

**OIL**



**CULTURE**

**ROSS BARRETT**  
and  
**DANIEL WORDEN**  
Editors

**Foreword by Allan Stoekl**

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*We dedicate this book to*  
CLEMENTINE *and* WILLIAM.  
*May your futures venture beyond oil.*

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# Foreword

ALLAN STOEKL

*Oil Culture* is not just a collection of highly informative essays, but it asks an implicit question: What *is* oil culture? (And are there cultures, more than one?) Along with that, and perhaps conditioning it: How are oil and culture conjoined? What is it for oil to be cultural? And culture to be oily? Why is oil culture and its fragmentation in cultures so fundamentally important?

These are, I think, central questions, for oil in itself is mere matter, but as a number of authors in this collection point out, it contains, when burned, concentrated energy, the power to do work much more effectively—more energy, less mass—than, say, coal, let alone human muscle. Yet there is a tendency on the part of some critics, not represented in this collection, to hold that oil, and the fuels derived from it, is *the* most important element in culture: that economic value, for example, derives solely from energy inputs and “EROEI” (“energy returned on energy invested”), and not, say, from human labor. Perhaps this kind of overstatement is only the flip side of another reduction, one much more commonly seen and endemic to mainstream economics: the source of value is labor, conjoined with invested capital, supply and demand, improvements in efficiency, and so on.

This latter view results in what I would call the invisibility of energy inputs, and, most notably in our era, the invisibility of that ultimate fossil fuel, oil. Oil is invisible, undetectable, when we “take it for granted”: we assume needlessly that “peak oil is garbage,” whatever that might mean, or that it will be very easy to find substitutes for oil when it becomes scarce and prohibitively expensive. We assume that current civilization, such as it is, is exclusively the result of human ingenuity as applied to technological development, or of human reason as it comes to transcend all material inputs. We assume that the chief problems of the world—overpopulation, mass warfare directed against civilians, climate change—are the result of technology out of control, all the while forgetting that technology is nothing without highly refined

energetic inputs. We assume that our current prosperity is the result of our personal decisions, our cleverness at school and our academic degrees, our correct career moves, our sagacity in investing our earnings—all the while forgetting that our luxurious homes, our cars, our clothes are the result of myriad energy slaves whose activities are those of all the joules liberated from the vast quantities each of us depends on, but never see, and never question. Where does oil come from? How is it extracted from the earth? How is it refined? And, most important, as a number of the essays in this collection demonstrates, how does capitalism, in conjunction with our government, foster this energy use, and this invisibility? How is capitalism as we know it today inseparable from the energy regime of oil?

Given this history of invisibility, how then might we think about oil in culture without “reifying” it—that is, without simply turning the current situation on its head and seeing oil as the be-all and end-all of culture in general?

I think the most effective way of refusing such a reification of oil, all the while granting it the visibility it deserves, is to write its history—as many of the essays in this collection do. It’s when we think about what “oil history” could mean that we take a *natural* entity and recognize its *cultural* centrality. Oil is natural in the sense that no one put it there in the ground: it is the result of natural processes, the arrested decomposition of plant and organic matter over millions of years. And yet everything that is done with it—the pumping, the refining, the grading, the distribution, the use in transport, manufacture, heating, the generation of electricity—is fully cultural. Oil is a natural element—and one that has a history. What’s more, its history, at least over the last two hundred years or so, is inseparable from the history of the advance and development—if that’s the word—of modern industrial civilization. It is thus not just a commodity; it is *the* commodity. Much as we try, embracing nuclear, solar, wind, tides, whatever, we still cannot find a real substitute for oil. It is dumb matter, a natural offshoot of natural processes, gunk in the ground, that we use, and that uses us, keeping us prisoner to our energy slaves, to the rich energy inputs that we find so hard—even impossible—to derive from any other energy source.

Oil is, then, the poster child for the argument that the natural, today, is fully cultural. It is futile to imagine a pristine natural space, some deep-green realm whose preservation will save us. Even nature preserves, even spaces seeming (for the moment) beyond our reach, are at this late date natural artifacts: if we manage to “preserve” the Amazon, it too will be simply an artifact, the consequence of decisions we have or have not consciously made. Oil is the ultimate natural-cultural artifact. Once it ceases to be gunk in the ground, it is what we do with it. And yet it is an agent as well: it calls to us, and we respond to its entreaties, its interpellations. It is the ultimate siren’s song, the ultimate Eurydice we reach for—as it disappears. We are the slaves of our energy

slaves, in a surprising (to us) revision of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. We work to further oil's consumption, imagining ever more wasteful "uses" for it—from lavish oil-heated homes to gas-guzzling Hummers. We cannot help but realize that in some sense we *are* oil: all those grain-fed cattle we eat, themselves fed with cereals grown with fossil-fuel-derived fertilizers, and protected by oil-based pesticides; all the water purified and pumped with the use of fossil fuels; all the wars powered and won with fossil fuels (not least the wars for control of oil resources). And we are the disappearance of oil. We are human, social, cultural—that is, we are not formed by a god, we form, make, ourselves—but we are also what we have done with oil. And oil is natural in the sense that it is present, then absent: it is finite, and that ultimate finitude is well beyond our control.

