

Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire

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Abstract

As the planet warms, new authoritarian movements in the West are embracing a toxic combination of climate denial, racism and misogyny. Rather than consider these resentments separately, this article interrogates their relationship through the concept of petro-masculinity, which appreciates the historic role of fossil fuel systems in buttressing white patriarchal rule. Petro-masculinity is helpful to understanding how the anxieties aroused by the Anthropocene can augment desires for authoritarianism. The concept of petro-masculinity suggests that fossil fuels mean more than profit; fossil fuels also contribute to making identities, which poses risks for post-carbon energy politics. Moreover, through a psycho-political reading of authoritarianism, I show how fossil fuel use can function as a violent compensatory practice in reaction to gender and climate trouble.

Keywords

gender, climate change, authoritarianism

Petro-masculinité: les combustibles fossiles et le désir autoritaire

Résumé

Depuis quelques années, force est de constater que le réchauffement climatique est accompagné par des mouvements autoritaires qui dénie ce phénomène et nourrissent des puissants élan racistes et misogynes. Plutôt que de considérer de manière séparée chacun de ces trois types de ressentiments différents, nous proposons d'approcher leurs combinaisons à travers le concept de petro-masculinité. Ce concept nous permet d'éclairer la manière par laquelle le rôle historique des systèmes énergétiques qui se basent sur les combustibles fossiles soutient le pouvoir du patriarcat blanc. L'étude de cette relation nous permet d'ailleurs de mieux comprendre en quoi les inquiétudes suscitées par l'anthropocène peuvent intensifier un désir de régime politique autoritaire. Cette notion nous suggère que les combustibles fossiles portent en eux plus que la seule question du profit. En effet, ils contribuent à forger des identités qui mettent gravement

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en péril toute politique qui voudrait encourager le développement des énergies post carbone. Enfin, à travers une lecture psychopolitique de l'autoritarisme, nous démontrons que l'usage des combustibles fossiles occupe dans l'ordre social actuel une fonction stratégique pour le maintien de son hégémonie. En réaction à l'émergence croissante des questions de genre et des problèmes climatiques, l'exploitation d'énergies fossiles tend à se muer toujours plus en une pratique de compensation violente de la masculinité ébranlée.

Mots clés

genre, changement climatique, autoritarisme

Petromasculinidad: combustibles fósiles y anhelo autoritario

Resumen

A medida que el planeta se calienta, los nuevos movimientos autoritarios de Occidente están adoptando una combinación tóxica de negación del calentamiento climático, racismo y misoginia. En lugar de considerar estos enconamientos de forma aislada, este artículo explora su relación a través del concepto de petromasculinidad, que valora el papel histórico de los sistemas basados en combustibles fósiles como puntal del dominio patriarcal blanco. La petromasculinidad es útil para entender cómo las ansiedades despertadas por el Antropoceno pueden aumentar los anhelos de autoritarismo. El concepto de petromasculinidad sugiere que los combustibles fósiles implican algo más que beneficios; los combustibles fósiles contribuyen, además, a crear identidades, lo cual plantea riesgos para la política energética postcarbono. Además, al realizar una lectura psicopolítica del autoritarismo, hago patente cómo el uso de los combustibles fósiles puede funcionar como una práctica compensatoria violenta en reacción a los problemas de género y climáticos.

Palabras clave

género, cambio climático, autoritarismo

Introduction

Global warming poses a problem for fossil fuel systems and those who profit from them; leaving fossil fuels in the ground likely means leaving trillions of dollars of profit in the ground.¹ Vast networks of privilege that are sustained by fossil economies are likewise threatened. As Jairus Grove reflects, 'environmental justice will require *unequal* roles: significantly constraining, even repressing, the powers of the Eurocene'.² Similarly, the 'Planet Politics Manifesto' reminds us that 'the planet is telling us that there are limits to human freedom; there are freedoms and political choices we can no longer have'.³

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1. Bill McKibben, 'Global Warming's Terrifying New Math', *Rolling Stone*, 19 July 2012. Available at: <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>. Last accessed May 28, 2018.
 2. Jairus Grove, 'The New Nature', *Boston Review*, 11 January 2016. Available at: <http://bostonreview.net/forum/new-nature/jairus-grove-jairus-grove-response-jedediah-purdy>. Last accessed May 28, 2018.
 3. Anthony Burke et al., 'Planet Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 507.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the amount of money and privilege at stake, the tragic *ethos* demanded by global environmental justice is being resisted. Those regions that have emitted the most carbon dioxide are positioning themselves to profit from a warming earth by advancing a militarised and corporatised version of climate security.⁴ The result, as Christian Parenti foresees it, is the likelihood of a ‘politics of the armed life-boat’, given that, already,

the North is responding with a new authoritarianism. The Pentagon and its European allies are actively planning a militarized adaptation, which emphasizes the long-term, open-ended containment of failed or failing states – counter-insurgency forever. This sort of ‘climate fascism’ – a politics based on exclusion, segregation and repression – is horrific and bound to fail.⁵

‘Climate fascism’, with its camps, barbed wire and police omnipresence, is a likely outcome of climate (in)security.⁶

A nascent fossil fascism is already evident in the wake of the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the conservative capture of the US Congress. In a short time, the Trump Administration and the Republican Party have shored up fossil fuel systems by denying climate change and dismantling a host of environmental policies including: withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, installing a climate denier (Scott Pruitt) to lead the Environmental Protection Agency, taking steps to kill the Clean Power Plan, weakening the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, lifting a moratorium on new coal leases on federal land, ending a study on the health effects of mountaintop coal removal, and moving to open nearly all US coastal waters to offshore drilling for oil.

Climate denial obviously serves fossil-fuelled capitalist interests. However, coal and oil do more than ensure profit and fuel consumption-heavy lifestyles. If people cling so tenaciously to fossil fuels, even to the point of embarking upon authoritarianism, it is because fossil fuels also secure cultural meaning and political subjectivities. Since the new imperialism of the 19th century, fossil fuels have become the metaphorical, material, and sociotechnical basis of Western petrocultures that extend across the planet.⁷ In other words, fossil fuels matter to new authoritarian movements in the West because of profits and consumer lifestyles, but also because privileged subjectivities are oil-soaked

4. I would like to thank the reviewer who suggested an engagement with Buxton and Hayes.

5. Christian Parenti, ‘The Catastrophic Convergence: Militarism, Neoliberalism and Climate Change’, in *The Secure and the Dispossessed: How the Military and Corporations Are Shaping a Climate-Changed World*, eds. Ben Hayes and Nick Buxton (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 35.

6. Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2011).

