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Towards post-automobility: destituting automobility

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we make the case for conceptualizing automobility as a singular and enduring imaginary that is located in the present continuous tense. It is an imaginary composed not only of discourses, representations, images and visions but also the ostensible materiality of automobility. That imaginary is the everyday, taken-for-granted reality of automobility. If we are to entertain hopes of living in a world absent the routine violence of automobility, the political challenge is not only the construction of alternative, “sustainable” and “just” mobility imaginaries but the deconstruction and destitution of the tautomobility imaginary. Pointers to destituting automobility may be found in policies towards controlling tobacco, fighting sex-trafficking, and decolonization. The concept of destituent power opens up possibilities for developing alternative strategies for moving towards a post-automobility future, not just as a conceptual deconstructive exercise but as political praxis.

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I destytute, I forsake or leave a thyng or persone, *je destitue*.

— John Palsgrave, 1530, *Lesclarcissement de la langue française*

1. Introduction

One way of thinking about how to get to a post-automobility world is through the construction of imaginaries of socially and ecologically sustainable transport, what Noel Cass and Katharina Manderscheid (2018) refer to as “autonomobility”. An egalitarian vision of social relations of equality, justice and freedom, autonomobility would be based on active, collectivized and socialized mobilities, such as cycling (Popan 2020; Koglin and Cox 2020), walking, and public transportation. This strategy, it is assumed, would result in the marginalization and eventual displacement of automobility; replaced not by sociotechnical mobility apparatuses equally as destructive as automobility, but by genuinely alternative mobility modalities. While we unreservedly support these efforts, moving to a post-automobility future will require proposals that deactivate (Agamben 2014) the socio-technical apparatus that is automobility (Braun 2019, 275).

Automobility has been criticized as socially and politically unjust (Martens 2016; Sheller 2018; Cass and Manderscheid 2018); as ecologically and economically unsustainable (Newman 2013; Becker, Becker, and Gerlach 2012); as intrinsically violent (Culver 2018;

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Braun and Randell 2020); as inimical to justice and civil liberties (Seo 2019). Across the automobility studies literature, automobility is largely understood to be irremediably problematic. In respect to automobile violence, Gregg Culver (2018, 145) has observed that “car deaths have always been in principle entirely preventable: cars could be banned, and the problem of car deaths would simply disappear”. A similar conclusion may be made regarding automobility’s contributions to environmental destruction. That such a possibility is virtually unthinkable attests to the hegemony of automobility (cf. Zipori and Cohen 2015; Canzler and Knie 2016; Nieuwenhuijsen and Khreis 2016).

Engineering, industry, road safety and policy discourses that acknowledge the harms of automobility typically focus on infrastructure, “the driver”, and the artifact that is “the automobile”. Their concerns are specific, individual, isolatable problems, to be addressed on a technology level with the goal of developing and providing a technically better solution: a safer car, a sustainable propellant, better road surfaces, more efficient signaling systems, better driver training, replacing the driver with a computer. Automobility is assumed to be a neutral technology and social good, its problems remediable, typically through technological solutions. The technical challenge is to fix the deficiencies and inadequacies of the components and their interactions within the automobility system (cf. Seiffert and Wech 2003). Both road violence and environmental violence are assumed to be not intrinsic to automobility but contingent and remediable (Braun and Randell 2020). It is this assumption of contingency and remediability that informs national and global “Vision Zero” projects (Elvebakk 2007; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2008).

Publicly performed visions of such technological fixes are instances of what Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (2009; 2015) call sociotechnical imaginaries. In this paper we propose a more expansive imaginary concept. Unlike sociotechnical imaginaries as defined by Jasanoff and Kim, the automobility imaginary is an imaginary that is oriented not toward the future but is a singular and enduring imaginary located in a continuous present composed of past, present and future. It is an imaginary composed not only of discourses, representations, images and visions but also the ostensible materiality of automobility.

The sociotechnical imaginaries of automobility are discussed in the following section. We then turn to the characteristics of the singular, enduring automobility imaginary. This is followed by a brief theoretical discussion of the concept of “destituent power”. The theoretical challenge is the deconstruction of this hegemonic imaginary, while the political challenge is its “destitution” (Agamben 2014; Agamben 2017, 1265–1279; see also Laudani 2017; Amato 2019, 44–50). If conceptualized as an imaginary, transitioning to a post-automobility future requires a political praxis oriented towards the deconstruction and dismantling of that imaginary, which is none other than the ontology of automobility. Conceptualizing automobility in its entirety as an imaginary allows us to identify possible ruptures and alternative trajectories and political strategies for moving towards a post-automobility world, which are discussed in the concluding sections of this paper.

2. The sociotechnical imaginaries of automobility

The concept of an imaginary has been employed to describe a diversity of social phenomena: as constitutive of social institutions (Castoriadis 1997); national communities and the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth century in the work of Benedict Anderson (1991);

collective social imaginaries (Taylor 2004); the relationship between the imaginary, the symbolic and the real in the work of Jacques Lacan (1977) and Louis Althusser (2014). It is a staple concept within anthropology (Strauss 2006), informing ethnographic work within Science and Technology Studies, most notably the concepts of “technoscientific imaginaries” (Marcus 1995; Ihde 2009), Kim and Mike Fortun’s (2005) “scientific imaginaries”, and Jasanoff and Kim’s (2009; 2015) concept of a sociotechnical imaginary.

It is that latter concept that is the most obviously relevant for the subject at hand. “Cars as we know them”, Jasanoff (2015) observes,

would never have taken to the roads without the myriad social roles, institutions, and practices spawned by modernity: scientists, engineers, and designers; patents and trademarks; autoworkers and big corporations; regulators; dealers and distributors; advertising companies; and users, from commuters to racers, who ultimately gave cars their utility, appeal, and meaning.

In a frequently cited passage in the introductory chapter to *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, Jasanoff (2015) defines socio-technical imaginaries as:

collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology.

From the Model-T Ford to General Motors’ annual design changes, to the Futurama exhibit in the General Motors pavilion at the 1939/40 New York World’s Fair (Jam Handy Organization 1940; Curts 2015; Norton 2021, 23–45), to a future of autonomous vehicles envisaged in a 1956 General Motors film, *Key to the Future* (Kidd 1956; Norton 2021), to fins, to diesel cars promoted as a solution to automobility CO2 emissions; to visions of future automobilities in science fiction (Braun 2019), the history of automobility may be read as a succession of sociotechnical imaginaries of the type defined by Jasanoff and Kim, each of which predicted a utopic automobile future, none of which came to pass as envisaged and promised (Möser 2003; Gundler 2013; Curts 2015). In invoking solutions and visions of a better future, to be arrived at by technological innovation, sociotechnical imaginaries cannot but refer to lacks, failures and problems in the existing state of affairs. Simultaneously they hold out the promise of a better future. Sociotechnical imaginaries have been, and continue to be, essential to the continued reproduction of automobility (Braun and Randell 2020).

Two contemporary examples are the sociotechnical imaginaries of electric and autonomous vehicles (Mladenović et al. 2020). Embodied in prototypes and concept cars and disseminated in public visions of a desirable future (Ardente et al. 2019, 60–67), they are imaginaries of a “green” and an accident free automobility future respectively (Braun and Randell 2020, 2). They are regularly reported on in the mass media, in newspapers, on television, in trade publications, in specialist automotive magazines (Topham 2020; Fraedrich and Lenz 2016), and are discussed in academic publications (see, for example, Lipson and Kurman 2016; Sumantran, Fine, and Gonsalvez 2017; Wadhwa and Salkever 2017; Pattinson, Chen, and Basu 2020) that extol the virtues of electric and autonomous vehicles. They are promoted at motor shows (North American International Auto Show 2019; Mercedes-Benz 2020) and museum exhibitions (Victoria and Albert Museum 2019;

Braun and Randell 2021). They are institutionally stabilized through the efforts of private and state actors (McKinsey and Company 2013; Bertonecello and Wee 2015; Aptiv Services US LLC et al. 2019). The electric and autonomous vehicle sociotechnical imaginaries are represented as significant scientific and technological achievements, thus appealing to shared positive evaluations of science and technology (KPMG 2012). They are exemplary instances of sociotechnical imaginaries as defined by Jasanoff and Kim. That the electric vehicle sociotechnical imaginary has been embraced by significant and influential segments of the environmental movement attests to its rhetorical efficacy.

The concept of a sociotechnical imaginary is useful precisely because it allows us to describe this network of institutional power. It provides a conceptual framework for the empirical investigation of how these publicly performed visions of a future automobility have informed efforts to bring those visions into effect: what they are; how such visions are disseminated; by whom and where; their rhetorical and persuasive properties; the kinds of sociotechnical entities, material and non-material, human and non-human, that have been brought into being – constituted – by those visions. To ask how power is exercised within and across this network (Jasanoff 2015, 4). To ask what makes these sociotechnical imaginaries so persuasive. To identify the diverse agents that are engaged in the routine work of persuading us that the imagined futures are superior to existing automobility and are the solution to problems that have become no longer possible to ignore or deny (Braun and Randell 2020). The sociotechnical promises of a radically different, better, inevitable future, are an abiding and recurring feature of automobility (Norton 2008, 2021). A “fetishistic belief in technological fixes”, as David Harvey (2003, 12) has argued, “supports the naturalistic view that technological progress is both inevitable and good, and that there is no way we can or even should try to collectively control, redirect, or limit it”.

3. The automobility imaginary

Among the component elements of the automobility imaginary is the succession of automobility sociotechnical imaginaries of the past and the present, some of which are described above. However, unlike sociotechnical imaginaries as defined by Jasanoff and Kim, which are temporally located, as Jasanoff puts it, in the “future imperfect tense”, the automobility imaginary is a singular and enduring imaginary that is located in the present continuous tense. It is comprised not only of “publicly performed visions of desirable futures” but, to paraphrase Jasanoff (2015), is also comprised of collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of a *desirable present* – utopias not of the future but utopias in the here and now.

There is a now substantial body of theoretical and empirical research that has documented the myriad ways automobiles have been publicly represented. Automobiles are figured as normal, essential, convenient and safe, as metaphorical and literal vehicles of status, adventure, power, freedom, happiness, autonomy and efficiency, and as objects of beauty. It is under descriptions and visions such as these that automobility is routinely *publicly* imagined. “Imagination” understood not as what might be inside people’s heads but, as Jasanoff (2015, 5–10) has argued, as a social practice: the *enacting of public performances*.

It is an imaginary that is ubiquitous and publicly performed through a variety of practices and across a multitude of locations: in the mass media; in popular culture, in movies (Zimmerman 1995; Archer 2017, 512–513) and music; in advertising; in road safety and driver education programs (Elvebakk 2007); in books; in science fiction (Braun 2019); in works of art and in collectibles; at Formula One races; in trade magazines and television shows for automobile enthusiasts; in corporate statements; in car showrooms, motor shows (Randell 2020) and museum exhibits (Victoria and Albert Museum 2019,2020; Braun and Randell 2021); in articles that regularly appear in the economics section of newspapers and television news that report on the financial circumstances of the automobile industry and individual automobile manufacturers; and routinely on the road (Conley 2012; Randell 2017).

Not only do words “do things”, as J. L. Austin (1965) in *How to Do Things with Words* put it, images also do things (Hook and Glaveanu 2013), as do material objects do things (Verbeek 2005). There is no such thing as an automobile that exists as pure materiality. Shorn of its endlessly iterable significations (Derrida 1988, 7) the automobile is no more than an engineering abstraction, which abstraction is legible *only* in the form of design blueprints and technical specifications. That abstraction is no more an automobile than a book is “just” paper and ink, a painting “just” canvas and paint, a house “just” bricks and mortar, a spoken word “just” sound waves. Luxury automobiles, more obviously but no more so than any other automobile, signify and embody social class. Not only some but *all* automobiles are instances of what are colloquially called “status symbols” (cf. Weber 1978, 302–307). Italian sports cars and American pickup trucks are distinctly masculine objects, that is, gendered objects (Randell 2019), which is not to suggest that they appeal only to men, or that only men drive them (Halberstam 1998). Automobiles can signify mundane domesticity (Gartman 2004) or, as Stanley Fish (1994, 273–279) in “The Unbearable Ugliness of Volvos” once argued, can represent utilitarian, non-ostentatiousness, signified through their very ugliness. Automobiles may be markers of personal and collective memory. Once a symbol of the National Socialist people’s community and later an “icon of the early German Federal Republic”, the Volkswagen Beetle, Bernhard Rieger (2013, 42–91, 123–187, 257) notes, “conveys distinctive meanings that are widely recognized across the social spectrum”.

Open to endless interpretation (Rorty 1982, 94), each and every automobile signifies more than itself and is saturated with meaning. No less a signifier than a spoken or written utterance, the meaning of the automobile is a function of its context, yet the automobile at the same time is a component of the context for any other element within the automobility imaginary. It is a reflexivity to which all language is irremediably subject. As Thomas Wilson and Don Zimmerman (1979, 60) put it in respect to gestures and utterances:

The meaning of a gesture or utterance depends on the particular context in which it occurs. Moreover, the elements of that context themselves depend on their own contexts for their meanings [T]hese latter contexts include the very utterance or gesture with which we began: each element in the situation is reflexively related to the others.

The world, as Harold Garfinkel (1967, 1–34) argued in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, is a world of radical and irremediable indexicality. Automobiles are components of what Martin Heidegger (1962, H 109) called an “equipmental totality”. Like utterances, the

ostensible materiality of automobility is no less an interconnected, indexical and reflexive collection of signifiers than its ostensibly non-material representations: the verbal, textual and visual images that Jasanoff and Kim define as the components of (sociotechnical) imaginaries. Conversely, the ostensibly imaginary is no less an interconnected, indexical and reflexive collection of the ostensibly material (Jensen, Lassen, and Lange 2020). The latter, no less than utterances, possess all the properties of a conventional speech act (Austin 1965): they are performative and possess illocutionary force.

As conceptualized by Jasanoff and Kim, a sociotechnical imaginary is reflexively defined by and simultaneously defines its opposing binary concept – the sociotechnical artifact. While sociotechnical artifacts may be “encoded”, as Jasanoff (2015) puts it, by the meanings attributed to them within an imaginary, sociotechnical artifacts are not conceptualized by Jasanoff and Kim as components of the imaginary, as publicly performed visions that are no less visions than the visions that brought the ostensibly material artifact into existence. We have argued, in contrast, that the automobility imaginary is comprised both of the class of entities that Jasanoff and Kim call “visions” and what is conventionally understood to be the materiality of automobility: automobiles, infrastructure and the urban and rural spaces that have been transformed by automobility (McShane 1994; Featherstone 2004).

In short, the ostensibly real and the ostensibly imaginary are indistinguishable: neither empirically, as referring to different categories of objects that might be available for analysis; nor conceptually, to refer to ontologically disparate entities; nor temporally, referring to objects that exist solely in an imaginary in the present but which, when constructed as real material objects in the future, cease to be components of that imaginary. There is no space nor analytically definable component of automobility that is real, and a separate part that is merely imaginary. Automobility reality, we are suggesting, *is* the automobility imaginary. Stated conversely, the automobility imaginary *is* automobility reality. It is a world - an ontology - wherein reality and imaginary are one and the same, hence indistinguishable.

4. The ontopolitics of automobility

To understand how this imaginary/reality came into being and how it is reproduced requires attending to power. A political order (Agamben 1998, 97) that has been constituted through the activities of an assemblage of automobile related human and non-human agents, the automobility imaginary is a *political* ontology (Esposito 2021). Those agents, recursively, are themselves components of the automobility imaginary. From within that world the individual material objects of which automobility is composed each appear to be real precisely because they appear to be material in ways that ostensibly non-material entities do not so appear. Their significations – beauty, power, speed, exhilaration, freedom, autonomy, or, more mundanely, the bland, underpowered, slow, unexhilarating, functional fulfilment of caring responsibilities – are assumed to inhere within each individual object. It is a world of commonsense realism. Within the imaginary, what is held to be real and what is held not to be real are delimited and separated: what automobility is and what automobility is not; what has been publicly constructed as intrinsic to automobility and what has been publicly constructed as contingent.

The suasive success of the former, that which has been constructed as intrinsic to automobility within the publicly performed routine visions of the automobility imaginary, requires the simultaneous occlusion of the latter, the contingent. It is an imaginary comprised both of presences and absences. Present are the “getting by” and “making do” of mundane automobility practices, such as caring responsibilities, which have been made efficient and simple within the equipmental totality of automobility. Absent is violence, which has been “bracketed”, rendering it politically, economically and ethically acceptable (Braun and Randell 2022). Discursively, it is represented under the designation “accident” (Bucsuházy et al. 2020), each one of which is routinely made to disappear from the location of its occurrence (Beckmann 2004). In the wake of an accident the road is cleaned, damaged automobiles are removed, victims are hospitalized, buried or cremated, statistics are compiled, drivers held to be culpable are retrained. The accident and its consequences are discursively marginalized and made to disappear not only from their physical location but from the automobility imaginary. It is world of simultaneous simulation and dissimulation (Baudrillard 1994, 3). What is not present is simulated as real; what is present is dissimulated as non-existent.

5. Deconstructing and destituting automobility

The three principal ways automobility has been represented within the automobility studies literature are as a “system” (Urry 2004), as a “regime” (Böhm et al. 2006b) and as a *dispositif*, or “apparatus” (Manderscheid 2012; 2014). If conceptualized as a *dispositif* the challenge becomes that of “deactivating”, rendering inoperative, that which Giorgio Agamben has described as “the *dispositif* of the exception of bare life” (Agamben 2014, 66).

In the epilogue to *Homo Sacer* Agamben (2017, 1268) draws the following contrast between “constituent power” (*potere costituente*) and “destituent potential” (*potenza destituente*):

if to constituent power there correspond revolutions, revolts, and new constitutions, namely, a violence that puts in place and constitutes a new law, for destituent potential it is necessary to think entirely different strategies, whose definition is the task of the coming politics. A power that has only been knocked down with a constituent violence will resurge in another form, in the unceasing, unwinnable, desolate dialectic between constituent power and constituted power, between the violence that puts the juridical in place and violence that preserves it [see, for example, (Lenin 1965, 370)].

Automobility is precisely such a constituent and constituted power. The imaginary reality that is automobility is not an indistinct, undefined “automobility”; even less is automobility simply “cars” or, as it described in the Oxford English Dictionary (entry for Automobility), “a mode of transport”, or, as Urry has described it, a “system”. “Automobility”, to paraphrase Derrida (2015, 20), is an “ill-named thing”. What goes by the name “automobility” is first and foremost a *political* ontology (Esposito 2021), a world that has been brought into existence through the deployment of constituent power of the type described by Agamben. It has appropriated space through the violence of death and injury, of both humans and our fellow terrestrials (Derrida 2008; Latour 2018). Within the juridically bracketed space that is the road, we are all reduced to what Agamben

(2018, 69) calls “bare life” (*nuda vita*) the figure of *homo sacer*; he or she who may be killed without homicide having been committed (Braun and Randell 2022). The two socio-technical imaginaries that promise to transform automobility, the electric and autonomous vehicle sociotechnical imaginaries, are none other than the recurrence of the desolate dialectic of automobility (Henderson 2020). It is a dialectic of successive promises of radically transformed and better sociotechnical futures, each of which creates new problems, injustices and harms. The publicly performed visions of a transformed automobility are paradigmatic examples of constituent power.

The English verbs to constitute, to institute and to destitute, of which the latter has largely fallen into disuse, are derived from the Latin root verb *statuere*. To destitute stands roughly in opposition to the verbs to constitute and to institute.¹ A post-automobility destituent politics would be directed to the deactivating, the deposing, the de-stituting, of the world, the ontology, that is the automobility imaginary, rendering it inoperative and “inaugurating a new reality” (Agamben 2014, 71) – an alternative world.

6. Strategies of destitution

Automobility in its entirety, its diverse and vast indexical collection of interchangeable and indistinguishable signifiers and signifieds that is the automobility imaginary, is an exemplary instance of what the Situationist writer Raoul Vaneigem (1996, 271) called a “factory of collective illusion”. Through its publicly performed visions the collective illusion that is the automobility imaginary is constituted. Its destitution would require collective disillusionment, public deconstructive performances of the taken-for-granted, self-evident visions and images of contemporary automobility that are grounded in an epistemology of common-sense realism.

Foucauldian automobility scholarship has focused on the construction of subjectivities, selves, who want and desire automobility (Böhm et al. 2006a; Paterson 2007), who have been convinced of its truths. What has been constructed is not just subjectivities that desire, but an entire world permeated by desire, populated by objects of desire. That world is the automobility imaginary. The political challenge is to make this visible *qua* imaginary. It is a world not just comprised of, and constituted by, the obviously symbolic – advertisements, popular culture, music, and so forth – but also by entities that appear “real” because they appear to be physical and material in ways that the obviously imaginary do not so appear.

We might here turn to classical phenomenology for some pointers. Edmund Husserl (1970, 137) suggested in *The Crisis of the European Sciences* that coming to an understanding of phenomenology was akin to the experience of a “religious conversion”, resulting in a “complete personal transformation”. William Barrett, in his Introduction to Daisetz Suzuki’s (1956) *Zen Buddhism*, wrote that he had been told by a friend of Heidegger, who had once visited Heidegger at his home and found him reading one of Suzuki’s books, that Heidegger remarked that if he had correctly understood what Zen Buddhism was, that this was what he had been trying to get at all along, not only in *Being and Time* but in all his writings (see also Heidegger 1976, 214–215). If we have correctly understood Husserl and Heidegger, their point was that coming to an understanding of phenomenology requires an existential shift from one world, one ontology, to another. A Zen like shift from everyday realism, wherein we believe that there is an already

constituted world “out there” that we “perceive” – a term that is already entangled within a realist metaphysics – to a mode of existence that Heidegger referred to as “Being-in-the-world”, and Husserl as the “lifeworld”. That world is not, however, an “impolitical” ontology (Esposito 2021) but an unequivocally political ontology, a world that has been constituted through the exercise of power/violence.

Beyond the significance of phenomenology for the individual, Husserl (1970, 137) insisted that its implications were political and global, which he described as an “existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such”. For the subject at hand, the task would be an existential transition from the self-evident everyday truths and experiences within the automobility imaginary to a world wherein the violence and destruction of automobility become visible as forms of constitutive power, not as unfortunate, remediable contingencies. It is to find ourselves inside the equivalent of, as Timothy Morton (2013, 104) has put it, “the expanding sphere of a slow-motion nuclear bomb”, within which sphere one has, he adds, “a few seconds for amazement as the fantasy that you inhabited a neat, seamless little world melts away”. The slow-motion nuclear explosion is the planetary destruction that engulfs us, caused in no small part by automobility.

In an essay first published in 1960, Lewis Mumford predicted that “if our present system of development goes on, without a profound change in our present planning concepts and values, the final result will be a universal wasteland, unfit for human habitation” (reprinted in Mumford 1963, 223–233). Our circumstances are more dire and the wasteland we are staring into is a more profoundly uninhabitable place than Mumford could possibly have imagined in 1960. In this sense automobility is “destituting” in the English language sense of the term: laying waste, rendering our planet impoverished – destitute. It is destitution² accomplished through the constitutive power by which automobility has been constituted. It is that destituted world that the automobility imaginary has bequeathed us, whose routine violence is occluded through routine dissimulation. Entering that world – that ontology – would be akin to the religious conversion of which Husserl spoke. De-stituting the automobility imaginary would be to render it inoperative, not by building a new, “better” imaginary, but through making the slow violence of automobility visible (Nixon 2013); disrupting and rendering visible the deployment of the constituent power that sustains and reproduces automobility; deconstructing its common-sense realism, which epistemology is reproduced through constituent meta-physical power.

More concretely, what kinds of practical strategies might disrupt the routine dissimulations within the automobility imaginary, render its violence visible? One relatively successful de-stitution of an imaginary that we might learn from has been the destitution of the tobacco imaginary. Margaret Douglas et al. (2011, 162) have argued that there are significant parallels between tobacco and automobility violence, and the lobbying efforts of tobacco and automobility interests. “Both industries, they note, “use professional lobbyists and front organizations – often the same organizations”, while “their tactics [have] included intense public relations campaign[s]”. “Both industries”, they add, “have sought to discredit evidence about the harms caused by their products, often using paid scientific ‘experts’ to do so” (see also McCright and Dunlap 2003). While both tobacco and road accidents came to be defined as global public health issues at roughly the same time, the early 1960s, the response of public health authorities has been

very different (Pepper 2018). To “reduce car use and increase active travel”, Douglas et al. (2011, 165) suggest the adoption of “similar techniques to those previously used to change attitudes to tobacco”. Although they do not enter into the details of what those techniques might be, it is a suggestion that opens a number of avenues.

First, an information campaign that, as with tobacco policies in many countries, provides basic information about risks and harms. Second, detailed visual representations of the effects of road violence, analogous to those visible on cigarette packets. Third, the placing of health warnings on automobiles and promotional sales materials. Fourth, forbidding the advertising of automobiles. Fifth, a move away from the misplaced focus on “the driver” as the responsible entity (Braun and Randell 2020). Sixth, as is the case with tobacco, the dissemination of information from respected national and international health organizations, such as the World Health Organization, regarding the decades of efforts by automobile manufacturers, oil companies, lobbying organizations and other automotive interests, to advance their own interests in the face of the massive death caused by automobility.

In respect to point six, the recent *WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic 2021: addressing new and emerging products* has an entire chapter, “Tobacco Industry Interference”, that documents tactics employed by the tobacco industry to thwart tobacco cessation (World Health Organization 2021, 44–49). These include “building alliances and front groups to represent its case”; “attempting to fragment and weaken the public health community”; “disputing and suppressing public health information”; “producing and disseminating misleading research and information”; “directly lobbying and influencing policy-making”; “influencing ‘upstream’ policies, including trade treaties, to make it harder to pass public health regulations”; “litigating or threatening litigation”; “facilitating and causing confusion around tobacco smuggling, using it to fight tobacco control”; “seeking to manage and enhance its own reputation in order to increase its ability to influence policy” (World Health Organization 2021, 44). Observations such as these regarding the automobile industry, in contrast, are entirely absent from the 2018 *WHO Global Status Report On Road Safety* (World Health Organization 2018). Were they included, this would represent a major change in the direction of automobility health policies. It would require a change in the very title of the World Health Organization’s regularly published “Global Status Report On Road Safety”. “Road safety” is as much an oxymoron as would be “tobacco safety”.

Beyond challenges to the tobacco imaginary, we might also borrow from efforts to challenge the epistemic violence associated with human trafficking and sex work (Chapman-Schmidt 2019), or challenges to a colonial imaginary that occludes the slow ecological violence being wrought upon all of us, but above all within the Global South (Nixon 2013; Sovacool et al. 2021).

7. Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction, we wholeheartedly support creating social relations of equality, justice and freedom via active, collectivized and socialized mobilities – ontomobilities. Rendering visible the violence by which the imaginary has been constituted, through which everyday life is governed, opens possibilities for imagining new means to resist automobility and move towards alternative, post-automobility, forms of everyday life. We have argued that the ostensibly material and the ostensibly imaginary are indistinguishable.

Enmeshed, they create social hierarchies, inequalities and practices of injustice by coercing humans and our fellow terrestrials (Latour 2018) into enduring multiple forms of violence. Destituent power may be effected through social practices that resist the discursive marginalization and constant occlusion of violence within the automobility imaginary. Those practices would be directed towards contesting the simultaneous simulation of a visibly present as real and the dissimulation of the occluded as non-real (Baudrillard 1994, 3).

Our aim has been to open a space for identifying ruptures that suggest a destituent counter-politics for moving towards a post-automobility world. We have made several suggestions, but further empirical and critical research is required to identify and develop potential forms of destituent resistance that would challenge common-sense realist beliefs in efficiency, simplicity and the conviction that it cannot be otherwise (Woolgar and Lezaun 2013). How, for example, by resisting the appropriation of space that automobility requires as it continues in its rhizomatic expansion across the planet (Braun and Randell 2022), we might ground forms of life that are more equitable and sustainable. The point is not to transition to an equally destructive apparatus, but to de-stitute the existing one. The risk is to inadvertently reproduce the very apparatus that one opposes through forms of resistance that performatively replicate the very ills for which they are an ostensible solution (Benjamin 1996).

There is a vast assemblage of agents that represent, speak on behalf of, sustain and reproduce the automobility imaginary: automobile manufacturers, state apparatuses, automobile clubs, road safety researchers, engineers, the mass media, marketing agencies, lobbying associations, think tanks, automobiles themselves and automobility infrastructure. Collectively, they are world-makers. There are no agents able to mobilize anything approaching the ontopolitical power that is routinely mobilized by, and on behalf of, automobility.

Steffen Böhm, Campbell Jones, Chris Land and Matthew Paterson (2006a) in their edited volume, *Against Automobility*, remarked that:

Every day, throughout the world, millions engage collectively in presenting possibilities that run against the current regime of automobility, and we will be very happy indeed if the publication of this book contributes to that movement of resistance.

More than fifteen years have passed since the publication of *Against Automobility*, yet automobility continues its rhizomatic expansion across the planet, and with that expansion, increased road violence. Annually, approximately 1,350,000 people are killed and 50,000,000 are seriously injured (World Health Organization 2018, vii), an increase of 100,000 deaths since only 2015 (World Health Organization 2015, vii), while hundreds of millions of animals are killed each year through collisions with vehicles (Davenport and Davenport 2006, 165–189). We would reiterate their hopes, but what is required are alternative metaphors, descriptions, narratives and strategies to those that have dominated the automobility studies field. The form of resistance we are suggesting is one that would rupture the fabric of automobility to create opportunities to create a world, as Hannah Arendt (1994, 233) once put it, that is fit for human habitation, and also, we would add, fit for habitation by our fellow terrestrials.

Notes

1. In the original Italian *Homo Sacer*, (2018, 1265–1279) the two terms are *potere costituente* and *potenza destituente*. It is clear from Agamben's use of two similar but different nouns (*potere* and *potenza*) that he wishes to make a distinction not just between a power that is constituent and one that is destituent, the difference residing in the adjective, but also between two forms of power, the difference residing also in the noun. *Potere* and *potenza* are usually translated as "power" in English. "Potential" is not an entirely satisfactory translation. The central translation difficulty concerns the English word "destitute." In English it is typically used either as an adjective (to be destitute, homeless for example) or as a noun (the destitute, those who are homeless). Rarely is it used as a verb, neither in the infinitive verb form "to destitute" nor as a conjugated verb. The OED entry for the verb form of destitute relies on a quotation in French, which is the epigraph to this essay. The Italian *destituente* in *potenza destituente* is the present participle of the verb *destituire* used as an adjective and suggests a power/potential that performs the act of destituting. It is the verb form that is central to Agamben's exposition. In Daniel Heller-Roazen's translation of *Homo Sacer*, the verb forms of *destituire* are translated as "depose" (Agamben 2017, 1275); what is lost here is that Agamben is referring to *the act* of de-stituting. These translation issues recall, appropriately enough, the Italian aphorism, *traduttore, traditore*.
2. The English "destitution" possesses significations that the Italian homonym, *destituzione*, lacks. *Destituzione* signifies neither poverty, homelessness, nor a world that has been rendered destitute, but refers to the legal act of removing from power (*destituire*). The impeachment of a US president, for example, would be his or her *destituzione*.

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