A Conversation with Cara Daggett about Affect, Sentimentality, and Extractivism

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Daniela Gutiérrez (DG hereafter): The title of this volume is "Affective Economies of Extraction and Sentimentality." What do you think could be the role of affect and emotions in the complex relation between humans and what we call "natural resources"?

Cara Daggett (CD hereafter): I want to start by thanking you for making a book that is devoted to affect. Although there is a growing literature surrounding affect and the environment, it often remains marginalized in energy studies and 'mainstream' environmental studies. I hope that will change. The importance of affect is right in the word: It points to our capacity to *be affected* as bodies, open to the world and in relation with it. Unlike terms such as 'emotions' and 'feelings,' affect also signals that there is a certain lack of control in how humans respond to experiences and things. The world enters our bodies, and our innermost sense of self; the world also enters and helps to compose our thinking and our reasoning. This directly challenges the ideal of the rational man, whose body, while being impacted by outside forces, is governed by a rational mind that can bracket those affective states and compartmentalize them.

Take, for instance, the way certain non-human entities have been categorized as natural resources and thus framed as a collection of objects to be extracted, exploited, and consumed. But 'resources' are not simply objects outside of us. They affect us, cause in us certain feelings—like distress or even love, disgust, or awe—depending upon the context through which we know them, and how they are built into our memories and cultures. Rational man can supposedly keep his mind apart from the non-human world and the emotions it provokes in him, which makes him better at ordering and controlling it for his benefit. According to this logic, rational man has the superior capacity to improve upon the world, which licenses him to govern ecosystems like forests or farms to his benefit, through cold calculation.

For me, the importance of affect lays in its challenge to these binaries (reason versus emotion, mind versus body) and the way these binaries assume that a Western perspective on the world is a universal one, because it is the most 'rational.' Affect, as a concept, allows us to see that there is no thinking or reasoning without a body, and that bodies will inevitably have different memories and world experiences. What is interesting is that leading neuroscientists have confirmed what feminists have long known, which is that affect, emotion, and cognitive reasoning are deeply embedded processes that are inseparable—René Descartes was wrong: There is no reasoning without emotion and affect.

And yet so much of mainstream social science—which informs much of environmental and climate policymaking—continues to assume a Cartesian separation of reason and emotion, and a corresponding distrust of emotions and embodiment. This has serious consequences for environmental politics. For example, by ignoring the importance of affect and embodiment, many policymakers carry on with the expectation that people will support a politics of climate mitigation once they truly understand climate science, or perhaps after they experience more climate disasters, as a rational response to the facts. Instead, it is evident that people interpret the meaning of science and climate disasters in highly variable ways, through many affective registers. Climate disasters might actually provoke people to double down on supporting fossil fuels and violent extraction, as in the U.S. right-wing movement.

Affect led me to appreciate the way identities and certain affects (like anxiety) are part of the defense of fossil fuels. In energy politics, the latter are usually thought of as simple resources that people and states order, control, and use. Focusing on affect helps us understand that the ways in which people relate to fossil fuels are tied up with historical and geographical contexts of their

extraction and use. Fossil fuels are both material things that power machines and fuels that metaphorically power certain identities and cultures.

DG: Would you say then that you see people's attachment to fossil fuels through a relationship or some sort of affective bond?

CD: Yes, for example if you think about smells, they have such a powerful connection to our emotions and our memories. A caregiver probably cooked a special dish for you as a child, and now that combination of spices sizzling in a pan can bring you a feeling of comfort, of nostalgia. The smell of gas, on the other hand, is more complex. Someone who has no cultural experience of gas would be affected very differently by it than someone who has spent a lifetime living around cars. I was at the Petrocultures conference in Stavanger, Norway, where Ernst Logar, an artist, had brought different kinds of crude oil for participants to experiment with. He let me smell them, and their odors were strikingly different—I hadn't expected how much crude oil would have a *terroir*. One, however, was immediately familiar. As soon as it entered my nose, I was at an American gas station, on a road trip, sweating in the humid heat, but also free in the way that open road advertising have encouraged me to feel (I often took road trips in the summer as a child). Maybe someone else worked on an oil rig, lived next to a petrochemical facility, or stores homemade liquor in old gas cans, tasting crude while drinking with friends. My point is that the ways in which people are affected by fossil fuels, and fossil-fueled machines and industry, really depend on personal and collective memories as well as cultural experiences.

