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The Nature Industry

Paysage—The shortcoming of the American landscape is not so much, as romantic illusion would have it, the absence of historical memories, as that it bears no traces of the human hand. This applies not only to the lack of arable land, the uncultivated woods often no higher than scrub, but above all to the roads. These are always inserted directly in the landscape, and the more impressively smooth and broad they are, the more unrelated and violent their gleaming track appears against its wild, overgrown surroundings. They are expressionless. Just as they know no marks of foot or wheel, no soft path along their edges as a transition to vegetation, no trails leading off into the valleys, so they are without the mild, soothing, un-angular quality of things that have felt the touch of hands or their immediate implements. It is as if no-one has ever passed their hand over the landscape's hair. It is uncomforted and comfortless. And it is perceived in a corresponding way. For what the hurrying eye has seen merely from the car it cannot retain, and the vanishing landscape leaves no more traces behind than it bears upon itself.

—Adorno

The more reified the world becomes, the thicker the veil cast upon nature, the more the thinking that weaves that veil in its turn claims ideologically to be nature, primordial experience.

—Adorno

The Weight of Water

In the era of privatized natural resources, the public spring in Cape Town is a strange remnant of a different relation to the natural world. As a free resource,

it is an anomaly, an anachronism. It offers an apparently limitless supply of fresh mineral-rich water filtered down through Table Mountain's multiple layers of rock. It is always sparklingly clear, exuberantly lively, and irresistibly delicious. For many years, it could be collected from outside the South African Brewery in Newlands—one of the middle-class, formerly whites-only suburbs that lie close to the foot of the mountain—where it ran continuously from three copper outlet pipes.

In the summer of 2018, the dams providing water to the city of Cape Town almost ran dry. Water restrictions, always in place, became increasingly severe. Water allocation was gradually reduced to fifty liters per person per day, and as the rain continued to stay away, plans were made for what appeared inevitable—the day the municipal water would be turned off. When the city announced the plans for day zero—an allocation of twenty-five liters to be collected at water points around the city—supermarkets ran out of bottled water. The city experienced the limit of a natural resource that directly affected the texture of everyday life. For a brief moment, it was confronted with the terrifying yet utopian possibility of an egalitarian distribution of resources. Many people in South Africa still do not have access to municipal water. Fetching water from shared taps is still a common experience. Yet almost immediately the capitalist machine responded to the new demand, bottled water was imported, five-liter plastic bottles of water lined supermarket aisles, and the hierarchy of access was reimposed.

What makes this example singular is the way in which it made visible and called into question a certain "technique of life."[1] This technique of life is in no way uniformly experienced by all city dwellers. But it is implicit in Cape Town's image of itself as a "modern" city, in which a functioning infrastructure separates those with resources from directly experiencing the work of maintaining everyday existence. Many have written about how failures in infrastructure make things visible that have been deliberately backgrounded by the particular form of life associated with modernity. In the particular case of Cape Town's water crisis, this shift in perspectival logic went further. The causes of infrastructure failure are complex and entangled, but its effect was to make tangible the abstract idea of climate change as something that directly impacts everyday life. The natural world could no longer be conceived of as a set of documented "environmental factors" that influence human settlement, a background against which human history unfolds. Rather, as rain clouds repeatedly gathered and then drifted out to sea, it appeared as an unstable and unpredictable historical agent.

During the crisis, the queues at the spring became increasingly long, and the increased traffic created problems for the brewery that managed the outlet. Eventually, the collection point was closed, and the water was rerouted to a new point a few kilometers away on a little piece of wasteland between some shops and the Newlands public swimming pool. Distributed among sixteen taps now, the spring was resituated within a fenced and paved yard presided over by a guard. The winter rains in 2018 came slowly with few of the usual downpours, but gradually the dams refilled. The moment of panic receded, though weather patterns continued to appear strange. Fetching water from the spring, usually late at night to try to avoid the still lengthy queues, and standing in the wind and the at times wild, wind-borne rain, I have found my carrying capacity. It is not large: two ten-liter bottles, one in each hand. A small industry has sprung up of water carriers who offer to ease the labor of carrying water for a low price.

I choose not to accept their service despite their mild irritation that I, a white, car-owning South African, could obviously afford to pay. I like to feel the weight of my drinking water, the labor it costs me to fill my two bottles and carry them to the car, to take my next two bottles and rejoin the back of the queue. It is a kind of discipline, an enforced slowness, a repetitive ritual. People are sometimes silent, sometimes communicative. Practices have developed that conflict with the official notice attached to the fence, which states, "Maximum of 25 liters per person at a time." After hours, someone tells me, you can now take fifty. The guard controls access, closing the gate and opening it to regulate the flow of people to the taps. People step out of the queue to have a cigarette, leaving their bottles to keep their place. The wind begins to shift them, and the person behind anchors them with a foot or a knee. At the taps, each person performs the same action, first rinsing his or her bottle in the freshwater and then standing it in place and waiting for it to fill, adjusting it to the exuberant flow of water, and then when the task is completed, shouting "Next" to indicate to the person at the front of the queue that the tap is now free.

Despite the queues and the expenditure of effort after the day's work is done, there is a pleasure in fetching water from the spring that has something to do with contact—contact with the water that splashes so energetically from the taps, contact with others engaged in a similar task, contact with the necessity of survival and the limits of your own ability. Although it is a form of consumption that is outside the logic of exchange, it is not an entirely innocent pleasure. Water is heavy, and carrying it away requires some kind of technology—sometimes a cart or trolley but in most cases a motor car. Fetching water requires certain

resources of transport, time, energy, and physical strength. The existence of the guard is a reminder of the fragility of such resources and the possibility of their exploitation. Yet despite this, the spring remains a strangely open space—in the privatized city, it has given rise to and sustains a small enclosure of common ground.