Back in the days of existentialism, we could write of the finitude of Man, all the while ignoring the prime locus of human finitude: the very fuel that serves to make "his" modernity. At a certain point, if we recognize our finitude, we recognize, ironically, not what is cultural but what is "natural." If the existentialists posited a human finitude based on the independence of man—no god in the sky, only the self-creation of our own meaning, our own destiny—now we can start to see a finitude deriving precisely from what is natural in man. If we can say that today the natural is now fully cultural—just think of oil and the ways in which its myriad uses have transformed the world—we can also say, just as convincingly, that the cultural is relentlessly natural. It is natural less in a positive way than in the subtractability of oil. But if the "cultural" as we know it today is inseparable from rich oil-based energy inputs, the horizons of culture will appear to be inseparable from the horizons of the limited availability of oil. The most advanced human culture will recognize its natural status when it finally *recognizes* oil, when it really sees it, and when it recognizes, consequently, the limits not just to growth but to any and all room for maneuver. Of course advanced technology can always pull a little more oil out of the ground, derive a little more energy from what there is—but *there are limits*. Per capita wealth, population density, physical fitness and comfort, levels of education, and all this in a temperate world unaffected by the long-term effects of the combustion of fossil fuels—all are highly fragile artifacts dependent on naturally conditioned but temporary energetic inputs. The "Death of Man"—or at least Man's radical reconfiguration into a species barely recognizable today—may be less a function of semiotic sleight-of-hand, as it was in the 1960s, and more the result of a natural limitation, the wall toward which the species is headed at top speed.

Thus the need, I would argue, for the essays in this collection. We cannot know oil (and hence ourselves) if we know it only in geophysical or chemical terms: where it is to be found, how it is to be refined. And we cannot know it if we see it only as

something manipulated by greedy corporations, or by speculators working for private profit. Those elements are part of the story of course, but they, in different ways, contribute to oil's invisibility: it is just another commodity, just another thing we buy and use, necessary to the American Way of Life, sure, but mainly just another way of getting ripped off. We need to do more: we need to understand, given the centrality of oil, its weird natural/cultural status, what oil has been in history, and what it will be: politically, culturally, aesthetically, historically. All the ways that oil has been, and will be, consumed, and all the ways it has, and will, consume us, exercising its material agency—all this constitutes a central task for the cultural historian, the literary critic, the geographer, the philosopher. The stimulating and brilliant essays in this collection are an essential first step in this direction, sure to be followed by many more.

# *Acknowledgments*

*Oil Culture* began as a panel at the American Studies Association's Annual Meeting and has grown beyond our expectations. We would like to thank Nancy Quam-Wickham, who served as respondent to that initial conference panel, as well as William Lucas, John Horne, the editorial board of the *Journal of American Studies*, and Marc Anderson at Cambridge University Press. We are fortunate to have had the support and guidance of Richard Morrison and Erin Warholm-Wohlenhaus at the University of Minnesota Press. We owe a special note of thanks to all of the contributors to this volume for their incisive, expansive, and thoughtful essays. We also thank Cat and Danielle, for so many things.



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# Introduction

ROSS BARRETT AND DANIEL WORDEN

Oil may come and go at any time and it may not be visible.

—Alabama Department of Public Health, from a sign posted on public beaches following the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

The National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling's Report to the President reproduces an Alabama Department of Public Health sign warning residents of the presence of oil on public beaches.<sup>1</sup> Along with more practical advice, such as “do not handle tar balls,” the sign makes the above claim, both a practical warning and a canny statement about oil's ontology. Oil is not entirely visible to us as a commodity, a fuel, a resource, or a political and economic agent, yet it is also not invisible. Events like the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill—“the largest peacetime offshore oil spill in history”<sup>2</sup>—are shocking not only because they are ruptures in the seemingly smooth, technologically sophisticated transport of fossil fuel, but also because they reinforce the already visible presence of oil in our everyday lives. Oil is not invisible to us as much as it is contained—in our cars' gas tanks, in pipelines, in shale, in tar sands, in distant extraction sites.<sup>3</sup> We might not interact with oil as a viscous material very often, but we are aware of it as such. This gives oil a curious valence in the cultural imagination—it is foundational and ever present, yet it is also secreted away.

Oil's signature cultural ubiquity and absence is the occasion for this book. *Oil Culture* analyzes, interprets, and explicates oil's presence in culture. This presence manifests in multiple ways: oil is material, mystical, historical, geological, and agential. Oil does things, connotes meaning, and is leveraged by nations, corporations, and individuals. Only in recent years, beginning with conversations about peak oil and transforming into debates about deepwater offshore drilling, fracking, and bitumen, has

oil become the subject of cultural analysis for a critical mass of scholars. Wishfully, we think that oil's emergence as a subject of analysis signals a shift in its hold on our world. More skeptically, we also acknowledge that this new scholarly interest in oil is so vital because oil is everywhere, and it shows little sign of being eclipsed by another energy source in the near future.

The BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill is but one in a long series of disasters—environmental, political, economic, military—that underwrite petroleum's more than 150-year history as a modern fuel. Understood from the beginning as a finite resource, petroleum is nonetheless routinely thought of as a necessity to modern life—without oil, we are often told, the economy will simply collapse, and our modern way of life with it. As Allan Stoekl has noted, energy discourse is saturated with an “uncritical faith in the capacity of human genius”: “Fossil fuels entail a double humanism: they are burned to serve, to magnify, to glorify the human . . . and they are produced solely through the free exercise of the mind and will.”<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to think of oil as a material substance that is not entirely the product of and subject to human will, and thus oil's necessity to modern life appears less as a problem than an ontological given. The lack of oversight, regulation, and cleanup technology that led to and exacerbated the Deepwater Horizon spill inspired even more reaffirmations of oil's necessity to human life, often under the guise of arguments for increased regulations and explorations into alternative energy. Even in the face of environmental disaster, and an environmental disaster that has been and will continue to be repeated on sliding scales as risky deepwater drilling continues to be practiced in the Gulf of Mexico and in even more treacherous parts of the world such as the Arctic, we are unable to give up oil. As the National Commission's report states, “Given Americans' consumption of oil, finding and producing additional domestic supplies will be required in coming years, no matter what sensible and effective efforts are made to reduce demand.”<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary culture, no better a symbol of oil's persistence can be found than the return of the television drama *Dallas* in 2012.<sup>6</sup> One of the most successful television dramas of all time, the first version of *Dallas* ran from 1978 to 1991, and its revamped version stars cast members from the original *Dallas* alongside younger actors who play the next generation of the show's focal point, the Ewing family. In its original incarnation, *Dallas* staged its major tension around Bobby and J. R. Ewing, with Bobby representing morality and ranching to J.R.'s avarice and drive to strike oil. In its contemporary iteration, *Dallas*'s major tension is between Bobby's son Christopher, a proponent of deepwater drilling for methane hydrate, and J.R.'s son John Ross, who wishes to drill for oil the old-fashioned way on the Ewing's Southfork ranch. While rhetorically positioning this conflict as one between clean and dirty energy, the

show represents the massive earthquakes and damage to the ocean floor caused by deepwater methane drilling as a merely technological problem, one that will inevitably be solved as the free market demands more fuel than can be produced through traditional drilling. Like the Deepwater Horizon's pursuit of new fossil-fuel deposits, *Dallas's* vision of "alternative energy" is an even more treacherous version of traditional drilling, and moreover, it represents not an alternative to but a continuation of our dependency on fossil fuels.

