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Environmental manifestoes

Argumentative strategies in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*

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In this paper, we analyze the argumentative strategies deployed in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*, published in 2015 by a group of leading environmental thinkers. We draw on pragma-dialectics and Perelman's rhetoric to characterize manifesto as a genre of practical argumentation. Our goal is to explore the relation of manifesto as a discursive genre to the argumentative structures and techniques used in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*. We therefore take into scrutiny the elements of practical argumentation employed in the manifesto and describe the polylogical strategies of dissociation in negotiating the ecological value of nature and the modernist value of progress.

Keywords: argumentative genre, argument schemes, arguments from values, dissociation, ecomodernism, environmental values, environmental rhetoric, hierarchies of values, polylogue

1. Introduction

Studying environmental manifestoes seems a risky endeavor. After all, we have been duly warned that “environmentalism is dead” (Shellenberger & Nordhaus, 2004) and that “the manifesto is passé” (Weeks, 2013, p. 216). One might justifiably wonder, then, if any study of such a topic can be anything more than an academic autopsy of sorts. We think it can. Crucially, environmental argumentation permeates our lives in an unprecedented manner, through a wide array of communicative efforts including manifestoes written even by the same people who announce the demise of environmentalism.¹ Yet, despite its manifest

1. Shellenberger and Nordhaus are among the authors of the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* we analyze below.

argumentative characteristics, the genre of manifesto has not so far been analyzed from the perspective of argumentation theory. By doing so, we hope to advance the study of argumentation in context and of environmental discourse, given that the manifesto is an overtly argumentative genre and still alive in environmental debates. Indeed, as we demonstrate below, methods of argumentation analysis can more precisely depict and systematize characteristics of manifesto which other approaches have observed but struggled to grasp in a consistent fashion.

In particular, we focus on the ways the characteristics of the manifesto can be strategically used in environmental argumentation. To do this, we first, in Section 2, discuss the general features of “manifesto” as an argumentative genre: exploring the reasons why one chooses to write a manifesto, or better, why one chooses to label a text as a manifesto, we investigate how it may be a suitable way to call for an action in order to influence value-based deliberation. Second, in Section 3, we provide an account of the main environmental positions and values, paying special attention to the history of eco-modernist ideas and proposals. In this account, eco-modernism is identified as offering a nuanced position by negotiating the key dividing lines between modernist anthropocentrism and ecological non-anthropocentrism.

As a case study, in Section 4 we analyze the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*, published in April 2015 by a group of eighteen contemporary environmental thinkers. We chose it as a relatively recent, influential, and distinctive contribution to the decades-long tradition of arguing about environment through manifestoes. As we argue further on, a close analysis of the Manifesto allows to reveal and thus better understand the complex argumentative strategies of today’s environmental discourse, where many distinct positions are debated by numerous actors (players) across various discursive venues (places) (see Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017). Our primary goal is, accordingly, to explore the relation of the manifesto as a discursive genre to the argumentative structures and techniques used in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*. In achieving this goal, more specifically, we address the following questions:

- RQ1. Which argumentative features of the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* are occasioned by the discourse genre? (see Section 4.1)
- RQ2. What is the central policy/practical argument advocated by the manifesto? (see Section 4.2)
- RQ3. How is this argument structured and defended, in particular, which values feature in its defense and in which ways? (see Section 4.3)

In addressing these questions, we rely on a range of concepts and methods used in argumentation theory. Drawing on pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren, 2010) and

Perelman's rhetoric (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), we look closely into the structure of practical reasoning employed (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Lewiński, 2017, 2018) and into the polylogical strategies of public argumentation (Lewiński, 2014, 2017; Lewiński & Aakhus, 2014; Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017).

We intend to illustrate that a deliberate selection of a genre constitutes an argumentative strategy, or that it can be conceived as a component of such a strategy. Our analysis shows how the culturally well-established conventions of a specific genre – manifesto – may be appropriated by arguers in order to construct a complex yet distinct argumentative position in the context of a polylogical disagreement space.

2. Manifesto as an argumentative genre

The word 'manifesto' comes from Latin *manifestus* (adj.) meaning 'obvious' and *manifestare* (verb) meaning 'to disclose,' 'to make known, public, evident.' Standard dictionary entries define it as "a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer" (e.g., *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). *The Oxford English Dictionary* stresses its political nature: "a public declaration of policy and aims, especially one issued before an election by a political party or candidate." Such general definitions make clear the manifestly performative character of the genre, which almost always intends to influence its audiences by the use of hortatory discourse.

Although the origins of the manifesto as a genre can be traced to at least 17th century England, it gained prominence as a weapon of political discourse during the French Revolution (1789–1799) (Lyon, 1999). Two most famous, indeed paradigmatic manifestoes appeared even later: Marx and Engels published their *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 (Marx & Engels, 1848/1988; see Martin, 2015; Puchner, 2006) and Marinetti his *Futurist Manifesto* in 1909 (see Hjartarson, 2007; Puchner, 2006). Today, the genre is typically associated with novel, subversive social or artistic movements, as evidenced in the numerous feminist manifestoes (Lyon, 1999; Pearce, 1999; Weeks, 2013). However, in a more institutionalized way, the manifesto also serves as a platform to announce programs of political parties, typically before elections (Harrison, 2013). Since the French Revolution the manifesto has thus established itself as "a paradigmatic medium of modernity" (Hjartarson, 2007, p. 173) or, more precisely, as "a distinctly modern rhetorical genre oriented to imagining an improved future by announcing the incompleteness of the present" (Martin, 2015, p. 53). The modernism of the manifesto lies primarily in its belief in the human capability to reshape the future by means of reasoned intervention. As such, the manifesto is most prominent in the area of politics, art, and

literature: it propagates revolutionary political ideas and announces artistic avant-gardes (Puchner, 2006; Yanoshevsky, 2009).

Given the variety of forms the manifesto has been given and its capacity to cover various fields of human activity, it has been repeatedly argued that a strict definition of the manifesto genre is impossible, impracticable, even counterproductive (Lyon, 1999; Yanoshevsky, 2009). The best one could do, perhaps, is to resort to a description based on a “family resemblance” (Lyon, 1999, pp.13ff). In what follows, we will thus be as moderate as others, while focusing more precisely on the argumentative features of the manifesto as a genre of political discourse.