7. This is the focus of the emergent field of energy humanities. See for example, Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, eds., *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017); Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Matthew T. Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2013); Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2013).

and coal-dusted. It is no coincidence that white, conservative American men – regardless of class – appear to be among the most vociferous climate deniers, as well as leading fossil fuel proponents in the West.⁸

This article undertakes a feminist reading of climate denial and fossil fuel boosterism in new authoritarian movements in the West in order to interrogate the entanglement of masculinity and fossil fuels. Through the concept of petro-masculinity, I emphasise the relationship – both technically and affectively, ideationally and materially – between fossil fuels and white patriarchal orders. While misogyny and climate denial are often treated as separate dimensions of new authoritarian movements, a focus on petro-masculinity shows them to be mutually constituted, with gender anxiety slithering alongside climate anxiety, and misogynist violence sometimes exploding as fossil violence.⁹

Despite a growing interest in gendered analyses of climate change,¹⁰ the intersection of gender and energy remains understudied, with most research located in the development field, where the focus is on equal access to fuel.¹¹ Meanwhile, research into masculinity and energy, as well as environmentalism, is even more limited.¹² Nevertheless, masculine identity, and the patriarchal orders that it supports, is important for understanding (the lack of) political responses to climate change, especially in the global

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8. Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, 'Cool Dudes: The Denial of Climate Change among Conservative White Males in the United States', *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. 4 (2011): 1163–72. I would like to thank the reviewer who referred me to this study.
 9. This draws upon feminist research into the gendered dimensions of violence. See for example, Laura Sjoberg, 'Gender/Violence in a Gendered/Violent World', *Millennium* 42, no. 2 (2014): 532–42; Paul Kirby and Marsha Henry, 'Rethinking Masculinity and Practices of Violence in Conflict Settings', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14, no. 4 (2012): 445–49; Paul Kirby, 'How Is Rape a Weapon of War? Feminist International Relations, Modes of Critical Explanation and the Study of Wartime Sexual Violence', *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2012): 797–821; Annick T.R. Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).
 10. Christina Shaheen Moosa and Nancy Tuana, 'Mapping a Research Agenda Concerning Gender and Climate Change: A Review of the Literature', *Hypatia* 29, no. 3 (2014): 677–94; Chris Cuomo, 'Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility', *Hypatia* 26, no. 4 (2011): 690–714; Seema Arora-Jonsson, 'Virtue and Vulnerability: Discourses on Women, Gender, and Climate Change', *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. 2 (2011): 744–51; Julie Nelson, 'Economists, Value Judgments, and Climate Change: A View from Feminist Economics', *Ecological Economics* 65, no. 3 (2007): 441–47; Sherilyn MacGregor, "'Gender and Climate Change": From Impacts to Discourses', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 6, no. 2 (2010): 223–38.
 11. MacGregor, "'Gender and Climate Change'".
 12. Ironically, Hultman notes that R.W. Connell's early work ('A Whole New World') to introduce the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' focused on the case of men in environmental movements. Hultman also points to rural studies research on masculinity and the environment as an important exception. For example, see Shannon Bell and Yvonne Braun, 'Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia', *Gender & Society* 24, no. 6 (2010): 794–813; Shannon Bell and Richard York, 'Community Economic Identity: The Coal Industry and Ideology Construction in West Virginia', *Rural Sociology* 75, no. 1 (2010): 111–43.

North. Sherilyn MacGregor, for example, argues that environmentalism itself has become masculinised as a result of the dominance of science and security frames for understanding climate change. These ‘hardened’ framings result in a preference for ‘the kinds of solutions that are the traditional domain of men and hegemonic masculinity’, which lead to a ‘downgrading of ethical concerns’ like justice, health, or economic equity.¹³

Appreciating the historic relationship between fossil fuels and white patriarchal rule is helpful in terms of understanding the authoritarian desires and anxieties aroused by the Anthropocene. A feminist reading of fossil fuel systems points to the emergence of another dangerous ‘catastrophic convergence’, to adopt Parenti’s phrase: in this instance, the convergence is between climate change, a threatened fossil fuel system, and an increasingly fragile Western hypermasculinity. For Parenti, convergence does not ‘merely mean that several disasters happen simultaneously, one problem atop another’, but ‘that problems compound and amplify each other, one expressing itself through another’.¹⁴ Analysing petro-masculinity alerts us to those perilous moments when challenges to fossil-fuelled systems, and more broadly to fossil-soaked lifestyles, become interpreted as challenges to white patriarchal rule.

Petro-masculinity, like fossil fuel systems, arguably has global dimensions. However, like other masculinities, petro-masculinity should be understood as manifesting in multiple, and locally specific, ways. This article focuses upon its most prominent recent appearance: in new authoritarian movements in the US.¹⁵ The US case is instructive, as American wealth, high energy consumption, and militarism make its climate politics crucial to planetary security. The article is oriented around the three convergent phenomena of fossil fuel systems, white patriarchal rule, and authoritarianism. The first two sections establish the historical relationship between fossil fuels and authoritarianism, on the one hand, and fossil fuels and white patriarchal rule, on the other. The remainder of the article employs petro-masculinity to understand the combustible convergence of all three in new authoritarian movements in the US. Here I focus on a psycho-political analysis of authoritarianism, positing fossil fuel use as violent compensation for the anxieties provoked by both gender and climate trouble. The article concludes by considering the wilful continuation of fossil fuel regimes as a misogynist practice, adopting Kate Manne’s understanding of misogyny as the policing activities that punish deviants and reinforce patriarchal rule.¹⁶

Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Politics

Fossil fuels built the modern world. There remains an appreciation for fossil fuels – or, at least, for the high energy consumption they provided – as a catalyst of mass liberal

13. Sherilyn MacGregor, ‘A Stranger Silence Still: The Need for Feminist Social Research on Climate Change’, *The Sociological Review* 57, no. 2 (2009): 124–40.

14. Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos*, 7.

15. Even narrowing to the US risks over-simplification, as the gendering of fossil fuels will vary within regions, e.g. as it does between Appalachian coal miners and the Silicon Valley tech culture.

16. Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

democracy. This is evident in ecomodernist calls for a good Anthropocene that would decouple the benefits of fossil fuels from the fuels themselves.¹⁷ After all, while industrialisation wreaks planetary destruction, its spread was coterminous with humanist victories like the abolition of slavery, increased literacy rates, gender equality and poverty reduction. Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that this cannot be a coincidence, and that ‘the mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel use. Most of our freedoms so far have been energy-intensive’.¹⁸

However, in addition to the ecological harms caused by oil and coal, fossil fuels have also done serious political harm. Timothy Mitchell argues that fossil fuels have had contradictory effects in terms of assembling democracy.¹⁹ On the one hand, due to coal’s material traits, its extraction and supply were vulnerable to choke points that could be exploited by a growing labour resistance in the 19th century. In contrast, oil systems were less vulnerable to democratic hijacking. The global oil systems of the 20th century required a host of illiberal and violent measures on the part of Western states and oil companies in order to ensure oil scarcity and, in turn, a profit. In the case of oil, the West touted a democratic creed while simultaneously benefiting from and supporting authoritarian regimes and extremist movements in the Middle East and North Africa. Likewise, fossil fuel and mineral extraction were secured, both within the US and abroad, by racist regimes of differential pay and access to benefits that were aggressively anti-democratic on the part of corporations and the states that supported them.²⁰

Carbon democracy thus arose in tandem with, and reliant upon, authoritarianism. Put more strongly, authoritarian politics have historically been part and parcel of the project of securing Western (fossil) rule. By fossil rule, I mean a logic of governing that is dependent upon intensive fossil fuel consumption in both material and, as I will explore below, psycho-political ways. Fossil rule is mobilised through ‘fossil capital’, Andreas Malm’s term to describe how modern capitalism was erected around a belief in ‘self-sustaining growth ... welded to the combustion of fossil fuels’.²¹ Fossil capital requires an unending, cheap flow of fossil fuels for the concentration of wealth at the expense of other people and things, and this necessitates authoritarian tactics in certain sites and moments, a phenomenon that has been exhaustively catalogued by postcolonial theorists and thinkers in the global South.²²

17. John Asafu-Adjaye et al., *An Ecomodernist Manifesto* (Oakland: The Breakthrough Institute, 2015).

18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 208.

19. Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*.

20. Robert Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

21. Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2016).

22. See for example, Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man,

As a result, authoritarianism, rather than a perversion of modernity, or a lurking risk of mass industrial society to be avoided, appears instead as the very marrow of a contemporary life predicated upon burning fossil fuels. We cannot take comfort that, over time, creativity will shed its destructive possibilities.²³ The novelty and freedoms enabled by fossil-fuelled civilisation are entangled with horrific violence, such that to embark upon fossil-fuelled life is to spark off mass species extinction just as much as it is to make possible the internet or global social movements.

Carbon democracy strives to conceal this underbelly of mass destruction from privileged publics, whether in subterranean pipelines, in zoning plans that place heavy industry alongside poor communities and people of colour, and in the very notion of throwing things *away*. Similarly, the authoritarian practices required by fossil capital in the global South were often geographically separated from liberal forms of governance in the West. This made it possible for many Westerners to remain ignorant of their complicity in fossil authoritarianism, and to continue to believe that fossil fuels and liberal democracy are natural and inevitable partners. The narrative of righteous fossil democracy is crucial not only to American identity *writ* large, but to its hegemonic white masculinities. However, as Aimé Césaire pointed out more than 60 years ago, the violence that Anglo-Europeans have practiced abroad returns with ‘a terrific boomerang effect’, and that despite efforts to turn a blind eye or justify the violence, ‘colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism’.²⁴

Fossil Fuels and Masculinity

The American public understands Donald Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ mission as an *homage* to a mid-20th century fantasy of American life, when white men ruled their households uncontested, a formula that relied upon widespread full-time employment for white men with wages that could support housewives and children. In the words of reporter Zoe Chace, reflecting on the 2016 election, ‘for a lot of people, “Make America Great Again” was about “make men great again”’.²⁵

Trump’s motto is a kind of petro-nostalgia,²⁶ in that the achievement of the mid-20th century patriarchal ideal in the US was predicated upon an ongoing supply of cheap

Its Overrepresentation – An Argument’, *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2005); W.E.B. DuBois, ‘Worlds of Color’, *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 3 (1925): 423–44.

23. Jairus Grove writes that ‘history is neither a series of creative destructions nor destructive creativities, as if either creation or destruction could be given primacy as the driving tendency of existence’. Jairus Grove, ‘Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Everything: The Anthropocene or Peak Humanity?’, *Theory & Event* 18, no. 3 (2015).
24. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 35–6.
25. ‘White Haze’, *This American Life*, National Public Radio, 22 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/626/white-haze>.
26. I borrowed the term ‘petro-nostalgia’ from a conversation between Dominic Boyer, Cymene Howe, and Timothy Mitchell on the podcast ‘Cultures of Energy’, from episode 57, 16 February 2017. Available at: <http://culturesofenergy.com/ep-57-timothy-mitchell/>.

fossil fuels. Cars, suburbs, and the nuclear family, oriented around white male workers, formed a triumvirate that yoked the desires of Americans not only to wage labour, but to the continued supply of cheap energy that made the dream possible. These privatised consumer perks, along with New Deal infrastructure and policies that supported them, were intended to inoculate the American public against the twin threats of communism and fascism, both of which lurked in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II.²⁷ On the supply side, and especially prior to the 1970s' oil crisis, the state helped to secure an artificial oil scarcity that ensured profits for oil companies.²⁸ On the demand side, the state also helped to cultivate oil desires, such that fossil fuel consumption became necessary to achieving the American dream.

Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of this article, the American way of life was centred around a version of white, patriarchal rule in which the achievement of hegemonic masculinity required intensive fossil fuel consumption and, for the working- or middle-class, jobs within or reliant upon fossil fuel systems (jobs and wages that, like state welfare benefits, were unequally distributed by race, often with the conscious corporate intention of dividing labourers in order to prevent unrest).²⁹ For many, extracting and burning fuel was a practice of white masculinity, and of American sovereignty, such that the explosive power of combustion could be crudely equated with virility.

No wonder that access to cheap and plentiful gas and energy became the *sine qua non* for American well-being, and a right demanded both of the state and for the state. Even as Americans in the 21st century disagree about whether health care or food should be considered a right, there is a widespread, bipartisan assumption that Americans deserve cheap energy, and that the state has a duty to ensure it.³⁰ In turn, any threat to energy supply appears simultaneously as a threat to the American dream and, in turn, the dominant position of the US in the world.

Make America Great Again thus insists upon a 'Leave it to Beaver' innocence about fossil fuel burning – that there are no downsides to burning more oil and coal, or at least none for white Americans. Exit polls show that it was a campaign message that resonated

27. Huber, *Lifeblood*, 33.

28. Iain A. Boal et al., *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (New York: Verso, 2005); Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* (New York: Free Press, 2008); Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*; Huber, *Lifeblood*.

29. Robert Vitalis shows how these policies were instituted by American oil companies in Saudi Arabia. See Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*.