However melodramatic, the family tension in *Dallas* resonates with popular audiences and signals just how integral oil is to contemporary life in the United States and to the American cultural imagination. When the actor Larry Hagman, best known for his role as J. R. Ewing, passed away while filming the second season of the relaunched *Dallas* in November 2012, newspapers and other media outlets memorialized him as the character he was so well known for playing. Hagman's *New York Times* obituary relayed that "at the height of the show's popularity, he handed out fake \$100 bills with his face on them."<sup>7</sup> The popularity of J. R. Ewing, "one of television's most beloved villains," is evidence of the hateful, yet pleasurable, proximity of oil to our lives and culture more broadly.<sup>8</sup> An underwriter of nearly every major museum, and whose petroleum products are used to make film, ink, paint, and countless other tools used to produce art today, the oil industry is as ubiquitous and necessary to contemporary life as money, the point of Hagman's funny one-hundred-dollar bills. Even more than money, though, oil is finite, and as demonstrated in *Dallas's* own fantasy of methane hydrate as a viable alternative energy, it is unclear how we can imagine a world without fossil fuels that remains a livable environment and not a postapocalyptic wasteland.

This stalemate between oil as a nonrenewable resource and oil's centrality to modern life requires more than just a commitment to alternative energy, more than just individual consumer choices such as buying local or driving a hybrid car. While these acts of personal conservationism are a welcome deviation from traditional oil profligacy, they do not grapple with a deeper problem—how oil has shaped contemporary ways of being and imagining not only in North America and Europe but also the world. Like vegetarian "hamburgers" or vegan "cheese," many "green" visions of the world entail maintaining our lives and practices as they exist with petroleum and simply swapping oil out for a different energy source that magically takes its place and replicates precisely its roles.<sup>9</sup> We believe that this failure of imagination can be partially remedied by understanding how oil works in culture.

This volume seeks to remedy the relative silence that scholars in the humanities have maintained about oil. This silence stems not from some imperative within any given discipline, but rather from a deep-rooted reluctance among humanistic scholars

to use oil, a crude material indeed, as a framework for thinking of anything beyond economics, energy, and politics. As we will see, the customary reluctance has begun to wane in recent years. During the twentieth century, however, academics did relatively little work to assess oil's saturation of modern social life and thought. In a well-known 1992 review of Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* novels, the Bengali novelist Amitav Ghosh identified a possible reason for this pattern of evasion, noting that "the history of oil is a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable."<sup>10</sup> Whether inspired by an unspoken (and perhaps unspeakable) Western shame about the ruinous legacy of oil capitalism or not, humanistic scholars have until recently abnegated the historical and theoretical analysis of oil to industry insiders, energy policymakers, environmental historians, and journalists.

To study the development of the oil industry, one can turn to a number of industry-centered histories, including Arnold Daum and Harold Francis Williamson's *The American Petroleum Industry* (1959–63), Daniel Yergin's best-selling *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (1991), and Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien's *Oil and Ideology: The Cultural Creation of the American Petroleum Industry* (2000). These works offer industry-focused, and in some cases explicitly triumphalist, assessments of the rise and development of oil capitalism. There are also a number of texts that offer crucial case studies of oil's material development in particular nations, such as Robert Vitalis's *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (2006), and more general introductions to oil energy, geology, economics, and politics, such as Gavin Bridge and Philippe Le Billon's *Oil* (2012), Morgan Dowley's *Oil 101* (2009), and Vaclav Smil's *Oil: A Beginner's Guide* (2008). In political theory, Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (2011) analyzes the ways that oil has both facilitated and frustrated democratic organization, expression, and action in the Middle East. Along with these books, there is also a large body of books about the energy crisis, war, and environmentalism that deal explicitly with oil, which includes Kenneth S. Deffeyes's *Beyond Oil: The View from Hubbert's Peak* (2005), Peter Maass's *Crude World: The Violent Twilight of Oil* (2009), Daniel Yergin's *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World* (2011), and Steven Coll's *Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power* (2012). While these studies are all integral to any understanding of oil, they do not engage specifically with oil as a cultural material, a force not only in economic and political life but also in everyday experience and aesthetics. As such, this work has done little to illuminate the resource's hold over common ways of thinking and acting in the oil-guzzling West.

As Imre Szeman has influentially argued, we are largely incapable of imagining a world without oil: "It is not that we can't name or describe, anticipate or chart the end

of oil and the consequences for nature and humanity. It is rather that because these discourses are unable to mobilize or produce any response to a disaster we know is a direct result of the law of capitalism—limitless accumulation—it is easy to see that nature will end before capital.”<sup>11</sup> Focused entirely on the very industry that has led to this impasse, existing work on the oil economy has little to say about alternatives, and the hard-nosed pragmatism common in industry-based histories of oil leaves little room for imaginative, let alone utopian, thinking. By analyzing oil as both an industry and a culture, a business and a set of aesthetic practices, a natural resource and a trope, this volume aims to find some room at the edges of oil’s hold on us, to see the ways in which oil’s dominance might, in and of itself, be a part of oil culture in the first place rather than an economic or physical necessity.

