

The Car as a Machine Producing Nature. Automobility as a Prosthetic Machine Reproducing Modern Mindsets

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Introduction

The car is perhaps *the* symbol of the good life in its modern declination. To live a middle-class lifestyle, to inhabit a single family house in the suburbs and to own two or more cars to commute to work and go shopping with is still the predominant idea of having achieved something. Although this ideal is perhaps waning in some urban centers of the more privileged zones, for many in the more recently industrialized countries, these ideals of the modern Good Life only recently have begun to spread—with ecologically catastrophic consequences, as is well known.

At the same time in many booming discourses, Modernity (with a capital M) as a whole and the modern, consumerist lifestyle in particular is more and more seen as an obstacle we need to overcome in order to ensure the possibility of living and dying well in a future marked by global warming, the sixth mass extinction and other factors of biospherical demise. However, while there is a lot of recent research about Modernity as a philosophical and cultural construct that entails problematic relations with the environment,¹ there is comparatively little research about how this abstract concept of Modernity is embodied in everyday-life by means of prostheses that not only enable modern lifestyles, but also reproduce the conceptual tendencies/biases of modern thought as an everyday practice. I want to argue that, while it is true that Modernity (at least in its European form that is mostly discussed in academic and other circles) has started out in the realm of the philosophical and conceptual by mostly privileged white men having “enlightened” ideas in elitist academic circles of 17th century Europe, the problem of Modernity can today only fully be understood if we regard it as a prosthetic practice producing these

1 To only name a few of the most prominent works, see Latour (2004); Descola (2015); Morton (2009) and for a good overview see Cavazza (2014).

mindsets as an everyday practice for everybody wanting to participate in modern life-worlds.

In this paper, I want to exemplify this very broad argument² with a concrete example: I want to show how automobility—as one of the main prostheses needed to achieve a modern Good Life—(re)produces one of the central modern philosophical concepts: that of Nature (with a capital N). I want to show that the problem of automobility is not only its toxic exhausts damaging the environment, but also that it produces a certain attitude towards the environment that unifies it as one external Nature. This reproduces the modern hitherto “merely” philosophical concept of Nature as an embodied practice that is required to participate in contemporary modern culture. The modern cosmology of Naturalism (with a capital N) (in Philippe Descola’s sense) is thus transformed from a mindset of some elitist philosophers into a popular common sense that stabilizes a catastrophic status quo on an ontological globalized level.

In order to show this, I will first give a short overview about how Modernity is problematized by contemporary theories such as New Materialism, Ecosophy or Ecofeminism by focusing on its critique of the concept of Nature through the lens of ecofeminist theorist Carolyn Merchant and black studies philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva. I will then move on to show how such a “naturalist” relationship to the environment has been popularized by means of modern technological prostheses such as the train and, more radically, the car. I will end this paper with a short reflection on the political consequences of these findings and sketch some pitfalls that alternative concepts of the Good Life, such as *Vivir Bien*, would have to avoid in order to become an environmentally flourishing ideal and viable alternative to the modern Good Life.

The modern production of Nature

Nature seems—at first sight—like an innocent and neutral concept that both scientific interest and environmental activism can claim unproblematically. However, as many scholars from various backgrounds have shown, Nature is all but an innocent concept but is, in fact, one of the central

2 This paper is based on a larger argument on the car as a prostheses enabling (and at the same time necessitating) an ecologically catastrophic modern lifestyle I develop in my book *Das Auto und die ökologische Katastrophe* (Jörg 2024).

nodes of Modern European thought that distinguish it from other philosophical traditions. As we will see, the concept of Nature, as something opposed to Culture (with a capital C) and thus being exterior to human realms of reasoning and civilization, has a deeply racist and misogynistic heritage that is all too often concealed by neutral descriptions of Nature. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the contemporary meaning of Nature is in itself a child of European Modernity and has few equivalents in other cultural realms. Even in the Chinese tradition, a concept similar to that of Nature has only been introduced in the 19th century as a result of imperialist pressure and hegemony from the British Empire. According to the French sinologist François Jullien, China has never altogether experienced the need to isolate a specific concept of Nature, “since it has not developed as a value or paradigm what could be counterposed to it” (Jullien 2006, 53). That is to say, the human was never defined as somebody apart from the vibrant vitality that forms the common base of all earthly life. It is only this separation from organic images of thought that made the European concept of Nature necessary.

