The Indoor People's Enchanted Ecologies

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Abstract Contrary to the taken-for-granted dictum in nature politics and in public media that "loving nature prompts care," this article considers less intuitive relations between love and ethics. Through the analysis of different enactments of natures in Denmark and a reading of Jane Bennett's *Enchantment of Modern Life*, the article captures how sensibilities and moralities swing from anethical moments to affective forms of responsibility. By comparing walks at a recreational beach with activists' campaigns at a peri-urban commons and a climate activist march in the capital center, Cecilie Rubow proposes, inspired by Bennett, to think of a variation of chords of wonder and ethics. Dissonantly, the chords of the enchanted ecologies range from magical moments in remote nature to love and respect for co-living plants and animals, and to the perplexing and motivational awareness of one's entwinement with the whole planet. This reconceptualization of enchantment speaks to the depth of the ecological crises.

Keywords enchantment, wonder, ecologies, ethics, environmentalism, climate activism

In this article the term *indoor people* serves as a prism for salient, predominantly urban, enactments of nature. The term is inspired by a Danish window manufacturing company that recently launched an advertising campaign under the heading "The Disturbing Facts about the Indoor Generation." Referring to sociological time budget research it stated that on average, Danes, and Europeans more generally, spend 90 percent of their time indoors, which equates to spending less than two hours outdoors per day.[1] Likewise in 1989 W. R. Ott, an environmental engineer, concluded that employed persons in the United States spend about 2 percent of their time outdoors; 6 percent of their time is spent in transit, and 92 percent of their time indoors. Ott suggested that "the finding that emerges is that we are basically indoor animals."[2]

Now, it seems, the indoor animals are on the move. While the window company campaigned for better light and fresher indoor air, since "indoor air can be five times

1. Velux. "The Disturbing Facts about the Indoor Generation."
2. Ott, "Human Activity Patterns," 3–32, emphasis mine.

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more polluted than the outside air," according to statistics the Danes also respond by turning to the outdoors in higher numbers.[3] Also, environmentalists secure new supporters and attention in the press, and the young generation of climate activists is pushing for political changes. Biologists, nature guides, and foresters, along with media reports, commonly equate the flourishing nature love with environmentalism and care for the planet.[4] While such a greening across cultural domains may, in some cases, be true, I will here emphasize less intuitive aspects of this equation and discuss how the diverse natures of indoor people illuminate the way moralities are related to ecological crises.

Studying Natures

The initial research questions for ethnographic fieldwork, which was undertaken in and around Copenhagen, Denmark, sought to understand how pronounced public interest in nature coexists with awareness of contemporary ecological crises. Being aware that the word *nature* in Danish (as in English) covers an extraordinary array of meanings (from the universe to various degrees of cultivated, farmed, and wild lands, as well as certain materials and biological processes), I designed the fieldwork to cover distinct enactments of what locally was recognized as nature. Building on Annemarie Mol's praxiographic notion of enactment to analyze how situations depend on a co-presence of multiple human and nonhuman actors,[5] I selected three sites for participant observation, archival work, and interviews:

A recreational beach in the countryside. In Denmark nature as the great outdoors contrasted to culture pertains mainly to beaches protected by environmental law. Beaches are favorite places "to go out into nature." These recreational places are cast as different from one's home, cities, and indoor workplaces. The chosen beach is known for its outstanding and untouched beauty.

A peri-urban commons. As a green environment with natural processes of growth with varying degrees of diversity, the commons is less dominated by human presence than the built environment and generally goes as nature despite obvious traces of human interference. The chosen commons was the object of intense campaigns because of municipal development plans.

3. In a few years the proportion of Danes who go "out for a nature experience" at least once a week has increased from 40.2 percent to 57.6 percent; see Videnscenteret Bolius and RealDania, "Danskerne i de byggede miljøer." The membership of winter swimming clubs in 2009 was around eleven thousand, and in 2021 around sixty thousand. See Vinterbader.com and Vinterbaderen.dk. With more than 102,000 bookings of the Danish Nature Agency's shelters in the first half of 2019, there was an increase of more than 25 percent compared to the previous year; see Miljøministeriet Naturstyrelsen, *Rekordmange sover i naturen*.

4. Rewilding efforts and green nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rapidly gain new supporters. In 2019 after climate marches, the Danish government, supported by the opposition, voted for a 70 percent reduction of Denmark's carbon emission by 2030.

5. In *The Body Multiple*, Mol's object of study was how atherosclerosis is a multiple disease that hangs together in practices in which both people and objects participate. I use enactment in the same line of thought to explore how "natures" come in different versions in cooperation with the participating human and nonhuman actors.

The parliament square. On regular occasions this city square is swarming with climate activists campaigning for a climate law and for downscaling carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions. Here nature is addressed literally as a nonurban exterior and through notions of exceeding levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere dangerously threatening the planet.