Axelle Germanaz (AG hereafter): I would like to come back to what you mentioned earlier about this notion of the "rational man" and the dichotomies of mind vs. body, rational thoughts vs. uncontrolled emotions that affect theory scholars have long been working against. There is a scientific consensus around the fact that fossil fuels are becoming nonviable because they are both a major motor of climate change and a finite source of energy that will ultimately run out. In the face of a global climate and energy emergency, the rational thing to do then would be to move away from the extraction and use of fossil fuels to secure a more ecologically viable future for humanity and the planet. Some environmental and energy studies scholars have talked about an "addiction" (cf. Matt Huber) and a "devotion" (cf. Stephanie LeMenager) to describe the detrimental relationship to an ongoing extractivism. What do you make of these metaphors? Are they helpful in overcoming the dependence on fossil fuels and in moving states and individuals to rely on more sustainable options?

CD: I am interested in why the solutions to the problems caused by fossil fuels are deemed unrealistic by many who are in power. I've heard firsthand, many times, from engineers or economists that it is unrealistic to demand broader transformations for climate justice. Elite economic interests are certainly behind this attitude, in that some people will lose trillions of dollars and pour a lot of money into lobbying politicians and propaganda to influence public feelings. However, a narrow economic reading fails to address why these narratives around denial, and the celebration of fossil fuels, are so easily circulated and so widely embraced, well beyond the elites who personally benefit. There is something more going on and this is what the scholars you mention are trying to decipher with the metaphors of "addiction" and "devotion."

Both are helpful metaphors, but I prefer the term "devotion," only because of the way "addiction" is misunderstood and poorly treated in Western culture. The medicalization of the concept too easily lends itself to rationalist arguments—that there is something irrational or beyond our control in our petro-attachments. Furthermore, the blame or accountability for addiction remains a little diffuse as a metaphor, as Western culture tends to individualize the problem of addiction. It can be thought about structurally, like in the case of the opioid crisis currently unfolding in the area around where I am, Appalachia. Here, pharmaceutical companies knowingly pushed addiction on communities they saw would be more vulnerable to it, as former coalfield regions facing the consequences of industry exploitation. Similarly, with fossil fuels, it is critical to keep the focus on the structural and collective dimensions of accountability.

Devotion, on the contrary, is difficult to think about purely on an individual basis because of its religious connotations—devotion is often going to be an experience that you share with a community. The religious connotations of devotion are also apt in understanding fossil fuel cultures. In *The Birth of Energy*, I explore the cosmological dimensions of energy. The moral aspects of energy are more obvious in premodern notions of energy as life force, or Aristotle's *energeia*. The modern notion of energy appears to be much more objective and mathematical, as it emerges as a scientific term in the 19th century science of thermodynamics. However, even in its scientific application, energy continued to have theological dimensions. For example, some of the first scientists of energy were Scottish Presbyterians, and they were not alone in interpreting the science of energy as a new knowledge that justified the imperial project of putting the world to work. This was based, for them, on the sense that only God stood apart from the laws of thermodynamics. Only God could create and

destroy energy. Only God could resist entropic increase, or the tendency for energy to diffuse into forms that cannot do work (again we see this separation between the ideal and the fallen world). Therefore, the best activities were those that put energy to work everywhere it could be found. Work, to these men, was already defined through a capitalist lens, as activity that produced commodities, with all other activities subordinated to that aim.

