when key features - the 'figurative nuclei' of the representation (Halfacree 1993), such as green fields, agriculture, low and dispersed populations (Halfacree 1995) – effectively act as a metonymic shorthand within everyday life. Rural, both ontologically and epistemologically, is always multi-faceted on the ground: fluid, hybrid, entangled, diverse, hard to pin down, often incoherent, 'messy, multiple and contested' (Hamilton 2016: 301). It is consequently thus often best not to engage with it 'as a whole' but, equally, its animals should not be skipped over.

Useful in supporting and framing this challenge to appreciate the rural as a diverse and often elusive animalised mix are two concepts. First, there is value and insight from recognising it as a (spatial) 'assemblage', as introduced to rural studies by Woods (2015; after de Landa 2006). This concept seeks to highlight and capture the 'ongoing process of forming and sustaining associations between diverse constituents' (Anderson *et al*. 2012: 174). These associations express 'unstable collections of "heterogeneous elements that may be human **and non-human**, organic and inorganic, technical and natural" (Anderson and McFarlane 2011: 124)' (Woods 2015: 30, emphasis added). Moreover, besides heterogeneity of dynamically associated elements, assemblages have expressive, affective components, coming together not least through 'expressive media' such as language. Thus, through 'an act of coding that positions [a] place within collective geographical imaginations' (Woods 2015: 32), the rural's:

> 'material components might include the landscape, buildings, crops, livestock, wildlife, people, economic commodities that are produced or traded, and cultural artefacts… whilst expressive components could include the aesthetic qualities attributed to the landscape, the emotional attachments of people to particular sites and localities and their sense of identity, and even the nebulous idea of the rural idyll as it is invested in an experience of calm, tranquillity and nostalgia' (*ibid*.).

A further key feature of an assemblage is that its elements are never defined solely by their place within that assemblage. Resisting being metaphoric 'organisms', assemblages are less 'a series of constituent parts… [or] an organic whole' and more collections of 'entities [that] can be detached from [the particular assemblage] to become parts of another… [thereby] never fully actualized within any of the relations that constitute [a specific] assemblage' (Anderson *et al*. 2012: 177, 179). The entities constituting any rural assemblage can thus have 'other lives' in other time-spaces, the 'experiences' of which may feed back into the rural assemblage's character and either promote its constancy or change. How animals are engaged beyond the rural, therefore, may connect with how they are noted within the rural assemblage.

Second, how the rural assemblage is regarded also merits attention. Do we take a 'romantic' or a 'baroque' perspective (Kwa 2002, introduced by Phillips 2014)? A romantic perspective 'looks upward', seeking a holistic, homogenous, abstract overview (Law 2004). In contrast, the baroque alternative – in line with the assemblage concept (Anderson *et al*. 2012) - 'looks downward', seeking instead to sustain a diverse, unevenly heterogeneous, specific lack of overview (Law 2004). Promoting rural as a baroque mix helps to retain an inherently relational element, enabling a drawing out of each particularity's 'strong phenomenological realness' (Kwa 2002: 26) and the flows and their consequences that can emerge (Phillips 2014). Such a perspective again encourages both recognition of and focus on diverse unevenly represented elements of the rural assemblage and how these write and tell multiple stories of both themselves and the rural. Put differently, there is value in picking apart any rural cultural 'meta-construction… [in order to discover the] many regional and local landscapes and lives therein' (Jones 2013: 423; also Cloke *et al*. 1998).

Some sense of the potential of taking an open baroque perspective on the rural is given via Franklin's (2017) discussion of the place of nature in the city. In mirror-image of the aforementioned rural de-naturalisation, Franklin argues that scholarship increasingly challenges 'notions of cities as humanist citadels successfully designed against "nature"' (*ibid*.: 202). Urban nature so acknowledged is neither presented as 'subsumed' by humanity nor 'sealed off' in its own Nature category – romantic perspectives. It is seen not just as a passive, decorative, educational, moral force but something also alive and 'mak[ing] its force felt as surely as any other political actor' (*ibid*.: 214) with wildness, independence and consequent subversion.

Jones (2013) adopts a similar lively sense of the rural when making the case for the 'animality' of 'landscape'. For Jones, rural landscapes comprise entangled 'meshworks' (after Ingold 2011) that present 'more-than-human collective[s]' in which 'animal presences fold into… through affect/emotive registers' (Jones 2013: 422). In other words, he stresses the emotional and affective bonds that tie together animals, humans and other elements within Figure 1's rural lives. Moreover, such affects and emotions are seen to impact strongly on the other ‘dynamics within human-animal relations’ (Jones 2013: 426), expressed in the present paper as rural localities and representations. Jones’s rural ‘animals [are] not… just… units of species, or commodities, or social constructions… but… unique individuals in particular encounters articulated through their own embodied, spatial narratives’ (Jones 2013: 427).

In sum, taking a more attentive, open and less pre-structured approach to examining animals within rural assemblages discourages any turn towards overall (romantic) thematic meta-constructions and likely early dismissals. Instead, it encourages the pulling out of animals within active and often very differently styled, even contradictory, (baroque) narratives across the three dimensions of rural spatiality. This approach is now elaborated further via the sheep that feature in the remainder of the paper.

3. Towards an ‘ensheeped’ rural

Numerous animals – cows, badgers, pigs, diverse birds – have a claim to be important expressive elements of UK and many rurals across the world. Sheep (*Ovis aries*), however, definitely feature, again not just in the UK (for example, New Zealand: Eversole and Martin 2005). A first approach to drawing out this place of sheep in expressing and co-producing the UK rural – its ‘ensheeping’ – is to engage the animals under associated thematic headings, of which three suggest themselves.

First, sheep can be addressed through an economic lens. Attention can be paid to their costs and market value, their significance within the farm unit, and/or their ability to fit into the productivist logic of the modern farm (for example, Lloyd 2011). Overall, though, this reduces sheep to a commodity. In ecosystem services terms, for example, it overwhelmingly concentrates on their ‘provisioning services’ for meat, milk, wool, and so on (Hall 2019).

Second, a cultural lens can take centre-stage, suggested earlier by Evans and Yarwood’s critique of a ‘units of production’ emphasis. Attention can thus be paid to sheep’s status as a rural Romantic aesthetic object positioned within idyllic rural imaginings. Examples include their prominence within Danny Boyle’s celebrated 2012 London Olympic Games opening ceremony (Hamilton 2016) or their position as leisure objects within hobby or rare breed farms (for example, Holloway 2001). Overall, sheep are reduced here largely to decoration, focusing from an ecosystem services perspective on the 'cultural services' they provide (Hall 2019).