I approached these sites with the methodological stance of a curious indoorsy animal, close to my personal habitus and habits. Being immersed in university life, living in a suburban environment, and not being a nature enthusiast or an environmental or climate activist, I sought out people who could teach me how to love nature in different versions. I walked the beach with and without company, accompanied birders, participated in workshops on how to identify plants, coedited a book on nature love, and followed activists in the preparation of campaigns and into the streets.[6] During fieldwork, strictly speaking, I remained mainly engaged in indoor life, counted in hours, but nevertheless I slowly reoriented my everyday practices to the outdoors. Also, I learned and directed my attention to how nature, according to my climate activist interlocutors, is not only out there but also permeates every aspect of modern indoor life. Everything we pick up in our houses, every mile of transportation and everything we consume, I was reminded, rely on materials that come from somewhere, somebody else's habitat, on a planet with limited resources. As such nature in different biosocial formats points to a common planetary condition.

The beach, widely celebrated as an icon of Danish nature, and the site that will take up the bulk of this article, was lauded as an "other" place, a kind of heterotopia offering moments of wonder that at first sight seemed to play out in a classic awe-inducing romantic chord. Comparatively, the enactments of the two other sites in contexts of dissonance struck quite different chords of wonder.[7] At the commons close to the center of Copenhagen a repertoire of wonders was cast in activists' efforts at relating to plants and animals as wild kin and friends. At the parliament square in energetic campaigns for a climate law, carbon is equated with the "nature" that mediates the activists' attention and evokes, I suggest, a peculiar, wondrous enthusiasm. All three cases reflect different chords of wonder and, as I will show, of ethics.

Chords of Wonder and Ethics

In *Enchantment of Modern Life*, from which this special issue of *Environmental Humanities* is picking up its lead theme, Jane Bennett describes enchantment as a disturbing and captivating experience and in ways that point to a wide spectrum of affects. In the

6. Gjerris and Rubow, *Naturens sprog*. All in all, I have had conversations with around one hundred people. I have worked in depth with around one-third of the interlocutors, with whom I have met several times in workshops, demos, and conversations. Across the sites I have met five interlocutors more than five times (and in some cases many more times) in conversations and go-alongs. For a more thorough presentation of the fieldwork, see Rubow, *Indendørsmenneskets natur*.

7. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

introductory chapter Bennett characterizes enchantment as being "struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" and being "transfixed in wonder."[8]

The mood Bennett calls enchantment thus involves surprise combined with "a pleasurable feeling of being charmed" *and* a feeling of being "disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition" with the overall effect of "a mood of fullness, plenitude, liveliness."[9] Throughout the chapters, however, "minor chords of enchantment" are also considered, such as joy, fascination, and inspiration, and experiences with "room for play and high spirits."[10] As such Bennett extends the conceptualization of enchantment as connected to the sublime in Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant's sense as extraordinary, transcendent experiences of nature to less highly strung chords of enchantment closer to contemporary, postromantic moods. This broadening of classical, romantic versions of enchantment to include "affective attachment" and "positive energetics" serves Bennett's conceptual work on an "ethics of enchanted materialism."[11]

Thus, while initially defining enchantment as a lightning strike that *motors* or *propels* an ethics of generosity, Bennett also works her way the other way around and explores ethics itself as an energetic sentiment—contrary to, say, a code of conduct. As such, the conceptualization of an affective ethics complicates the main causally constructed thesis that enchantment motivates ethics. As a result, throughout the book, interestingly and productively, enchantment and ethics become more and more spun into each other.

Picking up Bennett's idea of several chords of enchantment in this article I explore how different chords of captivating and disturbing wonders and ethics of environmental care strike in a world that since the publication of *Enchantment* has only become more aware of ecological crises.[12] However, at all sites the relations between wonder and care are contested, indicating that the indoor people in ever-changing natures appear to lack quite a few notes to be able to chime in fully with Bennett's story of how to cultivate "a stance of presumptive generosity."[13]

The Beach: Indoor People Going to the Outdoors

In Denmark, during winter, with few daylight hours and temperatures at five degrees Celsius on average, being outdoors is generally restricted to transportation time and

8. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 131.

9. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 5.

10. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 4, 12–13, 32, 92, 160.

11. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 3, 12, 158.

12. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 160: "I give voice to the minor chords of enchantment . . . partly because the more aware of wonder one is—and the more one learns to cultivate it—the more one might be able to respond gracefully and generously to the painful challenges posed by our condition as finite beings in a turbulent and unjust world."

13. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 131.

Figure 1. The beach of Tisvildeleje. Photograph by the author.

sport activities and the widespread habit of daily or weekly exercises in a nearby park or forest, or a walk on the beach. An hour's drive from Copenhagen, the beach of Tisvildeleje attracts large crowds of sun- and sea-bathing city dwellers during summer. During winter from October through to April, in the daylight hours, you can observe solitary and small groups of hikers walking along the beach (fig. 1).