The science of energy seemed to show that the cosmos reflected the goodness of capitalist production. But there is a slippage here between the laws of capital and the workings of nature. The science of energy does not tell people how to value energy, nor what is useful or wasteful energy. That is why the underlying common sense about how energy is valued can be understood in religious terms, despite its veneer of secular neutrality. Productivism is yoked to the sacred, and to the cosmos, by this one logic of energy. There are other ways to value energy, and other notions of the sacred.

DG: It is important to stress this complex relationship that you mentioned, between the individual and the collective, adding to it matters of temporality. Even if, rationally, people are aware of what is better for a collective ecological future, it is extremely difficult to put an end to the public's devotion to extractivism and to the lifestyles it has granted (some of) us. There is a clear conflict between the daily-life pleasures and comforts afforded by extractivism—with, for example, a family road trip, commuting by car every day, or holidays overseas—and the future-oriented decisions that could influence the planet and the generations to come. Of course, this has also important affective ramifications: We tend to find happiness and pleasure in the things afforded by extractivism in the now while dreading its destructive consequences for the future of the planet and humanity.

CD: Definitely. You could also flip this around and think about how, even if you, as an individual living in a high-energy culture, decide to make different choices and change your way of life because your consumerism is causing too much suffering and making you miserable, there won't be any structural support for that. You will have to do this alone and against the tides of social norms—from its infrastructures and expectations to your peers, their own lifestyles, and prospects. While it feels like it might be an individual choice—that you keep on living a consumerist way of life—it is, in fact, the collective devotion of a culture, and all the material infrastructures built around it, that makes it so hard to stop.

AG: Connected to this, we are also seeing a large-scale instrumentalization of this individualized guilt and this desire for change by various kinds

of corporations. For example, airline companies, most infamously, now sell to their customers carbon offsets, which promise to 'cancel out' the CO_2 emissions their flights will produce and therefore alleviate their consciousness. Of course, this kind of intervention prevents any kind of incentive towards actually reducing emissions, decarbonizing economies, and changing lifestyles. They instead keep the devotion to emission-intensive resources and polluting practices tightly in place and only a click away for those who can afford it.

CD: Yes, and interestingly enough oil companies were part and parcel of the effort to come up with the idea of a carbon footprint. They invested tremendous efforts to shift the accountability onto individuals, who are cast as these rational market actors making conscious consumer choices. The rational consumer is now responsible for counting and monitoring their own carbon footprints. This is increasingly how neoliberals invite people to practice citizenship in the United States—through consumer choices.

DG: What affective dimensions have you encountered in your work on energy systems?

CD: As a concept, affect can help us think about our bodies, how we feel when we move through environments and relate to other people and the more-than-human world. And by doing so, it can make us think beyond the limits of our human bodies and recognize that not only can other things feel pleasure, disgust, or desire as a result of our infrastructure, but that our own desires are influenced by, and expressed through, the more-than-human world. What we want, in other words, is not determined by a pre-formed personality.

Automobility is a powerful example of this because our desires, jobs, and homes have been built around cars. My experience of riding a bike to work can feel scary because there are sections without a bike lane, on busy roads, and because some U.S. drivers are aggressive toward cyclists. When we have petitioned the town to fix this, the main obstacles cited are automobiles (not wanting to reduce car space) and private property (homeowners opposed to granting easements to expand the road). Both commitments—cars and suburban yards—are relatively recent social constructions built on the basis of cheap fossil fuels. They are not inherent desires of humankind. As virulent as they are, they could change.

Against this, the co-housing community where I live was designed with small lots and homes (relative to suburban America), and with all the cars are parked around the perimeter, so that the homes are close together and the interior paths are completely pedestrian. This was counter to a traditional suburban development, which would have used the 33 acres to build 33, one-acre,

single-family homes. The design of our co-housing community entails minor, but unfamiliar burdens for rural Americans, in terms of living in smaller spaces and having to use carts to move your groceries to your house, like many urban dwellers do. The benefits are enormous, though. People spend more time outside and get to know their neighbors better, and children enjoy freedom of movement across the entire neighborhood and surrounding woods, much of which could remain intact because the homes were built in a smaller area.