Unlike earlier decolonial struggles that took place in the 1960s, South Africa's delayed liberation in 1994 took place at the very moment when the egalitarian promise of democracy—that the benefits of modernity accrue to all citizens instead of the tiny white elite—collided with a global narrative of environmental limits.[2] Reviewing the municipal water system from the perspective of its near failure, the wastefulness of using fresh drinking water to move sewage through the sanitation system became apparent. The flush toilet appeared suddenly as an unwarranted luxury even as people in informal settlements, who had been forced all their lives to contend with various forms of inadequate sanitation, protested against the shared chemical toilets that are the city's "temporary" response to these areas' lack of access to the formal sewage system. The lack of access to municipal sanitation is not a consequence of the water shortage caused by the drought. Rather, it was the result of colonialism and apartheid's long history of entrenched inequalities and the city's slow development of infrastructure, especially in poor areas. But the juxtaposition of these two events happening at the same time meant that the usually invisible texture of everyday domestic experience became visible as a confrontation between the aspiration to a "modern" lifestyle and the anticipated environmental transformations predicted by climate change.

"Modernity" is a difficult condition to quantify. It is associated with a certain rational control of the environment and a form of life not limited by the immediate demands of survival, although the precise form such an organization of everyday life might take is in a state of constant revision. Yet despite its uncertain and shifting definition, it has exerted a powerful influence on the way humans inhabit the world. Through the narrative of progress, it has justified massive and often violent forms of social transformation. It has become what distinguishes everyday life in England, Europe, and North America from life in Africa and other previously colonized places. Held up as the often-elusive goal of projects of development, it directs flows of money and resources. Beyond its precise definition, modernity has come to describe a condition of being protected from the everyday work of surviving and the freedom to work for profit

and to access a high standard of living—a lifestyle dependent on the consumption of fossil fuels and access to goods from all over the world.

While the carbon emissions generated by the African continent are negligible compared to those of North America, Europe, and China, within Africa, South Africa is one of the biggest contributors to global warming. With its coal-fueled power stations, its reliance on road transportation, and its attachment to imported commodities, it ties into global patterns of consumption. Yet it is also a product of uneven development. Alongside its ports, with their sophisticated intermodal transport technologies, lie settlements with very tenuous links to modern techniques of life and world markets. The colonial project was contradictory, invested both in destroying indigenous techniques of life to create a modern workforce and modern consumers and in maintaining the colony as wild open space, distinct from the rapidly industrializing metropolitan centers.

In Africa in particular, the natural world acquired value as the domain in which, freed from constraints of everyday domestic life in the metropole, the white colonial hero and occasional heroine could test their mettle through various profitable exploits—exploring, hunting, and mining. These exploits conferred a certain glamour on the ruthless exploitation of Africa's abundant natural resources. The history of South Africa provides one iteration of how these contradictory impulses continue to configure the global landscape even in the twenty-first century. If nature in the era of climate change now appears in a new form, as a fragile, even evanescent afterimage of earlier plenitude, it is one that continues to be profoundly, perhaps even unconsciously, shaped by this long imperial history.

Although the material I gather here is drawn predominantly from South Africa, I have adopted the term *postcolony* as a collective noun to reference a wider experience, to describe a particular position in the world based on the historical transformation wrought by a violent imposition of modernity—an organization of society based on industrialization and the production and distribution of consumer goods. It is deployed as a reminder of the historical forces that have produced the current situation and that threaten to be elided by the universalizing narrative of the Anthropocene. Fractured by the unfinished project of liberation, mesmerized by the promise of capitalism, South Africa offers an exposed surface for reading the set of contradictions that the current confrontation between capitalist modernity and environmental limit has driven to the surface. But it is not unique. I offer these particular moments

in the history of the production of nature in South Africa, Africa, and beyond as part of the necessary project of analyzing the complex myths and fantasies that have brought the world to this point of crisis and continue to shape the narratives through which it is understood.

The Alibi of Nature

In the era of environmental crisis, nature has become the subject of an intense, almost obsessive scrutiny. In this book, I argue that, within these myths and fantasies, "nature" has come to occupy the position of an alibi. Holding the promise of a value separate from the vicissitudes of culture and politics, it has become the perfect elsewhere. Yet to view nature this way is to neglect the way in which the environmental crisis is itself imbricated in a broader crisis of modernity.

Nature is a word that invites the form of the present tense—the form for expressing general, unchanging truths about the world. In this book, I am interested in how the narratives that have emerged to describe the current crisis facilitate or limit what can be said about nature and its relation to history, how nature is complicated by the particularities of time and place. The work of this book is to make these forms visible not through a systematic analysis of the diverse discourses through which nature is daily revealed (a potentially endless task) but through a strategic and selective juxtaposition of different orders of knowledge and experience.

In the subtitle, the phrase *the nature industry* is linked to the term *postcolony* with the conjunction *and*. On the surface, *and* is the most neutral and unexpressive of conjunctions, since it merely adds one thing to another without suggesting anything about their relationship. In this, it resembles the rhetorical device *parataxis*. The term *parataxis* comes from the Greek and indicates the act of placing things side by side. It is a grammatical form that assigns an equal relationship between the various words or phrases linked together. One thing is not subsumed by another. Placing the nature industry and the postcolony in juxtaposition, I explore how each concept configures the other.

There is a long tradition of writing about nature that favors observation, fact, and documentation. I propose a different approach, one that can encompass different orders of knowledge in a nonhierarchical arrangement. The book employs a synecdochic logic. *Synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which the part stands for the whole or the whole for the part. Following the logic

of the synecdochic figure allows movement back and forth between the part and the whole, the specific and the general, and the material and the thing itself. Through this operation of substitution, which works both ways, the form permits the most abstract ideas to be anchored in historical particularity. Refusing the separation of theory and experience, it acts to concretize abstract processes, finding in the most insignificant features of everyday life exemplary fragments of the whole.

In order to interpret these fragments, I have chosen to follow a particular intellectual trajectory. I make the claim that thinking about nature in the postcolony might best be achieved by following a tradition and a form of critique developed in another moment of extreme uncertainty, the period of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. The approach outlined by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno offers a uniquely flexible set of critical practices for articulating the diverse elements of the current crisis. While Adorno's work does not directly address the problematic at the center of this book—the particular configurations that emerge from considering the nature industry and the postcolony in juxtaposition—he does provide a compelling form for considering complex concepts, ones that circulate through diverse conceptual domains. The particular, he asserts, should not be subsumed within the general but rather should be placed alongside the general category in a way that might disturb the system as a whole. Experience, the contingent, and the ephemeral are all relevant for a study that takes seriously the demands of the subject under investigation. This is particularly true when considering the many narratives that emerge in response to climate change. Documenting carbon emissions involves measuring almost all aspects of everyday life, from the use of cars to the way myriad electrical devices structure life and the effects of industrial processes that underlie big infrastructural projects.