During fieldwork in the cold months of 2018 and 2019 I approached some of these beachgoers aiming to learn about their skills and sensibilities and how the hiking practices might relate to notions of enchantment and ethics. The hikers I spoke to unanimously characterized the Tisvildeleje beach as "real nature," free of urbanization and agricultural infrastructure, or as close as you get in Denmark to "nature" as a place without human interference. In an intensely farmed country, with almost no uncultivated patches of land left, the coastline is widely considered to be the only "real nature" left.[14]

If you approach the beach between Tisvildeleje and the neighboring village of Liseleje you get the first glimpse of the most unspoiled part of the beach stretching approximately three kilometers east to west, an open sea, and far to the east the rocky coast of Sweden. The first beachgoer I approached here was a retired government officer who told me that his daily walk for one or two hours was a much-needed break from oftentimes dismal moods at home, where he takes care of his wife who suffers from dementia. He said, "It's almost magical to come through the forest, to walk over the dunes and

14. According to Statistics Denmark, in 2017 agriculture took up of 62 percent of Denmark's area. Comparatively, in Germany, Poland, and Holland it is less than the half of the countries' area, and in Norway and Sweden less than 10 percent.

see the magnificent beach." It was, he told me, a "free space," invigorating, and prompting "spiritual solace." The wind, the sun, and the sea gave him the energy and the perspective he needed. "Normally, we focus our attention narrowly," he said, but at the beach he sensed the "width of life" for which he yearned.

Almost everyone I spoke to and followed along the beach said their attention was caught by the horizon, a mesmerizing line offering, the beachgoers explained, a sense of freedom, origin, meaning, opportunity, hope, energy, life confirmation, or spark of greatness. Sometimes these descriptions conveyed a lifelong love and respect for this special landscape. They had felt the true force of it too, the storms, the treacherous currents, or perhaps seen those who drowned. Sometimes single occasions were carved out as extraordinarily powerful: days when everything was covered by mist; cold mornings when withered heather had grown an icy, sparkling crust; or late afternoons when a storm howled and sand, foam, seawater, hair, skin, clothes, and dry seaweed whirled together. People of all ages declared that the beach is a place that embodies hope, peace, freedom, or a sense of infinity or "evokes a primordial sense of happiness." You become "so small at the beach," and yet, at the same time, I was told time and again, you "also become part of something much bigger," "so beautiful," and "so strong."

This is how I came to know the beach as a site of wonders with the captivating and disturbing qualities that Bennett's exposition of classical moments of enchantment alludes to. Consistently, the beachgoers pointed to the horizon, the stones, sand, light, and the grand emptiness of the beach as physicalities that disturbed their initial moods and sparked in them new, sought-for directions. Thus the beach was experienced as a more-than-human, awe-inducing space, emplacing the beachgoers, they said, "in the universe" or "in nature" as a distinct place, away from their everyday world. Importantly, however, the word *enchantment*, or in Danish *fortryllelse*, was never used by the beachgoers. The word has a ring of elves to it, or that of a bygone romantic era, and it is seldom used in everyday language. Instead, expressions like *almost magical*, *kind of holy*, and *nearly religious* dotted the stories of the beach, concepts indicating the powerful qualities of the site and inviting sensibilities described as joyful, energizing, contemplative, and liberating. Outbursts of praise like "nature is my god if I have one," "the beach is my altar," and "it is as if heaven moves down to earth" were commonplace. The beach was miraculous "in itself," or it was "pure" or "real nature." Gazing at the horizon; feeling the flying energy of the wind all over the body; pondering the age of the stones on the beach, the width of the universe, and the liveliness of the flickering light; and being constantly resized as small and big depending on the perspective produced routine feelings of astonishment at the possibility of "forgetting everything."

Enchanted Moods beyond Religion

As Bennett mentions, small wonders tend to occur somewhere between surprise and cultivated efforts, and some days were certainly more outstanding than others, but as observant and skilled in awareness as the beachgoers were, surprising colors and

certain views always seemed to lie in wait for them.[15] Some beachgoers explicitly addressed the element of repetition, which easily takes on a ritual character. As an academic in his sixties described his walking habits: "When I have reached the turning point [on my daily walk], I stop and . . . look at the sun, thinking: 'With all this light, don't fear anything.' I tell myself I should not forget this. But I do. It's my experience that the body cannot remember the light, and therefore I must make this walk again and again. If there is something religious in my approach to the beach, it's this necessary repetition."

The very common references to the sacred, holy, magical, and miraculous, and to a god, oftentimes prefixed with words like *almost*, *little*, *nearly*, or *kind of*, were never, with noteworthy exceptions, connected explicitly to religious discourse, church affiliation, or religious institutions.[16] Compared to the North American tradition of transcendentalism and the affinity between American environmentalism and Christian theological traditions, the Danish story has important differences. Here one does not find founding figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir, or Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold for that matter. The absence of a cultural tradition amalgamating environmentalism and religious thought is congruent with a peculiar secularization process. In line with José Casanova's *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics*, the Danish case displays several indicators of secularization: a loss of power and prestige of religious institutions and a general decline in both religious practices and doctrinal religious beliefs. But, as in every region, country, and social setting, the Danish case has its own conundrums.[17] Today, statistics on religion in Denmark show that 75 percent of the population are members of the state-supported Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, whereas only 16 percent state that they believe in a personal god, and even less, 11 percent, go to church as least once a month. Another indicator of this distinctive form of secularization is that the large group of Danes who may be said to belong to a majority group of cultural Christians are associated with the dominating liberal theological discourse—relevant for this case—for decades promoting an explicitly indoorsy existential post-metaphysical cosmology.[18] Enhancing a compartmentalization of cultural domains, this dominant theological discourse has for decades been extremely careful not to conflate nature with God and to avoid any pantheistic or panentheistic theologies.[19]

In sum, when Danes use expressions like *magical*, *holy*, and *miraculous* in relation to recreational "natures" like the beach, only exceptionally will it indicate an overlap with

15. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 10.