This might seem banal, but the dangers surrounding cars and roads in the United States actually do shape people's conception and experience of public space as threatening, stressful, and frustrating. The devotion to online shopping can also be understood in this light: The alternative to shopping online in the U.S. is to navigate crowded parking lots and wide expanses of concrete. Thinking about the effects of automobility has exciting political potential: It shows that another way of life, one that is more sustainable, is not only possible, but could also be pleasurable in its own way.

With sustainability, it often feels like people are asked to give up things, like their cars, their travels, their comfort, etc. But seen from another perspective, justice and sustainability could be achieved through infrastructure that contributes greatly to public and community health and well-being, so that these changes could *feel good*, maybe even better, to many people. Infrastructure can be an important affective strategy to make sustainability just and desirable.

AG: The main criticism that we hear from individuals who are reluctant to make the shift to or even imagine a decarbonized society is that this ecological way of life is simply utopian; it might be ideal and desirable, but it is impossible to achieve now. How can we counter this kind of pessimistic, nihilistic view of a post-fossil fuels future?

CD: I think the real utopianism is among ecomodernists—those who believe that technological innovation alone will solve the problem of global warming. Against all evidence to the contrary, and against common sense, in the corridors of power there is still a magical belief that human production and unlimited economic growth can become delinked from environmental harm. I must admit that it makes me angry when those who hold this belief turn around and dismiss calls for social justice as utopian.

But this notion of utopianism is important because it is a widely held feeling, the famous saying that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. To say that sustainability can have its own politics of pleasure does not erase the fact that some things will need to be given up by the wealthiest and most privileged, and more broadly in energy-inten-

sive cultures. But many of those things that will have to be sacrificed might, in the end, not even make people feel good, or might only feel necessary in a culture of long and stressful work hours with unfair compensation. The high suicide, addiction, and mental illness rates in the U.S. are revealing in terms of the impacts of the American consumerist dream.

Working people have received a bad bargain with capital in energy-intensive cultures like the U.S., in terms of poor community well-being alongside access to cheap mass consumerism. It's difficult to give up mass consumerism, though, when all the infrastructure for community well-being has been underfunded and destroyed after decades of neoliberal austerity measures. That is why sustainability must be thought of in relation to building these broader structural supports, like access to high-quality food and housing. Environmental movements need to take seriously that cheap consumerism does provide what Lauren Berlant call a "cruel optimism" (2011), a chance to feel good, and to get through the day, even if the thing you desire is also hurting you. Climate mitigation does entail challenging mass consumerism, but in order to do so, the best path is one that pursues social justice and community infrastructure.

AG: In your 2018 essay, "Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire," you describe how feelings of loss and (gender and climate) anxiety can dangerously fuel desires for authoritarian politics. We were wondering if you had ever thought about those feelings in connection to the sentimental. Is sentimentality at play in the narratives of victimization, pain, and resentment promulgated by climate deniers? Or perhaps in the various narratives that make people *feel right* about fossil fuel extraction and consumption?

CD: Because of your project, I have been thinking more about this relationship, between fossil fuels and sentimentality. It could be helpful to compare petro-masculinity to women's "intimate publics" that Berlant study in *Female Complaint* (2008), their work on sentimental women's genres in the U.S. Women's sentimental literature convenes an intimate public, which offers a fantasy of normality and belonging, a connection to others who have suffered as a result of being women. This genre provides a relief from the cold, hard world of politics and oppression, instead finding pleasure in sharing the generic experiences of love and survival. However, Berlant write that this feeling of solidarity can be politically problematic, as bourgeois White women have often expressed their own suffering through consuming stories about Black and working class women's experiences (6). Indeed, the key for Berlant is that although intimate publics *feel* like ethical spaces of emotional connection, the empathy aroused often favors consensus and unity, rather than antago-

nistic political demands for change. Sentimentality helps to assuage feelings of guilt and complicity. It provides affective tools for sustaining structural injustice.