Through making constellations drawing on elements from art, local histories, politics, popular culture, consumer culture, and environmental writing of various kinds, I consider the cultural and philosophical implications of living under the sign of imminent geophysical change. The term *constellation* to describe a particular methodological practice of combination was first proposed in the work of Benjamin and Adorno. As a method, it is useful because it offers a way of resisting the apparent immediacy of the concept of nature.[3] "Knowledge," Adorno notes, "comes to us through a network of prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections, presuppositions and exaggerations, in short through the dense, firmly founded but by no means uniformly transparent

medium of experience" (Adorno 1978, 80). The constellation offers a way of assembling some of these diverse forms of knowledge so as to reveal the manner in which they structure our understanding of and response to the transformations produced by climate change.

The current environmental crisis exists not only as an event in the world but also in a pervasive texturing of contemporary consciousness. It exists not only as scientific data but also as a reordering of the social around a new set of coordinates. For sociologist Ulrich Beck, what characterizes the current phase of modernity is the proliferation of unpredictable and unwanted side effects of modernization.[4] Climate change represents perhaps the most comprehensive of these damaging side effects. While the phrase *global warming* has become part of the shorthand of public discourse, the precise dimensions of this crisis, its complexity, and its strangeness are often obscured by the frequency of its iteration. This is in part because it occurs at an unprecedented level of abstraction. This is not to say that the effects of global warming and other forms of environmental degradation do not impact peoples' lives in very direct and intimate ways. Rather, it is to draw attention to the fact that what defines this crisis, its globalness, is precisely what is most difficult to bring into consciousness. The mystifying complexity of this new totality requires thinking not only in different scales of time and space but also in shifts between intimate everyday practices and great impersonal earth systems. In the face of the manifest impossibility of what is needed—a theory of everything—the work of this book, which is a gathering or assembling, a placing of things side by side, allows for the production of temporary and contingent relationships that refuse the division of the world into discrete sectors and scholarship into compartmentalized disciplinary logics. Such arrangements are deliberate works of interpretation designed to bring certain details into the domain of attention in a new way.

The Nature Industry

The phrase in the subtitle of this book, *The Nature Industry*, repeats and adapts the title of Adorno and Horkheimer's famous critical intervention *The Culture Industry*, written in the 1940s while both were in exile in California. *The Culture Industry* describes the way in which, in the era of mass production, culture becomes subjected to the logic of capitalist production to the extent that it loses any autonomous existence. Adorno brings the two words

culture and *industry* into contact to generate a shock—one brought about by the forced combination of two incommensurable concepts—but it is a shock that we can no longer experience. In his essay "The Exact Sense in Which the Culture Industry No Longer Exists," Adorno scholar Robert Hullot-Kentor argues that the precise meaning of Adorno's phrase has been irrevocably lost, as the words themselves have become absorbed into the everyday language of commerce. The phrase continues to circulate in the contemporary "frictionless vernacular" (Hullot-Kentor 2010, 9) but as a description of a legitimate domain of commercial transaction, not as critique. The word *industry* affixed to almost any human activity reduces it to a generalizable enactment for the purposes of profit.[5]

Recognizing the pervasiveness of the word *industry*, my choice of the phrase *the nature industry* for the subtitle both acknowledges the existence of such a commercial flattening and engages in the work of disaggregating the seamlessness of the fit. While *nature* has unquestionably become subsumed within the instrumental logic of capitalist production,[6] it is also now, in the light of the extent of environmental crisis, subject to a certain haunting. The commodification and the loss exist together in one breath, its precise value as an object of commerce being its precarious evanescence.

For Adorno, culture had, in the past, held the potential to offer a critique of society. Art held the residue of autonomy in an increasingly administered world. In a similar way, nature seems to contain some residue of utopian promise. It seems to offer a way of imagining the whole, of reintegrating the fragmented elements of modern life. Yet nature, like culture, to which it is frequently opposed, is a term of immense complexity and ambiguity.[7] In some ways, the setting up of this opposition between nature and culture masks the fact that the two terms are not commensurable. Culture, as a set of human practices that includes the classification and demarcation of the world, always contains nature as one of its categories.[8] From this point of view, nature can never escape into pure materiality, and the ways in which it has been categorized means that for many theorists, it is too fundamentally implicated in the legitimation of a variety of oppressive practices to be useful.[9]

Yet the ubiquity of the term *nature* in contemporary life means that it is impossible simply to dismiss it as irrelevant. It continues to exert pressure on the terms through which the current crisis is described. In another conceptual juxtaposition, Adorno proposes the combination of nature and history as a means of allowing the pressure of the material to enter narrative. However,

it is clear that he does not believe nature can do this in any straightforward way. "The Idea of Natural History" is a lecture Adorno presented to the *Kant-Gesellschaft* on July 15, 1932.[10] While it is primarily a philosophical intervention, directed at countering the phenomenological claims of Husserl and Heidegger, its staging of the complex interaction of nature and history provides a valuable guide to a mode of thinking that might reach beyond the current obsessive reiteration of nature as the domain of unmediated experience. What emerges instead is the idea of *second nature*, a phrase that aptly captures the way in which habits and conventions have become raised to the status of mythic inevitability. By twisting the articulation of the two terms *nature* and *history*, Adorno elicits a recognition of the limits of a form of thinking that simply describes and justifies the world as it is and, in doing so, covertly confirms the inevitability of a particular technique of life. Most importantly for this study, it describes a particular optics or adjustment of the gaze that might be deployed to bring the technique of life of consumer society into focus in a new way.

To describe this approach, Adorno uses the phrase *natural history* but wrenches it from its conventional meaning as describing the (prescientific) study of nature through observation. Instead, he proposes bringing these two terms together to generate a disturbance of both categories—a conceptual shock. At the beginning of the lecture, Adorno explains the two concepts that he hopes to overcome. The one is nature as myth, as that "fatefully-arranged and predetermined being that underlies history"; the other, history as the "mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence of the qualitatively new" (Adorno 1984, 111). Yet he resists an attempt to define how the concept of "natural history" exceeds or transforms the terms it contains. Instead, he suggests that the juxtaposition of the terms enables an analysis that pushes "these concepts to a point where they are mediated by their apparent difference" (111).