The first crucial quality of the manifesto is its confrontational, agonistic attitude. Manifestoes have been characterized as instances of combative, polemic, pamphletic, agonistic, critical, or revolutionary discourse (see Martin, 2015; Puchner, 2006; Yanoshevsky, 2009). One can even treat the manifesto as “the distinctive genre of modern social agonism. [...] a touchstone in the history of political conflict in the modern period” (Lyon, 1999, p.30). Importantly, this is not limited to its characteristically explicit, even provocative rhetorical style (“We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.” Marinetti, 1909). Rather, the manifesto’s agonism, in its strongest versions, breaks with the rhetorical tradition of reasoned deliberation rooted in the vast common ground, whether as conceived by Aristotle (2007; see Martin, 2015) or Habermas (1989; see Lyon, 1999). This break has at least two aspects. In the first place, manifestoes present their historic circumstances in a novel way that forcefully departs from extant accounts. A typical manifesto thus “seeks to appropriate the circumstances into which it intervenes by enacting argumentatively its own take on events” (Martin, 2015, p.62). There is not even a pretense to rely on taken-for-granted, seemingly impartial descriptions, widely shared among the community of potential readers. In the second place, manifestoes’ authors are typically exceedingly careful in sketching the multiple lines of existing and potential disagreements with other groups, thus engaging in skillful polylogical management of various opposing voices. Citing Marinetti’s letter to a Belgian colleague, Hjartarson observes that “in order to give a text the form of a manifesto ‘one needs violence and precision’ [...] As Marinetti emphasizes, ‘precision’ means clearly designating the traditions, institutions and individuals attacked in the manifesto” (2007, pp.181–182).

The second key argumentative characteristic of the manifesto is the call to action most manifestoes openly announce. The manifesto can thus be described in terms of hortatory, manifestary, declarative, performative, programmatic, and prescriptive discourse (see Puchner, 2006; Yanoshevsky, 2009). Indeed, it has been argued that, possibly, “the only uniform convention among manifestoes is a particular hortatory rhetorical style” (Lyon, 1999, p.13). But, again, manifestoes’

exhortations go beyond the mere style. Instead, one can see the call to action as an argumentative rationale of the genre, as a conclusion to which all the provocatively forceful yet tightly controlled arguments inevitably lead. After all, the workmen of all countries should unite.

To summarize: in its paradigmatic form (e.g., the *Communist Manifesto*) the manifesto argues for a radical break with the dystopian reality, while offering a utopian vision of the projected future (see Weeks, 2013). This step from dystopia to utopia can be seen in terms of a consistent argumentative strategy. To do its work, so to speak, this strategy should be based on some powerful and consistent – even catchy – idea capable of bringing all the elements of the manifesto argumentation to its apex, a call to arms. A famous example of such a strategy is Marx and Engels's idea that all human history is the history of property relations (see Martin, 2015).

These characteristics of manifestoes can be further captured within a consistent argumentative framework. One can resort to the classical canons of rhetorical oratory to trace the structure, arrangement, and style of manifestoes' arguments (Martin, 2015). Another fruitful avenue can be to describe manifestoes in terms of *argumentative activity types*, as developed within pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren, 2010, ch. 5). The “initial situation” is that of a direct, provocative and “mixed” confrontation with multiple other views and parties in the public sphere. The manifesto authors then forcefully propose new “starting points” for debate in order to establish a revised account of what *should* be common in our understanding of the present state of affairs, while yet *is not*. As already mentioned, this is a marked departure from the classic Greek deliberation, where practical arguments were grounded in the common ground, *endoxa*. Here, *endoxa* is precisely questioned as an oppressive set of beliefs, call it ideology, that should in the first place be critiqued, abandoned, and replaced by the new history / ideology. On the basis of this, the “argumentative means and criticism” in most manifestoes amount to vigorous rebuttals of dominant views coupled with explicit practical arguments in which newly defined circumstances serve as premises for newly envisioned goals. All this concludes with a seemingly self-defeating call to action: “The time for argument is past! The time for action is come” (*Suffragettes Manifesto*; Lyon, 1999, p. 28). A “possible outcome,” apart from the action being actually taken, is, more plausibly, the legitimation in the public sphere of the group behind the manifesto and the transformation of the virtual, inchoate audience into an actual, unified, and self-conscious social agent (see Lyon, 1999; Martin, 2015). Given the argumentative rupture the manifesto typically stages, there is no pretense to seek a resolution of differences of opinion through some reasoned consensus with adversaries, as in most accounts of deliberation in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; van Eemeren, 2010).

3. The context of environmental debates: From a false dichotomy to a polylogue

In order to understand the argumentative dynamics in any form of environmental discourse, including manifestoes, we need to have at least a synoptic overview of environmental debates, and the different value hierarchies which sustain these debates. Even this brief introduction illustrates that a polylogical approach which carefully looks into the interplay of various positions and players in argumentation (Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017; Lewiński, 2014, 2016, 2017) is necessary to gain insight into the argumentative intricacies of environmental debates.

An inevitable entry point seems the now almost caricature dichotomy between the tycoons of the industry with no concern for the environment and all kinds of eco-warriors, including back-to-nature environmentalists. To some extent, this dichotomy is still alive today in some of the public debates, chiefly those between the oil industry – as well as fossil fuel-friendly climate change skeptics – and climate change scientists and activists (see Goodwin, 2019; Paliewicz & McHendry, 2017). However, environmental debates have been populated by a myriad of mediating positions from the very beginnings of environmental argumentation, as evidenced in the discussions of the American preservationists and conservationists (the Muir vs. Pinchot argument) at the turn of the 19th into the 20th century (Meyer, 1997).

The basic dichotomy has been further undermined by the diverse environmental and non-anthropocentric currents of thought challenging the idea of human mastery over nature that have gained momentum in 1960s (e.g., following R. Carson's book *Silent Spring*, 1962/1994) and gradually expanded the scope of ethical concerns and moral responsibility to animals and inanimate nature (Yang, 2006, p. 24). Their challenge to the dominant politico-economic system and modern values (e.g., consumerism, free market, private enterprise) was founded upon the attribution of *intrinsic* moral value to non-human entities (Yang, 2006, pp. 31–32). While sharing this core value, the non-anthropocentric movements (animal liberation/rights, biocentrism, and ecocentrism) diverge with regard to the underlying hierarchies of values and the theoretical expressions of moral duties: extending from moral duties with humans exclusively, to moral duties owed to animals, to all life forms, and to nature as a whole (Beckert & Varandas, 2004; Gorke, 2003; Yang, 2006, pp. 35–36).