16. The exceptions were apparent in a separate series of conversations with members of a small group of eco-theological-oriented theologians and priests and a layperson who explicitly wanted to build bridges between the Lutheran Evangelical Church's teaching and "nature experiences"; see Rubow, "Økoteologiske udfordringer." See also Berry, *Devoted to Nature*.

17. Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics*, 2. In the United States, too, large parts of the country may be said to be as secular as Europe.

18. Mauritsen et al., "Cultural Religion"; Rubow, "Bagom transcendens."

19. Recent exceptions are Gregersen, *Deep Incarnation*, and Gregersen, "Tre slags panenteisme."

the discourse of the dominant religious institutions or, for that matter, the statistically very small groups that revitalize non-Christian cosmologies such as Asatrú. Interestingly, this differs from the North American tradition in which "nature spirituality," generally, to quote Evan Berry, has had a more "easy harmony among romanticism, natural history, and theological reflection."[20] It also differs from the neighboring Swedish case in which traditions of religious experiences and nature spirituality are also closely and explicitly related in a "post-Christian individual existentialism."[21] While affinities may also be identified in the Danish case, pointing to a semireligious amalgam of traditions, they are neither explicit nor harmonious. Rather, the magical and wondrous appears to be thriving the most in a naturalistically oriented realm.

Nature Lovers' Love of the Magical

If we address the intuitions expressed in Danish nature politics and in public media, very similar to Bennett's cue, the question is now whether the wonders can be said to be valuable for ethical life and have the potential to "rewire the political or ethical circuitry."[22] Bennett's affirmative answer, albeit framed mostly in a demonstrative, hopeful way, exhausts neither the questions of variations due to context nor the possibility of instances of enchantment without ethics. While Bron Taylor's study of surfers emphasizes that spiritual experiences (of for instance cosmic energy, divine will, and communion with other creatures) may well propel environmental care, other scholars have accentuated the negative cases.[23] In *Friction*, for example, through the study of Indonesian student nature lovers, Anna Tsing critically pursues the question of whether "the romance of nature is one important route to the appreciation of nature's fragility" and chooses to emphasize that this particular nature enthusiasm tends to be deliberately apolitical.[24]

Working with the Danish material tended to draw me in the direction of Tsing's and other postromantic analyses.[25] Many findings indeed indicated such decoupling of enchantment and environmentalism. For instance, when I directly asked my interlocutors whether nature love and magical moments connected, in their view, to a moral stand of some kind, in almost all cases this sort of questioning left the interlocutors somewhat perplexed, as if I had missed the point of what they had stated previously, namely, that the freedom from anything human at the beach included everything

20. Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 149.

21. Thurfjell, *Granskogsfolk*, 210.

22. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 8.

23. Taylor, "Surfing into Spirituality." Taylor also points out that some surfers do not have spiritual experiences or the ethical obligations that come from it.

24. Tsing, *Friction*, 123–54. Tsing also points out contradictory cases in which nature love is an avenue for many "avenues of growth," among them also "responsible guardianship," 154. Criticism of Western nature romanticism, recently summarized by sociologist Hartmut Rosa (*Resonance*), associates this forgetfulness with an oasis of deceptive self-absorption and hedonistic consumption.

25. Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness"; Morton, *Ecology without Nature*; Rosa, *Resonance*.

societal, not least regimes of obligation and political engagement. Likewise, in conversations with activists about climate activism, when I asked more specifically about potential links between ethical commitments, and political observations, and their best experiences in nature, the short answer, after some bewilderment, was an overwhelming no.[26] They found that the two had no bearing on each other. At the beach, ethical evaluations and priorities were thus unwanted and irrelevant. The remote, desert-like qualities of the beach with its very few plants and occasional birds seemed to support the feeling of being entirely "outside society."

The repeated "it's almost magical," "it's almost holy," "I reach a Zen-like state of mind" reminded me at an early stage of "the numinous" that Rudolf Otto defined as "the holy minus rational and moral aspects" and "an extra above and beyond the meaning of goodness."[27] Read as an instantiation of Otto's "minus-ethics" it appeared as if enough otherness of nature was restored at the beach to secure room for the minus-ethical. Just as Tsing emphasized nature lovers' love as a romance with transcendent nature, that is, separated from culture, I was tempted to frame the beach experiences as a modern revival of this classic chord of enchantment. But something did not fit, not even when I considered the experiences reported as being the very best and most intensive. What would happen if I paid more attention to the standard reservations of *almost*, *nearly*, and *kind of*? Would that carve out other chords of enchantment, leaving room for other instantiations without ethical implications? What if I paid more attention to Bennett's mention of the indispensable "link between enchantment and mindlessness, between joy and forgetfulness" in occasions "during which one's critical faculties are suspended, and one is caught up in the moment"?[28] In other words: was another other than transcendent nature involved?

