

Mountain Biking in the (Neg)Anthropocene. Encountering, Witnessing, and Reorienting to, the End of the 'Natural' World.

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Mountain bikers have long been derided by other users of the countryside. Critics have accused them of unsettling natural habitats, destroying plant life, and accelerating the erosion of surfaces and landscapes. In addition, mountain bikers are often said to constitute the 'outdoor anti-citizen' signifying 'all that is feckless and reckless' in a countryside that is primed for 'quiet enjoyment' (Brown et al, 2014). In this presentation, however, I argue that contrary to popular opinion, mountain biking can serve to both ease the trauma associated with 'Nature's' destruction, whilst helping to imagine a range of 'post-natural' futures. Bringing together a number of recent publications, and drawing on over five years of fieldwork with mountain bikers, electric mountain bikers, trail builders, and mountain bike advocates, I contend that the negentropic (Stiegler, 2018) qualities of mountain bike culture comprise a performative response adequate to the challenges arising from our current climate crisis, specifically those relating to the threat of consumer apathy. In particular, I proffer that it is the very 'uncanniness' (Morton, 2016) of the mountain bike as a technological artifact that renders an experience that is both constitutive of, and distanced from, the surfaces and materials with which it interacts. With this in mind, mountain bikes, as a particular form of off-road travel, are positioned as 'therapeutic prescriptions' (Stiegler, 2018: 34) that facilitate practices of care and attention within a specific social system, whilst assuaging the nihilistic discourse of existing Anthropocene thinking. As opposed to being simply subjective (i.e human-centred resilience), these care-ful practices, which include getting 'dirty', and the active enrolment of non-human labour, as well as the collective conversations and contestations that stem from these, are argued to facilitate more deliberative and open relationships with the environment, whilst engendering new and emerging forms of (onto)political subjectivity that are made to the measure of the (Neg)Anthropocene (Stiegler, 2018).