#### ON THE CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF OIL

*Oil Culture* draws inspiration from an emerging body of scholarship concerned with the cultural forms of oil capitalism. In the past twenty years, a growing number of scholars have investigated how creative texts, images, performances, and other productions have worked to stimulate and sustain the oil economy. As suggested above, this body of work has sought to fill a significant lacuna created by the material emphases of early oil studies and to challenge those assumptions and ambivalences that previously undercut humanistic inquiries into oil’s cultural expressions. In literary studies, for example, it was long assumed that the ascendancy of American oil capitalism left few traces in the fiction and poetry of the United States. In his above-cited 1992 review, Amitav Ghosh offered perhaps the best-known articulation of this idea, arguing that “the Oil Encounter . . . has produced scarcely a single work of note” and, more emphatically, that “there isn’t a Great American Oil Novel.”<sup>12</sup> In making this argument, Ghosh reinvigorated a claim that had received frequent expression in earlier criticism. In the introduction to a 1967 anthology of southwestern writing, for example, Martin Shockley declared that “with minor exceptions . . . oil culture is not represented in literature”—an assertion that ignored at least a dozen widely read period novels on Texan and Oklahoman oil, let alone the many novels, poems, and short stories devoted to other aspects of the petroleum business that had appeared in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1990s and 2000s, scholars across the humanities began to rethink these assumptions and explore the cultural dimensions of oil capitalism. A variety of intellectual and historical developments likely spurred this reorientation. The violent crises that beset the late-century oil economy—crises triggered by the depletion of proven fields and the petroleum industry’s increasing reliance on crude produced by risky and violent oil frontiers—inspired new interest in the mechanisms by which petroleum had

been established as the world's primary energy commodity. The contemporaneous growth of cultural geography, environmental history, and ecocriticism as distinct fields of inquiry likely worked to further encourage critical analyses of oil capitalism's spatial and symbolic forms. Working within this charged climate, turn-of-the-century historians, geographers, and anthropologists turned new attention to the broad array of cultural forms that have propelled the oil economy.

Much of this work concentrated on the specific cultural dynamics of the oil boom. This subject received an important early treatment in Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński's *Shah of Shahs* (1982), an imaginative account of the Iranian Revolution that includes a brief but evocative chapter on the petro-mythologies that flourished during the golden age of Iranian oil. A well-known passage in this chapter considers the power of promotional images of oil, focusing on photographs that "preserve the moment when the first oil spurts from the well: people jumping for joy, falling into each other's arms, weeping," and in so doing conjure "the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free."<sup>14</sup> In its brief but suggestive evocation of the power of visual representation to win popular support for oil, Kapuściński's chapter laid the groundwork for subsequent scholarship on the cultural dynamics of the oil-boom landscape.

Building on this precedent, several scholars have examined promotional representations of the American oil industry's first flush field: the explosively productive oil region of northwestern Pennsylvania. Brian Black's *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (2000), for example, explores how reporters and illustrators used the framework of the sublime to legitimate the disastrous overproduction that unfolded in the Pennsylvania oil fields.<sup>15</sup> Others have concentrated on the cultural dimensions of the mid-twentieth-century Venezuelan oil boom. Fernando Coronil's *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (1997) advanced an influential account of the ways that state-organized spectacles and promotional narratives helped secure popular allegiance to the Venezuelan oil economy and the tenuous government that administered it. More recently, Miguel Tinker Salas's *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela* (2009) analyzes the oil camp as a cultural laboratory that transnational companies used to promote forms of citizenship and social life attuned to the petroleum economy. The Nigerian oil boom has similarly inspired a variety of cultural analyses. Andrew Apter's *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (2008) addresses the 1977 Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture as a spectacle of national community built on oil-based prosperity and pan-ethnic unity. In a series of important essays, Michael Watts has analyzed the fetishizing discourses, oil mythologies, and booster narratives that arose around Nigeria's booming oil economy of the 1970s.<sup>16</sup>



While some critics and historians have focused on the imaginative representations and ideological constructs of the flush field, others have concentrated on the cultural practices underpinning petroleum-based lifestyles in the United States and other gas-guzzling Western societies. John Urry, Cotten Seiler, and others, for example, have studied the popular discourses of autonomy, speed, and adventure that have sustained the modern American system of automobility.<sup>17</sup> Various scholars have also begun to consider the ways that popular representations have forestalled efforts to understand oil's ubiquity and unavoidable transience. Peter Hitchcock has recently argued that oil's entrenchment in American society has depended in part on cultural strategies of evasion and erasure, and Stephanie LeMenager has charted the aesthetics of and affects clustered around oil in film, literature, and other media.<sup>18</sup> In three important articles published between 2007 and 2012, Imre Szeman identified three dominant contemporary discourses of oil that frustrate efforts in North America and Europe to envision alternative energy economies and analyzed present-day cinematic and photographic attempts to reopen dialogues about a post-oil future.<sup>19</sup>

Recent work in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, finally, has sought to develop a conceptual vocabulary that can better capture the concerns posed by climate change and global environmental movements. These efforts have yielded a range of ideas and terms that promise to inspire new ways of conceiving oil. Rob Nixon, for example, has recently used the concept of "slow violence" to explain the gradually compounding environmental ruin produced by industry and war and to challenge disaster discourses focused on sudden crises (explosions, oil spills, embargoes, etc.).<sup>20</sup> Timothy Morton's discussion of the "hyperobject" as a material that exists outside of time likewise offers a useful framework for reimagining dominant cultural interpretations of oil's historical presence and temporal nature.<sup>21</sup>

The past twenty years have, in sum, seen the emergence of a new body of multidisciplinary research attentive to oil's cultural presence in the various social, economic, and political realms that constitute the global petroleum system.<sup>22</sup> Drawing energy from this body of work, we have developed the present volume with the hope that it might extend and complicate ongoing dialogues about petroleum's cultural ramifications. *Oil Culture* aims to advance the field of oil studies, more specifically, by critically engaging the insights of existing work on oil's symbolic life, exploring new approaches to this subject, and expanding the historical, theoretical, and thematic horizons of cultural scholarship on oil. The essays collected here accordingly present the work of established scholars and figures new to the field, and investigate oil's imaginative manifestations in diverse cultural media and sociohistorical climates. In so doing, the essays bring a wide array of historical, interpretive, and theoretical methods to bear on representations of fossil fuels and the petroleum industry. The



total body of scholarship will, we hope, trace the preliminary outlines of a newly comprehensive account of oil's symbolic existence over the past 150 years.