The Anethical Moments

Going through the stories again, and returning to the beach, remembering the walks with the beachgoers, I now noticed that the beach experiences are more accurately described in terms of losing oneself in an extreme place than as a leap into nature as a place "wholly other." Notions of being blown through by the wind, of being invisible in the flickering light, and dragged into the mesmerizing brutal-and-beautiful movements of the sea seemed to propose a non-dualistic imagery. Whereas classic romantic figures like the archetypes in Caspar David Friedrich's paintings *Wanderer above the Sea Fog* and *Monk by the Sea* portray autonomous selves confronted with majestic mountains and an overpowering sea, the beachgoers' subject-position had a more absorptive, disrupted

26. This contrasts with the research of Sarah Pike who found strong correlations between eco-saboteurs' narratives of childhood experiences of wonder, awe, compassion and love, intimacy, and empathy with other species and their choices for activism. Pike, *For the Wild*, 81–89.

27. Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 6.

28. Bennett, *Enchantment*, 10.

bent to it, as if "being dissolved into the sounds of the waves" or "being in an embracing dream." Even though we might say that, to begin with, they "step out into the outdoors" as another space, other sensibilities soon take over, such as being remolded in a floating world of flickering, rolling, and blowing forces, some overly bright, some provokingly rough, as in a winter storm but with sizzling sand making its way into the ears, teeth, shoes, and eyes.[29] Not to mention the immediate fatigue from the noise and from walking in the soft sand. Also the sweetness of the post-experience, returning home after only an hour, is telling of the roughness and intensity. So, yes, the beach is an "other," a wet desert at the rim of the land, but it is also a place that decomposes the ordinary sense of space and absorbs one in a strange, out-of-the-ordinary place. Yes, the sea is immense, but its shifting colors and incessant movements also cancel out the ordinary sense of spatial dimensions. Yes, the wind and light are "out there" but are also, paradoxically, felt to be inside the body. To be "blown through," this most typical expression of the joy of the beach, is perhaps also the expression that stands most clearly for the beach experience's disturbance of the default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition. And so, yes, it is experienced as invigorating, when you leave early enough, before the beach becomes too cold and too exhausting to enjoy or sense anything.

Phenomenologically speaking, this shift in emphasis corresponds to a shift from Alfred Schutz's notions of transcendence, based on a Kierkegaardian leap between the everyday and the extraordinary, to Herman Schmitz's emphasis on the emotions of the felt body as atmosphere.[30] Concomitantly, it corresponds to a movement from thinking about a gulf between nature and culture to considering notions of environment and quasi-objects.[31] In terms of ethics it moves the attention from Otto's minus-ethics of the wholly Other (that sat well with theologies of a transcendent god) to other *others*, in particular recent discussions of everyday ethics with a non-transcendent interpretation of the crafting of momentary ethics-free selves. Here James D. Faubion in his dialogue with Michael Lambek's "ethics of the ordinary" asks whether ethical concerns are really everywhere as Lambek suggests, that is, as a "part of the human condition" and "intrinsic to human character formation."[32] Are there not occasions that are anethical—subject-positions devoid of ethics? Faubion's answer is yes. At one extreme charismatic authority is anethical, since there is "no one to serve as an ethical other," and at the other extreme cases of mysticism can be anethical processes of desubjectification, since there is no self to make any judgment in the mystic conflation of self and the holy.[33] Moreover, Faubion suggests, "we must be prepared to invoke [the category of the anethical] in characterizing other relationships of a charismatic overtone or undertone. The aestheticist devotion to

29. Jo Lee and Tim Ingold's study of Aberdeen walkers also notices how walking, in some cases, blurs the boundaries between the body and the environment. The winds, the sound, and the moving body enact a world in flux to a point where everything seems to be moving; "Fieldwork on Foot," 72.

30. Schutz and Luckmann, *Structures of the LifeWorld*; Schmitz, *New Phenomenology*.

31. Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*; Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

32. Lambek, "Introduction," 1.

33. Faubion, *An Anthropology of Ethics*, 85; Faubion, "Subject That Is Not One," 303.

art for the sake of art is largely an anethical devotion."[34] As such, Faubion allows for a conceptualization of situations that are more or less "amoral," in the sense that they come with different intensities of the anethical.

Contrary to the identification of enchanting moments in nature (and elsewhere) with, on the one hand, shallow and sentimental affect or, on the other hand, vital moments prompting ethics, the appreciation of the beach moment is not necessarily useful for or benefiting anything but itself and the joy it conjures. As such it is inaccessible in its singularity. The dying away of the ordinary self suspended in ethical relations may not last long before everything, again, moves on. Perhaps this is why, as I was told, you have to return again and again. If you do not, you will forget the forgetfulness that comes with the light, the horizon, and the wind. As such, a walk in a storm may, repeatedly, offer indoor people a joyful register of absorption and forgetting, most convincingly leading to nowhere in particular.

Loving the Living Environment

In the remainder of the article I will turn to other chords of enchantment and ethics, this time in dialogue with Bennett's discussion of an energetic ethics, in which she is less interested in how enchantment augments ethical behavior than in how ethics implies motivational joy. In that sense Bennett is no longer discussing how enchantment propels care, since the small wonders are now already a part of the ethics of care.