The sentimentality of petro-masculinity operates through different affects, but it might still be helpful to consider it as an intimate public, in Berlant's terms. Petro-masculinity also appears as a desire for recognition through shared feelings of normative sexuality; it offers relief from a hard reality by celebrating the pleasures of ordinary life; and it also circulates through a sense of suffering and victimhood.

However, where women's intimate publics are formed around a subordinated identity, "petro-masculinity" congeals around a sense of lost entitlement. I write about petro-masculinity as a hypermasculinity, a concept that I adapted from the work of Lily Ling and Anna Agathangelou—two feminist scholars of international relations. They described U.S. politics post-9/11 as 'hypermasculine,' a term to describe what happens when dominant masculine identities feel threatened and compensate by exaggerating those traditional masculine traits. Here, challenges to patriarchal rule are interpreted as victimization, despite the fact that many of these men are powerful elites.

The sense of victimhood is processed in different ways, according to normative gender scripts. Women's intimate publics follow a love plot, but petro-masculinity is lived through a war plot. Berlant tell us that the love plot manages the gap between the fantasy of romantic love and its disappointing reality in late modern capitalism. Even if love is thwarted, the feeling of love attaches one to a generic sense of community, and to a hopeful possibility for happiness, one day. The love plot features scenes for agency and belonging in a world in which one mostly feels powerless and alone. The war plot operates through a similar deflection of desire. It navigates the gap between the ideal of White patriarchal rule and the reality of frustrated traditional masculinity, in light of myriad challenges to it. It promises that proximity to violence will deliver a generic experience of power that *feels* like domination, even if the political reality is unchanged, and the world remains beyond one's control. Petro-masculinity also sustains the *status quo*, in this way. It is expressed through the shared glee of extraction, explosion, or combustion.

I'm interested to hear your thoughts on sentimentality and fossil fuels.

AG: I think that we would argue that the narratives of loss and victimization that you analyze in "Petro-Masculinity" fit really well with what Berlant call "the unfinished business of sentimentality" —"that 'tomorrow is another day' in which fantasies of the good life can be lived" (*The Female Complaint* 2). As you

mentioned, sentimentality has long been viewed as a progressive mode to inspire democratic change, but it is helpful to highlight its stabilizing, and maybe regressive, effects, too. The discourse surrounding the maintaining of 'business as usual'—i.e., the continued reliance on fossil fuels—is very often tinged with sentimentality. For instance, we have recently seen a political discourse that has turned fossil fuel industries' workers into national heroes, sacrificed subjects who suffered the injustices of globalization and sustainability policies, who should be rescued or revalidated through a re-turn to a hardcore extractive economy (see Donald Trump's speech analyzed by Heike Paul in this volume). For Berlant, (national) sentimentality in this sense is "too often a defensive response by people who identify with privilege yet fear they will be exposed as immoral by their tacit sanction of a particular structural violence that benefits them" ("The Subject of True Feeling" 62). With the rise of a global climate justice movement that has staunchly challenged extractivism and normalized the idea that a post-fossil fuel world was not only desirable but also feasible, fossil fuel industries and lobbies are doubling down on counter-narratives focused on the meanings of 'the good life.' This is often done by associating fossil fuel energy systems with stories of personal happiness and comfort, national security and 'strength,' and nostalgic accounts of the hey-days of capitalism. Sentimentality in this context is deployed to perpetuate and strengthen extractivism.

CD: Yes, and I think this is where the difference lies between the use of sentimentality among liberal centrists and the far right. Liberal guilt is aroused by the fear that one will be exposed as immoral by their complicity, or their tacit sanction of the status quo. It is interesting to put this in relation to how Berlant understood White women's empathy, as a means for handling the exposure of one's complicity, for processing guilt and yet remaining politically quiet.