This account relies on a particular model of "oil culture." We use the phrase to designate a dynamic field of representations and symbolic practices that have infused, affirmed, and sustained the material armatures of the oil economy *and* helped to produce the particular modes of everyday life that have developed around oil use in North America and Europe since the nineteenth century (and that have since become global). We first understand cultural signification to be a fundamental process of the expansive economic system that has arisen around oil. This proposition builds on the insights of several recent scholars. Diverging from accounts that would identify oil as the object of a discrete "industry," historians and theorists have increasingly understood the resource as the central concern of a vast network or "assemblage" of interlinked technological, commercial, financial, and political initiatives.<sup>23</sup> Others (including, most prominently, Imre Szeman) have understood oil as the foundation for a whole phase of capitalism premised on cheap energy, petrochemical goods, and risky modes of accumulation.<sup>24</sup> These accounts have increasingly considered the possibility that cultural signification might constitute a central function within the multivalent structures of the oil economy. In so doing, they have turned to a specific theoretical model for inspiration: Guy Debord's well-known account of the "society of the spectacle." Debord's 1967 treatise identified the spectacle as a new phase of capitalism defined by the hyperproduction of commodities and of the signs of commodified value.<sup>25</sup> Suffusing every last corner of everyday social experience, this web of images reorganized modern life around commodified appearances and the ideal of market exchange. Drawing on this theoretical model, contemporary oil scholars such as Andrew Apter and Michael Watts have interpreted various oil economies (and especially the OPEC petrostates of the 1970s) as spectacular edifices built on images of petroleum-based progress and prosperity.<sup>26</sup>

Following the work of Apter and Watts, we embrace Debord's spectacle as a useful model for thinking through the deep ties between oil capitalism and cultural representation. Indeed, we argue that the global oil economy is at root a spectacular system, built on and sustained by proliferating cultural significations. This symbolic imperative arises in part from the peculiar physical properties of oil, which more than any other commodity demands the unceasing generation of imaginative interpretations of its value (the sort of mystifying signs that constitute the spectacle in Debord's account). As a material whose utility is largely realized through its own destruction, oil requires creative accounts of its worth that depart from its physical form. As a substance that can (at least initially) be extracted without much work, moreover, oil encourages fetishistic representations of its value as a magical property detached

from labor. And as a fluid generally recognized to be dirty, sensually offensive, volatile, and transient, oil has long required especially elaborate affirmations of its economic and social benefits. In order to remake the difficult physical material of oil as a viable market commodity, then, petroleum producers and distributors have been continually forced to make intensive efforts to imaginatively recode the resource since its nineteenth-century rediscovery. Articulating oil's value in innumerable creative ways that transcend (and obscure) its actual material constitution, the resulting images, narratives, and discourses have contributed to the formation of an oil spectacle that has sustained industrial and financial commitments to the expanding system of petrocapitalism.

This vast economy of cultural representations has worked in turn to accelerate oil capitalism's reorganization of everyday life in North America, Europe, and an expanding array of non-Western industrial nations (including, most significantly, China) around the maximally intensive consumption of oil and its chemically engineered derivatives.<sup>27</sup> Scholars in a variety of fields have recently grappled with the cultural processes that have helped to make oil ubiquitous within modern life. Moving beyond simple economic or technological accounts, Szeman and Watts have explained oil's reorientation of daily life by theorizing broader structures of experience and understanding that have arisen around petroleum use. Szeman has used the term "oil ontology" to describe the emergence of a new phase of being in which oil functions as the "structuring real of contemporary social-political imaginary"; Watts has suggested that urban development patterns have organized a "regime of living" defined by oil use.<sup>28</sup> Building on these accounts, we emphasize the critical role that cultural representations play in the establishment of comprehensive systems of being, belief, and knowledge keyed to the priorities of oil capitalism. Oil culture, we argue, has helped to establish oil as a deeply entrenched way of life in North America and Europe by tying petroleum use to fundamental sociopolitical assumptions and aspirations, inventing and promoting new forms of social practice premised on cheap energy, refiguring petroconsumption as a self-evidently natural and unassailable category of modern existence, and forestalling critical reconsiderations of oil's social and ecological costs.

Though we have thus far emphasized the hegemonic effects of oil culture, the broad field of oil-inspired cultural activity also includes significant countercurrents of doubt, uncertainty, ambivalence, and critique. Since oil's nineteenth-century rediscovery, there has existed a steady chorus of protest and lamentation aimed at the petroleum industry, a chorus sounded in reformist treatises, muckraking investigative reports, conservationist essays, environmentalist manifestos, political protests, theoretical critiques, and other cultural texts that have attempted to check the onrush

of oil. And promotional imaginings of oil have long carried their own internal ambivalences and contradictions, moments of conflictedness that suggest the fragile tenuousness of the ideological constructs (techno-utopianism, financial adventurism, and so on) on which the unlikely oil economy and its turbulent markets have depended.