30. For example, rises in fuel prices at petrol stations often incite ample media coverage in the US, and have been shown to affect presidential approval ratings. In a 2005 Gallup poll, taken as fuel prices were rising, eight out of ten Americans agreed that high gas prices were 'unfair', and a majority thought that President George W. Bush could take steps to lower them. See Laurel Harbridge, Jon Krosnick, and Jeffrey Wooldridge, 'Presidential Approval and Gas Prices: Sociotropic or Pocketbook Influence?', in *Political Psychology: New Explorations*, eds. Jon A. Krosnick, I-Chant A. Chiang, and Tobias H. Stark (New York: Routledge, 2017), 246–75; Joseph Carroll and Jeffrey Jones, 'Nearly 8 in 10 Americans Call Gas Prices "Unfair"'. 6 May 2005. Available at: <http://news.gallup.com/poll/16171/Nearly-Americans-Call-Gas-Prices-Unfair.aspx>.

not only with white men, but also with just over one-half of white women voters,³¹ some of whom may also find security in the *status quo*, and therefore resent threats to fossil fuel systems and/or hegemonic white masculinities. Through the rosy nostalgia afforded by petro-masculine identity, the affront of global warming or environmental regulations appear as insurgents on par with the dangers posed by feminists and queer movements seeking to leach energy and power from the state/traditional family.

Petro-masculinity approaches masculinity as a socially constructed identity that emerges ‘within a gender order that defines masculinity in opposition to femininity, and in so doing, sustains a power relation between men and women as groups’.³² Masculinities are always multiple, and involve ongoing struggles over which version of masculine identity will become socially dominant, or hegemonic, to adopt R.W. Connell’s influential concept. Petro-masculinity draws upon aspects of a traditionally hegemonic masculinity, but at the same time, its appearance in the American far-right today is better understood as a kind of *hypermasculinity*, which is a more ‘reactionary stance. It arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity’.³³

Petro-masculinity is reactionary in part because it is not the only hegemonic masculine identity available in the late industrial US; it is perhaps not even the most dominant one in terms of the gendered experiences of energy or electricity systems.³⁴ Ecomodernism, for example, has become a prominent environmental disposition with arguably masculinised dimensions, and is especially popular among elite men (think of Elon Musk).³⁵ Instead of the ‘limits to growth’ mood of the 1970s, which proposed decreasing energy consumption, ecomodernists claimed that ‘there was no conflict between economic growth and environmental problems’ and that technological solutions, often private and market-based, would solve any difficulties,³⁶ a belief that continues to reign in much of

31. More white women voters have backed Republican presidential candidates than Democrats in recent US history. Race, conservative ideology and abortion are likely key dimensions explaining this trend. It is an important reminder that women are not an essentialised category. See ‘2016 Election Results: Exit Polls’, CNN.com. Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>. Last accessed April 14, 2018.

32. Robert W. Connell, ‘A Whole New World: Remaking Masculinity in the Context of the Environmental Movement’, *Gender & Society* 4, no. 4 (1990): 454.

33. Anna M. Agathangelou and LHM Ling, ‘Power, Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire from September 11’, *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2004): 519.

34. Here I am examining dominant modes of masculinity. This unfortunately overlooks early efforts to reimagine more ecologically generous masculinities fit for a changing planet. For example, see Mark Allister, ed., *Eco-Man: New Perspectives on Masculinity and Nature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004).

35. Jonas Anshelm and Martin Hultman, ‘A Green Fatwā? Climate Change as a Threat to the Masculinity of Industrial Modernity’, *NORMA* 9, no. 2 (2014): 84–96; Martin Hultman, ‘The Making of an Environmental Hero: A History of Ecomodern Masculinity, Fuel Cells and Arnold Schwarzenegger’, *Environmental Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2013): 79–99.

36. Hultman, ‘The Making of an Environmental Hero’, 90–91.

Western corporate culture. Not only was growth not a problem – it was the solution, the very foundation of the innovation and entrepreneurship required to fix things.³⁷

According to Martin Hultman, ecomodernism arose alongside a shift in hegemonic masculinity in the West, which Hultman traces through the changing roles played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, who became a globally influential ecomodernist figure. Older, industrially-aligned masculinities, embodied by Arnold Schwarzenegger in his youthful days of machismo and pumping iron, were discarded for the hybrid masculinity of Governor Schwarzenegger of California, an ecomodernist champion of fuel cells and greenwashed Hummers. Ecomodernism contributed to a new style of masculinity ‘in which toughness, determination and hardness was mixed with appropriate moments of compassion and care’.³⁸ However, like Sherilyn MacGregor, who critiques the masculinisation of climate security, Hultman insists that ecomodernism, and the Silicon Valley masculinities often aligned with it, are ‘asymmetric’ in how they organise these values. Care and compassion remain subordinate to techno-rationality, toughness, and economic growth.³⁹

In contrast to ecomodernist masculinities, petro-masculinity disdains any veneer of hybridity or care, and it also has no truck with sunny, California technoscience.⁴⁰ Ecomodernist masculinity may seek to adapt itself to new energy technologies and cultures, but petro-masculinity, as a reactionary stance, aims to defend the endangered *status quo*, entrenching the petrocultures that have historically propped up Anglo-European fossil-burning men. And while petro-masculinity is built upon mid-20th century fantasies, there is nothing nostalgic about its orientation to fossil fuels. After all, the fabled past of innocent fossil fuel consumption is irretrievable. In the US post-war economy, fossil fuel systems functioned as the means to becoming a real man – if burning them entailed violence, this was constructed as an unfortunate side effect to be made invisible to privileged consumers. But fossil fuels have become a dead end, both for the planet and for the goal of middle-class jobs. In this context, burning fossil fuels can come to function as a knowingly violent experience, a reassertion of white masculine power on an unruly planet that is perceived to be increasingly in need of violent, authoritarian order.

A Disastrous Convergence: Masculinity, Fossil Fuels and Authoritarianism

A political-economic reading of fossil fuel systems, such as that undertaken by Mitchell or Huber, is indispensable to understanding the formation of fossil authoritarianism. The threat to fossil-fuelled privilege can motivate authoritarian practices to secure ongoing

37. Ibid., 95.

38. Anshelm and Hultman, ‘A Green Fatwā?’, 92.

39. Hultman, ‘The Making of an Environmental Hero’, 97–98; Nelson, ‘Economists, Value Judgments, and Climate Change’.

40. This is an intentional riff on the title of William Connolly’s examination of the Christian right, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*. Fossil authoritarianism is the latest instantiation of the political formation that Connolly traces and, not coincidentally, Connolly was one of the few to foresee the threat of fascism long before Trump’s rise to power.