In *Enchantments* the contour of enchanted materialism is not as unfolded as it is in *Vibrant Matter*, in which Bennett, inspired by Baruch Spinoza and Henry David Thoreau, among others, shifts attention to the agency of things and nonhuman bodies that she calls "thing-power" and "material vibrancy." Now, provoked by a dead rat, litter, and other kinds of debris, right from the start Bennett strikes on wonders in less classical registers. Here the vital moral of the story is that an enhanced receptivity to vibrant matter of all kinds will "generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies and will enable wiser interventions into that ecology."[35]

My stories are also turning to dissonances, first in peri-urban Copenhagen, and second, by way of a short comparison to the city center, among environmental and climate activists (whom you may stumble upon among other beachgoers on a Sunday afternoon) engaged in radically different enactments of care for nature.

The Plain and its Fantastic Wonders

In 2019 Amager Fælleds Venner (The Friends of Amager Common), a loosely organized group of citizens, protested new housing development projects on Amager Fælled close to the city center of Copenhagen. For several years the main concern of the protests had been a part of the commons called Strandengen (the beach meadow), successfully

34. Faubion, "Anthropologies of Ethics," 441.

35. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 4.

resulting in a political concession to activist demands. A protection order was issued for Strandengen, but in 2020 the municipality appointed a new area for a housing project just next to Strandengen called the Camping site. With a common eco-communicative strategy, Amager Fælleds Venner (AFV) quickly renamed the ground the Lark Plain to signal that somebody actually already lives there.[36] "We live here" often appears on AFV's signs and banners with drawings of the white moth, the lark, the northern crested newt, and other nonhuman inhabitants. In processions, demonstrations, and other public actions, alongside songs, speeches, written complaints, and reports on the state of local biodiversity, these cardboard signs give a voice, the activists say, to the species of the commons, as creatures not only with a natural history but also with neglected "voices in our democracy."

The plain primarily embraces reclaimed land that has previously been used as a military area and landfill, topped up in 1974 with several meters of soil from urban construction sites. The municipality of Copenhagen assessed that it had a "poor to moderate state of nature": the plot was in poor condition, "hardly a landscape." These judgments were communicated at a meeting at the youth hostel, where the chairman of the panel referred to the area as "a bare field" where architects can catch the feeling of "going crazy" and project their "wildest fantasies." In contrast AFV portrayed the Lark Plain as a beautiful and distinctive part of Amager Fælled, where you meet the city's rare birds such as the song lark and snipe in addition to newts, a kind of salamander, and deer.

For decades Amager Fælled had been a highly diversified place where piles of oozing garbage, foxes, bird watchers, sea buckthorns, families on outings, and many more met at the fringe of the city. It was a place with mixed thing-powers of semi-cultivated scrubs in addition to methane leaking underground and other forms of toxic waste.[37] Now there was a clash between developers, the municipality, neighbors, environmental NGOs, and city dwellers. The municipality needed funding for the construction of a city metro and space for housing in a growing city, whereas a new alliance of botanists, ornithologists, green activists, and other nature lovers stated that the place had developed into "a wild place," a hub for several threatened species, a vital part of the "lung of the city," and a place with "true nature for an urban childhood."

During the campaigns and conflicts, Amager Fælled became fertile ground for what might be compared with Bron Taylor's analysis of the naturalistic, dark green religion of North America, but again with different historical conditions concerning religion.[38]

36. In Danish *bor* refers to a dwelling, implying privacy and ownership.

37. As such, the site would fit well into the *Feral Atlas Project* curated by Anna L. Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena, and Feifei Zhou as an industrial and military infrastructure and, after a few years' abandonment, home to many species.

38. Taylor defines religion broadly as having to "do with that which connects and binds people to that which they most value, depend on, and consider sacred"; *Dark Green Religion*, 2. Taylor distinguishes between four types of dark green religion that are more or less spiritualistic, naturalistic, animistic, and Gaian (that is, the organicist tradition that understands the biosphere to be alive or conscious [*Dark Green Religion*, 16–17]).

Among AFV the campaign unfolded in an ecological ethos that sought out new ways to not only oppose rampant domestication of "nature" but also to cultivate new ways of care by keeping a respectful distance. Hence, almost like Taylor's cases, connecting respectfully to "nature" was mediated by "reverent care."[39] Thus the eco-centric-oriented ethics is less interested in the classical mood of enchantment as awe as such, although they might experience it themselves, than in the deliberate cultivation of ethical sensibilities that acknowledge that human well-being may depend on other species.

In AFV's campaigns, efforts were made to collect diverse strands of knowledge about the autochthonous and migratory animals and plants appearing in the commons. Through collective identification of endangered and thriving species AFV members explicitly sought to create and deepen Copenhageners' relations to red-listed plants like *Selinum dubium* and the endangered northern crested newt and to the widespread sea buckthorn and blackberry. Through their campaigns they relied less on the dictum that love sparks care than on crafting practices of care that they hoped would spark new forms of love. Thus, contrary to the Nature Agency's management strategy of rarely involving citizen science campaigns, AFV initiated the "bioblitz," a biological survey attempting to record all the living species within a designated area, and which extended beyond the experts in beetles, birds, and plants to ordinary citizens. In the demos and protests the call for environmental care was a means of connecting citizens and decision makers of Copenhagen to the animals and plants as neglected kin. AFV caretakers took on the role of educators of respectful ways of connecting to both common and neglected inhabitants in registers far from the mainstream and the self-forgetting beach-like appreciation of the outdoors. To AFV the commons was a semi-feral backyard in which citizens could cultivate the joy of respecting nature's intrinsic values, both at the commons and within oneself.