On the right, this fear of being exposed as immoral is also there, but it is handled with refusal rather than passive empathy. We can think, for example, of the many debates happening in the U.S. about public education. People on the right are going to school boards to protest the teaching of slavery and White supremacy because they argue that they "should not be made to feel guilty or ashamed." In such a phrase, there is an interesting acknowledgment of the complex feelings that can arise with social change. But instead of finding a way to process feelings of guilt and shame, and route them toward political accountability, there is simply a blunt refusal.

Sentimentality in liberal culture welcomes some of these feelings of suffering and melancholia but makes a point of always being on the good side of it, through a sense of universal humanity. One can feel bad for the plight of the

world, and maneuver to ameliorate some harms, but the property and material relations of capitalism remain fundamentally intact. The right refuses this space of liberal guilt and recognizes it as hypocritical. However, the right also wants to defend a certain distribution of privilege and material power, but with a dramatically different affective style. For some people on the right, it feels good to celebrate consumption and extraction through, for example, rolling coal with your truck or blowing up mountains in mountaintop removal. It feels good to exit that space of moral ambivalence and liberal hypocrisy.

DG: In *Green European Journal* (March 2020), you argued that the far right is deploying "a melodrama of climate change denial." Why do think the term "melodrama" is helpful here?

CD: I draw my understanding of melodrama from Elisabeth Anker's work. The key element of melodrama is its moral clarity: There are heroes and villains, progress or decadence. Melodrama invites the audience to identify with the good side and to feel self-righteous. It is highly effective as a tool of political mobilization, and has been used by movements on the Left, too. There is melodrama at work, for example, when environmental movements talk about evil fossil fuels companies and the heroes that fight them.

According to Anker, melodrama has been a central genre for narrating American exceptionalism, where the American public is presented as a force of goodness. Bad events are processed as marginal mistakes, often the fault of small groups of villains, and they do not detract from the overall righteousness of the American project. The problem is that when you try to launch a critique of America within the melodramatic mode, the possibilities are reduced to evil or innocence. The quote from Berlant that Axelle mentioned earlier about the fear of being exposed is powerful, because it plays on this notion: If you have been part of something bad, then you are evil.

The genre of melodrama is not inherently fascist, though. As I mentioned, melodrama has been influential in resistance movements; it has its uses as a political tactic. However, melodrama is problematic in that it tends to leap over the complexity, ambivalence, and murkiness of real events and people. When the public only understands a problem in stark moral terms, it becomes easy to discredit social movements if they fail to perform as perfect heroes, or if their demands are not saintly enough. Likewise, it becomes difficult to fight injustice when those in power do not appear entirely evil, or when you yourself are complicit in it. Most people do not like to think of themselves as villains. Modern life is characterized by spaces in which people are both victims and perpetrators, where people can be exploited while simultaneously enjoying benefits

that accrue from violence done to other humans, creatures, and ecosystems. Melodrama does not provide a way to navigate such tricky subject positions.

AG: What you say about climate denial, and really climate defiance, relates nicely to Elisabeth Anker's concept of "ugly freedom," which she uses to discuss the ways 'freedom' has been invoked in oppressive and violent projects in the U.S. (and in its spaces of influence). Climate deniers protest environmental and sustainable policies as punitive and burdensome because they desire the freedom to extract, to consume, to pollute, regardless of the consequences. Your work on "petro-masculinity" and "the melodrama of climate change" has mainly focused on conservative and far-right groups. Do you see sentimental narratives—of suffering, loss, nostalgia—relating to the environment and energy at play in other communities or contexts?

CD: The melodramatic genre in the U.S. guides most mainstream approaches to climate change. America is depicted as the hero, and the story needs a villain. The villain might be China, with its leadership in green technology viewed as a threat. The villain can be feminists, communists, climate migrants. The script differs but the genre remains the same. There is little room for self-reflection or humility in melodrama. These stories avoid the more complicated challenge posed by the problem of fossil-fueled industrialization: understanding the causes of climate change inevitably shakes the heroic vision of the U.S., Europe, or industrial capitalism, as beacons of progress in the world.