profits and privileged ways of life. However, as many have pointed out, fossil fuels may no longer make economic sense for many American voters, much less for the planet. Coal companies do not provide the secure, high-paying jobs that they once did in the US, a trend that will continue no matter how committed Trump is to bringing back coal.⁴¹ Even Texas, which continues to revel in its identity as an oil and gas titan, has been vigorously developing wind power, which supplies up to half of the state's electricity needs.⁴² In many formerly fossil-bound regions of the US, like Appalachia or Texas, fossil fuels have become potent conservative symbols that represent autonomy and self-sufficiency, rather than real economic interests for most of the public.⁴³

In addition to considering the political economy of fossil fuels, then, it is also important to understand their psycho-affective dimensions, paying attention to the collective desires of those whose identities are most tied to petrocultures. In order to do so, this section puts the concept of petro-masculinity into conversation with psycho-political studies of authoritarianism. The Frankfurt School was involved in the most influential early research, which drew heavily upon Freudian analysis, including *The Authoritarian Personality* (to which Theodor Adorno contributed), a study of fascist-prone Americans, and Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*. These texts sought to trace the contours of the authoritarian personality – an ideal figuration, rather than descriptions of actual people. Many authoritarian traits were, to some degree, common in public life, but when amplified and in combination, they described a character 'whose structure is such as to render him particularly susceptible to antidemocratic propaganda'.⁴⁴ And because authoritarian desires circulate everywhere, albeit with local intensities, authoritarianism persists as an ongoing temptation amid democratic collectives. In this vein, Foucault, in his preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, famously encouraged a conceptual distinction between 'historical fascism' and 'the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us'.⁴⁵

Psychological studies of authoritarianism in the 20th century are best taken as narratives of specific historical movements, rather than as universal scientific truths. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify patterns. One of the most consistent themes that runs across Western authoritarian movements is a widespread sense of gender anxiety – especially having to do with masculinity.⁴⁶ Patriarchal ideals are manically proclaimed (by adherents who identify as women, too), but beneath the obsession with hyper-masculinity reveals an underlying

41. Bell and York, 'Community Economic Identity'.

42. Lawrence Wright, 'The Dark Bounty of Texas Oil', *The New Yorker*, 1 January 2018.

43. An important exception is natural gas, which has become a profitable and growing industry. However, despite the real risks of fracking, natural gas is often touted as an environmentally friendly fuel, and so it does not carry the same violent effect as oil and gas.

44. Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 1.

45. Michel Foucault, 'Preface', in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (New York: Continuum, 2004), xv.

46. For more on the association of masculinity and authoritarianism, see J.A. Mangan, ed., *Superman Supreme: Fascist Body as Political Icon* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1996). Available

fear of the social fragility of masculinity, as well as a shared sense among members of each having personally fallen short of that ideal. Capitalist crises, such as the worldwide depression of the 1930s or the 2008 financial crisis, do not help; they only make it more difficult for many to achieve that essential emblem of modern masculinity: a breadwinner job. *The Authoritarian Personality* notes that ‘high-scoring’ men (those with more authoritarian traits) ‘show deep-seated fears of weakness’ in themselves. The meaning of weakness to these men seems to be tied up with intense fears of nonmasculinity. To escape these fears they try to bolster themselves up by various antiweakness or pseudomasculinity defences, where pseudomasculinity means ‘boastfulness about such traits as determination, energy, industry, independence, decisiveness, and will power’.⁴⁷

Gender anxiety – or a sense of masculine weakness – is intertwined with another common trait of the authoritarian character: sadomasochism. After all, masculine displays of strength and independence would seem to be at odds with unquestioning submission to an authoritarian leader. But as Fromm argues, ‘*the lust for power is not rooted in strength but in weakness ... It is the desperate attempt to gain secondary strength where genuine strength is lacking*’.⁴⁸ In other words, sadomasochism reflects a desire to overpower others that is aroused by, and at the same time stymied by, one’s own sense of impotence. The failures of fossil capitalism to sustain its white masculine order, which it helped to erect, with wages and commodities, only exacerbates the sense of collective impotence. In order to manifest power, the impotent, authoritarian personality is forced to subsume its urge to dominate within submission to a stronger external force, be it God, the laws of the market, the military leader, or a tyrant. Or fossil fuel burning.

Petro-masculinity points to such moments, suggesting that masculinity can be reaffirmed through an obeisance to oil. Oil itself reflects the contradictory impulses of sadism and masochism at work in the fossil-inflected authoritarian personality. *Petro* connotes both hardness and flow: it is from the Greek for rock or stone, but as petroleum, it is the liquid produced by pressurised decomposition of plant and animal matter over millions of years. It is both death (fossils), and life (energy, wrought from death), both compression and escape.

As hardness, petro- captures the desire to congeal masculinity, and to protect it from dissipation. Alongside gender anxiety and sadomasochism, rigidity is yet another omnipresent trait of the authoritarian personality. In *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit’s study of the proto-Nazi *freikorps*, rigidity is an enduring theme for the ‘soldier-male dam’, who seeks to guard his dam against all that flows:

none of the streams we’ve mentioned can be allowed to flow. He is out to prevent all of them from flowing: “imaginary” and real streams, streams of sperm and desire. ... All of these flows are shut off; more important, not a single drop can be allowed to seep through the shell of the body. One little drop of pleasure ... threatens to undermine the whole system (the system of dams).⁴⁹

at: <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/fascist-virilities>; Sandro Bellasai, ‘The Masculine Mystique: Antimodernism and Virility in Fascist Italy’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 314–35; Bill E. Peterson and Eileen L. Zurbriggen, ‘Gender, Sexuality, and the Authoritarian Personality’, *Journal of Personality* 78, no. 6 (2010): 1801–26.

47. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 856, 428.

48. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1994), 160. Italics original.

49. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Chris Turner, Stephen Conway, and Erica Carter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 266.

Theweleit is important for understanding petro-masculinity because he opens up a link between feminist theory and political economy, between the fear of women and the fear of communists, both of which animated early Nazis. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Theweleit connects the *freikorps*' fear of flow to the forces of industrialisation.

Here we can begin to intuit how fossil fuels might feature in authoritarian desires. Theweleit describes how industrialisation 'opens up the borders of a hitherto unknown human productive potential, setting in motion streams of money, commodities, and workers'.⁵⁰ In parallel, though, runs 'a process of limitation' that the capitalist elite erects against pleasure, an effort to capture more and more surplus, and 'to prevent the new productive possibilities from becoming new human freedoms'.⁵¹ Transgressive desires that are not coded by money cannot be allowed to flow – especially not queer desires, nor unregulated desires for women. Theweleit argues that it is the Western image of Woman, an image that 'lives in water',⁵² that comes to stand for flow *qua* flow, for all that threatens to escape and dissolve the male ego. In Barbara Ehrenreich's foreword to *Male Fantasies*, she observes that 'women's bodies are the holes, swamps, pits of muck that can engulf',⁵³ and so they, perhaps more than anyone or anything, inspire revulsion and fear.