One of the most extensive works demonstrating this development of the modern concept of Nature as opposed to human culture is the ecofeminist classical book *The Death of Nature: Woman, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* from 1980 by Carolyn Merchant. In this historical study, she demonstrates how European Modernity is characterized by a transformation of the popular image of the Earth from a benevolent and nurturing mother to a dead mechanist machine. Where, in earlier times—and for most people and cultures—the Earth was understood as an organic, living and pluralistic cosmos we humans are an integral part of, the emerging mechanist world view of modern philosophy regarded the known universe as a machine obeying abstract and eternal laws that only god-privileged humans could look into. The sensual immersion into this cosmos was devalued in favor of an image of “the human” as a strong and rational subject position outside of this mechanist clock work and able to penetrate deeper into the laws of nature behind mere sensual appearances. It is these laws of nature enabling an industrial and unprecedented control over earthly processes that was co-constituent, according to Merchant, to the creation of a concept of Nature as exterior and independent of human reasoning.

Merchant takes great care to demonstrate that in none of these emerging images of thought all humanoid beings were considered independent of Nature. Much rather, the category of “the human” was, from its modern

onset, a tool to conceal white patriarchal norms under seemingly universal and neutral “natural laws.” In fact—as Merchant and other ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood (2001) and Silvia Federici (2004)—pointed out, the vocabularies of early modern “Natural” Sciences were directly inspired by the torture of women in the witch hunts. Francis Bacon famously called for Nature to be “made a slave,” be “bound into service,” “put into constraint,” and “be molded by the mechanical arts.” He further claimed that “nature exhibits herself more clearly under the trails and vexations of art than when let to herself” (via Merchant 1989, 169; underlining by KJ).

A similar epistemological submission/exclusion mobilized by this concept of Nature was put on the shoulders of black, brown and Indigenous peoples that—by emerging European Reason—were considered to be closer to Nature and lacking capacities of reasoning deemed necessary for Civilization and Culture (both with capital Cs, hiding their Eurocentric exclusivism under a falsely purported universalism). As Denise Ferreira da Silva (2022) argues, the whole modern framework of scientific reasoning is based on the submission of black and Indigenous peoples as belonging to the realm of Nature or “the world” and thus being part of the other side of human reason. Black and brown people are thus crucially not considered as rational subjects able to apply the *a priori* laws of reason to deduce natural laws from the world, because they were in fact considered dictated by these natural laws of necessity and logic and where thus—in the modern mindset of mostly white men—to be regarded and manipulated as mere “things.” This, according to da Silva, was a necessary ontological precondition for the exploitation of black people in slavery without causing too much moral scruples within the purported “egalitarianism” of enlightenment Humanism. Da Silva further argues that this subjugation was intrinsically necessary for so called human (=white, patriarchal) Reason to work and deduce insights about Nature. It further was a necessary ontological footing for Capitalism to emerge, since this relegation of humans to the realm of Nature and “things” sanctioned an (unpaid and unvalued) exploitation of their labor needed for the primary accumulation of capital and its further development of European capital.

Nature, as a thing held together by natural laws that can only be deduced by (privileged) humans (mostly white men) applying Reason thus necessitated not only the separation of these humans into a sphere of Culture regarded as detached from Nature. It further required the subjugation, exclusion and exploitation of female, black, brown and Indigenous peo-

ples as well as non-human life-forms to be exploited in hitherto inconceivable ways. I have only cited a few resources on this vast body of research, because a) a complete overview could fill whole books and b) my focus lies elsewhere. I will now continue to demonstrate how this modern “Nature-Culture dualism” entailed a specific epistemology and sensual regime. After having sketched this, I will move on to my main argument that this modern mindset remained that of only a small minority (with huge power and influence) in elitist academic circles until modern forms of technology and transportation transformed it to something like a common sense of interacting with the environment.