Adorno first approaches the question from the standpoint of neo-ontological thought—in which, through a formulation of the concept of being, historicity itself is naturalized—and then shifts to a reading of the philosophy of history in which the historical being of nature is revealed.[11] For Adorno, the problem with Heidegger's embrace of historicity is that it translates history as concrete details into something entirely abstract. Historicity as the condition of the possibility of being itself no longer has any connection to historical contingency, to the facticity of particular phenomena. Naturalizing historicity as the condition of possibility of being itself is ultimately an ideological move that

elevates the existent, the material conditions at a particular historical moment, to the ground for philosophical speculation. The loss of the real, the impression of the existent as something foreign, which, for Adorno, constitutes a specific historical condition—the condition of capitalist estrangement—becomes the basis for a philosophical position.

Instead, Adorno locates a new way of formulating the question in the work of Benjamin and Georg Lukács. For Lukács, the lost world of the real constitutes what he refers to as second nature, the world of conventions. He writes that "the world of conventions, a world from whose all-embracing power only the innermost recesses of the soul are exempt, a world which is present everywhere in a multiplicity of forms too complex for understanding. . . . It is second nature, and, like nature (first nature), it is determinable only as the embodiment of recognised but senseless necessities and therefore is incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance" (1978, 62).

Confronted by the world of second nature, Adorno writes, "The problem of natural history presents itself in the first place as the question of how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world" (1984, 118). For Lukács, at this stage of his thinking, the problem of awakening this world is conceived in metaphysical terms, as a form of "theological resurrection," a notion that persists today in ecological theories that seek to "re-enchant the world."

For Benjamin, the project of awakening is part of the task of philosophical interpretation and can best be understood through the mode of allegory. Adorno writes, "Allegory is usually taken to mean the presentation of a concept as an image and therefore it is labeled abstract and accidental. The relationship of allegory to its meaning is not accidental signification, but the playing out of a particularity; it is expression. What is expressed in the allegorical sphere is nothing but a historical relationship" (1984, 119).

Allegory as Benjamin defines it, Adorno suggests, provides "a presentiment of the procedure that could succeed in interpreting concrete history" (1984, 121). This procedure, which is the project of natural history, involves a different conceptual approach to that which is "based on a project whose foundation is constituted by a general conceptual structure" (120). What Adorno is describing here is the "constellation." The constellation does not aim at the definition and clarification of terms but rather provides a form that holds them in a particular relation to one another. Max Pensky explains that constellations "are not to be regarded as providing 'solutions' to problems posed by the assemblage

of recovered cultural material. Rather, such solutions are to be regarded as directions toward a political practice that would seek to dissolve the puzzle-like character of the real, rather than merely solving it" (2004, 234).

Constellations become the mode of illuminating not fixed coordinates but the ever-shifting ground of historical facticity so that in the moment of their juxtaposition, they are temporarily released from their solidification in second nature. Nature in its transience constantly invokes the historical and thus works against the seemingly fixed character of second nature. Adorno explains that "for radical natural-historical thought, however, everything transforms itself into ruins and fragments, into just such a charnel house where signification is discovered, in which nature and history interweave and the philosophy of history is assigned the task of their intentional interpretation" (1984, 121). The charnel house, an image taken from Lukács, becomes the figure for understanding the reified world not as a totality but as a collection of fragments ceremoniously housed together but constantly in a process of decay.[12] Philosophy, confronted with the world as a charnel house, finds its own impulse, "the urge to be at home everywhere in the world" turned against itself. To be at home in a charnel house is to belong there, to be one of the dead. The task of philosophy thus needs, Adorno suggests, to be redefined so that it does not become merely the legitimation of the given—the task of making the charnel house more homely.

The justification of the existent takes many forms, but what underlies all of these is an appeal to the notion of the inevitable. The real presents itself as something that cannot be avoided, something separate from subjective apprehension and providing an exact and preordained limit. The real, whether manifested in the ineluctable workings of market forces, the inevitability of capitalism as a system, or the unthinkability of a life not propped up with consumer goods and services, becomes the point at which critical thought must give way before something more solid. It is against this real—empirically supported by a host of institutions, statistics, scholarly papers, policy documents, and vested interests—that ideas collide when alternative economies and techniques of life are proposed. To describe something as second nature is to point to an absence of thought. It refers to an action that is habitual to such an extent that it vanishes as a deliberate activity and becomes inevitable, something that merely gives form to the real. It is precisely the automatic nature of such actions and interactions that gives the world of conventions the character, for Lukács, of a "charnel house." No longer attached to the fulfillment of actual social interaction, they constitute a kind of "senseless necessity."

An allegorical reading becomes the means by which to disturb this world of conventions and reified traditions. Subject to the optic of natural history, these "fragments and ruins" are displaced, shaken up, and reconstituted as constellations. The surface of the real decomposes into multiple incommensurable and discontinuous pieces no longer lined up in the service of mythic inevitability. Instead of a guarantee of authority, nature testifies to the transience not only of living things but also of knowledge itself. The optic of natural history provides a way of approaching climate change and the postcolony weighted by a specific materiality and by something less tangible as well—an affective texture or mode of inhabiting the world.

