AFFECT

We must internalize the externalities. By this I mean *not* that we must reform neoliberal capitalism so that global markets account for pesky "externalities" like a functional biosphere, but that we as human beings must begin to internalize and embody the consequences of our heretofore-disastrous energy choices. Not as theater or exercise, but as a first step towards action.

Reading Elizabeth Kolbert's recent book (2014) on mass extinctions, I was reminded that upon the detonation of the first atomic bomb in New Mexico in 1945, J. Robert Oppenheimer claimed that a line from the *Bhagavad Gita* sprung to mind: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds." With only mild rhetorical exaggeration, I would posit this sentiment as apt for our uniquely energetic age, the Anthropocene. In our energy choices (yes, choices) and daily actions, in our steady but nonetheless substantial contributions, we are responsible for the destruction of worlds big and small, near and far, human and nonhuman, existing and still to come. This is a fact. For most of us, however—for reasons that sociologists, social psychologists, and nonfiction authors have documented for over a decade now—this fact enters into our minds and bodies only in fleeting moments: the newspaper headline on climate change or ecosystem collapse that elicits a sinking sadness, a muscular contraction that's quickly but only temporarily relieved by turning to the Sports or Sunday Style section. As environmental humanists have begun to explore (e.g. Sandilands 2010; LeMenager 2014), this awareness is not merely intellectual but corporeal, lodged in our bodies, in our nerves and tendons, and it presents us with two options: to turn away or to act.

This is, then, a call for the development or cultivation of what might be termed an Anthropocene affect, "affect" referring (as Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth put it) to those "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement" (2010: 1).

To this end, we can draw lessons from the past. For most of history and all of pre-history, human beings had an intimate awareness of connections to the world around them that did not require lessons in energy consumption or ecology, but was necessary for daily life. Until the eighteenth or nineteenth century (depending on geographical location and class) it was almost impossible for people to be unaware of the

resources and energy (measured in human and animal work) that went into the manufacture of all the artifacts they came into contact with, be they flint arrows, animal-hide clothing, or toothbrushes. With the explosion of trade from distant regions and the harnessing of ancient sunlight in the form of fossil fuels, such awareness has become distant, theoretical. By the twentieth century, living within an ecology of cheap oil, Americans, citizens of industrialized nations, and, increasingly, elites and others around the world have been able to live as if energy and resources simply did not matter. This too shall pass, for better or worse.

We can also draw lessons from the present. In my work (2015) on the subculture and politics of American hard-core "peak oil" believers in the mid to late 2000s, I show how they developed something resembling an Anthropocene affect. They not only based their life decisions on the threats of oil depletion and climate change but also adopted a dissident ideology in which an alternative affective landscape was constructed and realized through daily practices (as it always must be): driving more slowly, refusing to fly, retrofitting their homes, etc. They formed an insurgent emotional habitus, which, as Deborah Gould puts it, "contains an emotional pedagogy, a template for what and how to feel, in part by conferring on some feelings and modes of expression an axiomatic, natural quality" (2012: 97). These (currently) "outlaw emotions," to borrow a phrase from Alison Jaggar (1989), take root in particular social conditions. A number of older "peakists" first developed these tendencies during the oil crises of the 1970s, when Americans were encouraged to be aware of and concerned about energy consumption, both as citizens and as consumers. Such a historical perspective is a useful reference for our anticipation of future developments; questions about the plausibility—or indeed, as I'm suggesting here, the *inevitability*—of future affective shifts might be answered not only quotes with from Spinoza ("no one has yet determined what the body can do" (1959: 87)) but also with the work of historians of emotion, who have shown that affective dispositions are not nearly as natural, timeless, and universal as they seem.[1]

As a result of the copious work on crowd psychology and the influence of scholars such as Teresa Brennan (2004), we tend to think of the transmission of affect via face-to-face interactions, but it should go without saying that digital networks offer ample possibilities for such exchange. In my book on the peak oil subculture, I critique

the metaphor of the crowd as a representation of the typical virtual experience, but the collective construction of outlaw emotions goes a long way towards answering one of my unanswered questions: why did so many peak oil believers in the mid-2000s radically alter their lives in preparation for the impending collapse, despite having never met another peak oil believer in person (in "the real world")? One explanation would look to the isolated, rational individual gathering information and making decisions, but a focus on the spread of dissident affective networks, even across fiber-optic network cables, is perhaps a more compelling picture. How can we lubricate the transmission of such an affect?

We can also draw lessons from possible futures. For example: in Paolo Bacigalupi's 23rd century, post-petroleum, climate-chaos novel *The Windup Girl*, human beings have primarily returned to a somatic energy regime, once again dependent on human muscle, "the joules of men," and geneticists have resurrected fifteen-foot Pleistocene proboscidea to wind "kink-springs" that serve as energy storage units (2010: 8). Once the seas have subjugated entire regions and wait patiently beyond the dikes like invading armies, the environmental consequences of carbon consumption become palpable. When one character comes upon a room of working computers, "the amount of power burning through them makes" her "weak in the knees. She can almost see the ocean rising in response. It's a horrifying thing to stand beside" (215). The fear and trembling of anthropogenic climate change in this passage is not just imagined but embodied, which Bacigalupi emphasizes by highlighting his character's physical proximity to the machines. These connections are reinforced by religious practices—the Environment Ministry has its own shrines around Bangkok (one of the few extant megalopolises), for example, and one of the most popular religious figures is a "biodiversity martyr," recalling the prayers of the eco-cult God's Gardeners in Margaret Atwood's MaddAdam trilogy. This radical shift in awareness of energy and environment—as this passage shows, an understanding that is affective and not merely intellectual; corporeal as well as rational—could certainly be seen as a harbinger of things to come, and perhaps works of imaginative fiction such as *The Windup Girl* can even encourage such connections.

How solid the present feels—its political orders, its infrastructures, its ideologies, but so too its affective predispositions. If we are to avoid the worst of the

dystopic forecasts suggested by climate scientists, disaster movies, and cli fi novels alike, change will begin—has begun?—not in the voting booth (policy) or the market (consumption) but in our bodies, our selves. The last ten years of environmental political inaction have shown that the information deficit model is flawed: few people will take proportionate action until they *feel* the consequences of their (our, my, your) choices. The economists are right, for once: we must internalize the externalities. Let's begin that work.

NOTES:

[1] See, for example, the work of Peter Stearns (1989), Barbara Rosenwein (2006), and William Reddy (2001).