On a guided tour introducing some of the widespread medicinal plants (such as perforate Saint-John's-wort), a guide stressed how she had, during the past few years, slowly acquainted herself with the plants through hundreds of visits where she patiently befriended the plants through careful observation. She had developed habits of approaching the plants with a quiet greeting, asking for permission to collect specimens, and she followed her intuition while choosing some plants for further investigation. The absorbed reading of botanical and folk medicine encyclopedias and attentiveness to folk myths and plant stories across many literary genres also formed part of her new plant-thinking relationship (see Janelle Marie Baker in this issue). In an interview she explained how, in accordance with her vegan preferences, it had become important for her to think of the plants as beings to equalize "all there *is*" instead of routinely positioning humans as "half-gods" above the other species.[40] Formerly a full-time indoor person with computer gaming as her favorite activity, she now approached the powers of the plant world with a sense of friendship and relatedness, yet also with a respect for

39. Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 12.

40. In Danish, *væsner*, a term normally referring only to animals.

its "fantastic wonders" and integrity. As such, on the guided tours and through her regular Facebook postings she hoped to inspire other people to develop intimate and respectful relationships with the "magical beings" whom, she said, she had truly come to love. This was, she pointed out, her way of being an activist, since she had "no political contacts" and didn't "have the nerve to plan large gatherings."

A main organizer of AFV told me, in interviews, about his version of a personal relation to the commons with slightly different registers of enchantment and ethics. Since childhood he had been fascinated by many different animals and spent many hours, days, and holidays in the outdoors. Over time he developed a special relation to the newts. As a film photographer by profession he had studied the northern crested newt with his cameras for years and had an intimate knowledge of how and when they breed and undergo metamorphosis from tadpole to newt, and where and how they live on the commons. He had documented their hiding places, beneath rotting twigs and molding garbage, and he studied throughout the year how they move around. Since the newt is protected by European Union directives and likes to forage on the projected construction site, the Lark Plain, it had also become central to AFV's campaigns. As an appointed ambassador of the newly formed Embassy of the Species (an association working for the protection and promotion of other species) he recited a tribute to the newt in which he praised it as "a dragon of the North," at once "prehistoric and a voice in our democracy," a species living "in the underworld of a human world of [economic] growth." Thus the commons was praised for holding unique exemplars of a rare species despite its official reputation of being a shabby park. "Underneath a forgotten old shirt, you may find a newly transformed newt, shiny orange with black dots, and fingers just like yours," the ambassador explained in an interview. In the debris and waste, and in "what might be an old crime scene . . . in the mud, the miracles keep on." To underline his sense of relatedness across time and place he continued, "I feel the old dragon in my own spine."

In praising the incredible work of evolution and the magic of myths the ambassador of the newt called for feelings of humility and a duty to know other species, to connect to them, and to care for them as part of "the greater community" of the branches of the genealogical tree. "The screaming ape," he added, who "tends to believe it is unique and safely positioned at the top of this tree," would learn much if it "attended the school of the other species" and "relearned what it means to be eaten, to have patience, to die, and to take part in regenerative symbioses." The enactment of the commons as a place of relational work was a call for a motivational ethics several steps removed from the beach-like cultivation of the outdoors. Rather than praising the bright moments of forgetfulness, which he nevertheless knew of and practiced himself, he advocated for eco-centric practices of symbiosis with other species, also with species, he pointed out, with probably little effect on the larger species community. Valuing feral life over further domestication, the threatened newt as a dragon and master in metamorphosis, inspired the acknowledgment that life critically exceeds human

control and knowledge. In other words, the call was made for new disturbing, captivating moods and new chords of enchantment in new forms of cooperation in a Gaia-like ethics of environmental care.

Saving the Planet

Before the concluding remarks, shortly and comparatively, I will consider yet another nature. Here my interlocutors were participants in a Friday for Future demo, young Copenhageners engaged in varying forms of climate activism. Some took part in the organization of climate marches, with or without elements of civil obedience, others characterized themselves as everyday activists who supported demos and everyday climate-friendly practices. Even though the young climate activists considered their political aims as overlapping with AFV's agenda, and occasionally took an outing to the winter beach, I was struck by their much more pronounced indoorsiness and their open declarations of how little they knew about the environment. A group of high school pupils and university students in their early twenties did remember being taken to the nearest pond early in their schooling, but since then it had never occurred to them that the mud might harbor any magic. Some lamented that their schooling had robbed them of their language about and experiences with other species. Forgetting words like *bark*, never leaving the paths in parks and forests, and having developed a distaste for unattractive insects, rain, and dirt, they speculated about whether they had ever related their engagement in environmental care or climate change to the natural recreational areas they visited now and then. Typically, the answer would be negative. Instead this group of young people, expressing high levels of frustration with the political slowness and inattentiveness of earlier generations to planetary crises, consistently tried to connect to the biocultures of urban life, "insisting," as they often said, that it should be possible to live "without harming the planet" or—most often interchangeably—nature. In that way, CO_2 as a dangerously vibrant matter became the main concern and their nearest nature in relation to which everything could be measured.