Third, attention can retreat from overwhelming emphasis on their human significance to concentrate directly on sheep as living creatures through an ecological lens. The place of sheep within rural webs of life can be the focus of attention, their place within defined ecosystems, even the status of some as disease-bearers disrupting rural complacency (for example, Hannay and Jones 2002). The detailed shaping of place by precise animal breeds – **Herdwick** sheep, not 'just' sheep, for example (Hall 2019) - may be specified. As Hall (2019) notes, failure to engage with such detail may have severe ecological consequences given the specific roles specific livestock breeds play in providing specific ecosystem services. Overall, here sheep are reduced to a species of living thing, albeit still entangled with humans. From an ecosystem services perspective, their 'supporting services' and 'regulating services' assume primacy (Hall 2019).

Whilst all three types of ensheeped narratives can powerfully draw out and pull to centre stage the place of sheep within the rural, a more baroque approach resists such 'legislative' reductions. Instead, it encourages production of co-existent multiple 'interpretive' narratives (Bauman 1987). These still place sheep in the spotlight but are cross-cutting, messy, indistinct, sometimes contradictory. The three themes of economy, culture and ecology will certainly be present but none overwhelm. Instead, a baroque approach seeks to demonstrate the rich and varied presence of sheep within rural assemblages and beyond (noting the 'other lives' assemblage elements also have). This diverse attentiveness should also reinforce the place and agency of sheep within human and more-than-human shaping of rural space.

A preliminary baroque ensheeped rural is now illustrated through considering some sheep placings within each of Figure 1's three elements of spatiality[1] - locality, representation, lives - before illustrating the dimensions converging within two rival ensheeped rural narratives. Throughout, the aim is for the advocated 'responsible… anthropomorphism' (Johnston 2008: 643): acknowledging human authority but also the 'actions' (Carter and Charles 2013) of sheep, which may support the former or work to undermine the rural humans seek to produce.

4. Ensheeping the UK rural: introducing perspectives from the three dimensions of space

4.1 Sheep localities

Sheep localities are more-or-less sharply defined areas distinguished according to distinctive sheep-related spatial practices. Such localities can typically be accessed via maps compiled from numerical data. These demonstrate, not least, geographies of sheep presence, expressed in different ways, which can be examined in detail to tease out how the sheep locality is constructed.

To access sheep localities, one can map such things as: distribution of different breeds; flows of sheep, such as between farm holding and markets; the extent to which rural landscapes appear sheep-shaped, using ecological indicators; measures of sheep husbandry practices; and locating markets and shows where sheep feature prominently. All demonstrate rural prominence for the animals, even if the sheep themselves still remain quite distanced and hidden in such expressions.

Figure 2 shows an obvious place to start in presenting and interrogating sheep localities. It is simply a map, sourced freely via the internet (DEFRA no date a), of the numbers of sheep found on farms across England in 2010, mapped by 5km^2 grid squares. It is based on data obtained by the annual June agricultural and horticultural census[2]. Whilst this map changes over time, it reinforces a locality sense of sheep as constituents of northern, western and upland UK especially, albeit with exceptions such as Kent / East Sussex. This emphasises their uneven place in UK rural space, largely as a consequence of agricultural economics and the pasture / land resources available in these areas.

<Figure 2>

Whilst translating living sheep to maps such as Figure 2 is a more-or-less complex process of objectification (see DEFRA (no date b) for Figure 2's data production), the animals need not be so silent. As Philo (2005: 829) put it, this is not least because '"animal disturbances" (Whatmore 2002: 35) … constantly destabilise, shatter and mock the ordering pretensions of the humans involved'. A bigger sense of sheep agency is thus presented in Figure 3, which maps the British farms that directly experienced the huge and tragic disruption of the 2001 Foot-and-Mouth Disease epidemic (Ilbery 2002). North West England, Cumbria especially, stands out, plus Devon and the southern England-Wales border. The sense of sheep agency here is, of course, indirect, not least because the disease was clearly not something the animals chose and the pathogenic *picornavirus* is a separate entity. Nonetheless, such maps suggest how sheep, here in combination with *picornavirus*, can quite suddenly challenge any impression of stable localities, perhaps suggested in Figure 2. ‘Disruptions’ certainly bring the animals firmly into the light.

<Figure 3>

4.2 Sheep representations

Sheep representations express through text, image, material object and other means how the animals are noted and consumed *in lieu* of more direct contact. Whilst there are representations originating firmly within the social domain of those engaging the animals in their everyday lives (exemplified in Section 5), direct connection is often not the case. Wherever they originate, representations are vital for taking ‘sheep’ to the general public, the majority of whom have little or no contact with them, even in rural areas.

Sheep representations are multifarious. They are more or less specific, more or less detailed. They range from individuals, such as Aardman Animation’s clay animation character *Shaun the Sheep* (2019), to grouped representations, in books such as *British Sheep Breeds* (Parkin 2015), to general expression of *Ovis aries* as a whole. Even cursory consideration of such representations immediately highlights the vast number of ways sheep are imagined in contemporary UK society and far beyond. This range also indicates how sheep are far from confined to a rural assemblage but make their de-territorialised presence felt in many other convergences, from infants’ libraries, television or computer viewing, to agri-policy debates.

To get a handle on this great diversity, and mirroring the three-fold perspective introduced in Section 3, Sellick and Yarwood (2013) reduce sheep representations to: ‘species bovine’, where their capitalist profitability shines through via an economic lens; the huge cultural lens ‘artefact’ perspective, with sheep in both elite and popular representations at varying degrees of distance from the living creatures of both localities and lives (Jones 2013); and as ‘physical system engineers’, a biological or ecological lens perspective. Within all three, sheep are clearly very prominent but again tend to remain quite passive. They are also often very strongly anthropomorphically presented and frequently caricatured, certainly within everyday culture.

Further sense of the ubiquity of sheep representations comes from recognizing them as: depicted by England's DEFRA (Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and other official bodies as part of the rural economy, via writing, graphs, maps, and so on (for example, Bevan *et al*. 2019); a key component of many 'idyllic' rural representations (Jones 2013); displayed and discussed on social media, such as Twitter and Instagram (for example, @RoughFellSheep); present with equally metaphorical shepherds in religious texts, such as the Bible; and, very differently, objects in agricultural policy such as the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (for example, European Parliament 2017).