In short, the insurmountable value and the fundamental normative standard for the non-anthropocentric eco-criticism leveled against the “great transformation” in 60's and 70's can be designated as *nature* or *naturalness* (Blühdorn, 2001). The immanent project of the environmental movement was hence the recognition of the natural limits and necessities and the need for re-embedding the human

society back into its ultimate horizon, the biophysical context, seen as limiting and commanding the human affairs (Mellos, 1988).

What Dryzek (2013) calls “the Promethean argument” against this form of eco-criticism was first and foremost a rejection of such limits: nature, far from being the ultimate value or the fountain of unbreakable laws, was seen as the brute material cultivated and refashioned by human creativity and technology. The project then becomes not to administer the human (appetites) using science and reason, but instead to use them to administer nature (Mellos, 1988). Energy is a key value in the Promethean argument, with the premise that having enough of it makes matter infinitely transformable. The Promethean discourse does not precede but is a response to the nascent discourse of limits in that it has been articulated – after being taken for granted – to address the environmental critique.

The Promethean argument is grounded in the anthropocentric values which, among other things, prioritize the *instrumental*, economic value of nature. The human, the only being endowed with rationality and language, is at the center of this long tradition since the rise of Modernity. Anthropocentrism is conservative in the sense that it tends to maintain the politico-economic world order, and to defend the dominant values of modern industrial civilization (White, 1967). Most environmental scholars identify anthropocentrism and environmental egoism (including environmental imperialism) as the ideological origin of the modern ecological crisis (White, 1967; Erhard, 2007; Heise, 2008; Nixon, 2011). Indeed, traditional anthropocentric attitudes express a position that human beings are of central importance, and other species and things matter only if they are deemed useful to humans.

Anthropocentrism, however, is not a unified ethical stance. According to *strong* anthropocentric positions, humans have moral obligations only toward other humans. Since humans are the only creatures capable of reasoning and morality, only they have *intrinsic* value, and only they can be objects of direct moral responsibility. Among others, Gorke maintains that although the advocates of anthropocentrism do not always explicitly articulate this view, it is implicit in their ethical premises and thought structures (Gorke, 2003, p. 245). All the same, anthropocentric ideas still allow for an environmental ethics based on human interests, since global environmental preservation is ultimately in the best human interest (Varandas, 2004, p. 21). This is especially the case with *weak, refined, or enlightened* anthropocentrism (Gorke, 2003), which differs from the traditional strong anthropocentrism in the identification of moral agents and moral subjects within the scope of human-nature relation. Weak anthropocentrism defends the human responsibility towards environmental preservation – and not only to other humans. It thus acknowledges environmental problems as ethical problems *per se*, yet eventually it tends to reduce them to a matter of resource management partly

dependent on technological advances. Therefore, while it does not exclude *a priori* the supplementary attribution of intrinsic value to nonhuman nature, “[i]n the long run it all boils down to human interests” (Gorke, 2003, p. 226).

Perhaps the most influential among the refined anthropocentric voices have been various discourses of sustainability based on an agenda of environmentally responsible management. These reconciliatory positions between the dichotomized poles mentioned above assume that humanity is “changing planetary systems fundamentally. Many such changes are accompanied by life-threatening hazards. This new reality, from which there is no escape, must be recognized – and managed.” (UN World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 18). The normative hierarchy substantiating the central argument of sustainability did not place Nature on the top to inform human decision and action. Instead, it was constructed through a more flexible anthropocentric relationship between the present and future generations, namely to meet “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 44).

Two more perspectives that have strongly influenced the environmental debate can be mentioned together. The first, *ecological modernization*, became influential in the mid-1980s both as a policy program and as a theory of societal change (Mol & Spaargaren, 2000). The other, *the risk society perspective*, has provided the missing theoretical foundation to the notion of ecological modernization, with its emphasis on the reflexivity of risks and their modernizing momentum (Beck, 1994 Blühdorn, 2001; Giddens, 1994). The extended theory of ecological modernization was characterized by its pragmatic approach: in the policy domain, its proponents advocated structural environmental reform rather than a wholesale metabolic rift. The key role in solving the environmental predicament was given to technological innovation and economic development (Mol & Spaargaren, 2000). Limits were not dismissed – as in the Promethean discourse – but were pushed to the background (Dryzek, 2013). In the foreground, beside technological optimism, featured also efficiency, flexible regulation, optimization, international cooperation, and “pollution prevention pays” (Jamison, 2002). Stressing the calculability, internalization, and management of environmental risks, ecological modernization was easily taken up by the policy institutions such as the OECD and the UNEP (Hajer, 1995), and became an ally or substantiating discourse of the sustainable development perspective. That said, ecological modernization can be seen as accommodating a stronger criticism of anthropocentrism and a more structural approach to social and ecological change than the sustainability discourse (Dryzek, 2013).

The perspectives or positions briefly characterized above find their expression today in various strong and weak versions. Trump’s views, for instance, can

in this context be seen as a return of a strong Promethean outlook. Versions of risks discourse devoid of any (self-) critical vision can be seen to have infused the green-colored business world. The EU's leading position in climate governance and the UN's postulatory agendas, so far characterized by sustainable development, are arguably going through a deeply modernizing moment in their dealings with notions such as post-truth and the Anthropocene. What were mentioned above as partly scholarly ideas – e.g., abolition of nature, crises of modern institutions – are today arguably becoming part of a wider public debate, at least among those concerned with the environment issues. We find the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* analyzed below as a contribution to this tendency: the manifesto seeks to introduce some mature theoretical and high-level policy trends into a broader public debate.

To sum up, this brief overview allows us to better understand today's environmental debates in terms of a polylogical expansion of disagreement space over environmental issues (Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017; Lewiński, 2016; Musi & Aakhus, 2019). In particular, it lets us precisely situate the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* we analyze below within a proper argumentative context.

4. Case study: *An Ecomodernist Manifesto*

To accomplish the task proposed – to explore the relation of manifesto as a discursive genre to the argumentative structures and techniques used in a concrete example – we analyze an eco-manifesto, the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*. In our argumentative analysis, we build on the characterization of the manifesto genre and the polylogical outline of environmental positions and values to, first, account for the argumentative features of the Manifesto occasioned by the genre (RQ1: Section 4.1). Further, we identify and focus on the central policy/practical argument advocated by the manifesto (RQ2: Section 4.2). More specifically, we provide a detailed analysis of the organization of practical argumentation in the manifesto, thus exposing the ways in which values feature in its defense (RQ3: Section 4.3).