Nature’s sensual regime

Since modern Nature was considered as something outside the “human,” “rational” and “civilized” realm, a radical rift was—in the understanding of the philosophers fermenting modern Reason—necessary to feel enabled to deduce “objective” truth and “natural laws” from this messy and sensual environment. The famous Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* argument is footed on this desire: the corporeal, sensual environment one is perceiving through one’s bodily embeddedness in it is devaluated as something too ambiguous and unreliable for scientific reasoning. René Descartes, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* from 1641, was thus able to declare that not only all sensual immersion in the environment has to be declared unreliable, but that the entire existence of the body has to be cast into doubt. According to Cartesianism, the only fact that is valuable for rational deduction about Nature is the mind freed from any particular environmental involvement. It is the human and its Reason (with capital R) that—from an outside—is deducing “natural laws” with certainty. In order for this modern epistemology to work, all sensual information had to be devalued in favor of logical deduction.

Furthermore, these clear body–mind, sensual–rational and nature–culture dualisms are undergirded by a partition of sensual information into “primary” and “secondary” qualities, as they are most famously formulated by John Locke. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1689, Locke defines sensual information about objects such as “solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number” as primary and “such qualities which are nothing in the objects themselves but power to produce various sensations in us” such “as colors, sounds, tastes, etc.” as secondary quali-

ties (Locke 2004, 135). He further argues that sound scientific reasoning should only base itself on primary and neglect secondary qualities. According to Didier Debaise, the legacy of this hierarchization of sensual information about the world “can still be found in contemporary science” (Debaise 2017, 155). Because these “primary” qualities only favor what is visible and easily reproducible in pre-given logical relations, they sanction a focus on abstract logical deduction of information of a “physico-mathematical order” and debase all other sensual involvement in an environment. The modern form of Reason is thus thoroughly footed on visual information, whereas taste, smell and sound are disqualified as too unreliable for scientific endeavors. It is no wonder that especially smell was, in modern European cultural history, for most part considered the most “animalistic” sense that—according to one of the chief-architects of modern Reason, Immanuel Kant—had to be fully neglected if not eradicated for the ideal “civilized” society to work (LeGuérier 1992). As philosophers such as Michel Serres (2016) among many others (see Jay 1993) have noted, modern Reason is a “ocularcentric” one—meaning it is privileging visual information while tending to ignore all other sensual partaking that would require more direct involvement in a specific environment: one can visually observe an environment from a safe distance, but one would have to “mingle” with it—in Michel Serres’ words—to get a smell or taste of it. An ocularcentric image of thought thus sanctions a distancing from the immediate environment in favor of a more uniform and universal concept of “world” or Nature as an abstract machine held together by so called “natural laws.” It is in this cultural milieu that the central perspective and the idea of a “natural landscape” developed in European cultural history (Jullien 2018): the idea of Nature as something observable as a whole from the outside—as a “panorama” (Ancient Greek for “seeing all”)—stems from this European modern epistemological footing.

The modern production of Nature is thus based on visual and logical *oversight* over an environment. By rules of logic, this information is processed into so called “natural laws” that are deemed more deep-rooted than sensory observation. Since this logic is, by its very etymological meaning, rooted in language (*logos* = speech, language, reason), philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (1998) have called this hegemonial form of Reason “logocentric,” meaning that it relies mostly on grammatical and logical structures found within European linguistic practices. To quote one of the forefathers of the so called “linguistic turn” leading to such in-

sights about “logocentrism,” Ludwig Wittgenstein: “One thinks that one is tracing nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it” (Wittgenstein 2010, para. 114). By this “frame,” Wittgenstein refers to language. The logical “laws of nature” that enable the abstraction and distancing from the immediate environment are thus further a result of an under-reflected role of the medium of language (see also Abram 2017).