A Theory of Everything

Before the recognition of global warming, environmental damage had always been attached to particular localities.[13] In the nineteenth century, intense forms of environmental damage surrounded Britain's rapidly industrializing north.[14] The manufactories produced both "the plague of smoke" and the goods that generated the wealth that approximately one hundred years later was able to rehabilitate the landscape. It also produced, as an invisible side effect, the carbon dioxide that is currently still accumulating in the atmosphere. In the contemporary "geography of capitalism" (Smith 1984, 7), a complex checkerwork of spaces, industrial, industrializing, and postindustrial, emerges where the most evident damage tends to occur in prolonged, intense encounters with capital that then moves on, taking with it all the paraphernalia of visibility—media attention, publicity, and expert personnel. The current mobility of capital disperses the sites of damage more widely, but what makes the crisis global is not simply the extension of damage into previously nonindustrial space; it is the evidence of the damage reflected back from the atmosphere, the invisible but increasingly significant rise in carbon dioxide levels. In the 1990s, when scientific evidence of global warming first began to enter the public domain, it provoked an anxiety not just about the practical consequences of this change to the biochemistry of the planet but also about its philosophical implications. Because climate change affects all aspects of the natural world, it undermines the possibility of a nature independent of human activities. "The end of nature"[15] signifies the condition of environmental damage but also a painful psychic loss. Nature can no longer be regarded as a numinous presence, offering the possibility of escape from human society, and appears

instead as attenuated and haunted by loss. Chapter 2 addresses this moment of loss, arranging its constellation around two public displays that attempt to offer advice about the proper response to nature in an era of predicted scarcity. Global warming, unlike other forms of environmental destruction, requires not only an awareness of damage done in a series of displaced elsewheres but also a recognition of damage being done in another time, in that most strange of locations—the future. The evidence of damage read in the material of the earth emerges as the teleological end point of our current trajectory. It presents a moral critique of modernity and the progress of human societies toward a particular "standard of living"—and a refutation of certain cultural and epistemological assumptions.

In 2000, this conceptual shift was formalized in the proposal, made by chemist Paul Crutzen, that the current geological age be renamed the "Anthropocene" to signify the impact of human activities on the geological and ecological substrate of the earth. In 2004, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) published a series of graphs that represent statistically the massive increase in consumption that has taken place since the 1950s.[16] This series of graphs, which has come to be known as the Great Acceleration graphs, juxtaposes graphs showing increases in human consumption with graphs showing changes in earth systems. All graphs show an exponential rise in the period since 1950 and are designed to show unequivocally the correlation between human activity and changes to the earth's physical, chemical, and biological processes. Chapter 3 engages with this moment of naming and accounting in which scientific nomenclature enters general public circulation and a set of graphs establishes a new measure for charting the relation between nature and history. This act of naming is a response to the crisis in knowledge and certainty that climate change inaugurates. I am not talking here about the "production of doubt" characteristic of climate change denialists.[17] Even those convinced of the accuracy of accounts of global warming are subject to uncertainty about the degree of increase and the precise effects of climate change. Despite sophisticated and detailed scientific research into change over time, the immense complexity of earth systems means that predictions about the future proliferate. The subjunctive mood describes a grammatical form used to talk about events we are not certain will happen. It reflects perfectly the condition of confronting climate change, the unpredictability heralded by the phrase "If temperatures were to rise by four degrees . . ." and the difficulty of responding to a crisis that is happening in the future. By claiming that we live in the subjunctive, I wish

not to undermine the claims made by climate change scientists but rather to draw attention to the fact that accepting climate change science (inevitably an incomplete and ongoing set of experiments, models, and predictions) means accepting the unpredictability of its effects and the uncertainty of the future.

The Great Acceleration graphs document the connection between the culture of consumption and the science of climate change. They invite into intimate proximity very different orders of knowledge. They place in a single conceptual frame the concrete everyday world of traffic and cell phone use, the culture of modernity embodied in glossy advertisements for new cars and cell phone networks alongside the abstract knowledge of rising global levels of carbon dioxide and the increase in the earth's surface temperature. Yet climate change is a crisis that is occurring while concurrently, the everyday life of consumer capitalism appears to continue unaffected. Climate change occupies the space of the early twenty-first century even as other crises—in world political configurations, in economics and the distribution of debt, and in global distributions of violence—continue to take place. In the past, the climate, as a relatively stable natural phenomenon, would be considered part of the background to human activity. Yet in the era of climate change, it is background that increasingly exerts pressure on the foreground.

In chapters 2 and 3, the technique of life I am interested in is one in which consumption is driven not—or not mainly—by the need to sustain life but, more urgently, by the network of social practices that define a certain mode of living as valuable. David Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark have argued that "what people are taught to value and consume in today's acquisitive society are not use values, reflecting genuine needs that have limits, but symbolic values, which are by nature unlimited" (2010, 124). This is not to argue that highly disposable commodities such as mobile phones and computers do not have a use value but rather that the precise nature of their functionality is not what drives the desire for replacement. In fact, these objects are seldom used to their full capacity, which for most users exists only as an attractive potentiality. Deyan Sudjic, the director of the London Design Museum, begins his book *The Language of Things* with the following claim: "Never have more of us had more possessions than we have now, even as we make less and less use of them" (2009, 7). He is referring, of course, to populations of developed countries. Yet a set of expectations about goods branded as valuable and their relation to what constitutes a life worth living, a life of value, circulates around the world through

the global culture industry. The crisis of global warming cannot be separated from these more ephemeral transformations in modes of human activity taking place at the level of culture.

Although the phrase *conspicuous consumption* seems particularly suited to describe the activities of contemporary consumer society, it was first used more than one hundred years ago in relation to a very different society, although one that contained elements that have intensified in the past century. In 1899, American sociologist Thorstein Veblen published his anatomy of contemporary society, locating it within a historical trajectory starting with the archaic hunter and warrior and moving through feudal lord and monarch to the individual of the modern industrial age. He used the phrase *conspicuous consumption* to describe a form of consumption designed to enhance status. Veblen's basic argument locates the impulse to consume in "invidious comparison," used, he explains, in its technical sense to describe "a comparison of persons with a view to rating and grading them in respect of relative worth or value" (1943, 34). Consumption attributes value to the consumer because it takes place not in isolation (an individual consuming something in order to meet a basic need) but within a social context, one in which comparison with others forms the fundamental basis for establishing a sense of self-worth. Drawing on an evolutionary narrative, Veblen identifies a continuity between the distribution of value in traditional societies and those in modern societies—in both, he suggests, certain activities not linked to productive labor like warfare and hunting are associated with honor and status while others, including the drudgery of everyday survival, are associated with debasement and a lack of status. In all forms of human society, the impulse to consume beyond what is necessary for survival is driven by the principle of "pecuniary emulation," or the desire of the individual to prove his or her worth in relation to others through activities that display his or her worth—conspicuous leisure and consumption.