Sheep are very prominently represented within popular culture, not least in children's stories, such as across the *Usborne Farmyard Tales* pre-school collection (Usborne 2019), and television programming, such as the aforementioned *Shaun the Sheep* (2019). Thus, *Woolly Stops the Train* (Amery and Cartwright 2005) tells how 'Woolly the naughty sheep causes more mayhem … on Apple Tree Farm' (Usborne 2019: no pagination). In such stories, sheep and other animals' representations are clearly dislocated from 'real' animals (Jones 1997), not least through strong anthropomorphism. They are typically 'ourselves in fur' (*sic*.) (Blount, quoted in Harrison 2021: n.p.) and often 'tamed' as adults seek to tame children (Harrison 2021).

In contrast to children's stories, in a second example of representation, the sheep's actual animal presence is deliberately foregrounded in some anthropological accounts of farming lives, even if the principal focus remains the farmer. For example, they are a frequently and actively represented presence within Gray's insightful commentaries on Scottish Borders hill farming, such as *At Home in the Hills* (Gray 2000; also Emery 2010).

4.3 Sheep lives

Sheep lives are inherently diverse experiences, understandings and expressions of the animals in rural (and sometimes other) specific locations. Breaking with the polarising 'real' versus 'imagined' tension often apparent in locality versus representations (Halfacree 1993, 2006), sheep lives seek to express the animals' largely mundane and repetitive existences. Whilst humans are again also usually central here – though they need not be - not least since sheep as domestic stock are never left completely to their own devices for long, the active presence of the more-than-human is clearly at its strongest in this dimension. Active and central, engaging sheep lives takes us closest to examining the direct sheep-shaping of rural places.

Engaging with sheep lives again takes various forms. A strongly bioscience approach can explore life expectancies, experiences of disease, food choices, reproductive practices and so on. Heightening the behavioural perspective can focus on their dwelt lives still further, possibly delineating their behaviour and preferences via animal tracking devices (Hodgetts and Lorimer 2020). Stirring people once again more fully into the picture, attention can be paid to everyday playing out of people-sheep dispositions. For example, Gray's earlier noted research did not simply represent the sheep of Scottish Borders's farms but delved deeply into their everyday lives (Gray 1998, 1999, 2000, 2014). A particular focus was the practice of 'hefting', which:

> 'refers to an instinctive territoriality of hill sheep and a recognized system of flock management… the "natural" or "instinctual" territoriality of certain breeds of wild and feral sheep, particularly their predisposition to remain and breed on the specific regions of the hills landscape where they live' (Gray 2014: 219-20).

More indirectly regarding the sheep themselves but strongly expressing their importance to human lives, attention may be paid to the affective and emotional impacts they have on farmers, other rural residents and/or visitors. This was particularly acute through and after the 2001 Foot-and-Mouth epidemic, evidenced in several studies (for example, Convery *et al*. 2005; Hannay and Jones 2002; Nerlich and Döring 2005). Clearly, sheep lives are thus both of interest in and of themselves and through their human entanglements.

Seriously engaging with sheep lives is fully in line with Johnston's (2008: 645) call to 'attend… more closely to understandings of nonhumans gathered from the practice and experience of co-relationality… [including] those developed in response to directly working with animals'. Not least through emplaced anthropological work, as by Gray, attention can be paid to exploring the detailed performances of sheep farms. Co-relational attention can further be presented through artistic initiatives. An excellent final example of this way of engaging sheep lives, albeit always still entangled with humans, is the *Land Keepers* project. This threw a spotlight on the lives of some of Cumbria's upland sheep farmers through photographs and text

(Land Keepers no date; Fraser 2016; Fraser and Fraser 2014), obtained from deep engagement with the everyday lives of both farmers and sheep. Perusal of this material usefully sets up the ensheeped Lake District that is used next to illustrate rival narrated ensheeped rural assemblages, bringing locality, representation and lives together.

5. Rival ensheeped rural assemblages converging and clashing in the Lake District

> ‘Animals are central not only to social constructs of rurality, but also to the discourses and practices deployed in political contests between constructs’ (Woods 1998: 1221).

5.1 Ensheeped rural assemblages

> ‘An assemblage approach demonstrates an empirical focus on how… spatial forms and processes are themselves assembled, are held in place, and work in different ways to open up or close down possibilities’ (Anderson *et al*. 2012: 172).

Investigation of ensheeped rurals via Figure 1’s three rural dimensions is a useful pragmatic strategy to tease out the multiple placings of sheep within rural assemblages, whilst also at least implicitly acknowledging their de-territorialised ‘non-rural’ other places. However, there is a danger of concentrating on the place of the sheep within one rural aspect more than how they are positioned within all three when converged within a specific rural assemblage. This section thus illustrates such convergence. It shows different ensheeped assemblies of localities, representations and lives underpinning two rival narratives of a specific geographical location, the Lake District National Park in northwest England.

Emery and Carrithers (2016) suggest the value of examining the assembled convergence of diversely ensheeped rurals. Rather than focus on - in the authors’ terminology – either representations or lives, bringing the dimensions together within accounts of dwelling demonstrates, specifically, how ‘farmers… are able to represent the land for rhetorical purposes in their engagements with those outside their moral community’ (Emery and Carrithers 2016: 395). Such a territorialised grounded assemblage can be politically powerful. Specific everyday landscapes (ensheeped rurals) as ‘sites of shared awareness… [enable] the speaker to evoke… some common past, present or future' (*ibid*.: 397) on which to build a political project. So, how has an ensheeped Lake District expressed rival rurals?

5.2 George Monbiot's sheepwrecked landscape

George Monbiot is a well-known – to some, notorious - radical environmental and political journalist, writing a weekly column for the *Guardian* newspaper, authoring several books and having a strong social media presence. He also has 'an unhealthy obsession with sheep' (Monbiot 2014: 154), having little time for their place and use across much of the British and wider countryside today[3].

Monbiot's negative sheep narrative gets an initial prominent airing in his book *Feral*'s call for 'rewilding' (Monbiot 2014). This is a process – now, of course, widely advocated (see, for example, *Rewilding* n.d.) - which he understands as both 'permit[ting] ecological processes to resume' (Monbiot 2014: 8) and human life to enhance civilization through greater involvement with nature. Monbiot sees a prime location for rewilding as upland areas of the UK, not least rural Wales where he lived at the time. Unfortunately, however, these are presently spaces Monbiot regards as predominantly shaped by the monocultural 'dewilding' (Monbiot 2014: 154) of 'a woolly ruminant from Mesopotamia' (Monbiot 2014: 70) - the sheep.