To summarize this *tour de force* of recent critiques of European Modernity: whereas Nature is frequently presented as a neutral object or framework of research (and is claimed by ecological activists to need “saving”), a brief excursion into the conceptual history of Modern Philosophy reveals to us that this very purported neutrality was—and mostly still is—an ideological tool privileging a white, male and capitalist relation to the environment by falsely claiming it as “universal.” Under the guise of this “universal” neutrality sought in nature lies a violent colonial and misogynist history. The Nature thus produced is the result of a modern epistemology that a) devaluates any bodily and sensory involvement in an environment by b) favoring visual and linguistic information thus c) deducing abstract “natural laws.” A situated participation in a specific environment is thus replaced by an abstract concept of Nature that is—allegedly and falsely—universal and the same for everyone everywhere. The cosmology that underlines this philosophical dualism is called—by French anthropologist Philippe Descola (2015)—Naturalism and I will now turn to investigating how naturalism could become such an all encompassing cosmology in current modernity.

The violent and prosthetic implementation of the modern “naturalist” cosmology

This modern epistemology of Nature was far from the only form of conceiving the world in the 17th century and onwards—even in Europe. While it is somewhat intuitive that this European Naturalism only gradually spread over the rest of the planet and made other cultures adapt to and integrate main concepts of it (such as the example of Nature in China mentioned above), the same is true among main-land Europeans. Modernity as a philosophical concept started out in small academic and literate circles and even there was not the only cosmology fermented at the time. The philosophical works of Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Anne

Conway (1631-1679), Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) and Valentin Andreä (1586-1650), just to name a few, followed very different and much more organic ideas of the planet and our place in it. Ideas which were inconsonant to a modern Naturalism. As Silvia Federici put it writing about Descartes, it “is because it interpreted so well the requirements of the capitalist work-discipline that Descartes’ doctrine, by the end of the 17th century, had spread throughout Europe” (Federici 2004, 150) She points out that this modern mindset producing Nature was anything but an uncontested one. However, what made it eventually so successful was the circumstance that its idea of Nature suited the emerging bourgeoisie best in their endeavor of capitalist expansion and exploitation (2004, 149).

But this doesn’t mean that this mindset was—in the 17th and 18th centuries—one of a numerical majority. As both Merchant and Federici point out, the mindsets of peasants, women, illiterate people or children (to just name a few) were for much longer following different ideas of their place on the planet which were disdained as “primitive,” “pagan,” or “backward minded” by the dominant classes. The slow spread of a Naturalist mindset was accompanied by violent normative regimes, such as the witch hunts (Federici 2004), the establishment of the category of the “insane” and asylums for them (Foucault 1988) or that of childhood—a phase of human life which is not yet fully “rational” (Aries 1965). Modern Naturalism didn’t just spread by itself like a fungus but was the result of frequently violent imposition of powerful capitalist forces and their colonialization of ever more domains of life. However, while I can only briefly mention these violent aspects of normalization that came with Modernity (and point to some of the vast body of research done about this), I will now turn to the main focus of this paper: how the establishment of modern transport technology caused an additional, and much more subtle aspect of this normalization. I will do this first by discussing Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s ground-breaking 1977 book *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* and then move on to the car as the—in my opinion—main prosthetic embodiment of a modern Naturalist mindset.

Seeing Nature from a panoramic view

Modernity is, since the beginning of the 19th century, characterized by a change of human mobility patterns that were hitherto unknown. With the fast spread of train networks and the growing dependency on fossil