As we envision it, then, oil culture encompasses the fundamental semiotic processes by which oil is imbued with value within petroculturalism, the promotional discourses that circulate through the material networks of the oil economy, the symbolic forms that rearrange daily experience around oil-bound ways of life, and the many creative expressions of ambivalence about, and resistance to, oil that have greeted the expansion of oil capitalism. We understand the study of oil culture as a project that traces the various threads of petroleum's symbolic life in pursuit of two overarching historical and theoretical objectives, each freighted with significant political implication. On the one hand, the cultural analysis of oil aims to reconstruct those symbolic forms and practices that enabled the emergence, development, and entrenchment of oil capitalism. On the other hand, by attending to those moments in which oil's ceaseless colonizing expansion has engendered uncertainty, ambivalence, or resistance, the cultural analysis of oil can also uncover symbolic materials that may be useful to the construction of alternative perspectives on fossil fuels and the energy economy. The former mode of inquiry promises to yield a fuller understanding of the mechanisms underpinning oil capitalism's dominance, an understanding that might be used to confront that system's hegemonic self-presentations. The latter approach may in turn help to open space from which to begin to conceive a post-oil future.

#### PLAN OF THE BOOK

The contributors to this volume pursue these two overarching projects from a variety of disciplinary angles and train their attention on a diverse selection of cultural forms. We have organized the essays into five sections that track the cultural interpretation of petroleum across several successive phases in the development of oil capitalism, moving from imaginative engagements with the emergence of that system in the nineteenth century to present-day efforts to contend with the global oil economy. In an effort to produce a narrative that is attentive to the contradictory spatial dynamics of oil capitalism (its local concentrations and global extension) and oil's own tendency to confound established territorial demarcations, we have assembled a group of essays that examine oil culture both within and across national boundaries. The bulk of the chapters concentrate on oil's multivalent existence within the American cultural imagination. As the historical fountainhead for the modern petroleum industry, the contemporary epicenter of global oil capitalism, and the society in which the

most intensely realized fossil-fuel lifestyles have taken shape, the United States has proven to be an especially productive incubator for cultural reckonings with oil, and the essays gathered here explore some of the many impulses (promotional, propagandistic, creative, educational, critical) that have informed these imaginative projects. To complement this account of American oil culture, we have included a handful of essays that examine petroleum's cultural dimensions in Europe and the various extractive frontiers on which oil-thirsty Western societies have increasingly depended (including the Niger Delta, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Alberta oil sands). These chapters shed new light on the role that cultural representations have played in enabling and resisting the colonizing drive of American and European oil corporations.

Part I, "Oil's Origins and Modernization," explores promotional narratives and interpretive frameworks that arose around the early American oil industry. Examining advertising, popular religious tracts, public monuments, and creative fiction, Heidi Scott, Rochelle Zuck, Ross Barrett, and Frederick Buell explore how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century representations of oil helped to establish the conditions necessary for the rise of a dynamic oil economy. Studying promotional accounts of the lighting commodity that held sway before petroleum, Heidi Scott shows that mid-nineteenth-century imaginings of whale oil established a set of cultural frameworks that deeply shaped how late-century marketers and consumers understood petroleum. Using the widely reported exploits of the medium-turned-oilman Abraham James as a case study, Rochelle Zuck explores how early publicity appropriated spiritualist themes to legitimize the fledgling oil industry. Ross Barrett addresses an early sculptural monument commissioned by the Standard Oil Trust as the centerpiece of a turn-of-the-century publicity campaign designed to rehabilitate the public image of the petroleum industry and an early expression of a promotional discourse (petro-primitivism) that would inform much twentieth-century oil boosterism. Frederick Buell traces the development of two cultural discourses that have informed literary interpretations of oil's meaning since the nineteenth century; while the first of these (exuberance) has given rise to promotional imaginings of oil as a vehicle of personal and societal progress, the second (catastrophe) has inspired critical reconsiderations of petroleum's ruinous potential. Taken together, these essays suggest that early cultural accounts of oil worked both to accommodate Americans to the tumultuous petroleum economy and open space for critical and protestatory responses to oil.

Part II, "Oil's Golden Age," addresses cultural projects that fueled and contested the formation of a modern system of oil capitalism in the mid-twentieth century, a system that linked national spaces of intensive oil consumption (chiefly, the United States) to a new array of productive frontiers. Sarah Frohardt-Lane and Daniel Worden examine cultural texts that affirmed the oil-based lifestyles that emerged in the United States

at midcentury. Frohardt-Lane shows that Office of War Information propaganda strengthened Americans' commitment to private automobile travel by celebrating carpooling as a patriotic act, denigrating public transportation, and presenting limitless driving as a reward for the sacrifices required by World War II. Analyzing the 1952 novel and 1956 film *Giant* as test cases, Worden identifies an ideological configuration (fossil-fuel futurity) that informed a wide variety of twentieth-century American representations of oil and that celebrated petroleum use as a means by which a normative familial life and an ideal liberal-pluralist society might be realized. Hanna Musiol and Georgiana Banita address the efforts of writers and filmmakers to assess the relationship of Western oil-consuming nations to the period's new extractive frontiers. Musiol examines John Joseph Matthews's 1934 novel *Sundown* as an account of the Osage oil boom that uses the bildungsroman form to dramatize the disastrous effects of unchecked production on the social life of an oil frontier within the continental United States (the Osage reservation in Oklahoma). Banita analyzes Bernardo Bertolucci's 1967 corporate-sponsored documentary *La via del petrolio* as an experimental attempt to visualize the flow of oil from Iranian fields to Italian refineries, an attempt that ultimately figures petroleum as a wondrous vehicle of transnational unity reconnecting post-World War II Europe.