In terms of sheep localities, firstly, Monbiot (2014) emphasises both the sheer number of sheep bodies found in the British uplands and their landscape legacy. From the first perspective, a more than 200% rise in British sheep numbers from 3.8 million in 1950 to 11.6 million in 1991 is noted. Whilst this number fell after loss of 'headage payments' per sheep from the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (Rural Policy Centre 2008), it still stood at 8.2 million in 2010, the animals occupying four million hectares of British uplands (Monbiot 2017c). Second, and of key ultimate significance for Monbiot, sheep localities can be mapped via what he termed 'more extensive environmental damage in this country than all the building that has ever taken place here' (Monbiot 2014: 70). Passing over how such a direct comparison could ever be made in practice, the damage marking 'sheepwrecked' (Monbiot 2014: 153) localities expresses British vegetation's lack of defence against the animals removing an upland ecosystem through eating all the edible plants and even stripping the soil. What remains is just ‘coarse grass, occasionally interspersed with bracken and bare rock’ (Monbiot 2017a: np). Or, put differently, after World War Two ‘Britain completed the transformation: turning heath and prairie into something resembling a bowling green with contours’ (Monbiot 2014: 157).

Besides desolated upland landscape, sheepwrecked localities can further be mapped through engaging with: historical land clearances of people in favour of more profitable sheep, notably the notorious 18th / 19th Century Scottish Highland Clearances; toxic sheep dip residues and flooding risk from compacted topsoil due to sheep weight; a distorted rural economy over-reliant on sheep (Monbiot 2014); recognising ‘ranching on a scale that looks… like Argentina’ (Monbiot 2017c: np); and even via sheep metonyms of ‘quad bikes, steel barns and absentee ownership’ (Monbiot 2017c: np; also Monbiot 2017b). Furthermore, with all this notoriety, the sheep do not just stay in specific ensheeped assemblages but are thoroughly entangled within Monbiot’s general expression of British uplands as ‘wet deserts grazed down to turf and rock; erosion gullies from which piles of stones spill; woods in which no new trees have grown for 80 years…; dredged and canalised rivers…; [and] tracks of bare mountainside on which every spring is a silent one’ (Monbiot 2017b: np).

Turning to Monbiot’s representation of sheep, secondly – which we have already just had a taste of - he is acutely aware that what he expresses overall is both unusual and controversial in Britain. He recognises that what he labels ‘the white plague’ has become ‘a symbol of nationhood’ (Monbiot 2014: 155), not only in Britain but also in countries such as New Zealand (Eversole and Martin 2005). Deeper still, Monbiot sees ‘sheep-worship’ as ‘the official religion’ (Monbiot 2017c) in some areas of Britain. Consequently, ‘[t]o identify the sheep as an agent of destruction is little short of blasphemy’ (Monbiot 2014: 155).

Such sheep-worship is, in turn, for Monbiot rooted in representations ‘based on a fairytale with great cultural power… [of] sheep farming as an Arcadian refuge from the corruption of the city’ (Monbiot 2017c: nd). This fairytale is reinforced in numerous ways in popular culture. On the one hand, as noted earlier, sheep are portrayed highly romantically in children’s books (Monbiot 2014). On the other hand, to challenge their highly positive representation is to challenge a rural ‘agricultural hegemony’ (Monbiot 2014: 162, 2013a) embracing not just the farming community but also many who might be expected to be more critical, such as environmental pressure groups. Within such hegemony, a ‘culture of deference’ leaves potential critics reluctant to speak up for fear of being labelled ‘extremists’ (Monbiot 2017c: np). Consequently, as Conniff (2014: np) puts it, ‘British conservationists… somehow fail to notice that all 15 of Britain’s national parks are overrun by sheep’. Overall for Monbiot (2014: 222), ‘[s]ustaining the open degraded habitats of the uplands means keeping sheep… [no] matter who you talk to in the hilly parts of Britain: farmers, government officials and wildlife groups.’

Monbiot’s iconoclastic representation of sheep as ‘a fully automated system for ecological destruction’ (Monbiot 2017c: np) goes on strongly to emphasise their position as a means of income generation for upland farmers. Whilst this may be expected and at first sight seems uncontroversial, the emphasis he gives is less on their market value – he focuses almost exclusively on lamb and mutton meat – but in observing that they supply just 1.2% of British food (including lamb from lowland farms) and are modest exports (Monbiot 2017a, 2017c). Instead, sheep value is seen as coming largely from European Union Common Agricultural Policy subsidies, soon to be lost as a result of Brexit (Monbiot 2017a). Whilst this income is clearly not to the full value of Britain’s total agricultural subsidy of £3 billion that Monbiot regularly quotes, the fact that sheep occupy roughly the same land area as the whole arable sector leads him to conclude that the animals represent an ‘astonishingly profligate use of land… [that] depends entirely on European money’ (Monbiot 2017a: np).

In contrast with its advocacy in the present paper, Monbiot’s account of sheep lives, thirdly, is relatively sparse. More attention is given to sheep farmers than to the animals themselves. In consequence, sheep as living beings remain remote in Monbiot’s narrative. He focuses on their agency in reducing and destroying upland ecosystems, with details of their everyday lives overlooked. Where the animals are directly discussed, they are largely presented through unflattering metaphors: Mesopotamian invaders (Monbiot 2014), ‘woolly maggots’ (Monbiot 2013b), ‘plague’ (Monbiot 2014). They are reduced to ecological destroyers (Monbiot 2017c), coming across more as mindless machines than sentient creatures.

Turning to the lives of sheep farmers, on the one hand, Monbiot consistently and sympathetically notes the challenges they face to make a living in ‘a tough, thankless and precarious occupation' (Monbiot 2013b: np). On the other hand, the very existence of such lifestyles today is subject to much critical questioning. Whilst historically Monbiot praises how the everyday lives of the sheep farmers and the cultures they gave rise to animated and even kept remote rural areas alive, as in much of Wales (Monbiot 2014), the situation today is regarded as fundamentally different, not least due to massive structural changes in sheep farming after World War Two. Consequently, the erstwhile 'sheep culture' model now only exists largely ceremonially (Monbiot 2017b), yet is culturally reproduced and highlighted through hegemonic representations of sheep and shepherds as inherently benign. Sheep farmers' lives today, whilst hard, are articulated by Monbiot as a British form of ranching (Monbiot 2013b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), deploying the aforementioned 'quad bikes' and 'steel barns' to harvest European subsidies. The sheep themselves are largely excised from the picture.

Monbiot recognises his sheepwrecked landscape epitomised strongly today in the Lake District National Park. In short, he regards this most famous UK designated landscape as now fundamentally and fatally mis-appreciated. As one of the 'ecological disaster zones' that comprise most of Britain's 'protected areas' today (Monbiot 2020: 1), it is not 'one of the most beautiful regions of the UK' (Visit Cumbria n.d.) but a landscape almost totally ecologically denuded through post-1945 upscaling of sheep farming. Gone is a rural modestly shaped by:

> 'hardy sheep (which lived on the fells year-round) and cattle breeds grazing on the hills in the summer and… brought off the fells in the winter… [in a landscape that included h]ay [m]eadows and special pollards… grown to produce winter fodder… [as well as] small-scale arable cultivation… [and even some] industrial use' (King 2017: np).