In a prescient way, Veblen provides a vocabulary for describing the role of consumption in the global circulation of value between objects and people in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He provides a way of addressing the mysterious power of commodities to signify value beyond their immediate usefulness. "Under Veblen's gloomy gaze," Adorno notes, "lawn and walking stick, umpire and domestic animals become revealing allegories of the barbarism of culture" (1981, 76). Modern industrial society alters the form and extent of consumption and introduces new "canons of taste," but its logic is not different from or more rational than earlier social forms. Although at times

Veblen's analysis seems a relentless reiteration of his central point, that the real reason for consumption is its indirect impact on others, his attention to the minute surface detail of everyday experience allows for a form of reading that is both minutely detailed and nuanced.

Adorno, like Veblen, is concerned with reading the social forms that manifest in everyday situations. As well as offering a form for articulating incommensurable orders of knowledge, his work also offers a particularly acute and detailed study of the culture of consumption. Fredric Jameson suggested in 1990 that Adorno, though writing from the 1930s to the 1960s, may turn out to be, presciently, the best analyst of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, "which he did not live to see, and in which late capitalism has all but succeeded in eliminating the final loopholes of nature and the Unconscious, of subversion and the aesthetic, of individual and collective praxis alike, and with a final fillip, in eliminating any memory trace of what thereby no longer existed in the henceforth postmodern landscape" (Jameson 1990, 5). He argues that Adorno's critique of positivism translates with peculiar ease into a critique of consumer culture, despite the fact that the glossy outward manifestations of contemporary consuming practices are apparently so different from the nineteenth-century petty-bourgeois philosophy of science out of which contemporary consumerist society emerges. Positivism becomes postmodernism, Jameson suggests, after it has fulfilled its own logic, one aspect of which is the abolition of the subjective—the "hesitations, deliberations and civilities" (Adorno 1978, 40) that form the material of subjective engagement.

If in the early twenty-first century, the term *postmodern* has lost currency, this is at least partly because of the insistent return of the real signaled by climate change and environmental crisis. Reading across the surface of cultural practices, this return of the real has taken many forms, from the popular attachment to reality television programs and nature documentaries to the sharp rejection within the academy of poststructuralist theories of social construction and the rise in status of personal engagements with nature and theories of materialism. That *postmodern* is superseded by the term *global* as the signifier for the contemporary moment testifies to a shift in conceptual orientation. The fragile earth becomes the new totality, a serious and unavoidable reality that undermines the postmodern celebration of relativity and fluidity. Ecology thus redeems realism and demands that the geophysical be taken seriously. Yet at the same time, the cause of the crisis lies in the ephemeral realm of culture—lifestyle, habit, modes of consumption, the articulation and pursuit

of desire, what counts as value—those intangible yet powerful motive forces that economists refer to as "public sentiment."

The first set of acceleration graphs used the number of McDonald's restaurants worldwide as the measure of globalization. While this was changed in the 2010 version of the charts to the less suggestive category "foreign direct investment," the implication remains that what the graphs depict is primarily the scale of human consumption. What persists despite the change in terminology is the centrality of the culture of consumption itself and the extension of commodification into all areas of life, including "nature" itself.

The Postcolony

In the reconfiguring of the world that is being brought about by globalization and climate change, the terms *colony* and *postcolony* may seem like a method of designation from an earlier world order. Perhaps in the future, a new set of categories need to be developed relating specifically to carbon emissions, dividing the world into those whose emissions are above or below a certain point.[18] Yet for the purposes of this book, *postcolony* remains an important term because of how it draws attention to the particular way in which various countries enter this new global configuration.

Invoking the postcolony is an act of naming that draws attention to the fact that the defining character of this collective identification is history, not geography.[19] It allows me to extrapolate from the thick description and detailed analysis of particular instances to the larger global arrangement of the world in the condition of environmental crisis. My concern is with the distribution of a technique of life that crosses geographical localities but that is also determined by specific local conditions. Within the synecdochic logic deployed by this book, the postcolony is both a general concept, encompassing countries with multiple different historical trajectories, and an exemplary fragment, a specific part that stands against and disrupts the whole.

Achille Mbembe, who first outlined the notion of the postcolony in an article published in 1992, proposes the term as an alternative to *postcolonial* to develop a different way of thinking about the operation of time. Unlike the postcolonial, which forecasts a time after colonialism, the postcolony invokes a sense of stasis, the interruption of the temporal overcoming promised by national liberation. While postcolony refers to geographical location primarily

in terms of its position in a particular historical trajectory, it also offers a collective noun for identifying elements of common experience. Mbembe's primary interest is in the specific character of political power and violence that emerges in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa after independence as it plays out at the level of everyday acts of signification. The postcolony provides a means of assembling some of these fragments of common experience. Like Mbembe, I do not suggest a uniformity or homogeneity across those countries that experienced colonial conquest, nor do I wish to annihilate differences in the way these global forces act in each individual case. Instead, in my argument, the term *postcolony* is used to denote a particular kind of specificity, a reminder that the world is not uniform in relation to environmental damage.

Because of the particular history of economic development in the colonies, the commodification of nature follows a different trajectory from the one it took in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. The colony was imagined as a discontinuous geography of valuable sites separate from their surroundings. These spaces were valued because of what could be extracted from them—their raw materials. Colonial mining projects generated enclaves around these spaces of natural value, constituting them as a different kind of ground. At an African Union summit in 2006, Hugo Chávez asserted Latin America and Africa's potential for development by identifying Africa's natural resources: "Africa is not a poor continent. . . . How can Africa be poor having oil, diamonds, cobalt, wide forests, all kinds of minerals?" (2006). Yet natural resources in African countries have an ambiguous status. In 1993, British economist Richard Auty coined the phrase *resource curse* to describe the curious effect of natural resources on developing economies, suggesting that in many cases, instead of generating wealth, mineral resources distort economies and lead to instability and conflict.[20]

In this book, I argue that Marx's phrase *primitive accumulation* has particular resonance for an investigation of the nature industry and the postcolony. Marx uses the phrase *primitive accumulation* to describe a particular moment in the prehistory of capitalism when accumulation takes place through violent dispossession. Chapter 4 presents such a moment of appropriation, generating a constellation around a particular instance of mineral resource extraction—the diamond rush in Kimberley. The constellation seeks to illuminate the way the primitive accumulation of this artifact of nature provokes a rearrangement of human activities and a redistribution of social status. In a short chapter in *Capital* called "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation," Marx describes the

mythical past imagined by political economists as including two sorts of people: "the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite" and "the other lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living" (1976, 873). He continues in a sarcastic tone, "And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labor, have up till now nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long since ceased to work" (873). In place of this mythical process of "natural" selection in which the elites accumulate capital through the diligence of their own labor, Marx offers an account of the actual history of accumulation—"the history of expropriation . . . written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (875). He draws his empirical evidence for this from a moment in British history—the enclosure of the commons. In order for capitalism to appear as a noncoercive system of free labor, the violence of this expropriation, which is the foundation of the capitalist class, has to be forgotten. Thus the need for the mythical past presented by political economists.

