

exhau-
stion
entan-
g
ments

OVERCOMING THE AUTO-SELF
OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
12-14 MAY 2022

HENRY-FORD-BAU
GARYSTRASSE 35, 14195 BERLIN
& OTHER LOCATIONS

Exhaust(ed) Entanglements Overcoming the Auto-Self of the Anthropocene

Humans taking up too much space, blocking each other's ways while emitting way too many toxic gases. A description of an everyday traffic jam can equally be read as a metaphor for the catastrophic predicament some call the Anthropocene. In this symposium, various scholars are invited to discuss the car as a main factor of a toxic entanglement to modern lifestyles.

Many contemporary discourses stress the need for *new* alliances and utopian speculations that can help to foster a future of more planetary thriving. Likewise, the question arises which *old* alliances, fantasies and collective dreams need to be abandoned to actually get there without falling into the pitfalls of green-washed eco-capitalism.

What affective entanglements, subjective investments and pragmatic as well as economic compromises tie us to the status-quo of fossil-fueled late capitalism? How resilient are our environmentally damaging lifestyles even in the face of more and more visible catastrophe?

In this three-day symposium, academics, activists, artists, journalists and other scholars are brought together to discuss these pressing questions with a focus on the car and car-centered mobility, urbanity, rurality and lifestyles. We propose that it is no wonder that the German word for car, "auto", means "the self" in its etymological root.

The damage of an over-identification with *this kind* of auto-self goes way further than the direct environmental damage of the vehicles exhaust pollution and soil sealing, but are the cause for our being dead-locked into a dynamic of ever-more precarization, globalization, fossilization of and alienation and detachment from sustainable livelihoods. The self-identification with the auto does not only make us choose the wrong means of transport, but leaves us trapped within our limiting logics and outlooks of anthropocentrism and modern exceptionalism that seduce us to homogenize the planet ever more. In the car we simply can't see (let alone feel, smell or hear) many of the less loud but more nourishing alternatives of going about with and on the planet.

Even though the awareness of our ecological predicament and the politicization of carbon-intensive lifestyles has risen significantly in the last years, the car and its centrality to modern human ideas of the good life seem almost impossible to overcome. As such, we regard the car as the signature device of a much larger problem: Namely, that of the "Homogenocene" and our highly resilient attachment to it. By investigating the material compositions, economic dynamics, cultural imaginaries and affective histories around car-culture, this transdisciplinary symposium seeks to speculate about which utopian, no-longer-modern fabulations might help us to get out of this raging deadlock. In overcoming the auto-self of the Anthropocene, we seek to not only to find more ecological ways of transportation, but also less self-referential and anthropocentric ways of sharing, reasoning and dwelling on the planet.

Program 12-14 May 2022

The main program will take place at the "Senatssaal" of Henry-Ford-Bau

** events marked with a star take place at a different location. See below for addresses.*

Thursday, 12 May 2022

13:00 Lunch together at Aux Delices Normands

14:00 Kilian Jörg: Welcoming & Introduction to "exhaust(ed) entanglements"

15:00 Paul Schuetze & Imke von Maur: The Affective Body of the SUV

16:00 Coffee break

17:00 (via Webex) Alf Hornborg: The car as a technology for redistributing time

18:00 (via WebEx) Brian Ladd: Four centuries of endangered privilege and road rage: vehicles on the street

Friday, 13 May 2022

11:00 (via WebEx) Ersilia Verlinghieri: Car-free for whom?

12:30 Alexandra Ganser: Exhausted Women on Wheels; Revisiting *Roads of Her Own*

13:30 Lunch together at Aux Delices Normands

15:00 Julia Grillmayr: Carcapitalism. The transformative power of cars and carps.

19:00 *Evening Program at diffrakt | centre for theoretical periphery
Discussion Panel with Activists from Berlin Autofrei (Anna Baatz), Lobau Bleibt (Heinrich Hirsch) and others.
Film Program.
Performative Interventions hosted by Philosophy Unbound.