The essays in Part III, "The Local and Global Territories of Oil," extend the investigations of the previous section by exploring representational practices and cultural projects that enabled, affirmed, and resisted the crystallization of a global system of oil capitalism during the second half of the twentieth century. Chad Parker, Michael Watts, and Jennifer Wenzel accordingly analyze the roles that history writing, creative fiction, mapping, and other spatial representations played in facilitating and contesting Western corporate efforts to establish production zones in the Middle East, Africa, and the Gulf of Mexico. Parker uses a particular instance of creative remapping—a campaign undertaken by Aramco in the 1940s and 1950s to redefine the potentially oil-rich Buraimi oasis (in present-day Oman) as a historical territory of Saudi Arabia—to address the cultural practices that propelled the expansion of corporate oil production in the Middle East. Employing the turbulent fields of the Niger Delta and Gulf of Mexico as case studies, Watts analyzes the legal, political, and cultural practices that have established the oil frontier as a primary productive realm of global petroc capitalism and a highly tenuous space defined by primitive accumulation, social disorder, and ecological ruination. Wenzel addresses Nigerian author Ben Okri's 1987 short story "What the Tapster Saw" as an illuminating example of petro-magic realism, a literary mode that arose during the Nigerian oil boom and that uses tropes drawn from Yoruba narrative tradition to contend with the state violence and environmental degradation that defined oil exploration in the Niger Delta. While Parker,

Watts, and Wenzel study the cultural dimensions of the violent production spaces that have unfolded in oil borderlands, Matthew Huber and Sheena Wilson address the contemporary ideologies and representational practices that have enabled the ever-more-intensive infiltration of Western life by petroleum. Huber analyzes an enduring promotional construct of oil-based existence (“entrepreneurial life”) that propelled the neoliberal refashioning of American social life, institutional politics, and urban settlement during the last several decades of the twentieth century. Interpreting a range of industry advertising and press imagery, finally, Wilson illuminates the ways that contemporary commercial photography uses constructs of femininity to promote the continued expansion of domestic oil industries, delegitimize women’s anti-oil activism, and derail post-Deepwater protests against offshore drilling.

The essays in Part IV, “Exhibiting Oil,” focus on the multivalent interpretations of oil offered by the exhibitions and public displays of aquariums, art institutions, and science museums. Offering broad audiences clear glimpses of the otherwise inconceivably vast or impossibly dispersed structures of oil capitalism, the public exhibition has exerted considerable pressure on twentieth- and twenty-first-century imaginings of petroleum. Dolly Jørgenson, Catherine Zuromskis, and Stephanie LeMenager demonstrate that the exhibition has served as an important vehicle for the dissemination of official booster arguments about oil *and* a significant venue for the articulation of more complicated perspectives on oil capitalism. Jørgenson examines strategies employed by contemporary Gulf Coast aquarium displays to refigure deepwater petroleum extraction as an ecologically beneficial activity. Analyzing two significant photographic exhibitions—the 1975 *New Topographics* show at the George Eastman House and a 2009 traveling exhibition of Edward Burtynsky’s photographs of oil landscapes, entitled *Burtynsky: Oil*—Zuromskis explores the quiet resonances of unease and anxiety that structure contemporary landscape photographers’ visions of petromodernity. Seizing on the institution’s still-resonant displays of oil’s prehistoric roots, LeMenager reconceives the George C. Page Museum in Los Angeles (known colloquially as the La Brea Tar Pits museum) as a space in which existing conceptions of environmental history and human dominion over the natural world might be productively reoriented, and in which contemporary Americans might begin to conceive a post-oil future.

The essays in Part V, the final section, entitled “The Futures of and without Oil,” take up this last problem raised by LeMenager’s essay and address cultural efforts to understand, critique, and look beyond the transient structures of oil capitalism. Chapters by Gerry Canavan, Imre Szeman, Melanie Doherty, and Ruth Salvaggio explore twentieth- and twenty-first-century attempts to develop cultural languages for the representation of oil that might satisfactorily account for the impossibly dense



entanglements of contemporary life and petroleum consumption, overturn existing discourses that seek to delay or defuse such evaluations, and foster alternative perspectives on the past and future of oil-based modernity. Gerry Canavan begins the section by addressing historical efforts to grapple with the inescapable transience of oil. Carefully reading a series of twentieth-century science-fiction novels, he tracks the development of two interpretive perspectives that continue to inform understandings of petroleum's end: a techno-utopian belief in the capacity of modern invention to supplant oil with more sophisticated energy systems, and an apocalyptic terror of oil exhaustion as the end point of human history. Imre Szeman investigates three contemporary oil documentaries to assess the difficulties posed by representing petroculturalism on film and the capacity of the documentary medium to depart from dominant narratives of the oil industry. Melanie Doherty addresses Reza Negarestani's 2008 novel *Cyclonopedia* as an experimental bricolage of literary and theoretical writing that uses a creative engagement with the insights of Speculative Realist philosophy to open new perspectives on oil capitalism. Drawing inspiration from powerful environmentalist icons of the twentieth century (most prominently, Rachel Carson's famous evocation of a "silent spring"), finally, Ruth Salvaggio uses post-Deepwater photographs of the oiled bird to theorize a new mode of resonant imagery that might inspire imaginative engagements with the hidden social and ecological histories of oil extraction and spur the formation of a new sort of sensory engagement with the natural world that would displace the authoritative gaze of technological modernity.

#### OIL STUDIES: PRESENT AND FUTURE

This volume is an attempt to consolidate the field of "oil studies" as a major component of not just environmental and energy studies but also cultural studies more generally. It is our hope that the contributions to this volume will lead to further work in anthropology, art history, film studies, geography, history, literary studies, museum studies, visual cultural studies, and related fields. Many dimensions of oil's cultural existence call for further study. These include oil's relationship to the seemingly abstract signs of digital media, petroleum's symbolic life within the traditional fine arts, the interpretations of oil advanced by television and print advertisements, cultural promotions produced by industry organizations such as the American Petroleum Institute, poetic and theatrical engagements with oil, the oil-themed programming of advocacy and public-interest groups such as the Center for Land Use Interpretation, and many other representations and symbolic practices.

For a scholar, the framework of oil studies can be both exciting and daunting. Oil studies is exciting because it challenges us to think about material culture in a way that we might not be used to, and it forces us to consider economic, environmental, and

political realities that might otherwise seem only tangentially related to our fields of inquiry. Oil studies is daunting for these same reasons—it asks us to think about the real world in a way that forces us to move outside familiar periodizing terms and national boundaries.<sup>29</sup> Oil is global, and oil is older than our modern world. The effects of oil, too, will outlast us all. We believe that these questions of scale and scope can productively and critically reorient us in relation to culture, and make cultural studies all the more relevant to the pressing questions of climate change.