The damming up of the authoritarian body, and state, against desire is justified as necessary to guard its strength, and to properly direct its energy into productive pathways. Too much flow, too much desire, saps its 'energy', letting it seep out into wasteful, swampy tributaries, threatening to make it soft and effeminate. Therefore, rigidity is especially necessary when energy itself is threatened. Such rigidity – often practiced as damming up the masculine body – reappears everywhere authoritarianism creeps in. In *The Reactionary Mind*, for example, Corey Robin observes that American conservatives share the belief that the US has gone soft since the New Deal, as the welfare state

sapped the nation's energy and patriarchal vigour. Instead of sturdy husbands and firm fathers controlling their wives and children, lipping bureaucrats and female social workers were now running the show. World War II exacerbated the problem: with so many men away at the front, and women working in the factories, male authority was further eroded.⁵⁴

The answer to the queerness and softening of the US was to make her hard again, to narrowly channel desire into the streams of heterosexuality and money, and to redirect all excessive desires into violence.⁵⁵

Proto-fascist movements in the US who celebrate Trump's victory likewise pair masculine rigidity to violence. As a proto-authoritarian leader, Trump alone is permitted laxity in

50. *Ibid.*, 264.

51. *Ibid.*, 264.

52. *Ibid.*, 273.

53. Barbara Ehrenreich, 'Foreword', in Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Chris Turner, Stephen Conway, and Erica Carter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xiii.

54. Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 206.

55. *Ibid.*, 208, 241; Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1*, 271.

his habits; his 'pseudomascuine' boasts of sexual exploits and aggressive deal-making serve as conduits that channel his followers' pent-up desires.⁵⁶ Meanwhile his deputy, Mike Pence, is excessively, even comically, rigid and anti-sexual, celebrated among evangelicals for avoiding spending any time alone with women who are not his wife. What about Trump's followers? While further empirical study is required, a hate group called The Proud Boys offers an illustrative example. The Proud Boys are a white male organisation that became associated with the 2017 fascist riots in Charlottesville, Virginia, and whose members believe in reinstating traditional gender roles by 'venerating the housewife'.⁵⁷ Their platform reverses the shame of white consumption and imperialism: in order to achieve the first of three 'degrees' required to join the group, a member declares, 'I am a western chauvinist, and I refuse to apologize for creating the modern world'. The second degree involves enduring a beating while naming breakfast cereals, and also 'no wanks', or limiting masturbation to no more than once a month, a practice that one Proud Boy describes as 'more of a religion'. Group member Dante explains that '[masturbation] mutes me. It mutes my masculinity'.⁵⁸ The final, third degree is getting a Proud Boys' tattoo.

White power pledges, breakfast cereals and masturbation may at first appear as adolescent pranks, but in the context of Trump's America, they are all too serious. As initiation rites, they adhere to Theweleit's analysis of the bodily practices of proto-fascist groups. By staying calm during beatings and limiting masturbation (making the body rigid), Proud Boys aim to enhance their masculinity, and in turn to become more successful with 'real' women, who nevertheless remain, as among the *freikorps*, off-screen and imagined figures who threaten humiliation. Lurking behind the tactics of rigidity is a sense of personal failure; a shared frustration among white men who have struggled to find a housewife willing to receive their veneration. Chace, who interviewed group leaders, explains that rigidity seemed to function as an inspiration that would get the men to 'go out, talk to women, and then marry them, procreate, be strong American family men, help restore the natural order of things that had been knocked out of whack by feminism'.⁵⁹

Although many far-right groups, including the Proud Boys, may not explicitly organise around fossil fuels, it is important to consider their misogynist rigidity in relation to the fossil-fuelled excesses pursued by their revered leaders. Seen through the lens of Theweleit, the contrast between Trump's groping, Pence's patriarchal purity, and The Proud Boys' #nowanks is not as contradictory as it might appear. Trump alone can flow. With his supermodel wives and rumoured affairs with porn stars, he lives out his followers' fantasies.⁶⁰ But the vicarious release of frustrated patriarchal vigour through the authoritarian leader's sexual prowess represents only one method of rechannelling desire.

56. Thanks to Ben Meiches for making this point in a conversation we shared at the International Studies Association Northeast Conference, November 2017, Providence, Rhode Island.

57. For more on the Proud Boys, see the Southern Poverty Law Center, which categorises them as a hate group. See, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>.

58. National Public Radio, 'White Haze'.

59. Ibid.

60. Moreover, his outsized role in the psychological lives of his most devoted followers means he must be the stable genius that he claims to be, despite all evidence to the contrary. Fromm explains that this kind of 'blind admiration' is logically necessary to masochism: 'If the

As in Theweleit, the more intensely one's own productive desires are dammed up, the more one longs for the violent, explosive release of flows elsewhere: destructive flows in place of productive ones.

Petro: both hard and soft. Both the solidification of toxic masculinity, and the grimy, deathly flows (oil, gas) let loose as psychological compensation for that self-discipline. Like the *freikorps*' cruelty, or the clamour to torture detainees after September 11 analysed by Robin, burning fossil fuels in an age of global warming can offer a compensatory practice of violence. Fossil fuel systems provide a domain for explosive letting go, and all the pleasures that come with it – drilling, digging, fracking, mountaintop removal, diesel trucks. In the words of Sarah Palin, 'drill, baby, drill!'⁶¹

Helpfully, the aesthetics of fossil fuels – most particularly oil – are ripe for recoding as expressions of sexualised power and orgasmic satisfaction. The parallels between rape and extractivism have been well documented.⁶² Stephanie LeMenager writes of 'oil's primal associations with earth's body, therefore with the permeability, excess, and multiplicity of all bodies', such that 'the spectacle of [oil's] gushing from the earth suggests divine or Satanic origins, a givenness that confers upon it an inherent value disassociated from social relations'.⁶³ In Upton Sinclair's novel, *Oil!*, too, LeMenager observes how a gushing well becomes an orgasmic woman ('There she came!'), while 'for a thirteen-year-old male narrator, industrial-scale pollution and waste translate into arousal and premature ejaculation'.⁶⁴

A psycho-political understanding of authoritarianism, and its demand for masculine rigidity, points to the social function and pay-off gleaned from such petro-sexual violence. For example, fossil fuel industries have taken ample advantage of gendering fossil fuels in this way. Shannon Elizabeth Bell describes how, even as the coal industry provided fewer benefits to Appalachian communities, it worked to sustain community support through an influential 'Friends of Coal' public relations campaign. Friends of Coal traded heavily in traditionally aggressive masculine symbols, tying coal to football, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR), hunting, fishing, the military, and other 'provider and defender' icons, such that 'by reinforcing the hegemonic image of the working-class provider as a man, and a particularly *masculine* man, the images in this commercial lubricate the process of the coal industry's becoming synonymous with the family provider'.⁶⁵ Similarly, Trump's professed love for coal is most

person who rules over me is so wonderful or perfect, then I should not be ashamed of obeying him. I cannot be his equal because he is so much stronger, wiser, better, and so on, than I am' (Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 164). If Trump is shown to be imperfect or merely normal, then submission to his rule would be humiliating.