4.1 The *Ecomodernist Manifesto*

The Manifesto was released in April 2015 on a website specifically devoted to its dissemination – <http://www.ecomodernism.org/> – in twelve languages. It appeared as a neatly edited, visually appealing, 32-page pdf file free for download. It was signed by a group of eighteen contemporary environmental thinkers including scholars, writers, journalists and co-founders of the Breakthrough

Institute, the sponsor of the Manifesto.² Short biographical notes on these authors precede the main text in the document. The main text consists of a two-page introduction and seven numbered sections. The time of publication is not coincidental, indeed it comes in a *kairotic* moment: the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) in Paris was going to negotiate a major global climate change agreement only a few months later, in November-December 2015. Several players sought to influence directly or indirectly the participants in charge of deliberating on the delicate balance between human development and environmental protection. Apart from back-door negotiations and off-record diplomacy, they did so by openly advocating and defending sometimes antagonistic positions, in a multi-party polylogue (Lewiński & Mohammed, 2019; van Laar & Krabbe, 2019).

In order to provide an answer to our RQ₁ – Which argumentative features of the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* are occasioned by the discourse genre? – we first ask how much of a manifesto is the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*? In formal terms, it has all the trappings of the manifesto: the title, the formal language, verbs in the present indicative or imperative, vocatives and the directive style. Accordingly, it does openly call to action (e.g., “Humans should seek to liberate the environment from the economy”, p.18), thus fulfilling one of genre’s two key features. It also clearly engages in the multi-party public debate, attempting to carve out a distinct position – and an audience amicable to it – in a discursive space already populated by a number of incompatible environmental positions. Moreover, its structure reflects the manifesto’s typical discursive progression: from the description of unwelcome circumstances, the authors advance to the presentation of key values they cherish, and more concrete goals and measures that can realize these values. Shortly, the text fulfills the minimal conditions for a political manifesto.

However, on the manifesto scale – stretching quite flexibly from powerful, one-page expressions of sheer political rage or artistic provocation (e.g., *The Dyke Manifesto*, *The Dada Manifesto*; see Lyon, 1999; Puchner, 2006) to carefully argued, multi-page formulations of political program (as in party manifestoes, including the *Communist Manifesto*) – the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* clearly belongs

2. Their mission as described on the Institute’s website is (our emphasis): “The Breakthrough Institute is a global research center that identifies and promotes technological solutions to environmental and human development challenges. We believe that human prosperity and an ecologically vibrant planet are possible at the same time. [...] We are researchers, analysts, and writers who reject outmoded orthodoxies on the Left and Right, and are dedicated to new ways of thinking about *energy and the environment*. [...] We are dedicated to bringing new ideas to the table that change the debates over *energy, the environment, and the economy* so they better reflect the global challenges of the 21st century.” <http://thebreakthrough.org/>. Last accessed 27 April 2018.

to the latter end of continuum. Within its seven parts and the 32 pages of the English version, it offers an overall neat, polite, and noticeably hedged argument, conforming to what seems to be one of the most influential norms of present-day environmental discourse (Üzelgün, Mohammed, Lewiński, & Castro, 2015; Üzelgün, Lewiński, & Castro, 2016). It conspicuously shuns an explicitly confrontational, provocative stance: adversaries are neither directly named nor called out – let alone scorned. This is clearly a deliberate strategy: “Too often discussions about the environment have been dominated by the extremes, and plagued by dogmatism, which in turn fuels intolerance. We value the liberal principles of democracy, tolerance, and pluralism” (p. 31).

The *Ecomodernist Manifesto*, shortly, is an example of an elaborate, reasoned manifesto, where long chains of well-structured arguments reveal a complex argumentative strategy – more in the tradition of the *Communist Manifesto* than the *Dada Manifesto*. As such, it is a suitable object for argumentation analysis, as delineated in our research questions. All the same, it can easily become an object of criticism for radical manifesto advocates: “If there is no shouting going on, merely reasoned argument, perhaps it is an essay you hold in your hands and not a manifesto at all” (Hanna, 2012, p. 55). Judged from such a perspective, it would seem an entirely toothless manifesto – if not for the fact that its apparently innocent, well-groomed position has provoked forceful critical responses from major voices in the environmental discourse. Noticeably, many of them, even the most critical, have been published on the Manifesto’s website – a sign of its authors’ consistent openness to argumentative dialogue with their discursive adversaries (e.g., Crist, 2015; Hamilton, 2015; Latour, 2015).

4.2 The decoupling argument

In our RQ2 we ask what the central argument advanced in the manifesto is. If there is such one central and controversial argument in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*, it is probably the decoupling argument, introduced in the very first pages of the manifesto:

[W]e affirm one long-standing environmental ideal, that humanity must shrink its impacts on the environment to make more room for nature, while we reject another, that human societies must harmonize with nature to avoid economic and ecological collapse. [...]

Intensifying many human activities – particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry, and settlement – so that they use less land and interfere less with the natural world is the key to decoupling human development from environmental impacts. These socioeconomic and technological processes are central to economic modernization and environmental protection. Together

they allow people to mitigate climate change, to spare nature, and to alleviate global poverty. (pp.6–7)

This basic argument of the Manifesto functions through two dissociations which, taken together, are aimed to dissolve the central contradiction the authors of the Manifesto need to face: Can one really advocate an ecological position while extolling modernism underlain by technological progress and economic growth? Dissociation – the counterpart of association – is an argumentative technique in which a unitary term (e.g., “love”) is split into two separate terms, one of which is highly valued (term II: *real* love: a profound spiritual attraction), while the other one dismissed (term I: *apparent* love: merely physical attraction) (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; van Rees, 2009; Üzelgün & Castro, 2016). One can thus be both *for* and *against* love – for *real* love, but against *apparent* love, etc. Accordingly, dissociation’s chief function is to resolve possible inconsistencies in one’s position in the face of expressed or anticipated accusations of inconsistency (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; van Rees, 2009). Overall, “[t]he dissociation of notions brings about a more or less profound change in the conceptual data that are used as the basis of argument” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 412). Applying a broader conception of dissociation, we propose that even in the inexistence of explicit speech acts breaking a unified notion into two terms, the argumentation weaved around decoupling serves to remove the potential incompatibilities in the argument.

