

Computational Methods in Urban Studies

Week 4 : A Goofy motor mania

James Marshall

Dr. Alexis Gummy (alexis.gummy@epfl.ch)

Plan

1. Theory | **Habitus and social practice theories**

→ Nuance the determinism related to the social classes approach.

2. Examples | **Gender(ed) identities and car cultures**

→ How did men become a social problem?

3. Policies | **Fighting petromasculinity**

→ Moving away from individualistic nudging policies.

4. Practice | **Structural equation modeling and gendered latent variables**

→ Environmental concern and transportation mode convenience.

The Plot



← *réf.: Aston Martin*

ASTON MARTIN

The Plot



← *réf.: Aston Martin*

ASTON MARTIN

↓ *réf.: 007.com*



The Plot



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↓ *réf.: 007.com*



réf.: blast ↓



The Plot



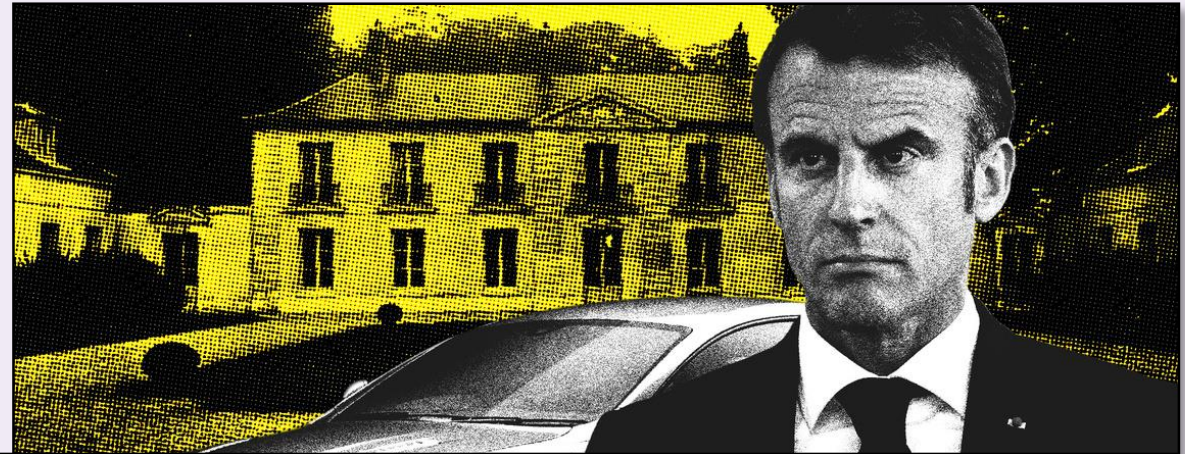
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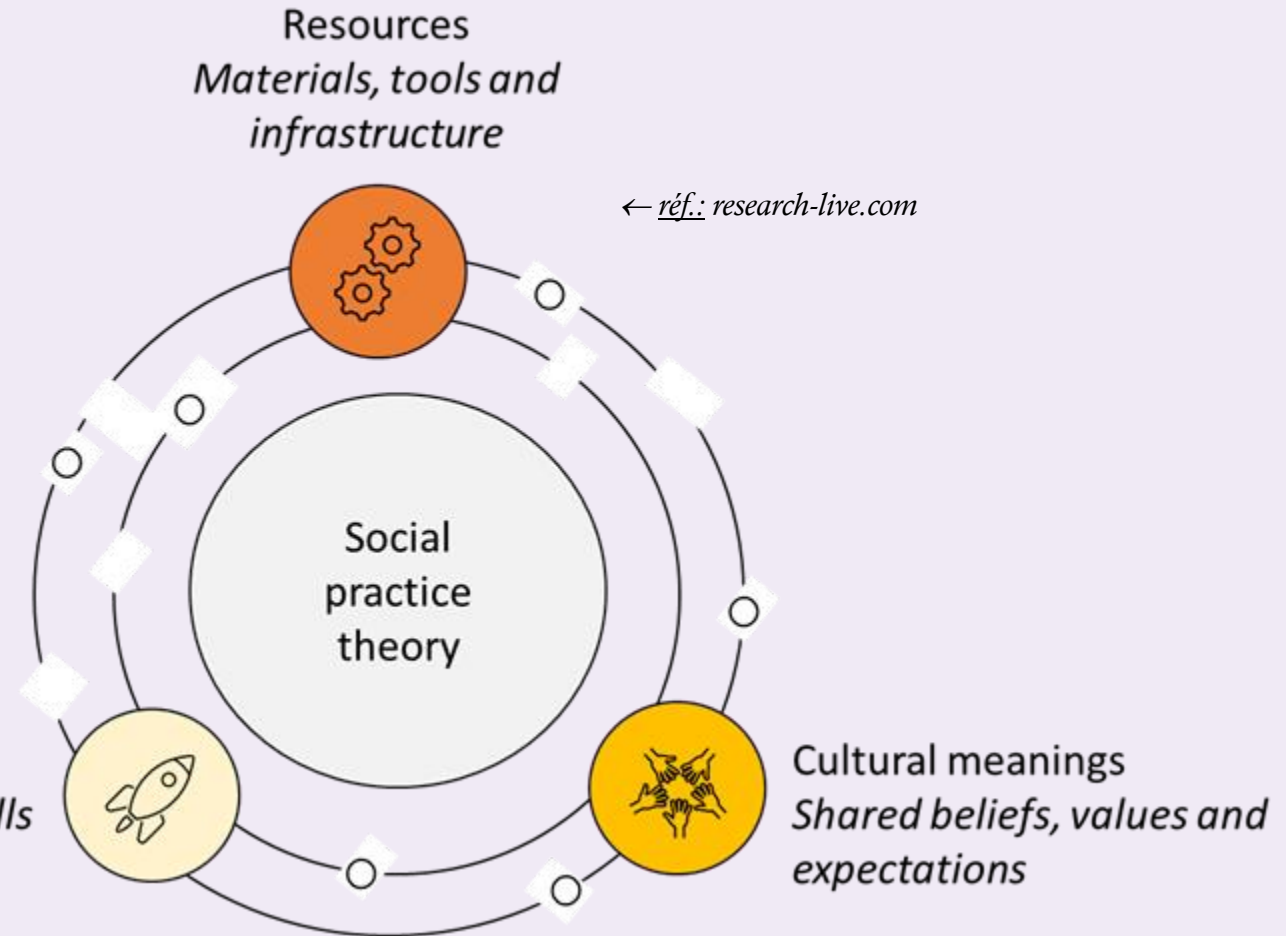
“What’s really important for the French is that... We’re very fond of the car. We love the car. And me, I love it.” (Emmanuel Macron, 24.09.2023).