That is why denial is not limited to the far right. There is also a kind of denial among ecomodernists, who dominate climate policymaking in the global North. Ecomodernism also would like to sideline challenges to global capitalism and to limit historical accountability for its violent unfolding. If global aid is discussed, it is through the lens of development, or as recompense for unfortunate side effects, rather than as reparations, which are demanded by many in the global South.

In the U.S. and elsewhere, new genres are needed for handling the feelings aroused by complicity and the troubled history of industrial imperialism. Sentimental genres can assuage those feelings of complicity, by appealing to a generic human solidarity, unified around feelings of love or a desire for consumer comforts. This is evident, for instance, in some of the Anthropocene narratives, which turn to a universal human agent (*anthropos*), with the emphasis that "we" are all in this together, in a manner that sidesteps accountability for extreme inequality. It reminds me a little of how White women in the U.S. process their own experiences of subordination through consuming salacious

tales of woe that center on Black and working class women. A similar sentimental trap lurks when stories of climate disaster in the global South are used to spread a message of universal human suffering, to the extent that they may create a space for feeling ethical, rather than for encouraging antagonistic demands for justice.

DG: With regard to a successful energy transition, do you think that stories and narratives that speak to people on an emotional level rather than a rational one can achieve change? Could we and should we think of a sentimentality that is strategic, perhaps even pedagogic?

CD: Sentimental genres in late capitalism have used generic consumer pleasures to absorb a great deal of frustration and anxiety that comes from structural injustice. Fascist movements are also adept at using sentimentality, routing emotions of fear and anxiety toward war plots, rather than justice. You ask whether sentimental genres could be used strategically, in an anti-fascist manner, to bring about justice rather than to forestall it. I think so, but only in the sense that sentimentality is unavoidable in modern life. Ignoring it, as liberal technocrats seek to do, merely cedes more of the emotional landscape to fascist movements in times of crisis.

Sentimental genres reveal the importance of the everyday, and the desire for simple connection and recognition, which are so often overlooked in high-level policy talk. I would be less interested in trying to deploy a new sentimental genre, than in appreciating what it teaches me about the public appetite for finding small pleasures and feelings of community in getting through each day. This brings me to the feminist emphasis on the political importance of everyday life, care activities, and relations of dependency. Ordinary life activities feel too small to consider when faced with global warming, yet they hold the key to understanding the feeling of 'stuckness' when it comes to achieving climate justice.

That is why I have been an advocate for talking more about pleasurein relation to sustainability and energy transition. First, that means recognizing that many people in the world need more energy, more food, and more shelter; those demands need to be met sustainably, and not through narratives of reduction or voluntary simplicity. Second, taking pleasure seriously also means recognizing the 'cruel optimism' of mass consumerism, which does deliver real pleasures and fantasies when living in a petrocultural system, where most social alternatives are lacking. This means energy transitions might be less about fuel switches, and more about building infrastructures of all kinds (social, reproductive, technological, financial) that make less energy-intensive ways of

life possible, meaningful, and pleasurable. Not as heroic consumer choices but as shared, generic experiences.

I acknowledge that there's a difficult circularity here in terms of desire and action; the public needs to demand new infrastructure, but infrastructure needs to be in place sometimes before new desires and genres can arise. The tricky reality is that they will take shape through each other. Instead of a love plot or a war plot, perhaps this is an infrastructure plot.

And, of course, there is a pedagogical moment in recognizing how one's feelings are attached to certain stories, even stories we no longer believe. This means having a kind of affective intelligence about our bodies and selves, one that learns how to develop our capacity for new sensibilities.