resources such as coal as fuels, an unprecedented speed of movement became the norm. Wolfgang Schivelbusch works out in his aforementioned book how this new paradigm of mobility caused not only a reorganization of modes of production, but also entailed a fundamental change in all people's spatio-temporal perception of the environment and the role of the human in it. Whereas earlier modes of traveling were characterized by bumpy roads, smelly horse dung and slow interaction with the environment and its peoples, the novel train travel on the super-flattened traintracks lead to a "loss of a communicative [*lebendig*] relationship between [hu]man and nature" (Schivelbusch 2014, 17). Since one could not smell, properly hear or feel the environment one was traveling through, all sensual participation with the environment except for the view became impossible while traveling on the train. Thus, according to Schivelbusch, a fundamentally different relationship to Nature was developed that he calls one of a "panoramic view": Nature is suddenly and normally perceived as something exterior and detached from one's own bodily involvement. The "human" self is shielded by a casing from the outside that is Nature. The naturalist separation of the sensually perceivable environment from a "mind" that slowly wanders the exterior Nature is thus prosthetically practiced by every train user. While riding the train, one could regard Nature from afar and even read a book or write a text while traveling—something deemed impossible in the shaky means of transport of earlier days (Schivelbusch 2014, 62). Nature thus became something akin to a reading practice not only for the elitist philosophers who have abstractly formulated modern Naturalism, but for every train user.

As Schivelbusch works out, this reorganization of sensual perception entailed a "mechanization" of the perception of all travelers. The primary qualities of Newton's mechanist cosmology—that we have encountered in their philosophical canonization through the feather of John Locke—became the only qualities one could deduce from the environment turned Nature one was traveling through:

This loss of landscape affected all the senses. Realizing Newton's mechanics in the realm of transportation, the railroad created conditions that also "mechanized" the traveler's perceptions. According to Newton, "size, shape, quantity, and motion" are the only qualities that can be objectively perceived in the physical world. Indeed, those became the only qualities that the railroad traveler was able to observe in the landscape he traveled through. Smells and sounds, not to mention the synesthetic perceptions that were part of travel in Goethe's time simply disappeared (Schivelbusch 2014, 53).

The train, as Schivelbusch points out, is thus a crucial vehicle that did not only create modern patterns of movement, but also popularized a modern cosmology of Naturalism and the sensual regime it sanctioned. Whereas regarding Nature as an abstract, mechanist and detached thing was the mindset of a ruling intellectual elite in earlier Modernity, it started to develop into a sort of popular common sense because of modern transport machinery. Modern transport technologies made, as Schivelbusch points out, everybody alienated from an organic and sensual apprehension of the environment and sanctioned regarding it as a Nature outside of one's own realms that can be seen and read. The logocentrism and ocularcentrism needed for the production of modern Nature thus turned into the “normal” way of apprehending the environment around oneself.

However, while this started out to become a popular phenomenon with the introduction of the train, I want to argue that it only solidified into an all-encompassing popular common sense because of the introduction of automobility. In this, I am following the interpretation of cultural theorist Kristin Ross, who makes this argument in her book *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1995). Whereas trains only used to run on a relatively limited space and also always required other means of transportation (to move to and from the station or town the train halted in), with the car a system was introduced that produced a monolithic approach to transportation: the ideal of a Good Life enacted by the car enables a human to move from the garage of ones single-family home in the suburbs (that only exist because of the car) to the garage of the work-place and back with a single means of transport. On the way home one could stop at the parking lots of the huge hypermarkets and go shopping, or pick up the children from school with the same car. Similarly, also going on holiday started to only require getting in the car at your home and getting off it in your desired holiday location (preferably something close to Nature, as we will shortly see).

As Mimi Sheller (2021), John Urry (2007) and others (for example Featherstone, Thrift, and Urry 2005) have pointed out, “Automobility” has to be regarded as a system that entails much more than the singular technological object of a car. Others focus this systematic view on its internal power structures and understand Automobility as a “regime” (Böhm *et al.* 2006). The single machine called “car” can only work because of a vast and excessively maintained network of streets, highways and gas stations—as well as an entire “consumerist” lifestyle with its clear spatial work-leisure

division, its vested power-interests of certain fossil lobbies, the creation of long stretches of suburbia, shopping centers, etc. It is this monolithic regime that, as I want to argue, made the perception of the environment as modern Nature *the* modern common sense of almost every human being participating in modern life-worlds. In the last segment of this paper, I want to illustrate this point further by relating how the sensual regime of Modernity is further incorporated by living in an environment dominated by the system of Automobility.