Here, the authors of the *Manifesto* – albeit rather implicitly – set up and merge two following dissociations for their complex argument to stand. First, they dissociate “environmentalism”: typically, this term would unite the idea that humanity’s impact on nature needs to be limited with the idea that this should be done by “harmonizing” human activities with the limits of nature. *Apparent* or *immature* environmentalism (rejected) would very much stress the second point and do so by proposing often radical solutions, such as jettisoning the idea of economic growth (e.g., the “degrowth” movement). *Real* or *mature* environmentalism (valued), such as Ecomodernism, would “affirm” the first “long-standing environmental ideal,” while “reject[ing]” the other. Second, in an even more implicit way, the authors dissociate the other crucial term, “modernism”: while it might mean the harnessing of the powers of man for the sake of progress regardless of its impact on nature, it can be split into *naïve* or *irresponsible* modernism which stresses human progress and comfort above anything else, and *refined* or *responsible* modernism which understands that advancing “humanity must shrink its impacts on the environment to make more room for nature” (see Table 1 for a more complete layout of dissociated terms).

Importantly, both dissociations are conceptually possible thanks to the notion of “decoupling”: if human progress and nature are “coupled,” then progress can either harm nature, with humans being largely unaware of this (naïve modernism), or must be severely limited by conscious humans to “harmonize with nature” (radical environmentalism). Progress and nature are thus tied, “coupled,” in a zero-sum game of sorts: one’s gain is the other’s loss. However, once we *decouple* human progress from its impact on nature (eco-modernism), humanity can have the cake (“the natural world”) and still eat the cake (reap the benefits of “socioeconomic and technological processes” that need *not* “harmonize with nature to avoid economic and ecological collapse”). Thus, by dissociating and combining mature environmentalism with refined modernism the authors navigate the simplified dichotomies of environmental argumentation, as we have seen before.

Table 1. Dissociation of Modernism in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*

	(Naïve) Modernism (Term I)	Eco-modernism (Term II)
New meaning assigned to Term II	Economic dependence on nature Fossil fuel energy Environmental threats to humanity; loss of wilderness and biodiversity	Radical decoupling of humans from nature; human prosperity Cheap clean, dense and abundant nuclear energy A great Anthropocene; biodiverse and thriving planet
Positive meaning retained		Human mastery of nature Optimistic view toward human capacities Human well-being Infinite growth Technological progress

We will have more to say about these argumentative moves below, so suffice it to say here that once they are understood and accepted – which is the first argumentative goal of the authors – the eco-modernist position becomes quite defensible, even obvious. Accordingly, these dissociations are central to the Manifesto: its complex argumentation either supports or results from them.

4.3 Practical argumentation

Our RQ3 – How is the argumentation of the Manifesto organized, structured, defended, and what values feature in its defense in what ways? – requires a detailed argumentative analysis. To this end, we will treat the manifesto as a special case of practical argumentation in the public sphere (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Lewiński, 2017, 2018; Lewiński & Mohammed, 2019). Practical

argumentation (PA) starts from an action-question: What shall we do? It thus involves a gap between current Circumstances (C) and envisaged Goals (G) – desired future states of affairs. These future states embody our main Values (V). In order to get from C to G we should take some Means or Measures (M). Indeed, most manifestoes include all these elements; some, such as the *Communist Manifesto*, render them methodically in a neatly controlled structure: starting from the persuasive description of historical circumstances, Marx and Engels’s manifesto moves on to elaborate communist goals and principles and to postulate concrete measures to be taken. Along the way, it carefully dispels criticisms and distinguishes its arguments from a myriad of other, nearer or farther, political positions of the era.³ There is thus some important empirical adequacy to using this conceptual framework – which we will do in our analysis of the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*.⁴

4.3.1 *Circumstances*

The Manifesto opens with the statement “To say that the Earth is a human planet becomes truer every day” (p.6), and declares at the outset that we live in a new epoch called the Anthropocene, the age of humans. This new state of affairs – in which the human is in charge – is pictured in an ostensibly balanced view of how humanity got to this point of ascendancy. The authors set forth both positive and negative consequences of modernization, albeit through different presentational devices.

Humanity has made extraordinary progress in reducing the incidence and impacts of infectious diseases (p.8)

Modernization liberates women from traditional gender roles, increasing their control of their fertility. Historically large numbers of humans – both in percentage and in absolute terms – are free from insecurity, penury, and servitude (p.8)

3. Lyon’s (1999, pp.14ff) “three argumentative gestures” characterizing manifestoes, can be interpreted as, respectively, (1) an argumentative description of circumstances; (2) presentation of goals or demands; and (3) conclusion in the form of a call to action by the newly unified audience.

4. Harré, Brockmeier, & Mühlhäusler (1999, pp.80–83) present a narrative analysis of the 1992 manifesto of the British Green Party. While treating the manifesto as a story with recognizable narrative structures, their analysis identifies elements of the environmental manifesto which we interpret as premises of a practical argument. As such, the analysis is fully compatible with ours. It also treats manifesto as a “persuasive genre” and, accordingly, proclaims that one of the chief goals of any analysis should be “to reveal some of the persuasive techniques of a genre” (1999, pp.82–83).

There remain, however, serious long-term environmental threats to human well-being (p. 10)

Much of the world's population still suffers from more-immediate local environmental health risks (p. 10)

Evident in such statements is an emphasis on progress, brought about by the modernization process that is presented as enabling humans to take control of their fate. The problems then are persuasively defined as *still remaining* threats, which as these presentational devices suggest (“still” is both a concession and a temporal marker), can be dealt with by pursuing the positive trends established in the first pages of the manifesto. As such, the prevalent strategy in setting down the circumstances is to establish them as *trends*:

Roughly half the US population worked the land in 1880. Today, less than 2 percent does (p. 12)

By 2050, 70 percent are expected to dwell in cities (p. 12)

...those same technologies have also made it possible for people to secure food, shelter, heat, light, and mobility through means that are vastly more resource- and land-efficient than at any previous time in human history. (p. 17)

Among the several trends catalogued (demographic, technological, etc.), urbanization is given the center stage as it is cities that “symbolize the decoupling of humanity from nature” (p. 12). The authors devote several paragraphs to establish urbanization as a positive trend due to its key role in reducing the human impact on the environment. The trends described are said to “challenge the idea that early human societies lived more lightly on the land than do modern societies” (p. 16). In this way, already at the stage of establishing the factual background of the practical arguments, the Manifesto conveys implicit value judgments, to which we return in Section 4.3.3.