1 : Habitus and social practice theories

- **The “Social Practice Theories” (SPT)**

- A social practice depends on resources (materials, things), competencies (skills), and meanings (values).
- Transportation modes “recruit” their users (through habitus).
- Practices form bundles (derived demand, system of automobility).
- A social practice is not an individual practice.

Competencies
Knowledge and skills



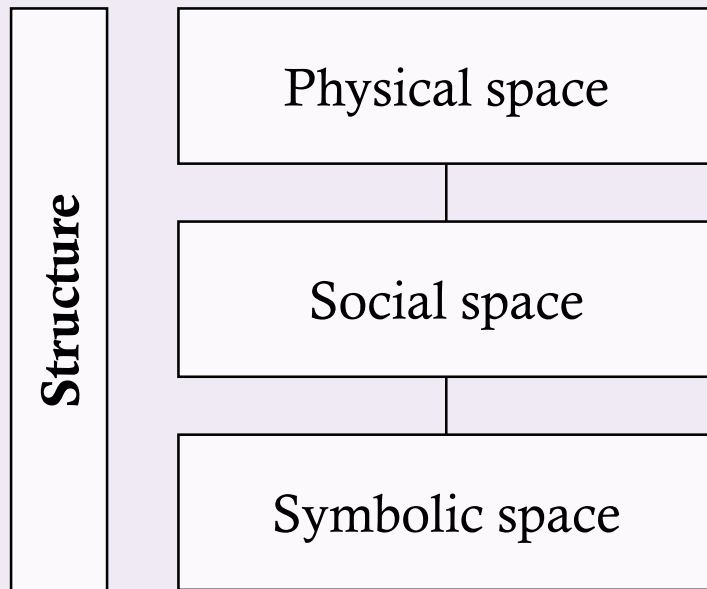
1 : Habitus and social practice theories