Driving into Nature

It almost goes without saying that all the observations about the change of perception analyzed by Schivelbusch in the last chapter do also apply to the car. As much as in a train, while riding a car on a highway one relates to Nature as a visual and logically abstract thing with a “panoramic view.” However, while most train users do not actively drive the train and thus become passive endurers of this change of perception, it becomes an active mode of engagement everybody has to commit to while driving a car. Thus, as I would argue, the Naturalist mindset becomes more solidified by the spread of the car.

Cultural theorist Rebecca Solnit relates that, whereas movement practices such as walking entail a unity of body and mind (Solnit 2001, XIV, 5), the modern lifeworld leads to what she calls a “disembodiment of everyday life” (Solnit 2001, 258) because it can only be properly accessed by the use of prosthetic machines such as the car.

We live in a world where our hands and feet can direct a ton of metal to go faster than the fastest land animal, [...]. It is the unaugmented body that is rare now, and that body has begun to atrophy as both a sensory and a muscular organism. In the century and a half since the railroad seemed to go too fast to be interesting, perceptions and expectations have sped up, so that many now identify with the speed of the machine and look with frustration or alienation to the speed of the body. The world is no longer on the scale of our bodies, but on that of our machines, and many need—or think they need—the machines to navigate that space quickly enough (258).

According to Solnit, body and mind automatically become separated, because it is a base requirement to be able to successfully participate in modern environments. It is by this concrete necessity that a body-mind-dualism such as it was theoretically formulated by Descartes could become

a standard modern mindset of everybody participating in modern life. Furthermore, this bodily environment thus perceived as separated and detached from one self is structured by a logocentric and ocularcentric sensual regime by means of the prosthetic machine one is using to navigate through it. In his book *Non-Places – An Anthropology of Super-Modernity* from 1992 the anthropologist Marc Augé relates that in modern practices such as driving a car “the link between individuals and their surroundings [...] is established through the mediation of words, or even texts” (Augé 1995, 97) In the alienation specific to a car based society, things, places and even other humans tend to get replaced by their textual representation, as he poignantly works out by relating one of his experiences on the French highways:

France’s well designed autoroutes reveal landscapes somewhat reminiscent of aerial views, very different from the ones seen by travelers on the old national and departmental main roads. They represent, as it were, a change from intimate cinema to the big sky of Westerners. But it is the text planted along the wayside that tell us about the landscape and make its secret beauties explicit. Main roads no longer pass through towns, but lists of their notable features—and, indeed, a whole commentary—appear on big signboards nearby. In a sense the traveler is absolved to stop or even look (Augé 1995, 97).

Whereas riding the train was mostly passively experienced by the very most, in driving a car every driver becomes actively engaged with this naturalist and detached way of engaging with Nature while driving through it. Nature produced by modern prosthetic machinery thus changes from a passive phenomenon to something one actively interacts with. Furthermore, whereas the train system covered only few stretches of land, the system of Automobility tends to spread everywhere modern humans live and thus becomes an omnipresent means of reorganizing both our environment as well as our perception of it according to car-centered requirements.

It is a well-noted paradox that the more industrialized a society becomes, the bigger grows the desire for “Nature.” Whereas the Alps were considered “ugly” and not worth bothering by the local rural populace, it was British urban dwellers seeking escape and relief from their industrialized cities that first learned to romanticize Nature and “consume” it as an experience. Alpinism and Nature Romanticism are thus a product of modern industrial societies. Whereas also this desire for Nature of industrial societies arose earlier than the car, it only became a popular desire for almost everybody because of the spread of the car.