In its place is a '230,000-hectare monument to overgrazing and ecological destruction' (Monbiot 2017b: np), where just over 1,000 farms (declining at 2% per year) articulate explicitly all aspects of Monbiot's 'sheepwrecked wasteland'. Here, furthermore, his accusatory 'sheep-worship [is] the official religion in the Lake District' (Monbiot 2017c: np), with no prominent local voices daring to challenge it, even otherwise vocal environmental groups such as *Friends of the Lake District* (n.d.).

Following-on from his account of the Lake District, Monbiot (2017b) is unsurprisingly horrified when the national park applies to UNESCO for World Heritage Site status on the very basis of its landscape. As he had earlier argued, Romantic poets' historical deification of the wild (*sic*.) Lakeland landscape will not help critique take root here (Monbiot 2013c). Neither will what he regards as a biased earlier report supporting the bid from Rebanks Consulting (Rebanks Consulting and Trends Business Research 2009). Not only does Monbiot claim it to be 'riddled with errors and omissions' but that it portrays a Lake District with supposedly 75% of its wildlife sites in an unfavourable state as a landscape in 'good physical condition' (Monbiot 2017c: np). Worse still for Monbiot, unlike an earlier bid (King 2017), the application is successful and the park granted World Heritage status in 2017. Monbiot fears this designation will reinforce the sheepwrecking lobby's power and influence (Monbiot 2017b). Such is the overall significance for Monbiot, in sum, of this ensheeped rural assemblage in the production of this distinctive rural place today.

5.3 James Rebanks's living entangled landscape

George Monbiot's highly critical account of an ensheeped rural assemblage targets what he regards as a powerful alternative celebratory narrative, a version of which is now outlined through expressions of sheep localities, representations and lives and then their convergence. The Lake District national park features throughout as the ensheeped assemblage is narrated by one of its earlier-noted 1,000 plus still-surviving farmers. This focus also expresses a higher profile given to sheep lives in place than was the case for the more distanced Monbiot.

James Rebanks is first and foremost a sheep farmer residing and farming in Matterdale in the Lake District, who aims to 'do field and sheep work until I can't work anymore, because I love it' (quoted in Marland 2021: np). Far from a newcomer to sheep, not only did Rebanks grow up with the animals all around but his family have farmed in the Cumbria area for upwards of 600 years (Knight 2018; Rebanks 2020). However, besides this strong farming identification, Rebanks has a degree in History from Oxford University and has worked in several other jobs (Rebanks 2015a; Marland 2021). As a UNESCO consultant (Craig 2015; Knight 2018), he authored the Rebanks Consulting report (Rebanks Consulting and Trends Business

Research 2009) on the Lake District's potential to be a World Heritage Site noted in the last sub-section. In addition, since 2012 Rebanks has been active on social media (McKenna 2015), using the Twitter handle @herdyshepherd1 (over 146,000 followers as of June 2021) to relay frequent photographs and descriptions of *The Shepherd's Life*, also the title of his best-selling 2015 memoir (Rebanks 2015a; also Rebanks 2015b). Indeed, not least through the book's success, not only in the UK but also across the Atlantic, Rebanks has a high media profile[4]. A further well-received book, *English Pastoral*, was published in 2020 (Rebanks 2020), a more wide-ranging critical celebration of rural life from the inside.

Rebanks's ensheeped spaces are extremely prominent within his expressions of rurality (especially Rebanks 2015b). First, his sheep localities are strongly expressed through the multitude of sheep farms that comprise much of his native Lake District. Whilst these farms have a strong independent structure, they also combine in practice to suggest a broader sheep locality, not least through overlap in the remoter and higher ground where sheep graze in the warmer months. This sense of a collective marking out of sheep localities is also manifest in Rebanks's keenness to emphasise how sheep farming is not just mapped by tracing solo shepherds but must embrace communal working (such as sheep shearing) and social events, from meeting in the pub to rural shows, with 'shepherds… social animals once winter is through' (Rebanks 2015a: 273).

A sense of strongly written and rounded ensheeped localities is taken further still through Rebanks's emphasis of the interconnectedness and deeply embedded character of the elements assembled in these spaces (Rebanks 2015a, 2015b). He strongly suggests a fundamentally multidimensional locality but also one that within it expresses almost a fusion between humans, animals, plants and other place components; 'farming and nature… together' (Rebanks 2020: 202). Whilst such a sense of place also comes through in other accounts of shepherding, notably Gray's already-noted studies of the Scottish Borders, it contrasts markedly with Monbiot's fragmented and troubled rural place.

Rebanks's strong and inherently entangled sheep localities consequently play down the importance of individual persons, since 'meaning comes from being part of things bigger than yourself' (quoted in Marland 2021: np). As he notes in terms of the significance of his Twitter posts, he is 'just a narrator', his Tweets:

> 'not really about me… [but] the way my people form an amazing landscape, the sheep, the land, the sheepdogs, and the characters in our valley. … The individual is not that important here' (Rebanks 2013: np).

Through being so integrated, even the deceased still have presence in the locality: 'Dad's in the landscape, he's in the things that we do' (quoted in Somewhere-Nowhere 2016: np).

Turning to Rebanks's representations of sheep, given that he is a sheep farmer it is unsurprising that they are much more positive than those of Monbiot. Yet, whilst not denigrated, neither are sheep treated Romantically nor 'deified' in the manner Monbiot suggests is almost taken-for-granted in Rebanks's Lake District rural community. Instead, Rebanks 'just' places sheep as a key part of his entangled landscape, with lives that can be painful and bloody as much as cute and harmonious. Indeed, a strong visceral element is central with their positioning in rural space, as they live through this land (Rebanks 2015a, 2015b; Craig 2015).

Besides trying for this life-realist representation of sheep as living creatures, Rebanks is also keen to recognise their specificity, from their often having a degree of individual character to the importance of breed (Hall 2019). On the latter, he notes that his farm has Swaledales and Herdwicks, each with particular characteristics. In stark contrast with Monbiot's 'plague', the 'Herdwick shepherd' (Rebanks 2015b) represents Herdwicks forcefully as having being 'bred for centuries to suit [the Lake District] landscape, [its] climate and [the specific] way of farming' (Rebanks 2015a: 11). They are much more than the animals represented by rural 'incomers' as simply 'things that held them up on the road or escaped and were found grazing in their garden' (Rebanks 2015a: 123).