The persuasive power of the definition of circumstances as trends transpires as the Manifesto argues simply for the intensification and acceleration of the emergent trends. Positive trends dependent on reasoned actions of humans signify progress, and progress defines modernization. This allows the authors to picture themselves as down-to-earth, clear-sighted eco-pragmatists. The resemblance of this strategy, i.e., mobilizing trends and advocating their extrapolation, to the Promethean argument (Dryzek, 2013) is striking. But there is another feature that adds to the construction of circumstances in terms of trends: while positive consequences are yet to be accelerated, the negative consequences of modernization are presented as *peaking*, and starting to decline. The authors’ celebration of the

Anthropocene and their “optimistic view toward human capacities and the future” (p. 31) can be understood in these terms:

The growth rate of the human population has already peaked (p. 11)

Meat consumption, for instance, has peaked in many wealthy nations (p. 14)

Material consumption has only just begun to peak in the wealthiest societies (p. 29)

These good news take an essential part in the construction of the decoupling argument. They serve as the evidence to depict decoupling as already out there: notice that the peaking of the negative consequences is associated with increasing wealth and development. By contrast, it is the rustic and the poor who appear as the main sources of environmental ills:

Ecosystems around the world are threatened today because people over-rely on them: people who depend on firewood and charcoal for fuel cut down and degrade forests; people who eat bush meat for food hunt mammal species to local extirpation. (p. 17)

What follows is that those people over-relying on ecosystems in the subsistence economies will only have to follow others before them and move to cities, which are characterized by high income and low fertility rates (p. 12). In sum, persuasion-by-design can be discerned in the Manifesto’s reconstruction of trends and peaks and defining the circumstances (Schiappa, 2003; Zarefsky, 2006) in a way to expose the virtues of modernity and vices of not-yet-modernized practices. In this way, the basic practical argument is set and ready to take off the ground.

4.3.2 *Goals and means*

Two of the most pervasive patterns found in the text are used in the presentation of the goals to be achieved by the Ecomodernists. The first is, unsurprisingly, the notion of decoupling: the word is used a total of 26 times and, as mentioned above, the Manifesto is structured around this concept. The second is a certain prioritization or hierarchy of goals, typically in the following form:

decoupling human well-being from the destruction of nature requires the conscious acceleration of emergent decoupling processes (p. 18)

Plentiful access to modern energy is an essential prerequisite for decoupling development from nature (p. 20)

First, regarding decoupling, rather than using it as a technical term to refer to breaking the link between environmental bads and economic goods (OECD,

2002) or the link between environmental impacts and economic growth (UNEP, 2011), the Manifesto strategically employs a broader definition, one that refers to the “decoupling of humanity from nature” (p.12). This is where the core rhetorical invention of the Manifesto is performed: seeking to “liberate the environment from the economy” (p.18), the Manifesto argues not for adaptation to or harmonizing with nature, but for conquering or mastering it for the sake of creating a “good Anthropocene.” As mentioned above, decoupling is presented as an “emergent” process that is already underway in a somewhat disorganized manner, and that needs to be transformed into an “accelerated, active, and conscious decoupling” (p.28). The central role of this proposal in the Manifesto’s argumentation is highlighted in Figure 1.

Secondly, regarding the organization of numerous Goals in linguistic structures, the examples quoted above – through argumentative indicators such as “requires,” “demands,” “essential,” “key to” – clearly establish a *necessary* link between Means and Goals (see Lewiński, 2017; 2018). This type of linking is widespread also when concerned with various other Goals:

A good Anthropocene demands that humans use their growing social, economic, and technological powers to make life better for people, stabilize the climate, and protect the natural world (p.6)

agricultural intensification for land-sparing is key to protecting wild nature (p.27)

There are also a few instances of connecting Means and Goals in ways other than by necessity. Although in such weaker constructions the Means are neither necessary nor sufficient, they are still conducive to reaching the proposed Goals (Lewiński, 2017, 2018):

knowledge and technology, applied with wisdom, might allow for a good, or even great, Anthropocene (p.6)

modern technologies, by using natural ecosystem flows and services more efficiently, offer a real chance of reducing the totality of human impacts on the biosphere (p.17)

More-productive economies are wealthier economies, capable of better meeting human needs (p.29)

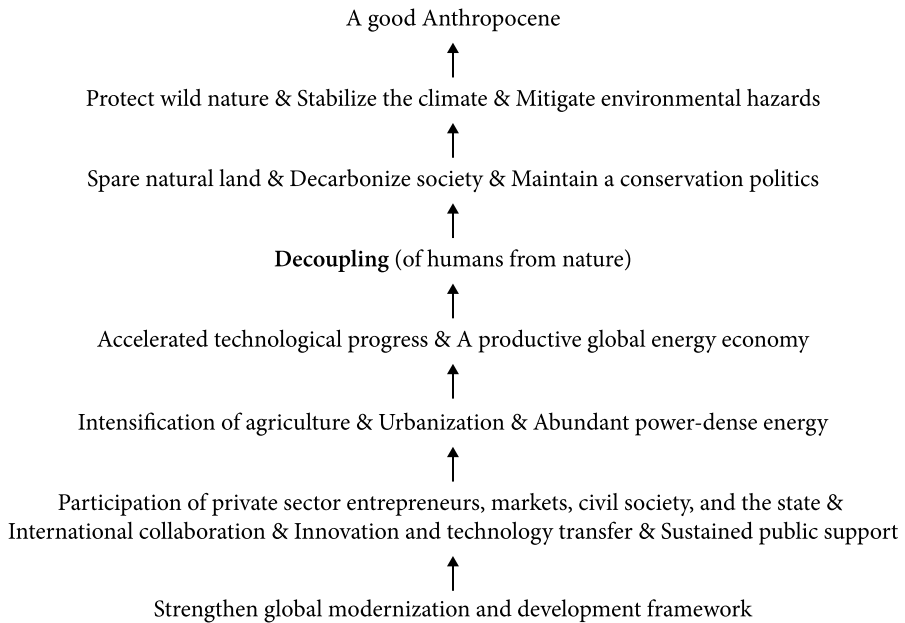


Figure 1. A summary of the arrangement of goals conveyed in the Ecomodernist Manifesto

As is the case in many complex deliberative discourses, what appears as a Means to a certain Goal in a particular argument is many times deployed as a lower-level or more immediate Goal in another argument. For instance, to achieve *a good Anthropocene*, we should first *stabilize the climate*, and to achieve that we should first *decarbonize the society*. Figure 1 provides a sketch of how the numerous Goals organized together in various linguistic structures can be arranged in a sequence. It shows that the ultimate Goal is to achieve a good Anthropocene, and the most tangible or immediate policy goal is to obtain “sustained public support for the development and deployment of clean energy technologies, both within nations and between them, through international collaboration and competition, and within a broader framework for global modernization and development” (p. 24). In such an arrangement of the Goals, decoupling emerges at the center-stage as a magic wand of sorts, connecting the measures for acceleration, intensification and multiplication with the measures for mitigation, stabilization and protection.

