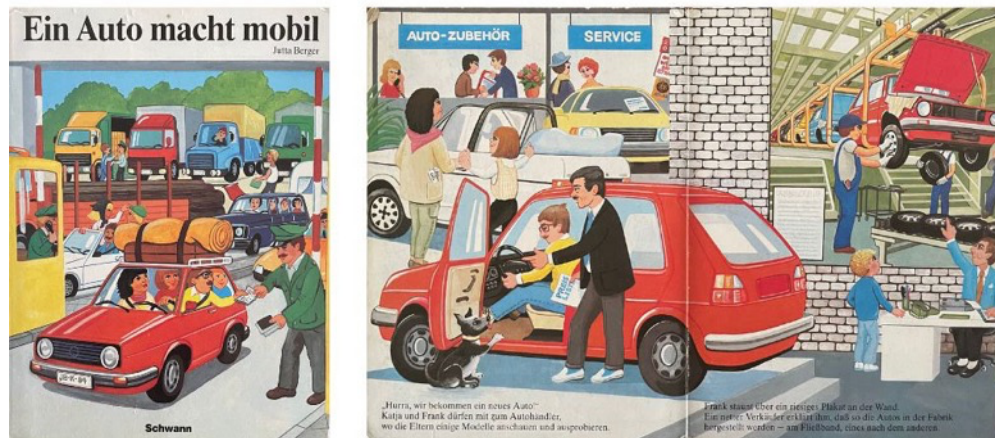


## The socioecological transition can only come by bike<sup>1</sup>

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With the last IPCC reports, the failure of a three-decade government and corporate-led climate agenda is undeniable and heralds the intensification of a crisis that affects unequally the most vulnerable population on the planet and also the less responsible for the crisis<sup>2</sup>. While all this is happening, a corporate energy transition conceived by the most pollutant and energy-consuming countries of the planet establishes a new consensus of so-called *critical minerals* that translates into financial speculation and the consequent expansion of the frontiers of what activists and scholars call green extractivism. A new expression of neoliberalism, Green Extractivism is not only the subjugation of human communities and nature to a zero-emission economy chimera, but also the commodification of the crisis by those who created it in the first place.

That's exactly what many in the Global South and further are currently denouncing and fighting against nowadays. Actually, last summer and after having spent a whole week meeting activists, rural communities and scholars resisting lithium mining in the Jadar Valley, Serbia<sup>3</sup>, I found myself in Berlin. The heat wave was nearly unbearable in all the region and yet I managed to enjoy the city that hosted me years ago at some point of my life. A place every time I visit seems more expensive and gentrified as electric devices of all sizes invade streets and even sidewalks. While taking a walk by Neukölln, I found these typical *free boxes* full of old and not-always-useful stuff. A colorful old book for children caught all my attention so I took it. Its title was *Ein Auto macht mobil*. It had to come in handy one day, I reckoned, and kept it.



Text Image 1 "A car makes you mobile" by Jutta Berger

Text Image 2 : (Left page) "Hurra, we're getting a new car!" Katja and Frank are allowed to go to the car dealer where their parents can look and try out a few models." (Right page) "Frank marvels at a huge poster on the wall. A nice salesman explains to him that this is how cars are made in the factory – on the assembly line, one after another"

<sup>1</sup> The title is a reference to the sentence "Socialism can only come by bike", from Jose Antonio Viera-Gallo, Salvador Allende's Secretary of Justice, cited by Brand and Wiessen (2017).

<sup>2</sup> See: Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment report (AR6). Summary for Policymakers [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Press conference: International Declaration Against Lithium Mining <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeOZg4eG190>

Taking a look to it with the aid of the translator on my phone, the first thing that came to my mind was how we tend to analyze the problem related to lithium mining as a socioecological issue related to unsustainable mining practices in territories *where governments are probably corrupted and legislation is insufficient*. On the one hand, these realities usually keep us too busy to question ourselves about what happens on the side of the demand for the *critical minerals*. What is lithium (and copper, cobalt, and nickel) extracted for? Who's going to use these electric vehicles, and what for? What about the EV factories? Aren't there any alternatives such as electric public transportation?

On the other hand, narrow and reductionist interpretations of the reality of rural territories suffering from centuries of colonial extractivism and increasing climate change effects such as the Puna de Atacama (or the misnamed *Lithium Triangle*) not only hide the persistent violations of Indigenous human rights and the degradation of ecosystems such as the Andean salt flats and wetlands, but entitle the predacious industries aforementioned to commodify the local conflict under slogans such as *responsible mining* or *responsible sourcing*. As a result, companies avoid obligations set by international conventions ratified by Chile such as ILO169 and Escazú and minerals like lithium can access the German and EU markets in spite of the companies' continuous misdeeds.

But using a beautifully produced and cured *glocal*/space such as this to bring details about the myriad of impacts of lithium mining in Atacama Salt Flat – just any other megamining in any other ecosystem subjugated to the explosive demand of raw materials from world superpowers such as Germany – would be an absurdity. I feel rather compelled to favor a collective reflection on how hegemonic modes of thinking and living are profoundly limiting both the understanding of the crisis and the conception of its solutions or, needless to say, their impacts. Also, what would the role of social movements, local communities, civil society organizations and, why not, artists be when it comes to put push and work for a for a socioecological transition that puts people and life over profit. For that to happen we'll need to reimagine the world economy and transform modes of living specially of the most pollutant and energy consuming societies. A cultural change that – among others - will need more bikes and more books like this.



Image: Book "The Car that Wanted to be a Bike" by Lior Steinberg (Human Kind City)