Saturday, 14 May 2022

12:00 – 15:00

*Performance Side Program:
Diverting the Public Space by David Kummer and Kilian Jörg – 3 hours of interactive performance interventions in the inner city of Berlin (meeting point: U Kottbusser Tor, crossing Adalbert-/Oranienstraße)

Locations:

Henry-Ford-Bau: Garystraße 35, 14195 Berlin
Aux Delices Normands: Ihnstraße 29, 14195 B.
diffrakt | centre for theoretical periphery:
Crellestraße 22, 10827 Berlin

Abstracts

Kilian Jörg: Introduction to “exhaust(ed) entanglements”

Humans taking up too much space, blocking each other's ways while emitting way too many toxic gases. A description of an everyday traffic jam can equally be read as a metaphor for the catastrophic predicament some call the Anthropocene. Many contemporary discourses stress the need for *new* alliances and utopian speculations that can help to foster a future of more planetary thriving. Likewise, the question arises which *old* alliances, fantasies and collective dreams need to be abandoned to actually get there without falling into the pitfalls of green-washed eco-capitalism.

As the organizer of this conference, I will speak about the philosophical and political implications of such “exhaust(ed) entanglements” and will try to put forth question such as:

What affective entanglements, subjective investments and pragmatic as well as economic compromises tie us to the status-quo of fossil-fueled late capitalism? How resilient are our environmentally

damaging lifestyles even in the face of more and more visible catastrophe? How could Utopian fabulations look like that get us out of these toxic entanglements?

Paul Schuetze & Imke von Maur: The Affective Body of the SUV

The modern SUV is usually not bought, used and loved for any good reason. In fact, in most cases it is simply an impractical and even harmful machine – deathly for pedestrians, cyclists, and the environment. To many, such a machine nonetheless appears as an aesthetic and desirable object. We contend that this phenomenon is only comprehensible in reference to a dominant (affective) ideology manifested in idiosyncratic socio-material relations in Western society. In this talk, we specify these relations using the concepts of “affective milieus” (Schuetze 2021) and “little worlds” (von Maur 2021).

Concretely, we identify a socio-culturally specific affective milieu as the foundation of the SUV's predominance and we thus specify how the SUV is not only a car, but the epitome of a hegemonic (affective) ideology. This ideology becomes particularly visible in the “automobile milieu” and it is marked by specific affective entanglements and associated stakes; for instance, by liberal ideas of freedom and opportunity, a need for control and regulation, as well as an affirmative vision of progress and technology.

Against this backdrop, the appeal of the SUV to the individual can be understood in terms of what we call “little worlds” (von Maur 2021). Here, the automobile milieu is, for instance, reproduced in concrete

moments of being content while driving an SUV, experiencing its appearance as aesthetic or looking forward enthusiastically to configuring and ordering one in the future. In this way, individuals disclose little worlds (together) – they produce shared spaces of meaning and take part in practices, perpetuating the automobile milieu as the broader normative horizon. In sum, by considering these two intertwined affective dimensions, the aim of our talk is to get a clearer view of the dominant socio-material structures within Western society and thus to open up ways to rethink and ultimately overcome these current conditions.

Ersilia Verlinghieri: Car-free for whom?

Automobility is entangled with the production of uneven urban landscapes, neoliberal capitalism and climate crisis. It has re-shaped public space, collective imaginaries, daily habits and social relations. Growing concerns around its detrimental impacts over health and the environment are slowly pushing western cities to reclaim portions of public space from car-dominance, via pedestrianisations, new bike lanes, tactical urbanism, or car-free zones. But to which extent are these efforts tackling the dominance of automobility as a socio-economic and political system and its embedded patterns of social and environmental injustice? Driving on action-research projects with car-free activists and research with planners and community groups working on car-reduction strategies, this presentation offers a reflection on the limits and potentials of new policies attempting to reduce car-dependency in western cities.

Brian Ladd: Four centuries of endangered privilege and road rage: vehicles on the street

It is generally recognized that the automobile changed city streets profoundly. However, that particular machine maneuvered into a longer trajectory of cultural and technological change. Disputes over urban street space and mobility accompanied the growth of wheeled passenger transport in Europe from the 17th century onward. Assertions of privilege challenged the realities of crowded streets, whatever kind of vehicles either enforced or challenged hierarchies of street users. Planners and politicians were consistently attentive to the voices of the wealthy and influential minority that demanded separation and speed. When it appeared, the automobile proved to be the apotheosis of wheeled transport, both technologically (speed, enclosure) and politically (widespread individual ownership, road design, suburbanization). In becoming essential to individual and collective identities, it embodied a democratized privilege that defied any rational calculus.