Third, as already noted, Rebanks presents sheep lives much more fully than Monbiot, again reflecting his closer connections and much broader experiences with them. Actual sheep lives receive 'warts and all' coverage but so also do those of the shepherds. In respect of the latter, it is useful to note how W.H. Hudson's 1910 *A Shepherd's Life* both strongly inspired

Rebanks to become a writer (Rebanks 2015a; Somewhere-Nowhere 2016) and gave him the name for his memoir.

Focusing first on the lives of the sheep themselves, and notwithstanding their ubiquity throughout, *The Shepherd's Life* (Rebanks 2015a) begins prominently in this respect by opening with 'Hefted' and its definition (see also Gray 2014), reinforced by a picture of some Herdwicks. It then proceeds through chapters titled by the seasons, from summer through to spring, rather than adopting a more human-centred structure, such as being ordered by Rebanks's life-course. Through the book, almost all aspects of sheep lives are outlined, albeit usually in the context of how they are intimately linked to those of the shepherds, reflecting again the entanglement of the ensheeped assemblage's elements. As Craig (2015: np) observes, besides the author being 'always in the midst of the physical':

> 'work… dominates: gathering and herding, clipping, dosing with antibiotics, feeding, castrating, burning carcasses after… the foot-and-mouth epidemic. And the work is intertwined closely with the characters and relationships of the farming families'.

Within Rebanks's account, the significance of sheep within the detailed playing out of hard-working human lives comes across strongly. As he pithily observes, 'Some people's lives are entirely their own creation. Mine isn't' (Rebanks 2015a: 38), whilst the 'First rule of shepherding [is]: it's not about you, it's about the sheep and the land' (Rebanks 2015a: 201). In sum, Craig (2015: np) correctly concludes that the book – and, we add, Rebanks's Twitter posts – provides 'the closest possible look into a way of life that most of us only glimpse'. More generally, it is part of his desire to de-romanticise yet still celebrate farming today (Rebanks 2020; Marland 2021).

Rebanks's ensheeped writings and supporting photographs are strongly grounded in the Lake District. This is, moreover, a national park about which he is full of praise and celebration, contrasting strongly with Monbiot. For Rebanks, sheep are certainly not ecological vandals here but together with shepherds co-produce an immensely praiseworthy landscape. They are core ecologically benign shapers of a space well worthy of UNESCO World Heritage status (Rebanks 2020: 236). Describing one of his Twitter tasks as 'trying to wean people off the idea that all special places are wild' (quoted in McKenna 2015: np),[5] achieving this status in 2017 helps

Rebanks reiterate this point. Thus – here first strongly onside with Monbiot – the Lake District is not just to be seen via the priorities and beliefs of 'dead white men' (quoted in Somewhere-Nowhere 2016: np) of art and literature. Instead, 'this landscape isn't just Wordsworth, isn't just Wainwright[6] …there is other stuff' (*ibid*.). A reading centred on its sheep-focused 'indigenous, ancient farming system' (*ibid*.) needs greater popular recognition – again with Monbiot, albeit that the latter no longer saw it as 'traditional'. However, in strong contrast to Monbiot, it is a set-up worthy of explicit celebration. Rebanks's 'Lake District [is]… one of the world's great farmed landscapes, cultural landscapes… [To] look at a treeless Lake District common… [is not to] regret that is doesn't have lots of trees… [but to see] it as an integral part of a cultural and political landscape' (*ibid*.). And sheep - Herdwicks in particular- are throughout this Lake District rural assemblage **not** 'woolly maggots' but cornerstone agents of an intentionally and internationally matchless rural place.

6. Conclusion: recognising the more-than-human rural

> 'Words, words, words. But beneath the symbols, something stirs'
> (Kingsnorth 2020: 102)

Simply and directly, we call in this paper for further attention to be paid to the place of animals - and, by extension, other animate forms - in the 'rural studies' this journal embraces. This may not seem a challenging ambition at first, 'animals' having long been associated with the 'nature' of the rural, but it is still not 'trivial' (Tovey 2003: 212) to acknowledge how humans and animals stand in respect to one another in society (Benton 1993). The paper has argued not only that animals have to date received insufficient attention within rural studies – too often taken-for-granted, largely as dim and distant background figures – but that they have much to say within all three dimensions of rural space. This was demonstrated as far as was possible using the example of sheep, extending to drawing out their presence within two rival Lake District rural assemblages.

Furthermore, the need for rural studies' understanding of rurality to become more animalised is boosted further today by at least four factors. Whilst the first and perhaps the fourth of these may be largely relevant just to the UK, the middle two are certainly of international significance. First is the UK's leaving of the European Union (EU) or Brexit, with its very major consequences for not just farming but rural space as a whole through withdrawal from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (Halfacree 2020; Tsouvalis and Little 2020). If this results in, for example, a decline in the number of sheep in the UK uplands, then this could have major consequences for the whole production of such rural space, as the rival accounts of Monbiot and Rebanks above both clearly suggest. Second, there is the move towards the rewilding of some rural spaces (see *Rewilding* n.d.), introduced in this paper through Monbiot's advocacy in *Feral* (Monbiot 2014). Again, this speaks of likely major rural spatial restructuring and the place of animals within this in terms of their rural production must be explicitly recognised. Third, and at the most global scale, are the potential major transformational impacts that global warming may have on rural spaces if not severely curtailed (for example, Gale *et al*. 2009; Olesen and Bindi 2002), where the rural's more-than-human will be impacted on as severely as its humans, again requiring them to be explicitly acknowledged. Fourth, and emerging after much of this paper was originally written has been the 'turn to the rural' that the Covid crisis has encouraged, not least in the UK (Halfacree 2021). Within this we may ask what the 'rural' is thought to be that people have seemingly sought to engage with, and where are animals within this? In facing up to all four of these challenges it is, in short, imperative that everyone involved, from rural policy makers through field workers to the general public as rural consumers to key political players, has a rich enough appreciation of the complex production of rural space today, to recognise what stirs beneath the words and images. Animals must not be seen simply as sketchy, simplistic, misrepresented background but as a central, active and complex part of rural (re)production and change.