Subsequent theorists have suggested that instead of locating primitive accumulation in the past, it should be recognized as an ongoing part of the capitalist system—in particular, of imperial expansion. Rosa Luxemburg, one of the first to develop this idea, argues that capitalism requires "the existence of non-capitalist forms of production" (1951, 368) as a market for its surplus, as a source of raw materials for production, and as a resource of potential wage labor. She argues that "a natural economy thus confronts capitalism at every turn with rigid barriers. Capitalism must therefore always and everywhere fight a battle of annihilation against every form of natural economy that it encounters. . . . The principal methods in this struggle are political force (revolution, war), oppressive taxation by the state, and cheap goods" (369).

In his article "Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation," Robert Nichols suggests that instead of seeing land simply as a commodity like any other (although clearly it can be bought, sold, or stolen like other commodities), Marx saw land as also located in nature, an instrument of purposeful labor, not simply an object on which labor was performed. Dispossession thus involves not simply the theft of land but something more complex. Nichols writes, "Marx's focus on land is the particular expression of a generalizable insight, namely that dispossession entails the appropriation of, and consolidated class monopoly in, the mediated 'metabolic interaction' of humanity and the productive resources of the earth" (2015, 26). Nichols suggests that the term *dispossession* is more precise and concludes that it "comes to name a distinct logic of capitalist development

grounded in the appropriation and monopolization of the productive powers of the natural world in a manner that orders (but does not directly determine) social pathologies related to dislocation, class stratification and/or exploitation while simultaneously converting the planet into a homogenous and universal means of production" (27). Although Nichols prefers the term *dispossession*, I argue that *primitive accumulation* has a particular relevance for describing what happens to nature in the postcolony. Through the settlers' refusal to recognize any form of property except private ownership, nature in the colony is cast as a wilderness uniquely available for accumulation. I investigate the diamond industry in South Africa as an exemplary fragment of the primitive accumulation of nature, a *fantastic* project of value extraction. The discovery of diamonds precipitated the reorganization of the economy and the landscape of the colony and provided the ground for the emergence of an elite whose wealth depended on a complex management of value through the promotion or interruption of the flow of this natural artifact.

The idea of development that emerges after World War II constructs a model for historical progress and incorporates colonized and formerly colonized countries into this model at a temporally earlier stage. Colonial countries were subjected to a compulsion to modernize that addressed itself specifically to the form of everyday life. The introduction of commodities was key to this process.[21] Gustavo Esteva identifies the founding moment in the history of the idea of development in a speech by Truman in 1949 in which the U.S. president deliberately distances himself from "the old imperialism" and affirms a "program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing" (quoted in Esteva 1992, 6). The notion of development assumes that the historical trajectory of a very few nations can provide the model for defining and judging the value of techniques of life elsewhere. Development implies a condition of lack that must be improved by intervention. In the most general terms, it is associated with more efficient systems, a growing economy, industrialization, and a stable government. But it also contains the promise of a certain lifestyle of consumption and freedom of choice in which the aspiration and target are particular standards of living. In South Africa during apartheid, the discourse of development was modified to accommodate the idea of "separate development," a different trajectory for black and white South Africans. This racially inflected interpretation of the idea promoted a particular standard of living among the small white population while advocating a different set of conditions for black South Africans. Yet these carefully calibrated distinctions had to be maintained

through force. Chapter 5 reflects on a moment of rational calculation in which a fundamentally instrumental attitude toward nature gives rise to bizarre experiments. In a strange collision of rational science and irrational fantasy, nature is conceived of as a resource of primitive violence to be crafted and deployed in defense of a particular way of life.

The narrative of development presupposes a linear temporality. The temporality of the postcolony is very different from this gradual progress toward an established goal. For Achille Mbembe, "the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another: an *entanglement*" (2001, 14). This entangled time places the postcolony in a very different relation to history than the one opened up for the former colonies by the narrative of development. Instead of occupying an earlier moment in a general world history, the postcolony describes a condition of inhabiting different times at the same time, disrupting any notion of a linear progression toward a predefined end point. The postcolony emerges as a consequence of a violent but also incomplete imposition of a particular technique of life. The postcolony describes the resulting site of discontinuous and competing regimes of value.

In the era of environmental crisis, nature in Africa assumes a new global importance. In this narrative, it is precisely Africa's lack of development that makes it a valuable repository of nature. Yet even though Africa's contribution to global carbon emissions is negligible, the postcolony is nevertheless a space that is disproportionately subject to the social and environmental costs of global production. Rob Nixon uses the phrase *slow violence* to describe "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed over time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2011, 2). Typically, effects are divorced from causes by a displacement across time and space. It is, he notes, "a violence that is neither spectacular or instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across temporal scales" (2). Slow violence, he suggests, is a particularly important concept for understanding environmental damage and the "unintended consequences" or side effects of extraction, production, and even military invasions in a range of different contexts. The difficulty with slow violence, he observes, is that unlike spectacular violence, it is difficult to bring into and hold within the public imagination. It requires sustained attention, something that the contemporary culture of "accelerated connectivity" (13) tends to erode. Nixon's careful reading of texts by writer

activists Wangari Maathai and Ken Saro Wiwa demonstrates one way of bringing into the foreground these elusive threads of damage. These writers reflect on local depredations wrought by the nature industry in Africa—despite the low levels of industrialization, the damage of deforestation and mineral extraction are extreme. In his book *The Social Costs of Production* (1971), Karl William Kapp, an economist briefly associated with the Frankfurt School in New York, argues that in working out the cost of production, those factors designated as "externalities" are, in fact, costs borne by the society as a whole. "Capitalism," he notes, "must be regarded as an economy of unpaid costs, 'unpaid' in so far as a substantial portion of the actual cost of production remain unaccounted for in entrepreneurial outlay" (231). The postcolony, I argue, describes a space particularly burdened by such costs. This is evidenced, for instance, in the different responses by oil companies to oil spills in American and Nigerian waterways.[22]