Alf Hornborg: The car as a technology for redistributing time

In 1973, as the so-called 'energy crisis' put an end to three post-war decades of continuous and unprecedented economic growth in the Global North, Ivan Illich turned his critical eye to the automobile. He famously calculated that the average American annually spent 1,600 hours on the car in order to drive 7,500 miles, which means that the 'real speed' of the car

was less than five miles per hour. This is the part of his argument that has been most widely remembered, perhaps because it makes us hesitate about how we tend to fool *ourselves*, but the most important point he made is more subtle and largely neglected, perhaps because it exposes how our cars tend to fool *others*. He showed that a technological increase in transport velocity increases the demands on human labor time represented by that technology, and that, as the market put price tags on human time, the speed of vehicles correlate inversely with equality. Beyond a certain velocity, he observes, ‘passengers become consumers of other people’s time, and accelerating vehicles become the means for effecting a net transfer of life-time.’ In other words, the time saved by car drivers is time *lost* for all the people (in mines, factories, service stations, oil refineries, and so on) who keep their cars running. This *distributive* perspective on modern technologies can be generalized as applicable to most time- or labor-saving devices invented since the Industrial Revolution. It is easily neglected as we focus on the alarming ecological impacts of fossil-fueled technologies in the Anthropocene, but it deserves to be added to the list of good reasons to abandon current patterns of automobility, whether propelled by gasoline or electricity.

[Alexandra Ganser: Exhausted Women on Wheels; Revisiting Roads of Her Own](#)

As a result of my doctoral research as fellow in the former PhD program “Kulturhermeneutik im Zeichen von Differenz und Transdifferenz” (“Cultural Herme-

neutics under the Sign of Difference and Transdifferenz,” funded by the German Research Foundation) at the University of Erlangen, my dissertation in American Studies, *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in North American Women’s Road Narratives, 1970-2000*, was published in a book version in 2009 (Rodopi). As a research field, mobility studies—first delineated in sociological and cultural geography contexts, later increasingly transdisciplinary—was just emerging, the *spatial turn* was the turn of the day, and the insights of feminist scholars like Doreen Massey or Rosi Braidotti focused on female bodies which were moving across/beyond, rather than statically remaining captured by, binary conceptualizations of public and private spatialities. Women at the wheel seemed to disturb the patriarchal order, as the novels and autofictional narratives I analyzed appropriated, renegotiated, and at times ridiculed the mythical American *road trip* from diverse gendered perspectives. By literary means, they articulated this disturbance and made visible difference-based lines of contention regarding women on the move. More than a decade later, I am still doing mobility research; also, the concept of gendered im/mobilities has certainly not decreased in importance. And yet, today my book could by no means be written the way it was, since it completely neglected a problematic underlying paradigm—that of automobility as emancipatory in and by itself, eradicating its ecological costs and ultimately patriarchal spatial logics. In the second decade of the 21st century, we seem to have come to the end of fossil-based mobility, and it is in this context that my paper attempts to critically revisit contemporary car-based women’s narratives by fo-

ocusing on the exhausted female protagonists of late capitalism/neofeudalism, e.g. in the recent, award-winning film *Nomadland*. It especially highlights the rural and working-class dependencies on automobility in inquiring after the exhaust(ed) entanglements of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene.

Julia Grillmayr: Carpitalism. The transformative power of cars and carps.

“Carpitalism” must end, be smashed, or crashed – these have become popular slogans on banners at climate protests and demonstrations against environmentally damaging forms of mobility and petroculture as a whole. While this neologism aptly expresses the socio-economic and systemic dimension of the car and allows to put fossil fuel-based mobility in a broader analytic framework, it cannot get rid of another meaning: the strange entanglements between capitalism and the large group of freshwater fish called Cyprinidae, commonly known as carp.