- **The process of embodiment**

Social space

1 : Habitus and social practice theories

- **The process of embodiment**



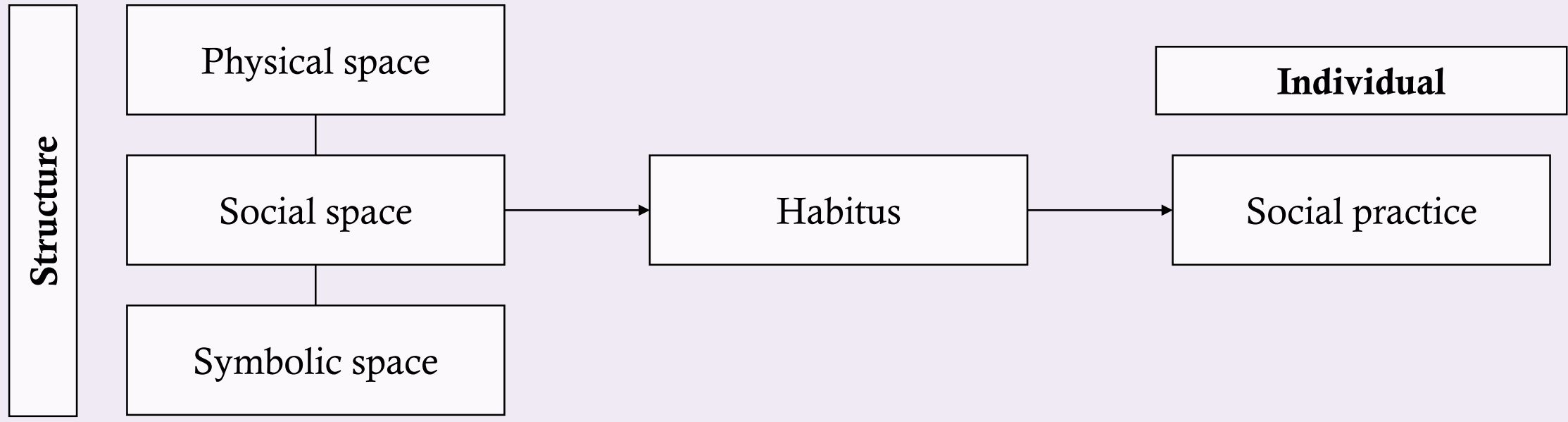
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- The process of embodiment