These spaces of mineral exploitation exist alongside different kinds of enclosures—fragments of untouched nature that provided the ground for exploits such as hunting and for demonstrations of wealth and status. Upmarket reserves directed toward the international tourist industry, owned often by large corporations, frame their ownership of land in Africa in terms of a global duty to preserve "nature" and the environment. James Ferguson notes how these often exist as independent entities linked into the global economy through technology but separate from the surrounding land and society.[23] Chapter 6 reflects on a moment of sequestration in which nature, entirely dominated, is produced as a scarce resource and privatized for its own protection. Set aside from everyday experience, enclaved nature is crafted to recall the exploits of past encounters. In a work of dispossession that is both material and metaphysical, nature in the postcolony appears always to be produced for the benefit of others.

Conversations about climate change are characterized by a perceived acceptance of the inevitability of capitalism and the sanctity of "life as we know it" or the culture of consumption. Acts to mitigate the effects of climate change are framed as necessary in order to maintain an already existing lifestyle. Yet the style in which we live is not inevitable. It is a complex negotiation of desire, choice, necessity, attitude, culture, history, and innovation. It is an orientation toward the world and to other people, a conscious and unconscious distribution of what is considered valuable. The following chapters track some of this fractured landscape of desires and habits through which world nature is constituted as valuable. As a resistance to the promise of totality offered by the global and

the earth as a system, I put together fragments of specific habits of consumption and fantasies about style and the possibilities and impossibilities of imagining a different technique of life.

They include certain awkward, strange, and at times uncomfortable gatherings of historical incident, artistic projects, consumer choices, and cultural ephemera in which nature is found to be a decisive element. Chapter 2 brings together exhibitions from the American Museum of Natural History in New York—dinosaurs, the Akeley Hall of African Mammals, and the Hall of Biodiversity's Dzanga-Sangha rain forest—the Rain Forest Biome at the Eden Project in Cornwall, and the fate of the banana as iconic instances of nature under threat. In chapter 3, I take the totality proposed by the name Anthropocene and break it down into parts that do not quite add up to the whole—rhetoric and science, cell phone contracts and carbon emissions, the promise of development, the rise of advertising, and the impossibility of satisfaction. Both of these chapters bring into focus the fragmentary references to forms of consumption in order to reveal what lies submerged in these narratives—the centrality of a particular technique of life based on the conspicuous consumption of goods and energy. At the same time, I trace the way in which, throughout these responses to climate change, traditional imperial narratives continue to surface as reminders of a past not superseded by this new crisis. The following three chapters reflect in more detail on these traditional imperial and colonial narratives by offering moments from the backstory of the technique of life based on consumption inflected through the history of South Africa's entry into capitalist modernity. The discoveries of first diamonds and then gold in the late nineteenth century are crucial to the story of South Africa's modernity. Chapter 4 offers four photographs of Kimberley in the 1880s—the gentleman's club, the mine, the labor compound, and the hunt—as tableaux of social distinction, setting these alongside the memoir of a diamond smuggler and a massively successful advertising campaign. Chapter 5 confronts a strange moment in the history of the production of nature in South Africa—the South African Defence Force's wolf dog breeding program. It brings together Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) transcripts from hearings on chemical and biological warfare and two self-published border war memoirs to explore these wolves' ambiguous position, caught between nature and history. Gathering together a controversial Land Rover advertisement, modernist game lodges, golden wildebeest, and a dead lion with a big international following, chapter 6 investigates the proliferation of high-end private game reserves in

Africa as the manifestation of an emerging economic but also symbolic and emotional investment in the value of nature. Placed within constellations, all these small, diverse details become points of access for decoding nature in the current moment of crisis.

In his most literary text, *Minima Moralia*, Adorno employs the aphorism to consider, in a unique way, problems of experience and subjectivity. Written in the mid-1940s while Adorno was in exile in California, the text is a sustained reflection on the ethics of form and the possibilities opened up by juxtaposition as a combinatory practice. Composed as a series of fragments, *Minima Moralia* reflects upon those minute details of everyday experience that give form to contemporary life. In the preface, Adorno writes, "He who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy must scrutinize it in its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses" (1978, 15). Although the objects of scrutiny here are the "objective powers," in a sense, it is the "hidden recesses" that seem to engage Adorno's attention most thoroughly. What Adorno's text takes as its object is not the discovery of the hidden "intentions" of reality, the identification of a concealed meaning or order, but rather the analysis of overlooked moments of reality, unguarded moments of what Adorno calls "unintentional reality." *Paysage*, the aphorism quoted at the start of this chapter, describes a fragment of experience from life in its estranged form. The car, an emblematic fragment of what Jennifer Wenzel calls the "petromodern," is part of the unintentional reality of life in contemporary consumer society (2017, 10). Traveling by car habituates the body to a certain kind of perception—the hurried glimpse. Reducing the passing landscape to a background, it enables a detachment from the world so that "it is as if no one had passed their hands over the landscape's hair. It is uncomforted and comfortless" (Adorno 1978, 48). This missing gesture, this gentle yet expressive touch, offers a metaphor for an interpretative project that involves not a rigid separation of subject and object but rather a delicate sensory engagement with the object—a conceptual feeling through the body. The work of the chapters that follow is to feel through the accumulation of details, the fissures and rough edges that the long history of colonial exploitation has impressed on the world.

The concept of the Anthropocene, with its invocation of a singular-subject "humanity" responsible for global warming and its urgent message about imminent disaster, invites us to forget about history and to focus on the present as it careens into an unthinkable future. Thinking about climate change and the

Anthropocene from the perspective of South Africa means interrupting this increasingly popular global narrative to offer instead an account that is neither exemplary nor representative but that as a collection of fragments of the damaged whole nonetheless has the power to illuminate something beyond its own particular history.