DG: When preparing this interview and thinking about societies' devotion to fossil fuels, we kept on returning to the same question: How is it that with all the existing scientific evidence and knowledge about the anthropogenic nature of climate change and the hazardous consequences of extractivism, most people do not seem to be ready to make the needed changes to ensure a sustainable and ecological future for all? This is where perhaps affect and emotions can make a difference. There are pockets of territorial resistances around the world, where communities are organizing at the local level and creating, defending, and imagining other ways of relating to the non-/more-than-human world, to each other and our socioeconomic systems. How, in your view, is a planetary transformation possible?

CD: There are two important questions here. The first: Is planetary transformation possible? Yes, I think it is. These alternative practices that you mentioned give me hope, too. From the perspective of liberal modernity, there is this widespread notion that humanity has to come up with new ideas and new ways of being to 'fix' the climate crisis. It is reassuring to think that there are already many ideas, practices, and knowledges in the world that are worth experimenting with. There are vibrant groups of scholars and activists thinking critically about infrastructure. Ultimately, the problem is not necessarily a lack of ideas, or even of a history and experience with other ways of living. J.K. Gibson-Graham, who are feminist economic geographers writing about capitalism, have argued that non-capitalist practices are happening all around us all the time—practices that we already feel and value. The problem is that these ideas are ruled out in advance as utopian or unrealistic because they do not accord with capitalist maxims of productivism, profit-seeking, and the sacredness of private property. Moreover, there have been, and continue to be, active efforts to destroy and block anti-capitalist experiments, and to erase non-cap-

italist ways of life. So yes, the change required is dramatic and yet, not impossible.

The second part of your question is more difficult. If more just and sustainable ways of life are possible, how can they be brought about, and brought about on a planetary scale, especially considering the forces ranged against such an outcome? Scale is key because capitalism operates globally. Making elite, wealthy corridors green by accelerating extraction in marginalized regions, for example, does not address the root of the problem. Theories of change are not always explicitly acknowledged in the literatures on transition. Berlant, too, becomes a little vague on this point, recognizing the 'potential' or unfinished business of sentimental genres but not speculating much further on what this would look like. Meanwhile, mainstream policymaking has a largely technocratic theory of change: Experts and engineers will figure out smart solutions, and policymakers will enact them. The public's role is to behave rationally, following price signals and our own self-interest, whatever that is.

Achieving more transformational changes in material distribution threatens the concentrated sites of power, wealth, and violence. That is why debates over the role of the state loom large on the Left. States have been instruments of terror, settler colonialism, misogyny, and environmental racism. States also have considerable, existing institutional power in terms of implementing widespread change. A recent book called *Degrowth & Strategy* (Barlow et al.) wades into this debate, and others, recognizing that there is a need for more writing about "how to bring about socio-ecological transformation" (the book's subtitle). The book is organized around a critical engagement with Erik Olin Wright's influential framework of three "modes of transformation." The three modes are: *interstitial* (building new forms on the margins of capitalism), *ruptural* (direct confrontation or breaks with capital), and *symbiotic* (changing existing institutions from within) (57). These modes create a "strategic canvas" (67) with multiple avenues for seeking change that are not mutually exclusive, and that are often highly effective when combined.

What is interesting to me about this 'strategic canvas' is that it moves us away from the notion of singular, heroic breakthroughs, and insists upon the plurality of resistance and transformation. In keeping with our earlier conversation about melodrama, this is an anti-melodramatic understanding of change. The technocratic theory of change looks for heroic inventors and technologies that will swoop in and save the day. Frustration mounts when the Left does not have a comparably heroic, nor simple, savior idea. Part of encourag-

ing new genres of climate change, though, is embracing new plots—plots that have compelling drama, but also more tolerance for complexity, failure, and surprise. Plots that seek change but also take seriously the sentimental need for ordinariness, for the pleasures to be found in surviving everyday life.

A strategic canvas is a nice metaphor that allows people to see how their efforts could fit into a larger set of movements. This could be understood as 'let a thousand flowers bloom,' but there is also room for alliances, strategy, and organization across modes and sites. Now we need more climate stories that take place in such a landscape.

AG & DG: Cara Daggett, thank you for having taken the time to answer our questions.

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