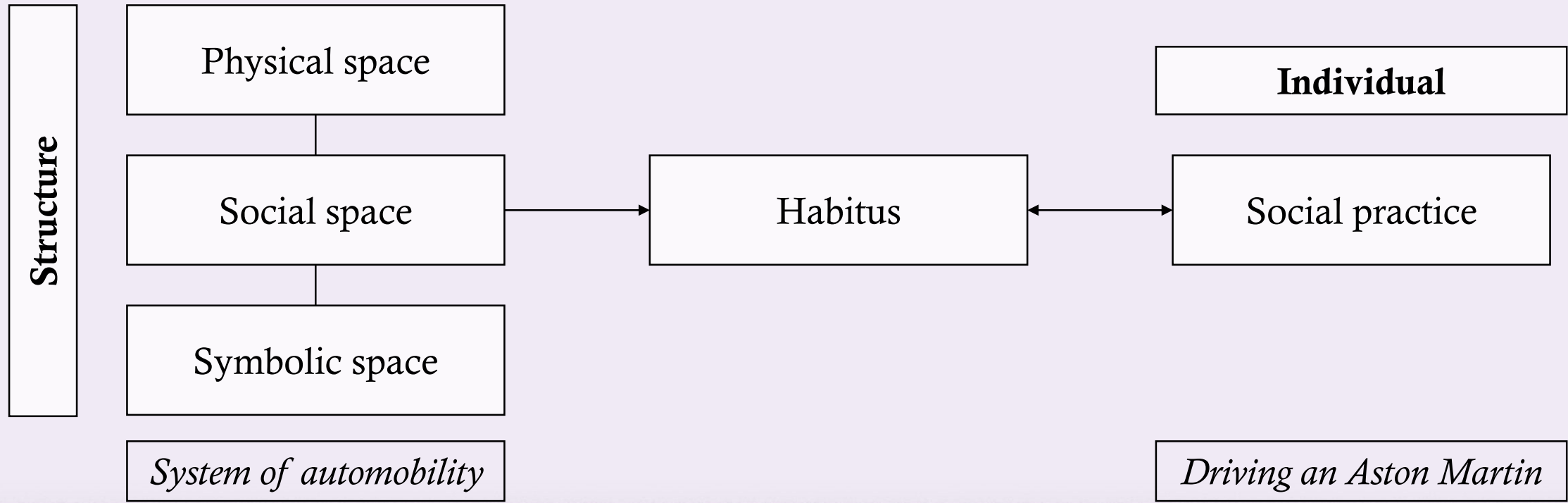
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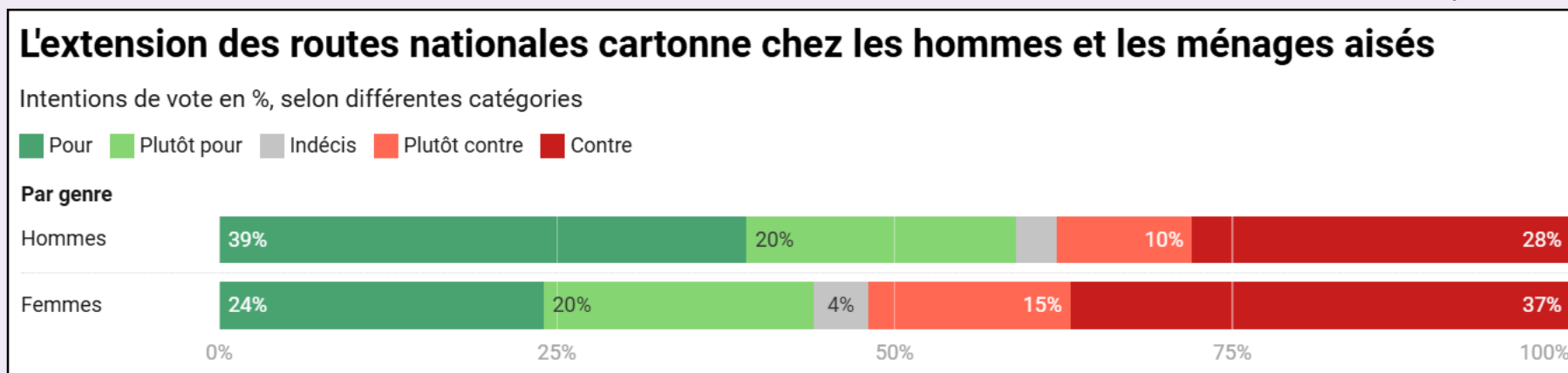
- **A dispositional perspective of individual action (or agency)**
 - *Capitals in embodied form* = the social (or the history) existing within individuals = what lies in me that makes me capable of driving of car ≠ objectified form.
 - *Dispositions* = acquired, durable, and transposable inclination (or propensity) to reproduce a practice in a given context = what makes the car an obvious or natural choice ≠ competencies.
 - *Habitus* = the set of dispositions that produce collective individuals, or embodied structures, bounding individuals rationality = why we struggle to move away from the car ≠ habits.
 - *Socialization* = all the processes through which individuals are constituted (or forged, modeled, etc.) by the local/global societies they are exposed to, and during which individuals acquire (or learn, embody, etc.) socially situated dispositions = everything that contributed to my taste or love for the car ≠ sociability.

2 : Gender(ed) identities and car cultures

- **Automotive emotions (Mimi Sheller)**

- There are objective reasons why men and women do not drive to the same extent (i.e., Week 2 class).
- What about subjective, embodied reasons, which would result from socialization processes? Is there a *gendered* car-driver habitus?