It is perhaps wishful thinking to believe that the positing of “oil studies” will somehow hasten the end of oil’s hold on us. Nonetheless, the contributions to this volume all serve as evidence that thinking of oil culturally can help to envision a future without oil. We hope that the future of oil studies is in the study of the past, and we regret already that this will not be the case for some time.

#### NOTES

1. National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, *Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling, Report to the President* (January 2011), 190, <http://www.oilspillcommission.gov>.

2. William R. Freudenberg and Robert Gramling, *Blowout in the Gulf: The BP Oil Spill Disaster and the Future of Energy in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 13.

3. As Rob Nixon notes, “Niger Delta communities have suffered the equivalent of an Exxon-Valdez sized spill annually for half a century.” Occurring gradually over time, these spills do not register as much as the more spectacular, sudden spills in or near the United States. See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 274.

4. Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xv.

5. National Commission, *Deep Water*, 305.

6. The new *Dallas* premiered on June 13, 2012, on the TNT network.

7. Enid Nemy, “Larry Hagman, Who Played J.R. Ewing in ‘Dallas,’ Dies at 81,” *New York Times*, November 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

8. *Ibid.*

9. For an account of these narratives of a world without oil that looks exactly like a world with oil, see Imre Szeman, “System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106 (Fall 2007): 805–23.

10. Amitav Ghosh, “Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel,” *New Republic*, March 2, 1992, 29.

11. Szeman, “System Failure,” 820–21.

12. Ghosh, “Petrofiction,” 29, 30. These claims were meant to underscore the singularity of Munif’s works and to redirect the reader to the problematic character of global oil as an object of literary exploration.

13. Martin Schockley, *Southwest Writers Anthology* (Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 1967), xvi. These novels include: Edna Ferber, *Cimarron* (New York: Doubleday, 1929); Karle Baker’s *Family Style*



(New York: Coward-McCann, 1937); Mary King O'Donnell, *Quincie Bolliver* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941); Edward Lanham, *Thunder in the Earth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1942); Carl Coke Rister, *Oil Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949); Jewel Gibson, *Black Gold* (New York: Random House, 1950); William Owens, *Fever in the Earth* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958); and Tom Pendleton, *The Iron Orchard* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

14. Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*, trans. William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1985), 35.

15. Historian Paul Sabin and art historian Rina Youngner have similarly analyzed how rapacious promotional discourses and oil-field photography sustained local investments in the Pennsylvania petroleum business. See Paul Sabin, "A Dive Into Nature's Great 'Grab-Bag': Nature, Gender, and Capitalism in the Early Pennsylvania Oil Industry," *Pennsylvania History* 66 (Fall 1999): 472–505; and Rina Youngner, *Industry in Art: Pittsburgh, 1812–1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 41–55. Other work in history has similarly focused on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century oil fields, both in Pennsylvania and in California. See Brian Frehner, *Finding Oil: The Nature of Petroleum Geology, 1859–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); and Paul Sabin, *Crude Politics: The California Oil Market, 1900–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

16. See Michael Watts, "Oil as Money: The Devil's Excrement and the Spectacle of Black Gold," in *Money, Power, and Space*, ed. Stuart Corbridge and Ron Martin (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), 406–45; "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity," in *Violent Environments*, ed. Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 189–212. See also Michael Watts, ed., *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years on the Niger Oil Delta* (New York: Powerhouse, 2010).

17. See John Urry, "The System of Automobility," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (October 2004): 25–39; Cotten Seiler, *A Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). See also David Gartman, "The Ages of the Automobile: The Cultural Logics of the Car," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (October 2004): 169–95; John Ott, "Landscapes of Consumption: Auto Tourism and Visual Culture in California, 1920–1940," in *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 51–68.

18. Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in an American Imaginary," *New Formations* 69 (Summer 2010): 81–97; Stephanie LeMenager, "The Aesthetics of Petroleum, After Oil!," *American Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 59–86; and LeMenager, "Petro-Melancholia: The BP Blowout and the Arts of Grief," *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 2011): 25–56.

19. See Szeman, "System Failure"; Imre Szeman, "The Cultural Politics of Oil: On *Lessons of Darkness* and *Black Sea Files*," *Polygraph* 22 (2010): 3–15; Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman, "Oil Imaginaries: Critical Realism and the Oil Sands," *Imaginations* 3 (2012): 46–67.

20. Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

21. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

22. This burst of scholarly energy has also given rise to a variety of other research initiatives. These include the Petrocultures research cluster at the University of Alberta, founded by Imre

Szeman and Sheena Wilson, and the inaugural Petrocultures Conference (held in September 2012), as well as the *Oil in American History* special issue of *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012).

23. See Michael Watts, "Crude Politics: Life and Death on the Nigerian Oil Fields," *Niger Delta Economies of Violence Working Papers* (2009): 9–12. See also Gavin Bridge, "Global Production Networks and the Extractive Sector," *Journal of Economic Geography* 8 (2008): 389–419. For an influential account of the assemblage that uses the electrical grid as its chief example, see Jane Bennett, "The Agency of Assemblages and the North American Blackout," *Public Culture* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 445–66.

24. See Szeman, "System Failure," 805–9.

25. See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 11–34.

26. See Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 14–45; Watts, "Oil as Money," 408–13.

27. For a statistical analysis of the global expansion of intensive oil consumption, see the U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Short-Term Energy Outlook* (June 11, 2013). [http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/steo/report/global\\_oil.cfm](http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/steo/report/global_oil.cfm).

28. Szeman, "Cultural Politics of Oil," 34–35; Watts, "Crude Politics," 11–12.

29. This challenge to periodization is also explicitly posed in Patricia Yaeger, "Editor's Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources," *PMLA* 126, no. 2 (2011): 305–26.