Finally, nature writer Kathleen Jamie (2019) recently called – again, at first sight seemingly simply – for us all to pay more direct and explicit attention to the 'natural world'. She described such attentiveness as a political act, challenging what literary critic James Wood (quoted in Jamie 2019: n.p.) had earlier described as 'the slow death that we deal to the world by the sleep of our attention'. This paper has followed Jamie and called for greater attention to be paid directly to the known but largely taken-for-granted involvement of the more-than-human, animals in particular, in production of the rural. Positively, as Smith (2017: 186) observes, such ‘acknowledgement and revelation of [such] non-human presences and agencies can be a resource helping us to understand place as an ongoing process of discovery, development, consensus and creation’. The rural, in sum, axiomatically must not be confined solely within Edward Thomas’s (1909) parochial humanity but recognised fully as ‘something more than a human estate’.

Footnotes

1. Due to space constraints, only two examples for each dimension are more fully presented.

2. Undertaken mostly online, this census is compulsory to complete under the Agricultural Statistics Act 1979 and EU legislation for those who receive it (about a quarter of farmers) if they have, for sheep specifically, more than 20 head (DEFRA 2019; no date b).

3. Monbiot also has little time for rural landscapes seen as at the mercy of bloodsports, such as those 'grousetrashed or reduced to blasted wastes by… deer' (Monbiot 2020: 1).

4. Rebanks has even already received the celebrity honour of choosing eight Desert Island Discs on BBC Radio 4 (Barratt 2019).

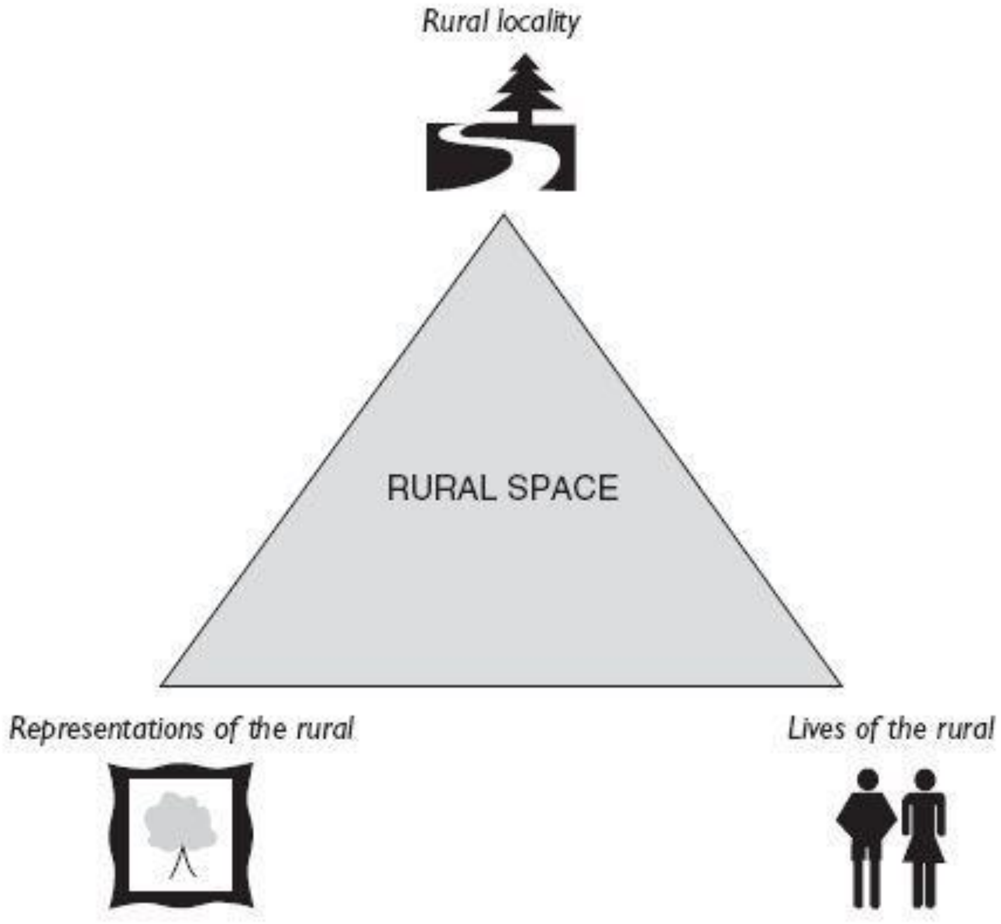
5. Rebanks (2020: 202) is also critical of rewilding, perceiving it as seeking to separate rather than bring back together farming and nature.

6. Alfred Wainwright was a celebrated 20th Century British walker, guidebook author and illustrator, strongly associated with the Lake District.