réf.: rts.ch ↓

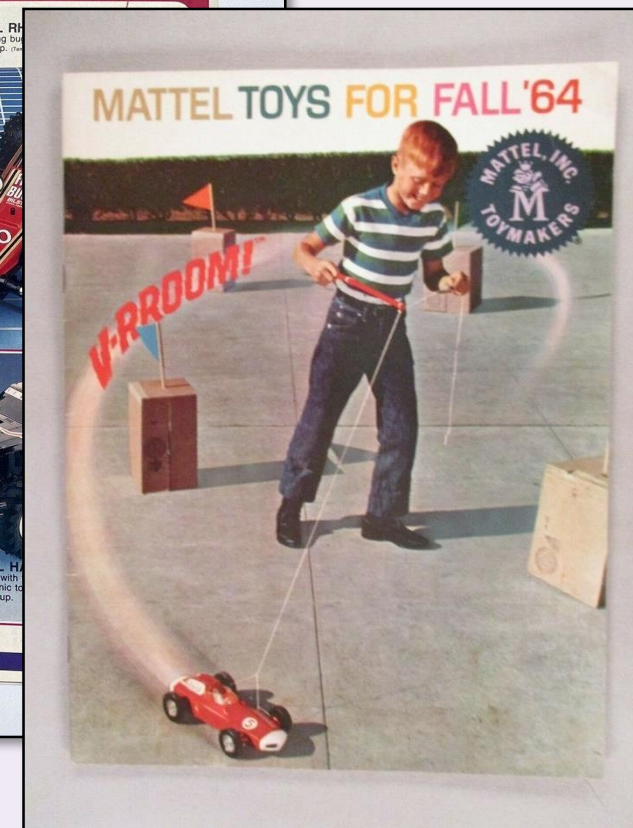


2 : Gender(ed) identities and car cultures

- Automotive emotions: relationship with the car as an object
 - Socialization through advertisement and family.
 - Kids embody the correspondence between cars (or other transport modes) and boys.
 - Dispositions to fast and reckless behaviors.



← *réf.*: Toys'R'Us



réf.: Mattel →

2 : Gender(ed) identities and car cultures

- **Automotive emotions: relationship with driving rules**
 - Socialization through institutionalized and compulsory learning lessons.
 - Drivers embody the official recognition stating that men drive “better” than women.
 - Dispositions to showcase confidence behind the wheel (virility).

2 : Gender(ed) identities and car cultures

- **Automotive emotions: could cars be socialization instances themselves?**
 - Socialization through the car(s).
 - Members of the household embody the social role(s) that cars perpetuate and help to accomplish.
 - Dispositions to individualistic vs. collective practices and opinions.

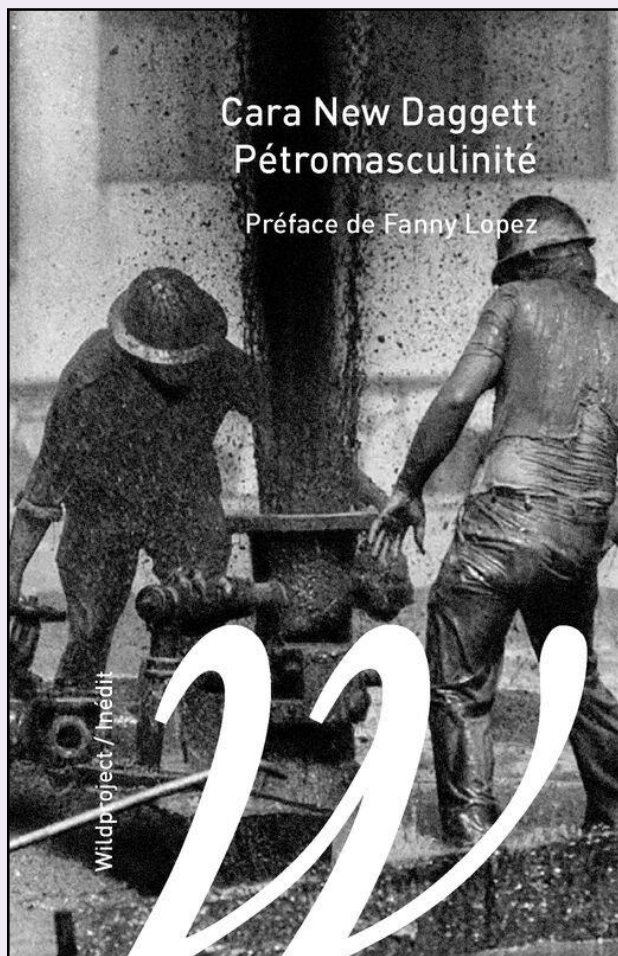


réf.: [npr.org](https://www.npr.org) →

2 : Gender(ed) identities and car cultures

- **From a psychological problem to a social problem**
 - Tempting to explain some of the “latent” dimensions of car practices through psychologizing or biological arguments (“impulse”, “instincts”).
 - Not only will this reinforce (gendered) stereotypes but also miss the point: automobility is a social problem, which needs to be addressed as such.
 - Social practice theories and theory of habitus help in that regard → can be extended to sustainability issues.