4.3.3 Values

In Fairclough & Fairclough’s (2012) analytical framework, the value premises specify the sources of normativity that justify the goal premises. Three distinct types

of values underlie the *Manifesto's* central argument: liberal, economic, and environmental values. Below, we distinguish the first from the latter two, and examine the relationship between the economic and environmental values – and how the tension between them is dealt with.

Explicitly stated or externalized values are the *liberal values* presented as “abstract values” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp.77ff.) of public dialogue – democracy, tolerance, pluralism, freedom, and human dignity:

We value the liberal principles of democracy, tolerance, and pluralism in themselves, even as we affirm them as keys to achieving a great Anthropocene. We hope that this statement advances the dialogue about how best to achieve universal human dignity on a biodiverse and thriving planet. (p. 31)

In other words, these liberal values constitute the very background against which the claims are to be appraised (see Habermas, 1989). In this sense, their role in the decoupling argument differs from the latter two: economic and environmental values. Figure 1 above suggests that the underlying (environmental) values of the Goals of mitigation and protection are placed higher in the hierarchy than the (economic) values associated with acceleration and intensification: after all, the latter are advanced for the sake of the former. However, as we shall see below, the tension between the two is not simply wiped out, it is rather dealt with through employing certain terms (nature, environment, modern, eco-) strategically in a way that dissociates or further segregates their already varied meanings.

Economic values, such as material well-being, resource productivity, economic integration, and shared infrastructure, are referred to, for instance, in the key definition of *modernization*. These “concrete values” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p.79) are known to be associated with aspirations of stability:

What we refer to when we speak of modernization is the long-term evolution of social, economic, political, and technological arrangements in human societies toward vastly improved material well-being, public health, resource productivity, economic integration, shared infrastructure, and personal freedom. (p. 28)

This position on values is explicitly connected with the necessity of development and deployment of modern energy technologies. The repetition of the arguments concerned with energy throughout the text – besides the various lists of different energy technologies, the word “energy” appears 25 times – is an evidence of their important role in the *Manifesto's* argumentation:

The ethical and pragmatic path toward a just and sustainable global energy economy requires that human beings transition as rapidly as possible to energy sources that are cheap, clean, dense, and abundant. (p. 25)

Nuclear fission today represents the only present-day zero-carbon technology with the demonstrated ability to meet most, if not all, of the energy demands of a modern economy. [...]

In the long run, next-generation solar, advanced nuclear fission, and nuclear fusion represent the most plausible pathways toward the joint goals of climate stabilization and radical decoupling of humans from nature. (p. 23)

With its strong emphasis on abundant energy, the Ecomodernist argument bears some similarity to the Promethean discourse (Dryzek, 2013). Its crucial difference however is in its not being a discourse of denial – of environmental limits or of a broader normative background – but an elegantly crafted strategy to both steal the fire and maintain intimate relations with the spirits above.

A very salient feature of *environmental values* is their emotional and aesthetic framing:

We write this document out of deep love and emotional connection to the natural world. (p. 25)

The case for a more active, conscious, and accelerated decoupling to spare nature draws more on spiritual or aesthetic than on material or utilitarian arguments. (p. 25)

Explicit efforts to preserve landscapes for their non-utilitarian value are inevitably anthropogenic choices. (p. 26)

The tension apparent in the notion of decoupling plays out in these examples: we are to be decoupled from the natural world to which nonetheless we maintain a deep “emotional connection.” In other words, there is an incompatibility – at least potentially, for some part of the target audience – between economic and environmental values. Yet, this is only one of the conflicts the Manifesto’s authors deal with in their advocacy of decoupling employing dissociation.

Noticeably, the recognition of the aesthetic and spiritual value of nature comes along with the argument for – the intensification of – shaping the environment by “human local, historical and cultural preferences” (p. 27). This incompatibility can, however, be only apparent once another dissociation of the two key terms in the Manifesto is properly understood. On the one hand, *environment*, the locus of multiple human/non-human interactions and interdependencies, would have all its doors opened for human modernization activities: sea-water can become drinking water, atmospheric carbon can become rock, metals can be recycled, given “plentiful access to modern energy” (p. 20). On the other hand, *nature*, “what remains outside the scope of human intervention” (Giddens, 1994, p. 76), and which the intensified decoupling project would “make more room for” (p. 6)

becomes the ideal object of human spiritual and aesthetic experience. It is by intensifying their dominion in the global *environment* that the Ecomoderns become able to purify *nature*, thereby, again, solving possible inconsistencies lurking in their argument.

4.3.4 The complex practical argument

We lay out the structure of the complex ‘decoupling argument’ relying on Fairclough & Fairclough’s (2012) proposal, further developed by Lewiński (2017, 2018). As is clear in this schematic reconstruction (see Figure 2), the argumentation culminates in a call to action, thus fulfilling one of the essential characteristics of a manifesto (see Section 2): *We should support policies envisioning decoupling human society from nature.* A call to action is one of the action-relevant speech acts which typically conclude practical argumentation: while strong in its illocutionary force (compared with an advice or recommendation), a call presupposes the utterer does not have the decision-making power required to order, let alone implement, the action called for. It is thus, like in many other manifestoes, a practical argument directed at someone else than the actual authors. In particular, the Manifesto’s authors call for supporting specific energy policies – especially nuclear energy – as the vehicle for all other concrete practices that will bring about “a great Anthropocene.”

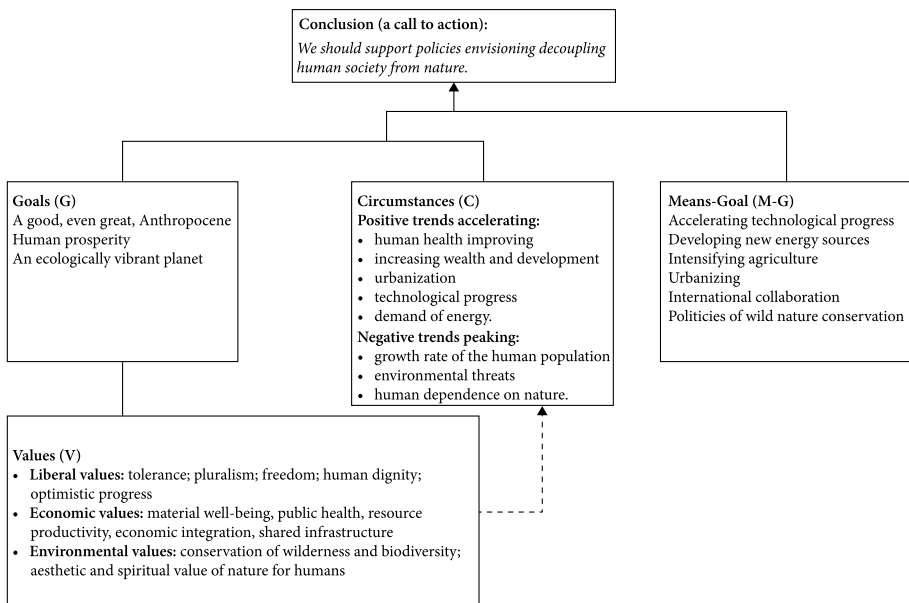


Figure 2. The “decoupling argument” (structure based on Fairclough & Fairclough, (2012; Lewiński, 2017, 2018)

5. Conclusion

The manifesto – despite its open and indeterminate character – is no doubt an emphatically argumentative genre of public discourse. We have contended that a manifesto accomplishes at least two argumentative tasks: firstly, it forcefully advocates an action to be taken and, secondly, it carefully manages the multi-party disagreement space, by distinguishing the advocated position from numerous others in the public sphere. The final aim of a manifesto is to transform the disagreement space into concerted action; or at least to create a consistent audience that would rally behind the ideas exposed and legitimate them in the public sphere, and eventually become “the mediator of change” as envisaged in any type of persuasive, rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968, p. 4). In these tasks, a manifesto’s authors typically construct their exposition around one central idea, which serves as a backbone for a complex argumentative structure. Using numerous techniques related to practical argumentation, they project the ambitious leap from the often dystopian present circumstances to the bright goals that can be achieved in the almost utopian future. The driving force behind each manifesto is, in the end, a profound belief in reasoned human agency: we can change our destiny if we reason straight, that is, if we properly grasp what is, what should be, and what can be done about it. In this sense, the manifesto has rightly been described as the prototypical argumentative genre of modernity.

As such, it thus seems to be an adequate choice for a movement that calls itself *Eco-modernism*. However, this movement also needs to carefully maneuver between its modernist core and ecological aspirations – just as much it needs to maneuver between the genre’s radicalizing tendencies and eco-modernism’s avowed pragmatism and moderation. In answering our research questions, we have identified here a number of argumentative strategies employed by the authors of the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* that allow to manage these apparent tensions, among them:

1. Scaffolding the complex practical argument around the notion of decoupling, and resorting to multiple dissociations in this task;
2. Arranging the multiple goals and means in a neat hierarchy;
3. Strategically juxtaposing liberal, economic, and environmental values, whereby some are expressed as concrete values (liberal economic model) and others (open debate, environment) as abstract values;
4. Concluding the argument with a call for action, supported by a presentation of circumstances as trends already out-there.

We have argued that the authors of the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* employ these strategies, primarily, to distinguish their position from the complex constellation

of environmentalist and modernist voices. In this way, they aim to argumentatively manage the polylogical disagreement space in which they partake. Importantly, this is a characteristic of today's environmental discourse in general (Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017; Dahl & Fløttum, 2014; Fløttum, 2017; Lewiński, 2016; Musi & Aakhus, 2019; Pearce et al., 2015). Here, the primary challenge for the authors is to undermine some entrenched topoi based in nature/culture conflict, such as "progress causes environmental destruction," breaking their connections and causal links. As we have shown, this can be achieved through the strategic use of the resources offered by the manifesto as a genre of argumentative discourse, by resorting to a number of important dissociations, and by a careful crafting of a complex practical argument.

What is at stake in managing disagreements with various competing positions – spread on a spectrum from strong non-anthropocentric environmentalism, to weak anthropocentrism of ecological modernization, to strong anthropocentrism of some business and political leaders – is ultimately an ideological struggle between alternative visions of the future, because the values and their hierarchical organization ground competing analyses of both the current state of affairs (*Circumstances*) and the ideal state of affairs (*Goals*).

Overall, the Manifesto's central argument – the decoupling of human progress from nature – can be seen as a critical discursive engagement with the main positions in the global environmental debate. The key target is the conventionalized and broadly accepted environmental argument that our goal is harmony with nature, here being rendered as a rather naïve idea. In this way, as we pointed out in our analysis, the authors align themselves with some basic strategies, goals, and values (e.g., exerting trends, intensified human dominion, strong emphasis on abundant energy) of the Promethean discourse. Another more intimate link can be traced to the discourses of ecological modernization. By making explicit and contesting what is mostly taken for granted in the contemporary public discourse on environment – i.e., harmony with nature, conservation decisions being "anthropogenic" choices – the Manifesto accomplishes a modernizing momentum: admittedly, harmonizing with nature today remains an abstract goal, an empty signifier of the environmental movement. Hence, beyond its technological optimism and emphasis on (an abstract) human responsibility, deliberation, and wise management, the Manifesto can be seen in a deeper alignment with a certain "modernization (or radicalization) of modernity" (Beck, 1994). In an astonishing manner, however, it completely avoids consideration of the possible consequences of the actions and measures proposed. That can be, at least partly, attributed to the conformity with some features of the manifesto genre, such as a clear and univocal exposition of a novel idea. But to the extent that the insecurities and ambivalences (and for that matter, the institutional crisis) of

industrial modernity are completely banished from such a document, it becomes difficult to rank it with other modernization approaches. To be more precise, it is the lack of reflexivity that distinguishes the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* from other perspectives of advanced modernization (e.g., Beck, 1994; Giddens, 1994).

In the end, while manifestly extolling moderation and carefully crafting a nuanced and complex argument thanks to its fine dissociations, the Manifesto reaches a provocative conclusion: We should support policies expanding the decoupling of humanity from nature, advancing at full throttle into an era of grand transformation based on abundant energy, including various nuclear technologies. In this way, the text challenges not only the core values that have galvanized contemporary environmental campaigns and concerns, but also the potential coalitions between those parties that may gather under the rather abstract figure of harmony with nature. Being so explicitly contentious (see Crist, 2015; Hamilton, 2015; and Latour, 2015 for profound criticism) it is, perhaps, a proper argumentative manifesto in the end?

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