Acknowledgements

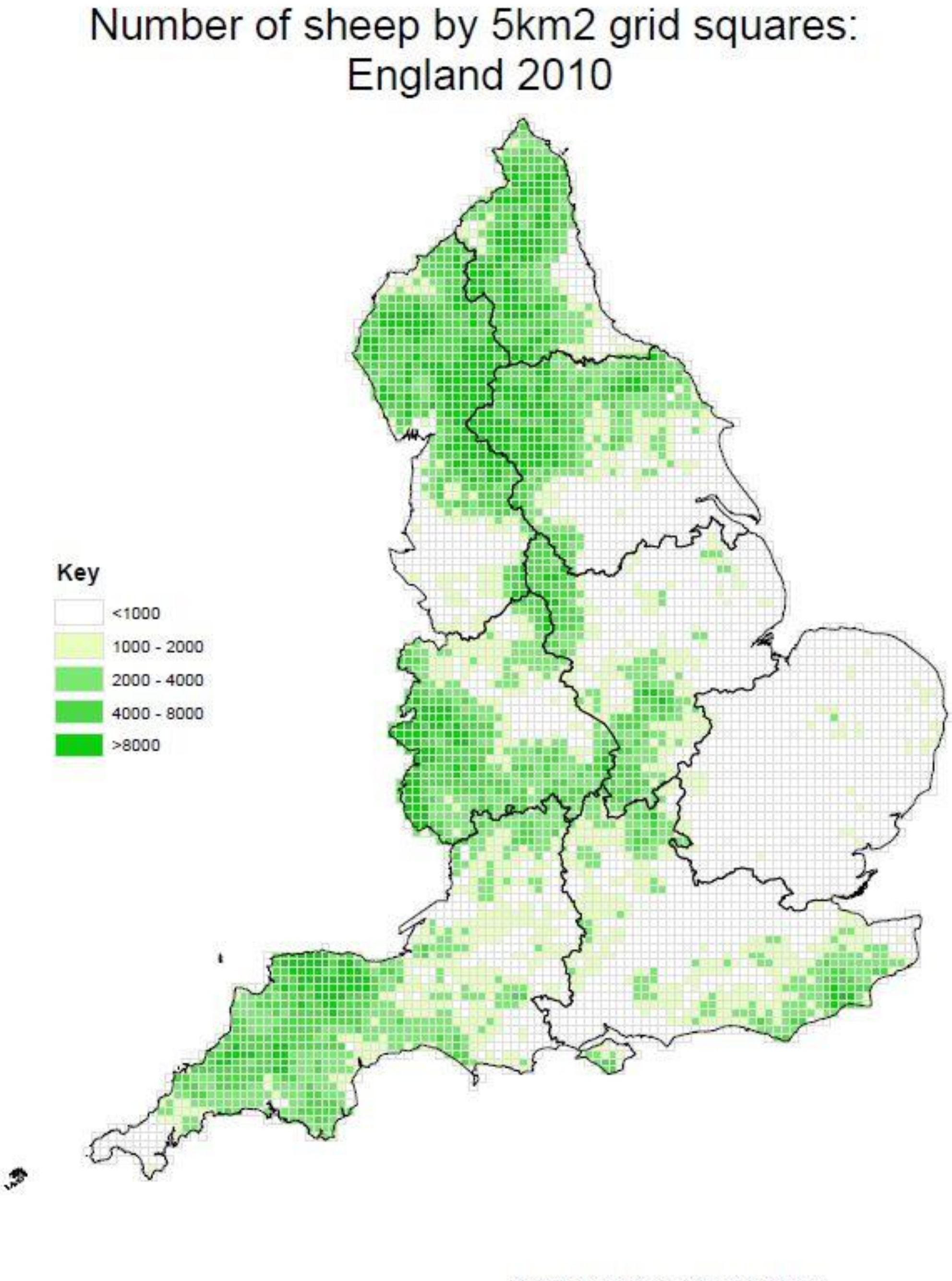
To come…

Figure 1: Three Dimensions of Rural Space


Rural locality
RURAL SPACE
Representations of the rural
Lives of the rural

(Source: Halfacree 2006)

Figure 2: Sheep distribution in England in 2010



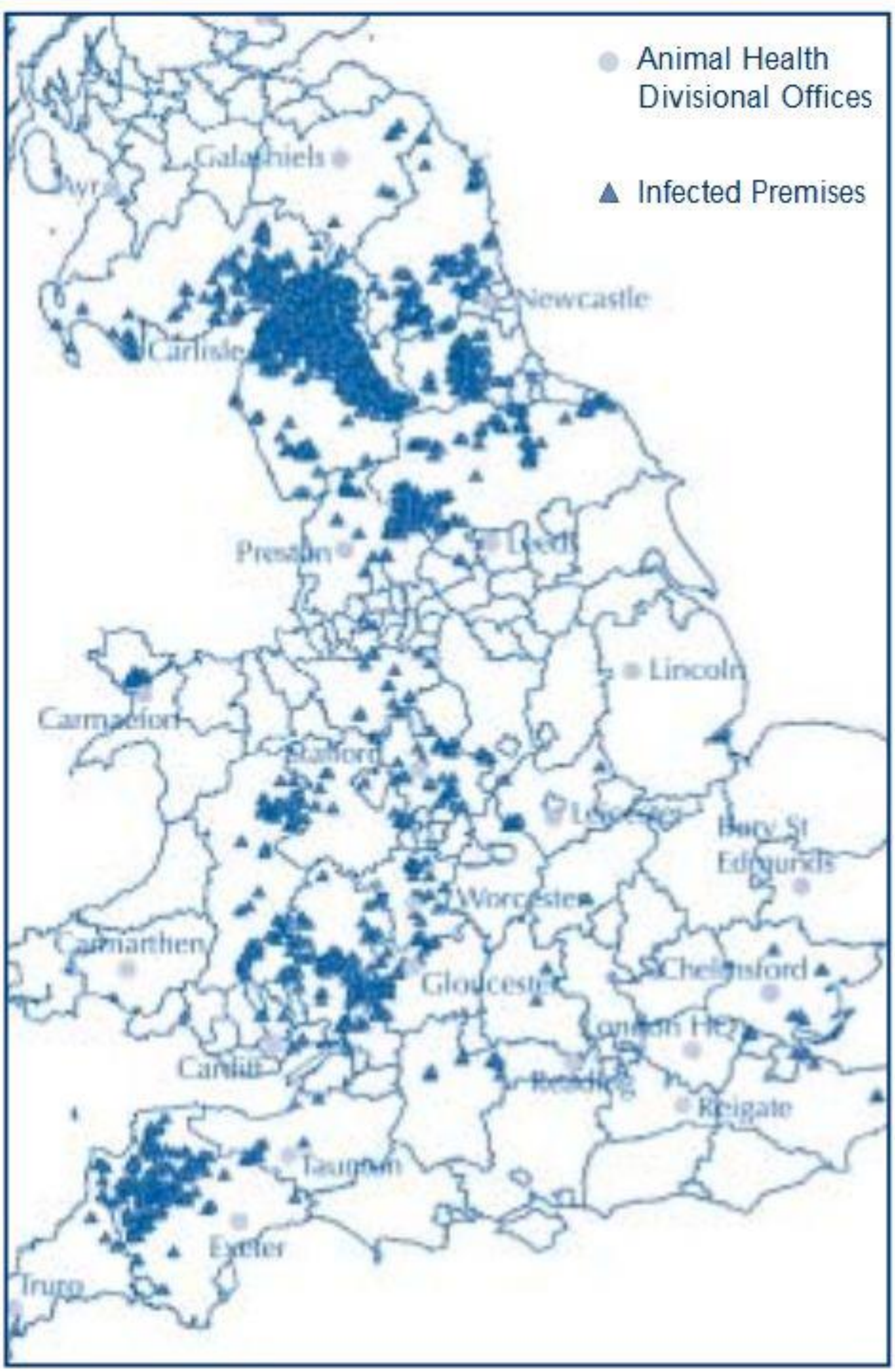
Number of sheep by 5km2 grid squares: England 2010

Key
<1000
1000 - 2000
2000 - 4000
4000 - 8000
>8000

Source: Defra June Survey of Agriculture
Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Defra Licence no. 100018880 2011

(Source: DEFRA no date a)

Figure 3: Distribution of Foot-and-Mouth Disease Infected Premises 2001


● Animal Health Divisional Offices
▲ Infected Premises
Galashiels
Ayr
Newcastle
Carlisle
Preston
Leeds
Lincoln
Caernarfon
Stafford
Leicester
Bury St Edmunds
Worcester
Carmarthen
Chelmsford
Gloucester
London HQ
Cardiff
Reading
Reigate
Taunton
Exeter
Truro

(Source: Comptroller and Auditor General 2002: Figure 11)

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