The climate activists argued that it was time for serious changes, politically and personally, to reduce the carbon footprint. Among them several pointed to the changes they themselves had brought about by reducing meat and dairy products in their diet. Their zeal was manifested in other efforts to change acquired habits and values: they preferred trains and bikes over cars and aircrafts, and they redirected their preferences to secondhand clothes and to seasonal, organic, local food products (if they could afford it). As such, they were motivated by finding ways to attach themselves to well-being at a planetary level, mediated by scales of CO_2. Yet at the same time, they were disturbed by what Timothy Morton has called the "weird knowing": that despite knowing that every non-expenditure of CO_2 would not do the planet any good statistically, they nevertheless performed this responsibility in everyday, exemplary micro-events.[41]

41. Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 8.

This concerted activism, momentarily "figuring" a sustainable future in "exemplary actions," as Stine Krøijer has framed it, was vested in manifold everyday actions. The exemplary action of refusing invitations to overseas holidays or buying one's greens from local market gardeners were cultivated as an ethics of love and responsibility.[42] Meticulously putting the milk carton's plastic lid in the correct refuse pail and repairing old household machines, it struck me, were not tedious chores but zealously crafted efforts of a caring connecting to the real world of "nature." Knowing well that the planet would not thrive any better because of the singular microscopic action itself, the activists nevertheless insisted on the vitality in these actions and non-doings of connecting to the planet.

Concomitantly, demos with speeches, chanting, social mingling, and performative features were not only directed at decision makers and voters; they also worked as places for releasing political frustrations and energizing high hopes. The focus on CO_2 generated a subtle awareness of the complicated connection between their individual ecological footprints, which led to multiple interventions, even though everybody was fully aware that only collective, global efforts can energize a transformation of the planet into sustainable ecologies. In a kind of magical-cum-political practice, a reconfigured chord of wonder and ethics, and never referring to it as a disenchanted ethos of gaining less, these actors, in my analysis, tried to make the smallest indoor routines and the continuous demos in the streets exemplars of motivational attachments to the planet.

New Moral Ecologies

By comparing indoor people's enactments of diverse natures that gain public attention as hopeful avenues to a greener future I have argued how love for nature and care for the environment are not necessarily woven into each other. The sensibilities and moralities swing from anethical moments to diverse affective forms of responsibility oriented toward specific landscapes, habitats, or the whole planet. Moreover, the enchanted ecologies of the remote beach, the peri-urban commons, and CO_2, show how indoor people's chords of enchantment and care for nature come in highly diverse versions, which do not, contrary to public intuition and policies, translate easily from one to the other.

This analysis does not preclude the possibility that moments of enchantment in beach-like nature might inspire pro-environmental values but emphasizes that, surprisingly often, this seems not to be the case. I have suggested that the beach enactment is deliberately disconnected both from nature as the awe-inspiring classical transcendent other and from the disturbing facts of the indoor generation as living in a polluted (indoor and global) environment. As such the anethical moment harbors a joyful register of absorption and self-forgetting that conjures nature as a naturalistic, amoral good. To ignore the small wonders or to deem them unethical or apolitical tout court in a world with escalating ecological crises is also to isolate what is only a part of larger ecologies

42. Krøijer, *Revolution Is the Way You Eat*.

and ethics of care. Beach-like magical self-forgetting may also turn up at the commons in moments of unsolicited love of a newt or in sweet moments with a blazing sun in the city. Albeit the moments are deliberately cultivated at the beach, they are nevertheless not uncommon in the urban outdoors. However, relying on the indoor people's beach-like love for nature as a primary motivational joy for environmental care seems to lead to a blind alley. Can the indoor people learn to play several chords of wonder and ethics at the same time? During fieldwork, indeed, I did meet nature geeks and concerned citizens who deliberately tried to traverse the natures that modern secularization have separated, but these were rare birds.

As the comparative cases have focused on, the multiple enactments of nature prompt dispute and conflict. This is also the case at the beaches. In Tisvildeleje, the Nature Agency, landowners, tourist hotels, and visitors constantly negotiate how the beaches are best used and protected. In summer 2021 the municipality of Copenhagen approved the removal of nests and newts from the Lark Plain. The AFV activists immediately responded with new protests, now in full newt attire, and have by other means continued to address politicians, investors, and the public. As I am writing this in November 2021, the climate protests also continue, with new confrontations between the government and protestors. Concerning the beaches, as in other exposed low-lying areas of the world, over the next decades many will be seriously affected by rising sea levels motoring new and higher levels of social conflict.

The ecological crises demonstrate that the indoor people's contemporary enactments of nature do not translate into effective forms of responsibility. But the same crises also prompt new responses that deserve attention. The need for care for many natures is immense, and new chords of wonder must critically energize collective indoor and outdoor engagement.

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