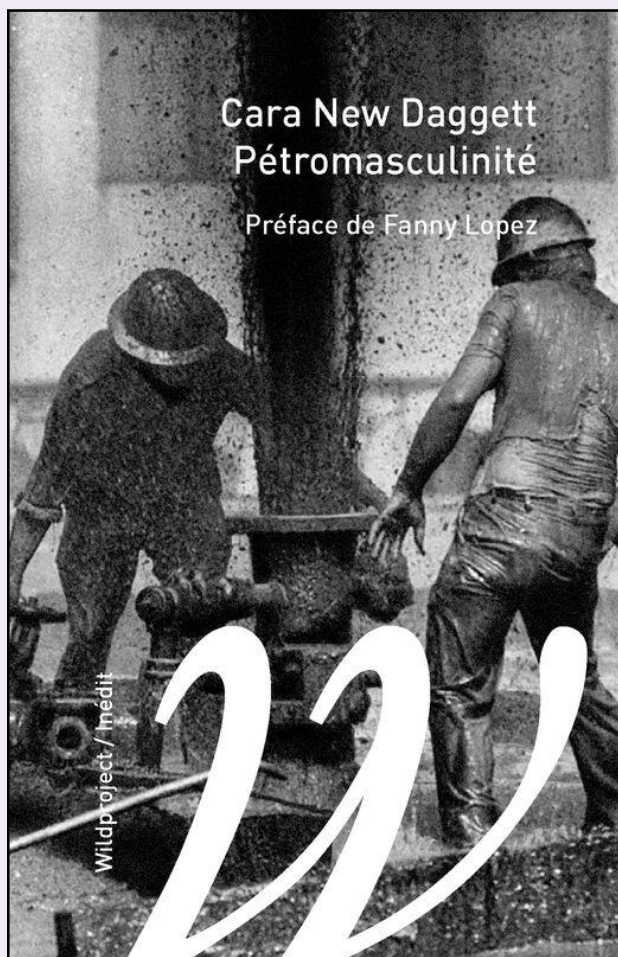
3 : Fighting petromasculinity



- **Petromasculinity**

← *réf.: Wild Project*

3 : Fighting petromasculinity



← *réf.*: Wild Project

- **Petromasculinity**

- Masculinity can be reaffirmed through an obeisance to oil.
- Masculinity = socially constructed identity that emerges within a gender order that defines masculinity in opposition to femininity [and] sustains a power relation between men and women as groups.
- *“The technical, affective, ideational, and material relationship between fossil fuels and (white) patriarchal orders”*.
- To treat misogyny and unsustainability as concomitant dimensions of new authoritarian movements.

3 : Fighting petromasculinity

- **Threatened masculine identities**
 - Gender identities are no stranger to living in a fossil-fueled system.
 - Energetic abundance always relied on gendered discrimination and is endangered because of environmental policies.
 - Extreme case: “rolling coal” in the US as both a “leisure” (enjoyment) and a political statement.



réf.: [TheDistancePlan](#) →

3 : Fighting petromasculinity

- **Cars as a conduit for petromasculinity**

- Driving a car is embedded in care(lessness) about the climate and responds to gendered habitus.
- Combustion as the assertion of virility.
- Hypermasculinity as reaction to threatened identities.
- Mechanical/technological dimensions of the cars as male appealing properties.
- Speeding as a way to satisfy thrill seeking.
- Reckless driving as an individual (collective) reward (cost).
- Cars' male recruits have higher propensities for unnecessary unsustainable social practices.

3 : Fighting petromasculinity



réf.: URBACT →

3 : Fighting petromasculinity

- **Transportation engineering and the nudge narrative**
 - Urban policies have been informed by rational choice economics and psychological theories (individualistic perspectives).