If you allow it, this association and rather silly play on words can take us down a rabbit hole of case studies and readings confirming that even if “nothing is connected to everything, everything is connected to something” and that it is worth to take a closer look at especially murky “muddles” (Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016). The muddy connection between cars, carps and capitalism leads to an approach that – informed by media studies – is particularly sensitive to the boundaries of inner and outer spaces, surfaces and depths and how the blurring of these boundaries can bring forth different perspectives.

“This is the abyss: Paradise“, writes Vilém Flusser in *Vampyroteuthis infernalis* (1987), an essay that will guide us through this rabbit hole, together with Mark Bould’s *Anthropocene Unconscious* (2021) and Elizabeth Kolbert’s *Under A White Sky* (2021). While Bould’s study explores the current “Fast-and-Furiocene“ with the help of fictions like the *Sharknado* series, Kolbert’s non-fiction book about *The Nature of the Future* features only a bit less spectacular and improbable case studies from the biological sciences, e.g. “The Attack of the Jumping Carp”.

David Kummer & Kilian Jörg: Diverting the Public Space

We are entangled with the spaces around us. We are the public, we have our spaces.

The public space enables us and limits us – it makes us what we are.

But, in times of ecological turmoil, are our spaces changing fast enough with us? Do they adapt (us) well to the new chaotic climates of the Earth? Or do they make us stuck in the values and practises of an old, fossil fueled and consumerist way of life?

Space is inert. We tend to become inert with it.

How can we engage it to change – with – us – and the world?

Through a spectrum of shared bodily practices in public space, we seek to enable new modes of action and perception, which should lead to a self-empowerment of the participants and an invitation to dialogue and engagement with pedestrians. Together, old patterns of movement in public space will be questioned

and a new playful and at the same time critical physicality will be explored. The developed and guided scores shall give the possibility to inscribe oneself deeply into the public space in a different way and to practice and experience a choreographic perception. The space, being transformed into a versatile adventure playground (for big and small), is meant to open utopian windows of possibility for a different “fusion” with our human-made, urban environment and the questioning of its norms.

Having worked on this project continuously in Berlin and Vienna, we have developed a set of scores and loops that can be adapted on site and further developed with the public / spectators / co-collaborators. Through this ongoing research-practice we have established a routine that enables us to make tangible and work with the norms that are illicit in our mundane forms of space and movement. Exposing our bodies to the “slow violence” of the fossil fueled, late-capitalist normality opens up possibilities of reflecting and “queering” them in ways unexpected.

Interactive Performance will take place on Sat, 14 May, 12-15h at Kottbusser Tor, meeting point at the crossing of Adalbert- and Oranienstraße

Biographies

Anna Baatz is an activist with the initiative “Volksentscheid Berlin Autofrei” (Referendum for a carfree Berlin). On the way to the referendum, the initiative tries to illustrate the clear advantages of a car-reduced city and thus to overcome the persisting forces of car regimes. However the activists are increasingly experiencing that these forces are hardly concerned with practical aspects of urban everyday mobility, but rather persons perceive the vision of a car-reduced city either as an attack on their personal lifestyles or as a ludicrous. Anna engages in different working groups of the initiative and gets to know distinct reactions from journalists, participants of interventions as well as social media users. Besides her activism she works as a researcher and investigates the (transformative) dynamics of everyday practices and spaces.

Alexandra Ganser is professor of North American Studies at the University of Vienna, where she also heads the interdisciplinary research platform and PhD program “Mobile Cultures and Societies: Interdisciplinary Studies on Transnational Formations” (funded by the Austrian Science Foundation FWF). She is author of *Crisis and Legitimacy in Atlantic American Narratives of Piracy, 1678-1861* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) as well as co-editor of the book series “Maritime Literature and Culture” (with Meg Samuelson and Charne Lavery, Palgrave Macmillan). A Fulbright alumna and former Daniel Christoph Ebeling fellow at the American Antiquarian Society as well as FWF Elise

Richter grantee, her current research focuses on US astrocolonialism and future mobilities.