The environmental historian Paul Sutter documents in his book *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* that one of the main driving forces behind the modern development of National Parks as sites of protected nature was the popularization of the car in the first decades of the 20th century. The pioneers of the American “Wilderness Movement” were demanding protection zones for “untouched nature” under the influence of the automobile and its infrastructure that massively spread in the USA of the 1910s and 20s. The larger the American cities became and the more of their inhabitants could afford a car, the greater the need for leisure excursions into so-called Nature became. Whereas in the past a “retreat into nature” was considered a critical gesture toward modern culture (Thoreau, etc.), in the age of the automobile it was integrated as a recreational part of that same culture. The city, once a walled shelter from the environment, became a stress-factor that demanded periodic escape into it stylized as “pure nature,” precisely because more and more people were longing after the modern ideal of the Good Life. These escapes into Nature were of course mostly undertaken by car and had the paradoxical effect that Nature became ever further away. “[O]nce a road had been pushed into the heart of a wilderness area, there was almost no stopping the forces of development that would erode and finally destroy it” (Sutter 2002, xi). A myriad of hotels, parking lots, gas stations, and other infrastructures were created and brought “culture” to the very places where Nature was actually longed for.

Thus, the call for “pristine nature” to be protected in national parks actually springs from an increasing dependence of modern humans on automobile access. Actualizing the naturalist cosmology by means of a prosthetic practice for “everybody,” the Nature which was wrested from the modern nation-state as “worthy of protection” was understood as something completely external to humans and their culture. According to this ideal, both “Human” and Culture had to completely stay away from these “natural protection zones.” This frequently resulted in the (sometimes violent) eviction of Indigenous peoples from their land, many of which had already lived for millennia in these now declared “nature” zones and had maintained an environmentally beneficial relation to it.³

3 On the connection between the establishment of American national parks and the displacement of Indigenous peoples, see, for example, Spence (2000).

With this universalization of “human” e.g. car centered impact needing to be generally kept apart from Nature, the dualistic split between “Humans,” their Culture and Nature was further radicalized. All other humanoid forms of relating to the environment had to make room for the naturalist one and its ever increasing lust for Nature—be it as a resource or as a leisurely escape experience. As Philippe Descola and Alessandro Pignocchi (2022, 15) point out, “protection” and “exploitation” are actually the two sides of the same coin of naturalist cosmology. As I have tried to show, the car was one of the many technological prostheses that made this naturalist dead-lock to appear like the only available cosmology for humans. The car is in fact not only a machine exhausting many toxic fumes, but also one that is producing Nature as an ideal and antipode of the modern Good Life.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show by means of an example that our contemporary environmental problem is more deep-rooted than the mere exhaust of industrial machines quantifiable in a numeric regime of carbon emissions or the like. The environmental catastrophe can not be solved as a kind of numerical game trying to make certain emission numbers as little as possible⁴—this would be too easy and is already beginning to form easily exploitable markets for capitalism in its actively green-washing variant. Much rather, the environmental problem is the fruit of a catastrophic relation to the environment that has been seeded in European early Modernity, but has only come to full fruition as a popular common sense by prosthetic machines such as the car. Nature, from this angle, is no longer a solution or something to be protected—it is an essential part of the problem. New and alternative ideals of the Good Life that try to develop a more sustainable relation to the planet, such as *Vivir Bien/Sumak Kawsay*, need to be wary of the pitfalls and “false friends” of Nature and the cries to protect it. Much rather, we would have to seek to overcome the conditions that create the (conceptual as well as affective) desire for Nature in the first

4 For more on an “Ecology beyond Numbers” see the article of the same name in the book *Toxic Temple* by Anna Lerchbaumer and myself (Jörg 2022).

place and invent many new and old form of relating to as many different environments we can find and bring to flourishing.⁵

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5 These other forms of relating to the planet might, in a less central form, even involve a technology similar to what I call "the car." I am not so much arguing that there is only one way of using the car and relating with it to the environment. However, I want to alert to the fact that the tendency of homogenization of the senses, our environments, desires and economies has so far been the main drive behind the massive spread of Automobility across the globe. Rudiments of other forms of car cultures and relations can be found in Manuel Moser's text in this volume and it remains to be an interesting discussion how much cars there might still be in a world that could no longer be understood to be the "Homogenocene."

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