“Nudges are subtle changes in the way *choices* are presented that influence behaviour *without restricting* options or significantly altering economic incentives. They work on the principle of *guiding* individuals towards a *desired choice* by leveraging psychological insights. While the private sector—such as the car industry—has effectively utilised behavioural nudges for years to promote certain behaviours (like buying a specific brand or model), public policy has been slower to adopt these methods. If public transport systems do not harness these insights, they may be at a *disadvantage* in encouraging more sustainable behaviours.” (URBACT, EU, 2025).

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→ Solving the causes or the symptoms?

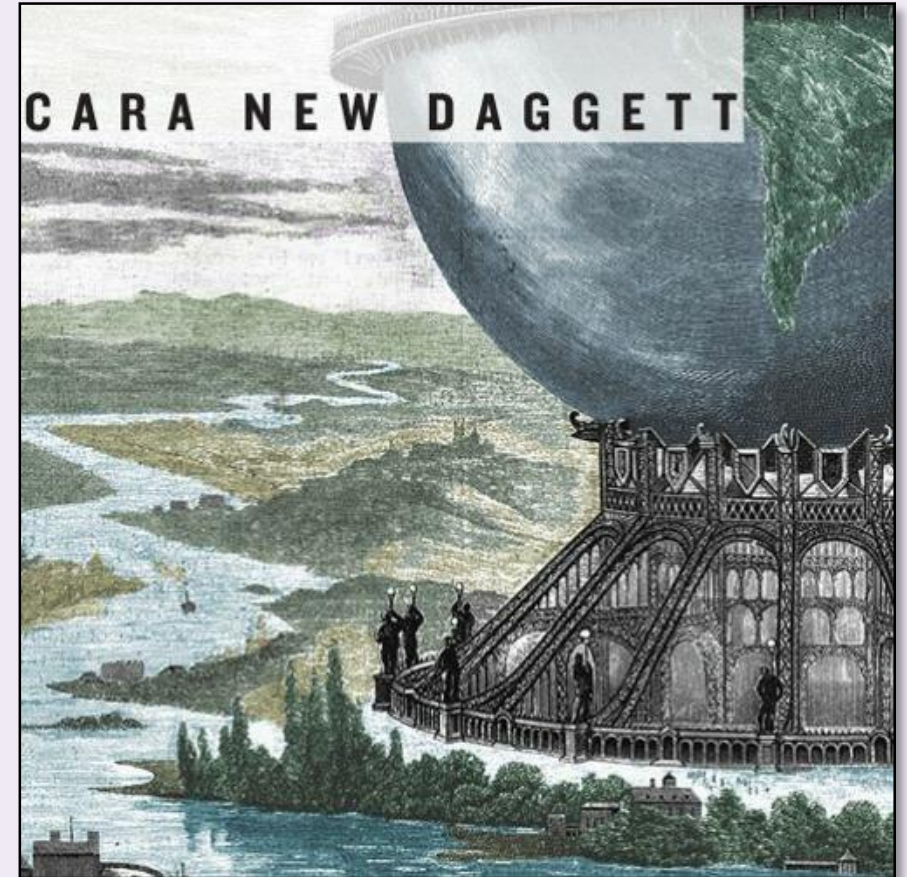
3 : Fighting petromasculinity

- **Resistance to change?**
 - How to use social practice theory and habitus to overcome nudge policies?
 - Account for the embeddedness of car practices and how obvious they are.
 - Practices result from a habitus where acquired dispositions can be activated when facing social, spatial, moral, political, etc., conditions.
 - Reduce gendered inequalities in habitus.
 - Come up with (im)material solutions to reduce how the car recruits unsustainable practices.

“It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing, that what they do has more meaning than they know.” (Bourdieu, 1977)

3 : Fighting petromasculinity

- **Three equations we need to resolve for sustainable energy systems**
 - Movement \neq Progress.
 - Comfort \neq Consumption.
 - Innovation \neq Petromasculinity.



Conclusion

réf.: GuillaumeTC (Twitter / X) ↓

- **Do people *care* for the Planet?**
 - (Auto)mobile behaviors needs to be understood as social practices to make sense of the latent and non-rational motives behind them.
 - Unsustainable/unnecessary car practices stem from gendered dispositions – forging habitus – acquired through uneven socialization processes.
 - Urban policies cannot simply rely on tailored incentives (nudges) if the goal is to encourage sustainable mobility *while addressing social inequalities*.
 - R Session: Who *cares* for the environment?