61. Sarah Palin, 'Drill, Baby, Drill', *The Guardian*, 14 July 2009. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/jul/14/sarah-palin-energy-obama>.
62. For example, in Carolyn Merchant's path-breaking *The Death of Nature*, she describes the sexual imagery of 'penetrating' nature that 'legitimizes the exploitation and "rape" of nature for human good'. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper One, 1990), 171.
63. LeMenager, *Living Oil*, 92.
64. *Ibid.*, 93.
65. Shannon Elizabeth Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 98–100.

often expressed through the discourse of putting miners to work, a promise that resonates strongly with a community primed to associate mining jobs with masculine identity. In other words, Trump and his supporters 'dig coal' (a popular campaign slogan) because it is an icon of masculinist empowerment.

Another recent trend, 'rollin' coal', exemplifies fossil fuel violence experienced as masculinised power. Rollin' coal means retro-fitting a diesel truck so that its engine can be flooded with excess gas, producing thick plumes of black smoke. Coal, which is not actually burned, functions as a symbol of industrial power expressed as pollution. The truck becomes its own mini-factory, complete with belching smokestacks; the driver becomes a coal baron. Rollin' coal has long been popular in the world of diesel truck racing, but in 2014, the practice emerged on roadways as a conservative protest against environmentalism, the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) and, soon after, anti-Trump protesters.

It is difficult to estimate its frequency, but rollin' coal has become common enough that some states, including New Jersey, Maryland and Colorado, have passed measures specifically banning it;⁶⁶ the Colorado Health and Environment Department also set up a 'smoke school' that trains police officers in enforcing the ban.⁶⁷ Instagram has over 300,000 posts on two of its largest rollin' coal streams,⁶⁸ while tens of thousands of user-generated videos show (mostly) men blasting smoke at bikers, protesters, and hybrid cars, especially Priuses, as 'Prius repellent' against hybrid cars that have become widely recognised as symbols of green consumerism. Gender and race also play a role in target selection; it has become popular to roll coal at 'rice-burners' (Asian-made cars)⁶⁹ and unsuspecting women pedestrians ('hot girls').⁷⁰ One commentator fittingly called the

66. Linda Greenstein, Robert Gordon, and Timothy Eustace, 'Prohibits Retrofitting Diesel-Powered Vehicles to Increase Particulate Emissions for the Purpose of "Coal Rolling"', Pub. L. No. NJ S2418 (2015). Available at: <https://legiscan.com/NJ/bill/S2418/2014>; Don Coram and Joann Ginal, 'Prohibit Nuisance Exhibition Motor Vehicle Exhaust', Pub. L. No. SB17-278 (n.d.). Available at: <http://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb17-278>; 'Vehicle Laws Causing Diesel Emissions to Discharge onto Another – Prohibition', Pub. L. No. HB0011 (2017). Available at: <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?pid=billpage&stab=01&id=hb0011&tab=subject3&ys=2017RS>.

67. 'Smoke Opacity Certification Schools', Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Available at: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/smoke-opacity-certification-schools>. Last accessed April 14, 2018; Hiroko Tabuchi, "Rolling Coal" in Diesel Trucks, to Rebel and Provoke', *The New York Times*, 4 September 2016. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/05/business/energy-environment/rolling-coal-in-diesel-trucks-to-rebel-and-provoke.html>.

68. See #rollingcoal or #rollincoal on Instagram. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/rollingcoal/> or <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/rollincoal/?hl=en>.

69. David Weigel, 'Rolling Coal', *Slate*, 3 July 2014. Available at: http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/07/rolling_coal_conservatives_who_show_their_annoyance_with_liberals_obama.html.

70. This theme recurs in YouTube videos. See for example, 'Hot Girl in Bikini gets Rolled Coal on – Crazy!'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTCBOOvt4w8>.

videos ‘pollution porn’.⁷¹ Hyper-masculine discourse surrounds the practice (‘It’s just a testosterone thing. It’s manhood’, Sean Miller told *Slate* magazine).⁷²

Spectators and coal rollers express pleasure in the noise, the smell, and the beauty of the smoke, all of which give them a sensation of power that, not coincidentally I suggest, is directly related to the smoke’s violent effects. One man told *Vice News* that people roll coal because it feels good: ‘When you sit there and you can hear and you can see the horsepower, it does something to people around here. It makes them giddy. It happens naturally, but there’s an awe effect’.⁷³ The *Denver Post* described rollin’ coal as ‘a way to have fun at the expense of other people’⁷⁴ – a fitting description of the desires animating petro-masculinity.

Whether it is the Proud Boys who proclaim white, Western chauvinism, or the coal rollers who revel in conspicuous pollution,⁷⁵ Trump’s brand of fossil authoritarianism feels good because it bursts the constraints of liberal, Western hypocrisy. Despite the occasional pretence of innocence, fossil authoritarianism gets its kicks precisely because fossil fuel consumption has become undeniably destructive in an era of global warming. Controlling fossil fuels, and being controlled by fossil fuels, comes to feel good as a practice of power/being overpowered, especially because it has become a game of life and death, of flirting with apocalypse. Fossil violence is brought into the light and celebrated – a welcome respite from the guilt, resignation, and often paralysis that otherwise grip the West in the face of global warming. The circle of concern has been narrowed, in a satisfyingly simple moral taxonomy, to the pleasures of the white *paterfamilias*, who will be the sole guarantor of the welfare of his legitimate household members (e.g. white women, pets, trucks, white children, white neighbours). The *paterfamilias* is justified in using every tool at his disposal – coal, oil, survivalist bunkers, guns, border walls – to secure his household against insurgent others.

When petro-masculinity is at stake, climate denial is thus best understood through desire, rather than as a failure of scientific communication or reason. In other words, an attachment to the righteousness of fossil fuel lifestyles, and to all the hierarchies that depend upon fossil fuel, produces a desire to not just deny, but to refuse climate change. Refusing climate change is distinct from ignoring climate change, which is effectively what many people who otherwise acknowledge its reality do.⁷⁶ Ignoring can be dangerous, too, but it is a passive disposition, often connected to emotions of frustration or confusion, or even fear. Refusal is active. Angry. It demands struggle. In the case

71. See, <http://www.vocativ.com/190898/rollin-coal-is-pollution-porn-for-dudes-with-pickup-trucks/index.html>.

72. Weigel, ‘Rolling Coal’.

73. Grace Wyler, ‘There’s Nothing Wrong with Rolling Coal’, *Vice News*, 11 July 2014. Available at: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/jmb4d8/nothing-wrong-with-rolling-coal-711.