Julia Grillmayr is a Vienna- and Linz-based cultural studies scholar, journalist, radio maker and science communicator. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Vienna. At the University of Art and Design Linz, she explored the relationship between contemporary SF literature and futurological scenarios. Her research interests are speculative (eco) feminist philosophy and cyberpunk. She is creator of the radio broadcast *Superscience Me* on Radio Orange, she works for the public radio channel Ö1, and podcasts for the Austrian Academy of Science. The rest of the time, she spends in muddy danubian wetlands and in tap shoes.
<https://juliagrillmayr.at>

Heinrich Hirsch is active in the protest movement “Lobau bleibt” with the goal of saving a Viennese national park from motorised individual traffic. The main part of the planned motorway tunnel was successfully stopped by exerting pressure on the national government through protests and camping on construction sites. Now the focus of the protest alliance is a connecting high-traffic road for the formerly planned tunnel. Next to his commitment in Vienna, Heinrich is still politically involved in “Verkehrswende, jetzt!” in his hometown Linz, a city also threatened by multiple large-scale motorway projects.

Alf Hornborg received his Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Uppsala and has taught at Uppsala, the University of Gothenburg, and at

Lund University. He has conducted field research in Nova Scotia, Peru, and Brazil. His primary research interest is the cultural and political dimensions of human-environmental relations in past and present societies, particularly from the perspective of world-system analysis. This has led him to explore various perspectives not only from anthropology but also from trans-disciplinary fields such as environmental history, ecological economics, political ecology, and development studies. The central ambition has been to examine how specific cultural assumptions constrain human approaches to economics, technology, and ecology, and how such assumptions tend to serve as ideologies that reproduce social relations of power. His books include *The Power of the Machine* (2001), *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange* (2011), *Global Magic* (2016), and *Nature, Society, and Justice in the Anthropocene* (2019)

Kilian Jörg works at the multimedial interfaces between philosophy and art and is based nomadically between mainly Vienna, Berlin and Brussels. Kilian is interested in the narratives of our ecological dilemma and how they can be best framed to unleash the most socio-politically transformative forces. For this, Kilian uses the expression of text, performance and installation. Kilian is founder of the collective philosophy unbound and member of the research cluster Stoffwechsel - Ecologies of Collaboration and the artist initiative im_flieger. Kilian has published several books on topics such as the political backlash from an ecological point of view, a speculative religion venerating toxic waste and club culture as a social machine. Currently Kilian is working on a research

project titled “On the Utopia of the Car-Free World” at the SFB Affective Societies.

<http://kilianjoerg.blogspot.com>

Brian Ladd is a historian of urban form (Ph.D., Yale) and research associate at the University at Albany. His ties to Berlin go back decades. Among his books are *The Ghosts of Berlin*; *Autophobia: Love and Hate in the Automotive Age*; and, most recently, *The Streets of Europe: The Sights, Sounds, and Smells that Shaped Its Great Cities*.

Paul Schuetze is a research assistant in the *Ethics of AI* research group at the Institute of Cognitive Science at the University of Osnabrück. In his research he focuses on the structure and functioning of digital capitalism and its connections to the climate crisis. Particularly, he is interested in the textures of power and subjectivation in the age of Big Data and AI. His background is in affect studies, philosophy of mind and critical social philosophy.

Imke von Maur is a philosopher, working as a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute of Cognitive Science of Osnabrück University. In her PhD thesis she developed an approach of the epistemic relevance of emotions that makes the world disclosive dimension of feeling a subject for social theory and social critique. Her current work focuses on what it means and requires to understand complex phenomena, such as the climate crisis, and how to teach this, as well as on the ethics of and narratives around the role of AI and technology in and for society.

Ersilia Verlinghieri is Research Associate at the Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford and Senior Research Fellow at the Active Travel Academy, University of Westminster. She is also Early Career fellow of the Regional Study Association. Her research sits at the intersection of urban studies and transport geography, with a specific focus on issues around mobility justice. She is currently involved in several projects covering three main topics: the governance of low-carbon transition, post-growth theories and urban transport, pathways to low-car cities.

Exhaust(ed) Entanglements Overcoming the Auto-Self of the Anthropocene

International Conference
12–14 May 2022

Conference Concept & Chair: Kilian Jörg

Henry-Ford-Bau of FU Berlin;
diffrakt – Zentrum für theoretische Peripherie
& other Locations – plus Hybrid-Event via WebEx

www.sfb-affective-societies.de

AFFECTIVE SOCIETIES



Gefördert durch

DFG Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft