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## Breaching the Dialectic with Situated Knowledges: The Case of Postsocialist Naturecultures

### Abstract

The article analyzes the significance of situated knowledges for going beyond dominating conceptual dichotomies that a) establish *status quo* dialectics, b) proliferate homogenization of the Global Northern experienced materialities, and c) conceal and suppress alternate affectual body-environment experiences and materializations. With the example of postsocialist ontogenealogies, the article analyzes the potential blind spots when failing to consider both sides of a *status quo* dialectic in their interconnectedness. To conclude, the article suggests the potential of situated knowledges as a vehicle for future environmental ethicalities.

### Keywords

Ontogenealogy, Postsocialist Embodiment, Situated Knowledges, Genealogy, Environment

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### Introduction

In this article, I analyze the dialectic of the local and the global (both in scholarly as well as a material context) to demonstrate the significance of situated knowledges (Haraway 2016) via concrete examples of local ontogenealogies

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of the body-environment parallelisms in the postsocialist time-space of Latvia. The main goal of this article is to use local knowledges as a vehicle for going beyond the dialectic between local and global, self and other, private and communal that make up the fabric of Global Northern understandings of body-environments, and to investigate these entanglements via the route of parallelisms between the understanding of the body and human relations with the environment.

After a brief note on the method, the first part of the article will concisely comment on the conceptual background from which I refer to the dominating conceptual dichotomies and the formation of a *status quo* dialectic upon the backbone of substance ontology that haunts the Global Northern socio-political discourses from at least the Antiquity. In line with various accounts of environmental humanities scholars, esp. in feminist posthumanities, such as Astrida Neimanis (2017), Stacy Alaimo (2010), Cecilia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti (2018), it is my argument here that the reflection of environmental humanities research through philosophical conceptualizations of the body exposes a significant dimension for the necessity of transgressing the status quo dialectics of local–global, private–communal, self–other, and other such dichotomies that raise various philosophical and environmental debates circling the question of rootedness and nomadism (Heise 2008).

I then focus on a specific case in the next part of the article. Namely, the dialectic between the Soviet socialist and the capitalist understanding of body-environments expressed via deprivatization<sup>1</sup> and privatization understood as dialectic processes behind the communal and private dichotomy. Here, I argue for the need for a different kind of subjectivity beyond this dialectic via the reflection of postsocialist affective experiences and what they can contribute to the scholarly discussion. There are several interconnected reasons for this move. First, the postsocialist or post-soviet space represents the “East” that has vanished with the establishment of the Global North in contrast to the earlier conceptualization of the West (Jehlička et al. 2020, 286-287; Müller 2018, 3-4; Sauka 2022d), and as such represents the materialization of the homogenization of narratives within the Global North itself. Second, the Soviet past allows considering both 1) the significance of affectual and experienced body-environment relations that go beyond the dominating narratives as sources of knowledge production, as well as 2) the

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I use the term “deprivatization” in a broader meaning than its original meaning of something private being transferred to the public sector, to emphasize the ontogenaeological depersonalization of nature via not only economical but also ideological deprivatization practices.

various ways in which the *status quo* dialectic can come up in most various circumstances (as in the case of Soviet and capitalist logics), showing its unfortunate importance also beyond the usual framing of the Global North.

Lastly, I conclude the article with a brief reflection upon Rosi Braidotti's proposal of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 1994), with the example of Latvian pagan traditions, as a potential proposition for affirmative, affectual environmental ethicality, to showcase the possible way forward with situated knowledges that reflect planetary embeddedness and heterogeneity, beyond the *status quo* dialectic. In this context, the postsocialist space is a significant potential ground for rich alternate genealogies, esp. in the context of the Baltic region as one of the latest regions to be Christianized in Europe. Thus, it demands further reflection on its potential as an independent knowledge producer rather than an unimportant 'province' of the North.

### A Note on the Method

Critical genealogy (Koopman 2013; Sarasin 2009; Sauka 2020b) outlines a complicated way of the development of phenomena, accentuates the multiplicity of 'beginnings,' and refuses the search for a single origin (*Ursprung*), thus, refusing grand, universal narratives (Šuvajevs 2015). Among others, the idea of genealogy can overstep its role as a methodology and be re-framed within the context of new materialism and biophilosophy within the sphere of experienced materiality, according to Michel Foucault's idea of the lived body's entanglement with its co-constituting conditions—natureculture, its climate, nourishment, and soil (Foucault 1977). Within this context, life itself is exposed as genealogical.

For the sake of a conceptual distinction between genealogy as a method and a genealogical conception of life itself, I, thus, reconceptualize an ontologically understood new materialist genealogy via the concept of ontogenealogy (Sauka 2022b) to denote the genealogical development of naturecultures (Haraway 2016) and to accentuate the materialization of genealogies via transcorporeal (Alaimo 2010) entanglements of body-environments, and the parallelisms between imaginaries that refer to the body and those that refer to the environment, and their respective materializations due to the transcorporeality and processuality of human and more-than-human naturecultures (Sauka 2020c; 2022c).

Upon these conceptual grounds, grows the significance of the question of the time and space wherein a specific understanding of the body and nature develops,<sup>2</sup> and the ontogenealogies of the environment and the body can be understood as co-constitutive to the lived materiality (Sauka 2022b), while the lived materiality itself partakes in the constitution of the ontogenealogies we live by.

Here, the ontogenealogical account demonstrates the necessity to take process ontology seriously for future ethicalities via the two interrelated paths of embodied critical thinking (Sauka 2022a) and seeking out existing (if somewhat concealed) situated knowledges (Sauka, *forthcoming*) for reflection upon affectual and experienced genealogies via a first-person phenomenological approach and a genealogical analysis, respectively.

Moreover, by combining Foucauldian genealogy with new materialist and critical posthumanist considerations (Braidotti 2013), the ontogenealogical approach critically assesses human-centered substance ontology as the potential grounds for homogenization of today's narratives and life-worlds. Namely, a genealogical conception of life reflects the processuality of life itself as well as the processuality of the understanding of life that, in turn, influences the lived materialities. It is, hence, a likely account for a critique of the status quo dialectics of life and death, local and global, subject and object. Namely, although this is a wide range of dichotomies that requires a more detailed analysis in other contexts, here they are demonstrated in the light of their common ground within substance ontology (Radomska 2016; Nicholson and Dupré 2018; Dupré 2012). Thus, the approach of ontogenealogy allows me to view these dichotomies as ontologically interdependent and interconnected in the context of their roots within substance ontology that emphasizes *things* before *processes* and strives to define and fixate meanings within a logic of A is not not-A. This logical structure is in stark contrast to the material processuality of life and (non)living (Radomska 2016, ch. 1, Povinelli 2016), and the fixation of meanings within this logic, thus, creates a mutually dependent dichotomy (subject as the opposite of object, life as the opposite to death, local as the opposite of global) that here is termed as a status quo dialectic due to the practical interdependence of the opposites.

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<sup>2</sup> The conceptual backbone of these considerations is further explored in "Ontogenealogies of Body-Environments: Perspectives for an Experiential Ontological Shift" (Sauka, *forthcoming*) a forthcoming article that was presented at the "The XVIII Symposium of the International Association of Women Philosophers (IAPh): Defining the Future, Rethinking the Past 2021" (the speech is available online, see Sauka 2021). Thus, this article is a further installment for the consideration of situated knowledges and will not dwell on the method of ontogenealogy in any further detail.

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### **The *Status Quo* Dialectic: A Critical Note on Abstraction and Substance Ontology**

The dominance of the critique of Global Northern or Western conceptualizations of nature in research is to be evaluated ambivalently. On the one hand, nature discourses of the Global North are dominating and, as such, require critical attention since their influence has overstepped their supposed geographical borders. Thus, the critique of the Global Northern understanding of nature is significant for the environmental humanities. On the other hand, the dominance of this critique itself acquires critique today (Neimanis et al. 2015) since it instates the perception of the univocity of genealogies. Namely, it creates the illusion that the lived experience and understanding of concepts such as *nature*, *the body*, or *the environment* is exhausted by the dominating discourses not only in a local but also in a global context, where they have proliferated due to the globalization processes (Guha 1989; Guha and Martínez Alier 1997; Neimanis et al. 2015).

This accentuation of the dominating perceptions, thus, both secures a false perception of the homogeneity of nature genealogies, as well as facilitates and enforces these dominating perceptions, continuing their expansion. According to the perceived *inscription into the flesh* of the genealogies of beliefs and understandings, this also means that the popularization of certain discourses results in their material implementation, thus, restricting access to other alternative development options of the embodied experience and socialization.

For example, if the dominating narrative rests upon the understanding of nature-culture distinction, wilderness and civilization materially become increasingly separated, or—if the forest is understood as a timber farm, this understanding also gnaws into the forest itself, reflecting a lived genealogy, namely transforming the forest into a timber farm, and thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. The co-constitution of materiality is, hence, related to the dominance of certain perceptions.

The homogenization of critique vs. the ruling narrative goes hand in hand and represents another dimension of the dominating perceptions called the *status quo* dialectic. Namely, according to the ontogenealogical interconnectedness of dichotomies, the dominating perception *is not just* that nature is a mere resource for human use—a measurable, static, mechanical background for human flourishing. Instead, nature simultaneously is *both* a resource and a sacral ground that *should not be touched*, and the dominating Global Northern narrative upholds this contrasting dichotomy of fragility vs.

meaningless object, subject vs. object, sacral vs. secular, mind vs. body, etc., abstractions that are based upon a substance ontology that seeks to categorize upon the basis of either-or. As such, it is in opposition to a genealogical and processual understanding of life and non-life, where the manifold beginnings of each occurrence presume the possibility of anything to be “either” and “or” at the same time. For example, a stone might be living and non-living at the same time, depending on the perspective of its role in the proliferation of life, or—an entity might have agency without pronounced subjectivity in context with the processual entanglement in which it is situated.

What allows the *status quo* dialectic to build a non-contradictory life-world for its carriers is the common attribute of human exceptionalism (Anderson 2018) that the opposing dichotomies bear with them. Either considered angelic or demonical, humanity is exempt from these dichotomies as an alienated onlooker whose *touch* upon nature is either toxic or to be thought of as a blessing. This enantiosemy makes sense in a human-centered substance ontology, where, from an *I-conscious* standpoint, *thingness* trumps *processuality*, both as a measure for distinguishing between self and other or subject and object, as well as from the standpoint of defining life as opposed to death, or as opposed to an object, in context with the strive for self-preservation.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence for the fact that this anthropocentric substance ontology goes deep within the Global Northern lifeworlds can be thought of in the context of language, for it is linguistically hard to formulate concepts that go beyond the *status quo* dialectic, without falling into the trap of a new abstract dichotomy and the debates over either-or that follow.

Moreover, human-centered substance ontology can be traced, for example, through classic Freudian psychoanalysis (via the dichotomous understanding of life and death forces (see further Sauka 2020c) or classical phenomenological structure of an intentional *I-consciousness* that “has” a body as an object to control and maintain. Both conceptualizations represent a dominating understanding of the self as a fixation that needs to be preserved in a fight against the force of dispersion identified as a death drive.<sup>4</sup> Within this conceptual background, deterritorialization and reterritorializa-

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<sup>3</sup> I have talked about this more elaborately in other articles, such as Sauka 2020a; 2020c and 2022c.

<sup>4</sup> In contrast, a processual understanding would equate both drives as non-dialectic life drives for the proliferation and sustenance of life, where preservation is only possible as a moment, a fixture within the movement, and selfhood comes about as a stabilized process.

tion (Heise 2008, 51; Deleuze and Guattari 1977; 1978) mirror the forces of death and life, de-centralization and de-subjectification, and the maintenance of selfhood.

Thus the dichotomic, dialectic thinking of embodiment also seeps into other similar dichotomies of local vs. global, deterritorialization vs. reterritorialization, rootedness vs. nomadism (Heise 2008), etc., both on account of the constitution of selfhood based on substance ontology that leads to the prioritization of self-preservation over dispersion and variability, as well as on account of the either-or logic of the *thing*-oriented ontology.

Many of these dichotomies are of great importance for environmental philosophies and humanities today and allow considering the discussion of the Anthropocene as one side of a contraposition of the dialectic dance of the opposites.

The scholarly insights that work within this dialectic are not always misguided. In most cases, scholarly contributions that can be considered part of this dialectic give meaningful insight into the consequences of human impact upon planetary processes, thus, reflecting the consequences of the *status quo* dialectic. Yet, it seems that a reflection of the deep-seated assumptions that come from the conceptualizations that we, as humans, have of ourselves as the bodies that we live by, and the environments we live by, is necessary to find a way to go beyond the dialectic and to expose the substantial heterogeneity of the ontogenealogies we live by since a critique of the dominant narrative often cannot go further than providing negation (i.e., the inverted image) of the same, thus, replicating it,<sup>5</sup> where future ethicalities are considered.

“Negate thyself,” thus, lives hand-in-hand with “negate the world” within this dialectic, as is also evidenced by the pleas to save and conserve nature that goes hand-in-hand with human “progress” already from Antiquity.

### **The Case of the Local and the Global: The Pains of Abstraction**

However, the materializations of this dialectic are problematic because of the inherent human exceptionalism and because the abstracted dichotomies that make up its structure stifle other alternate ontogenealogies by pushing

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the more radical accounts of human toxicity, represent this dialectic well. See, for example, del Val 2022, and MacCormack 2020 that propose stopping human reproduction, or, as in McCormack’s case—the ideal of a planet without humans, without considering humanity as part of the planetary naturecultures.

them out of what can be meaningfully expressed into the realm of the linguistically impossible, which is often the case of any or most dichotomic constructions that create the illusion of an either-or logic, thus representing a genealogy of the either-or at hand. Since the scope of this article does not allow a further discussion of the variable dichotomies and their respective consequences, I here briefly discuss the local vs. the global, wilderness vs. civilization and rootedness vs. nomadism as exemplary cases.

A well-known critique of the Global Northern discourses is Ramachandra Guha's (1989; 1997) critique of what is termed as the "radical American environmentalism"—an approach in environmental philosophy and practice that has stemmed from the movement of deep ecology (Naess 1973; 1985; 1989) and primarily focuses on the preservation of pristine wilderness. His reflections demonstrate how damaging it can be to extrapolate a local approach based upon the local situation—the American wilderness-civilization divide to global contexts. However, what is significant in this context is how the dichotomy becomes useless in these discussions. While the "global contexts" *within* American environmentalism are usually understood via an essentialist lens of homogeneity that presumes wilderness and nature to have equal needs everywhere, the factual global contexts presume heterogeneity, i.e., the global necessitates the acceptance of the local, and *vice versa*—the presumed essentialist understanding of nature as a global phenomenon is, in fact,—a local approach. Thus, by presuming that alternate approaches are conflictual with global demands, American environmentalism extrapolates a local approach to global heterogeneity. From a substance ontological view of either-or, the dichotomy, thus, becomes useless to any coherent thinking with the environments we live by.

Moreover, the "local context" from which it stems is almost certainly reinforced by the thought patterns that maintain it; namely, it is not only the case that this local thinking stems from the situation at hand (a distinction between wilderness and civilization in America) but also the case that the local situation stems from this way of thinking. Thus, this case also exemplifies the genealogy of the dichotomy of wilderness vs. civilization as embedded within the *status quo* dialectic and can be similarly dismantled when questioning the naturalness of a carefully preserved supposedly "wild" region (for what is wild about its careful maintenance?) and the wilderness of the modern urban jungles.

Should the idea of nature and, with it, also the intimate connectedness advertised by deep ecology, thus, be abandoned as such to get beyond the dialectics of human-nature? Scholars are undecided in this regard, where,

for example, embodied materialism (Salleh 2017) and critical embodied thinking (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdóttir 2016) underscore the necessity to reconnect with the natural embeddedness, among others, on the grounds of the debasing that nature, as well as women, have endured in the Global North (Lloyd 1984; Merchant 1990), and others (Vogel 2015) argue for the “death of nature” as it has been previously understood. However, the problem with these discussions is the discussion itself—for it presumes a particular idea of nature as an abstracted concept that, via abstraction, lies within the dialectic. The main takeaway, thus, seems to be the necessity to reformulate the concept of nature outside of the dialectics of anthropocentrism–biocentrism, human–nature, local–global, etc., to allow deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1977; 1978) to exist in a constant flow of powers, rather than as fixed and finite processes.

In place-based approaches and global demands, going beyond the dialectic might mean a reconceptualization of what constitutes the relationship one experiences with what is colloquially referred to as “nature.” Namely, it might mean a reconceptualization of dwelling, sense of place, or rootedness (Heise 2008, 29-49) via a process ontology.

When thinking of “home” in the context of human–nature dialectics, one usually thinks of a human-made space, a landscaped place, or a haven of civilization in the chaotic surroundings (be their “natural” or “urban”) (Sauka 2022a). Conversely, “home” might mean the world, the Earth, or “Mother Nature,” which speaks to the same dialectics of biocentrism vs. anthropocentrism or bioconservatism vs. transhumanism. This notion of “home” as a dwelling, however, can be reconsidered in the context of experiential relations with the homes that people have, considering “becoming at home” or homing as a continuous, dynamic interaction that is both transformative and transformable and does not place human will in the center. In this sense, the notion of “a sense of place” might prove vital, and deep ecology could maybe redeem itself as an experiential practice that allows a shift in the dominating ontologies towards a postanthropocentric landscape that, however, takes into account the heterogeneous relationship that communities experience with their “home ecologies,” and the differences between the communities themselves and their ecological needs.

Thus, a genealogy that follows a Deleuzian logic of “and... and...” instead of “either–or” allows the hope that the exposition of the heterogeneity of ontogenealogies that breaks down the *status quo* dialectic allows appraising the bodily and transcorporeal experience of body–environment intercarnality as well as affectual and experienced ontogenealogies in a certain time-

space, illuminating the hitherto underrepresented aspects. For this analysis, the postsocialist space is not only a possible path as an “and...” in the overall heterogeneity of genealogies but also a fruitful ground of exploration because of the various, contradictory genealogies these regions bear within their experienced lifeworlds that, for example, have undergone long periods of occupation that signify being at home in a foreign land and being in a foreign land at home, often, both at the same time.

### **A Postsocialist Conundrum: The State and the Capital**

The question of the private and the communal is frequently linked with the question of the use of the commons (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 2015). It is, however, sometimes overlooked that a particular system is also always entangled with the discourses of embodiment and the environment that encircle it. Thus, to analyze the genealogies of the postsocialist and post-soviet naturecultures, it is not enough to reflect upon the pragmatic aspects of the situation since the phenomena (theories, practices, and attitudes) are embedded in particular ideological structures.

With the example of privatization via exceptionalism of the One vs. communalization via the creation of a Mass, I argue here that the Soviet ideologies of body environments are one side of the same denomination of the capitalist ideologies,<sup>6</sup> which, hence shows that neither socialist nor capitalist visions can be sufficient for the betterment of human-environment relations, as far as they stem from the same underlying human exceptionalism.

There is often the sentiment in place that Soviet embodiment is in complete opposition to Western notions of the body, especially in the context of sexuality. This sentiment seems, however, not the case when discussing the discourse of hygiene and physiology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where literature

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<sup>6</sup> I am here, of course, generalizing some of the conceptual underpinnings of “the soviet” and the “capitalist” (or “the state” and “the capital.” While both these social structures exist in an elaborate complexity of ontogenealogical underpinnings, from whence they become, and have been and deserve to be thus analyzed in a more detailed fashion, here my aim is precisely to emphasize these very big conceptual dichotomies because socially accepted and experienced generalizations tend to have a respectively huge ontogenealogical impact in terms of co-constituting materiality via the *ingraining in the flesh* of these ideas. The capitalist context is here, therefore, based on the previous discussion of the dominating Global Northern genealogies, while depersonalization is introduced as a concept that is especially characteristic of the Soviet era.

mainly reveals significant similarities between the discourses of hygiene and physiology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century across Eastern and Western Europe and Russia (Starks 2009).

Igors Šuvajevs, when commenting on the imperial discourses and their continuation in the soviet era, characterizes it like this:

It also has another characteristic inherited by “soviet anthropology,” namely, naturalism and the racialization of social thought. Society is viewed as an organism, thus maintaining the organologism of the discourse praxis (characterized by different organs, their entirety, that can be cured and cut out in the medicalization process).<sup>7</sup>

Organologism, however, is not lacking in Western conceptualizations of the society of that time, esp. in biopolitical contexts (Lemke 2007). How, then, to pinpoint the difference in place felt by so many, esp. in the postsoviet-postoccupied countries?

An important aspect of differentiation is the deprivatization of the body endeavored by the Soviet regime and communism more broadly. A sample case of this might be Stalin’s plans to transform Nature. This case might be one of the most radical attempts at transforming nature via technologization, and it falls roughly in line with other similar attempts at the time in the USA and other Western countries, as it is the time of the beginning of the Great Acceleration. The introduction of “In the Name of the Great Work: Stalin’s Plan for the Transformation of Nature and its Impact in Eastern Europe” (Olšáková 2016) notes that the plans for nature transformation implemented by the USSR are not widely different from similar events in the rest of the world in this time, yet the differences are marked by the attitude toward the significance of the individuality, namely, the seemingly similar discourses of industrialization at the beginning of the “Great Acceleration” are different in their attitude toward the individual embodied persons. While both sides of the iron curtain employ exploitative tactics, whether through the State or the Capital, in the first, the exploitation is masked with the veil of equality, while in the second—with the veil of opportunity, thus creating a monstrous dialectic dichotomy of the Mass and the One (that also mirror the different power structures).

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<sup>7</sup> Tomēr kopumā šo diskursīvo praksi raksturo nacionalizēšana un rasizācija. Tai ir vēl viena raksturīga iezīme, ko pārmanto arī „padomju antropoloģija”, proti, naturālisms un sociālās domas rasizācija. Sabiedrība tiek skatīta kā organisms, nodrošinot diskursīvās prakses organoloģiskumu (to raksturo dažādi orgāni un to kopums, ko medicinizācijas procesā var ārstēt, arī izgriezt) (Šuvajevs 2015, 70).

The difference in the genealogical underpinnings of both ways of exploitation demonstrates part of the difference between Western and Soviet understandings of the body as anchored within the opposition of impersonality and subjectification. Here, the search for situated genealogies, hence, faces the phenomena already highlighted by Michel Foucault—the similarity of discourse in the conditions of different praxes (as, for example, Foucault characterizes the sexual revolution as a continuation of Victorian puritanism, Foucault 1978) and—on the contrary—the existence of different discourses in the conditions of similar praxes (Foucault exemplifies this via the discourses of virginity in Ancient Greece and Medieval Europe, Foucault 1990).

The impersonal attitude toward the human being, propagated by the Soviet government, goes parallelly to the depersonalization of the environment, reflected by realized and unrealized nature transformation projects in the USSR, as well as Soviet architecture and city planning. Here the intercarinality of bodies and environments is represented in the context of the scientific materialism that highlights and seemingly affirms the significance of nature and simultaneously negates it in a dialectical move that demonstrates the human being as part of nature, while nature itself—as mechanical and thus to be depersonalized and deprivatized.

Moreover, since “Stalin’s ecological planning, which was essentially very utilitarian towards nature, obviously had mixed effects” (Lāce 2020, 65), among them—a “massive tree planting campaign [...] and a planting system of rotating crops” (Lāce 2020, 65), this is an example of the variability of the status quo dialectic, where despite the highlight on technologization, these plans include some aspects of conservationist discourse. This conundrum showcases Stalinist environmentalism and acceleration as a dialectic phenomenon in itself.

The danger is here to think that a preceding of the individual goes beyond human exceptionalism by considering the negation of humanity for the “good of nature.”

Entirely on the contrary, the parallelism of human and environmental imaginaries in Stalin’s plans for the transformation of nature and their further development can also be considered via the prism of exploitation (Olšáková 2019)—the value of nature is directly linked to its usefulness (similarly to how it is framed in the capitalist society), which, among others, can also be an aesthetic value, but, significantly, in the Soviet context nature loses individuality, and is subjected to the ideology of collectivism and communal work (Lysenkoism)—it is a proletarian nature that works towards the achievement of the “great goals of communism.” This (forcefully im-

posed) ideology, in context with an ontogenealogical account of the materialization of ideologies, not only co-constitutes the carnal becoming (in the forms of body exploitation and nature degradation) but also alienates the human from nature via the strive to connect them in a depersonalized and exploitative way that again demonstrates the abovementioned dialectic via the negation of affirmation. The human body undergoes similar dialectics marked by negation via affirmation and exploitation that is endeavored via literal negation of exploitation, etc.

Here, it is an example of how the devaluation of human bodies in the name of the depersonalized “Mass” reinforces the Same and the devaluation of human bodies in the name of the “personalized One” in a dialectic move of negation (of the personal) via affirmation (of the amorphous mass) mirroring the dialectic move of affirmation (the personalized One) that negates (the manifoldness) as an object. Suppose, in one case, nature represents the depersonalized crowd that is both the subject of exploitation and also the Goal of victory over nature, thus, negated via affirmation, in the other. In that case, nature is outwardly negated for the One (human, person), yet, both cases forego senseful, affectual manifoldness, giving way to an amorphous mass (Marder 2021) of the Same.

The Soviet case is, however, engaging as far as it includes the contradictory dialectic in one ideology (affirmation through negation), in contrast with Western discourses, where the affirmation of nature comes as an outside environmentalist critique of the dominating discourse rather than being concealed within the narrative. Thus, while the Great Acceleration in Western countries demonstrates a dialectic with deep ecology and other environmental philosophies, the depersonalization of nature within scientific materialism of the Soviet era includes the negation via affirmation within one seemingly non-contradictory ideology, thus, demonstrating how such dialectic can be thought of as a single two-sided coin also in the Western context.

Consequently, among other things, the depersonalization of nature and the human body in the USSR gave rise to a particular type of environmentalism—one that focuses on particular personalized objects that hold cultural value and are to be protected (Lāce 2020). Such as the 18-meter-high cliff Staburags on the bank of Daugava in Latvia that since 1965 has been 6.5 meters underwater due to the construction of the Pļaviņas Hydroelectric Power Station dam, raised many discussions, as it was considered a national treasure with considerable mythological and symbolical value. Until today, this discussion is still part of the cultural background. In response to the

depersonalized and deprivatized attitude toward nature, environmentalism in the 1980s originally served national purposes in the Soviet-occupied countries:

In places such as Latvia and Estonia, environmentalism was put in the service of nationalism, thereby contributing to the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia, too, in the 1980s, popular environmentalism escaped the control of officialdom and became a vehicle for the expression of political dissent (McNeill & Engelke 2016, 197).

Behind this loophole are thus both pragmatic and ideological reasons. Pragmatically it is a possible cover for national agendas. Nevertheless, politically–ideologically, it is also a consequential choice that links environmental concerns with sacralization, personalization, and individualization of nations and their living surroundings—putting value not only on the “great masterworks of the Soviet nature at large” but also on the individual natural values such as the cliff mentioned above Staburags. Here is an example of the nationalization of the commons and its parallels to the nationalization of the human being—festivities, bodily expressions, etc.

While not without its benefits, this kind of environmentalism, born out of the national resistance to occupation, while decolonial or at least de-colonizing at its heart, ironically becomes defenseless against capitalist colonization of nature that makes up the second half of the dialectical contraposition of human-nature relations, namely, the privatization party over the commons that sees its roots already in the “Age of Discovery” and even before.

Privatization mirrors deprivatization via the dialectical move of placing particular importance on a personalized One against the mass of depersonalized<sup>8</sup> and exploited others.

Thus, Global Northern environmentalism often falls into the trap of deprivatization, readily accepting calls for prioritizing the communal that quickly leads to the depersonalization of humanity, with the hope to thus take down the human from its ivory tower of exceptionalism. What the Soviet regime demonstrates, however, is that this is the double bind of humanity to both resent itself as a demon to be extinguished in the name of nature and to hail humanity as the highest good—in both cases, the dialectic persists. In both cases, however, what goes missing is the agency of the more-than-human natureculture, as well as the senseful, affectual ties humanity

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<sup>8</sup> I do not use the word “dehumanized” here since that would make it seem that all the othered populations are essentially human.

has with the environment both as a continuation of the individual bodies, as well as the place of habitation that does not only surround but also goes through, lives within and co-constitutes the transcorporeal embodiment.

This dialectic of the private and the communal (in the context of privatization and deprivatization as well as personalization and depersonalization processes) mirrors the dialectic of dwelling vs. global nomadic citizenship and the local and the global and refers to many interconnected problems in environmental humanities. In a broader sense, it can also be demonstrated as a dialectic of subjectification and objectification. As such, it is exemplified in scholarly environmentalism and non-academic, sociopolitical genealogies of thought and practice. In environmental thought, this dialectic of deprivatization and privatization is, again, reflected by the calls for human extinction on the one hand (as in MacCormack 2020 or Del Val 2022 and other antinatalist movements) and the call for “humanization” or personalization of all non-human life-forms on the other, as in the environmentalist accounts that endeavor an extension of humanism, for example, toward land (Leopold 1949) or animals (Singer 1975).

While both sides of the dialectic contraposition are to some extent beneficial for environmental theories, they also demonstrate serious fallacies. For example, the anthropomorphizing or, more precisely, capitalo-morphizing of individuality upon non-human agencies often implies what Elizabeth Povinelli identifies as part of the processes of geontopower (Povinelli 2016)—the individualization of geological structures that, however, forgoes the embeddedness of these structures in the vaster planetary processes. At the same time, the desubjectification of humanity leads to the conclusion that human social structures and societies as such are parasitic at heart and should be led to their logical denigration that Deleuze via Nietzsche would term as “passive nihilism” (Deleuze 2006, 148-151) and that plays into what today is often termed “climate grief.”

A further reflection of sociopolitical processes, for example, the case of forest protection in Latvia, would show that the dialectic of environmental protection vs. nature utilization operates on similar grounds yet fails to reconsider human-environment relations in connection to the human embodiment.

As this part of the article demonstrates, while emphasizing the Mass or the One might differentiate between Soviet and Capitalist dominating genealogies and their exploitative practices, they mirror each other. Moreover, they fully partake in the dialectic—as in, an affirmation via negation is necessary to uphold the dominating ontogenealogical line. Namely, while they

are each other's "dark" side of the dialectic "coin," the dialectic is also duplicated within their respective genealogies as a deviant or disruptive force (of an imagined concept of "capitalist" or "socialist" attitudes) to fight against *qua* necessary because of the need of opposition to uphold the *status quo*. Hence, the force of dialectic itself is demonstrated as the *status quo*, with different emphasis but a similar structure. The risk for critical thinkers of either capitalist or postsocialist background is, therefore, to fall into the trap of either of the "dark sides" of the dialectic contraposition of their respective dominating genealogies.

What is lacking here is to consider the false dilemma that something is either the property of someone or does not belong to you or the makeup of what you are. Whether via objectification *qua* depersonalization or objectification *qua* subjectification, the body becomes an object to either own or utilize as commons, mirrored by the soviet and neoliberal environmental policies and can be shortly termed by the concepts of the Mass and the One. The post-soviet ontogenealogies are, however, not exhausted by the Soviet and Global Northern understandings of body, nature, and the environment, which, themselves, are also weaved through by various genealogical lines.

### **Conclusion: The Settled Nomads**

Hitherto, the article has considered the significance of situated knowledges to recognize the blind spots in thinking, understanding, and research when operating within an accepted ontogenealogical makeup immersed in *status quo* dialectics. Already here, it was clear that a single dialectic is not in place, but the dialectic structure of substance ontologies bears significant grievances that hinder the consideration of the embodied environments beyond the false dilemmas of abstracted dichotomies. In conclusion, it is essential to note the path forward beyond the dichotomies that come to the fore when considering the complexity of the genealogies behind the dominating paradigms.

In context with Rosi Braidotti's call for a new kind of subjectivity (Braidotti 1994), affirmative of a self-constitution yet beyond the dialectic of the self and the other, I, hence, propose that further exploration also has to consider the background genealogies that continue to thrive both within the postsocialist as well as the neoliberal context. Here, I think in line with thinkers such as Nancie Marie Brown (2022), that emphasize rethinking the local and situated mythologies–epistemologies (next to, for example,

already more often considered Indigenous situated knowledges) to seek future ethicalities, as well as to expose the heterogeneity of our ontogenealogical makeup—and thus, maybe also endeavor a shift in thinking and experienced materialities.

This shift would also include rethinking various dimensions of the socialist past that, among others, allowed the reanimation and conservation of many of the practices that sprouted in the shadows of the Soviet ideologies both as the opposition to these ideologies as well as their continuation or their complimentary practices for practical purposes. Thus, such practices as the gift economy of garden-grown goods, widespread mushrooming and harvesting practices, composting, and communal garden plot utilization continue to thrive in the margins of newly globalized Eastern Europe, often without recognition by their actors of the positive environmental aspects of said practices (Jehlička et al. 2020; Mincytė and Plath 2015; 2017; Trenouth and Tisenkopfs 2015, 369; Sauka 2022d). These practices reveal a different kind of post-privatization that might also be termed just as likely as pre-privatization, where sharing not only among humans but with the more-than-human is regarded as a cyclical process of give-and-take.

When considered in the context of Baltic pre-Christian traditions, which still co-constitute the ontogenealogical materialities of these regions, it might be possible to arrive at the idea how what is “mine” is also “not-mine” either in the context of the body or the environment (in their material entanglement as well as parallel genealogies), via the agency of the more-than-human lifeworlds and the entanglement of the human as a transspecies assemblage with the living.

Latvian folklore traditions mark a seemingly deeply personal link with nature that obviously has lost its influence over time but has not been completely lost and continues to co-constitute human-environment relations today. Latvian Dainas or folksongs reflect a cyclical understanding of nature that does not separate humanity from nature and depict their intercarnality. Here, processuality gives way to understanding the importance of One as non-contradictory to the importance of the “many,” precisely on the grounds of more-than-human entanglement. One of my favorite images is the almost posthumanist depiction of a dying girl turning into a Linden tree that is then made into a kokle (a string music instrument—a Latvian variation of the zither) which makes the most beautiful yet poignant sound. A story of dendromorphism that also links together technology and nature, thus embedding humanity firmly within the naturecultured planetary structures.

This cyclical understanding of nature is also present in mythology and folklore of other regions in various forms, and what is significant to both 1) disallow falling into the trap of privatization, as well as 2) consider alternate genealogies beyond the trap of deprivatization, is to highlight the entangled yet identifiable genealogies of local cultures that are today often misleadingly covered under the umbrella term of the Global North.

The author of “Against the Grain” (Scott 2017) proposes a thought-provoking argument defending the idea that a settler lifestyle was possible and even thrivingly so (in certain places) before the agricultural revolution by settling within environments that allow human flourishing rather than creating these circumstances on purpose. This idea does not only illustrate the practical possibilities of an affirmative, processual understanding of environmental embeddedness and a life beyond the dialectic of the private and the communal but, philosophically, also illustrates the selfhood disentangled from the dialectic of the self and the other, where a “self” is usually to be affirmed via independence and freedom that practically necessitates the negation of interdependence and symbiosis.

What the old epistemologies, as well as postsocialist sharing practices, might demonstrate is the necessity to reframe selfhood, freedom, and nature beyond this dialectic of self and other via a processual understanding of freedom in relatedness (since only via the more-than-human can the human become) that is not to be confused with the Soviet depersonalized understanding of commonality as a totalizing power that subjects. Similarly, the idea of property rights (either in the form of their negation or defense) can be reframed, instead showing the relational character of living with the commons as lands we have, perhaps, leased and the bodies as vehicles for self-expression beyond and before a fixed state of ownership or relegation to a communal other.

Thus, what the postsocialist affective relations with the environment and situated knowledges show is not only the dangers of sticking to either or both sides of dialectic contraposition but also the possibility of reconnecting with the genealogies that are hitherto relegated to the shadows of the materialities we live by, realizing their tangible presence in our everyday lives.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, thus, we can ask ourselves—what other stories have made us that we are not yet aware of—and can those stories help us to reconnect to what we are made of?

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<sup>9</sup> In part, also as a form of “weak” or “visceral resistance” strategy (Kukaine 2021).

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