74. Bruce Finley, ‘Diesel Drivers Who are ‘Rolling Coal’ in Colorado: Tune Up or Pay Up’, *The Denver Post*, 22 May 2017. Available at: <http://www.denverpost.com/2017/05/22/colorado-rolling-coal-fines/>.

75. Sociologist Lisa Wade coined this term in reference to rollin’ coal. See, <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2014/07/23/conspicuous-pollution-rural-white-men-rollin-coal/>.

76. Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

of climate change, by refusing it, one also subscribes to an accelerated investment in petrocultures. Refusal can no longer rest at defending the *status quo* but must proceed to intensifying fossil fuel systems to the last moment, which will often require resorting to authoritarian politics.

The concept of petro-masculinity alerts us to additional psycho-political catalysts that might fuel armed lifeboat politics in the West. More specifically, authoritarian desires are likely to be aroused not only by the appearance of the Other at the gates – e.g. climate refugees from the global South – but also as a reaction to perceived enemies within the state, both human and nonhuman. This can include poor people of colour in hurricane-ravaged cities like New Orleans or Houston, or feminist and ecojustice movements as they strive to undermine toxic masculinity and fuels; it might also include global warming, mega-storms, ocean acidification, fish die-offs, and other phenomena that appear as an affront to fossil fuel resilience. In addition to the possibility of violence levied against the poor, we should also be alert to moments in which gender-based and climate change-induced violence appear simultaneously, wherein the reinforcement of gender binaries or heteronormativity works alongside the armouring of lifeboats.

Conclusion: Fossil Fuel Violence and Misogyny

Fossil-fuelled life has always been violent, but much effort has been expended to make the suffering subterranean, and to render it as invisible as possible to privileged American consumers. However, the industrial, capitalist system built to hide its waste, with its subterranean pipes, shunted refuse, oceanic dumps and accounting fantasies, is breaking down. Death is overwhelming the seawalls and flooding back into the carefully sanitised cores of privilege. The Western belief in the impenetrable body, and of those bodies being ‘tucked up like little hobbits into the safety of our burrow’, as Timothy Morton charmingly describes it, has become increasingly difficult to maintain.⁷⁷

Leakages can be met with either receptivity or hostility. Most environmentally-sensitive scholars and activists are attempting the former. The goal is to develop an ethics, and an emotional capacity, for living on an earth marked by radical change and periodic mass deaths, while avoiding an escape into either nihilism or transcendentalism.⁷⁸ A host of creative proposals are emerging, all of them seeking lifeways that are less anthropocentric, and better attuned to death and decay: living ‘amid the capitalist ruins’,⁷⁹ ‘posthumous life’,⁸⁰ ‘learning to die in the Anthropocene’,⁸¹ ‘trying to perish better’,⁸² ‘loving

77. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2013), 104.

78. Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook, eds., *Posthumous Life: Theorizing Beyond the Posthuman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

79. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

80. Weinstein and Colebrook, *Posthumous Life*.

81. Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2015).

82. Grove, ‘Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Everything’.

your monsters',⁸³ queer futurity and failure, making kin instead of babies,⁸⁴ or art as 'grief-work' for 'after the end of the world'.⁸⁵

However, grief work can be decidedly unappealing, especially when avoidance tactics are readily available. The key problem that confronts these proposals is that of desire. While this difficulty is duly appreciated, we have only begun to imagine alternative desiring strategies for the new Earth. The permeability of our bodies and the leaky waste that pervades modern life may be the reality of our existence, and we may even believe that we should attend to them, but they can disgust more than they seduce. As the leakages multiply, and neoliberal tactics falter, the desire to shore up the body, and the state, can become an authoritarian urge, an obsession with a purified future. Life in the ruins is as likely to invoke rage as generosity. Rollin' coal and other methods of fossil fuel burning become tempting weapons for seeking vengeance against the forces that threaten petro-patriarchal orders.

Fossil violence most obviously punishes the Earth (ever allied to femininity in the Western imagination), but it should also be appreciated as a misogynist tactic, if we follow Kate Manne to think of misogyny not as an individual belief – the hatred of women – but instead as a set of practices, as 'the system that polices and enforces' the norms of patriarchal rule.⁸⁶ Manne argues that the traditional definition of misogyny, as an extreme belief, makes it overly difficult to declare its presence. We become mired in debates over a perpetrator's true meanings and intentions. However, if misogyny is instead understood as a policing practice, the focus moves from decoding the misogynist's worldviews to detailing the suffering of its targets, making room for structural as well as direct manifestations of violence. Using Manne's logic of misogyny, it becomes far easier to recognise, and contest, the pattern of omnipresent aggression experienced by women and others deemed to be gender deviants.

Manne's focus, understandably, is largely on women as the main targets of misogyny, especially when they are perceived to have transgressed patriarchal norms, and/or when they intersect with other marginalised identities (black women, queer women, or trans women, for example, are at greatest risk). However, I see no reason not to put Manne's helpful reconceptualisation of misogyny into conversation with ecofeminism in order to analyse all the other modes of violence committed in the name of policing the norms of white Western patriarchy. This could include some instances of violence against the planet and its oceans, creatures, waterways, and mountains.

To describe fossil violence as misogynistic is not to claim that gendered norms offer a totalising explanation for fossil fuel consumption and the authoritarianism it underwrites. Instead, it is to recognise that gender identities have something to do with the pleasures of fossil fuel life, and quite a lot to do with the more extreme versions of fossil

83. Bruno Latour, 'Love Your Monsters: Why We Must Care for Our Technologies As We Do Our Children', *Breakthrough*. Available at: <http://thebreakthrough.org/index.php/journal/past-issues/issue-2/love-your-monsters>.

84. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

85. Morton, *Hyperobjects*.


86. Manne, *Down Girl*, 20.

authoritarianism. Fossil fuel extraction and consumption can function as a performance of masculinity, even as it also serves the interests of fossil capitalism. Similarly, the concept of petro-masculinity emphasises that global warming may sometimes be interpreted as a breach in the patriarchal dam. It alerts us to the possibility that climate change can catalyse fascist desires to secure a *lebensraum*, a living space, a household that is barricaded from the spectre of threatening others, whether pollutants or immigrants or gender deviants. Taking petro-masculinity seriously means paying attention to the thwarted desires of privileged patriarchies as they lose their fossil fantasies.

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