

Truck Sluts, Petrosexual Countrysides, and Trashy Environmentalisms

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Abstract If the climate crisis, undergirded as it is by oil dependency, can be called “cis” insofar as it is driven by cisgender normativity, then it requires a response to oil that is broadly trans—transgender, transspecies, trans-corporeal, trans-material. Rural petro-masculine iconography elides and erases our oil dependencies by pretending to a total control over fossil fuels and thereby a control over cultural and material formations of stable, binaric gender and sex. To think outside these foreclosures of both nonbinaric genders and oil’s animacy, this essay introduces readers to *Truck Sluts*, an Instagram account that puts rural trucking culture at the center of a three-fold t4t exchange: trans-for-trans, trans-for-trucks, and a more expansive trans-for-trans* that crosses materialities. The author argues that *Truck Sluts* explicitly models these kinds of exchange and that doing so unseats the cisgender sexism of the petro-masculine rural, which is necessarily environmentalist work.

Keywords oil, trucks, trans-corporeal, rural, environmentalism

#transtrucksfromhell, #gonecountry, #t4t4t4t4ever

Trans-for-Trans, Trans-for-Trucks, Trans-for-Trans*

Taking pleasure in oil is an act of violence. Gasoline is a patriarchal weapon. Sexed and gendered fossil fuels can only be toxic. Rural ignorance impedes Earth’s salvation. To ruffle these entrenched ideas, my essay introduces readers to a radically rural, gender outlaw, insidiously sexy, intimately dangerous, fossil-fueled archive of photographs concisely named *Truck Sluts*. This Instagram account models t4t three ways, as trans-for-trans in the sense that a desirous exchange occurs between trans media makers and trans audiences, and also as trans-for-trucks in the sense of trans “truck fucking” and cyborgian body building. Even further, it manifests a third more expansive trans-for-trans* in the affective, trans-corporeal, desirous exchange between trans bodies, oil, and petro-machinery. In this last iteration of t4t*, I’m using *trans** to gloss identity as well as other kinds

of constitutional relations and movements figured by the prefixial *trans*- . With *Truck Sluts* as case study, I articulate an iteration of what Nicole Seymour (2018) calls “trashy environmentalisms,” in which ecological meaning is achieved through ironic, irreverent, low-class, and dirty means, asking: If the rural iconography of the working truck along with its petrol life fluids can be *trans**ed, what new highways open between a petrol dream, rural ecology, and a *trans** futurity? Although it is easy to see oil as exemplary of all that is disastrous in the Petro-Capitalocene, what *trans** potential lies in oil as a technology of affective and material becoming? In other words, can *trans** refigure an oil imaginary beyond disaster and into a *t4t** ecological assemblage, not to save oil but to understand it more clearly?

This essay lives in the slippery confluence of *trans* and queer theories, energy humanities, “new” materialisms, and rural studies. I’m fascinated by the prefixial *trans*- in *trans-corporeal* (Alaimo 2010) as it relates to *trans* studies; what *t4t** can show us about the Petro-Capitalocene’s gender formations that we don’t already know; and how *trans**ing oil, or oiling *trans**, can be an ethical way of rethinking the Anthropocene, not simply reproducing the resource fetishism that helped create all this trouble in the first place. I situate these concerns in emerging discourses on petro-cultural gender trouble, including what Stacy Alaimo (2016) has called “carbon-heavy masculinity” and what Cara Daggett (2018) has called “petro-masculinity.” According to both Alaimo and Daggett, petro-fetishism and cis het hypermasculinity have reached a fevered imbroglio in late-stage capitalism. Fossil fuel overuse has become a masculine defense performance triggered against threats to both gender and climate trouble. Take, for instance, the so-called Trump Highway Rallies leading up to the 2020 presidential election (Kahn 2020). Donald Trump’s populist thesis—white male nationalism and climate denialism—was embodied in massive caravans of smoke-belching, coal-rolling, exhaust-retching megatrucks with MAGA flags clapping in the wind. By controlling the oil in their engines, or so they thought, shaping it into a techno-affective experience of domination, the rally drivers also sought to control certain cultural formations of binaric gender, stable and predictable sex, resource allocation, proud extraction, and the privileged position of middle-class whiteness. What’s more, this kind of petro-masculine trucking culture predominantly takes the rural as performance space. Unseating such a material and affective hegemony will require loosening from the inside, an intimate deterioration of that matter control, which in turn speaks to cultural control. Oil cannot be theirs alone, seeing what they’ve done with it.

With this in mind, *Trucks Sluts* models how *t4t** redistributes oleaginous power in the rural, both our power over oil and oil’s power over us. Transgender is fundamental to this archive’s gender troubling of the petro-masculine. Its broader

trans*ness, too, opens up opportunity for rethinking the materiality of fossil fuels and their gendering social powers. I turn to Mel Y. Chen's (2012) "animacy" and a trans*ed trans-corporeality to speculate about how a trans revision of rural trucking culture rebukes petro-masculinity's presumed control over all forms of matter.¹ Oil and trans taken together reshape transference across not just species but also materials organic and geological.² My definition of trans, in this regard, follows Susan Stryker's (2017: 1) as "the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place, rather than any particular destination or mode of transition." That unchosen starting place might refer to the Petro-Capitalocene, the petro-masculine rural, cisgender identity, the human species, or even the organic, perhaps regarded in one frightening amalgamation. Coming face-to-face with oil's animacy, its sexy and gendered sway over human species' being and the materiality of our bodies, is anti-Anthropocenic work, a shearing of andro- and anthropocentrism. If the climate crisis, or oil dependency, can be called "cis" insofar as it is driven by cisgender normativity, then it requires a response that is broadly trans—transgender, transspecies, trans-corporeal, transmaterial. *Truck Sluts* is a bumptious political site for such thinking.

I've divided the rest of this essay into three sections. In the first, I introduce readers to *Truck Sluts*, glossing its history and mechanics, discussing how these images trouble relations between sex, gender, sexuality, pornography, and rural iconography. The t4t here relies on queer strategies of camp and disidentification for its revision of the rural. This is not to say that queer and trans are easily distinguishable in the archive, but that the archive is doing many kinds of work simultaneously. Next, I discuss how petrosexual aesthetics in *Truck Sluts* productively eroticizes trans rural entanglements with fossil fuels and combustion engines. This section describes the trans* work undergirding the *Truck Sluts* brand of queered rurality. Last, I describe how this archive composes a "trashy environmentalism," harnessing the technicities of oil and trans* to translate working truck iconography into a sexy signifier with the potential for opening up more complicated ecological thought. The reader will have to excuse the smell of gasoline along the way. Or, better yet, enjoy it.

Making Trucks Gay since 1982

Petro-masculine rural trouble covers over seething material enmeshments. Uncovering those enmeshments reveals potential for thinking oil in deeper ecological terms. Likewise, doing so can help rural queer and trans people find modes of living that make better sense to them. When Donna J. Haraway (2016) compelled environmental scholars to "stay with the trouble," maybe this isn't exactly what she had in mind. But the trouble of oil and petro-masculine rurality cannot be solved by only those people who do not (critically) love or understand it. *Truck Sluts* stays with the trouble.³

Tiffany Saint-Bunny began this project nearly seven years ago with the Instagram account CoolTruckZone (Parker 2020). “I’m . . . a trans woman and gay. . . . It felt bad to always feel like you had to choose one or the other,” she says in an interview with *Autostraddle*, “like you could be into all this shit [trucks, beer, guns] or be queer, but not both, you know, and it felt wrong to me” (Parker 2020). As CoolTruckZone attracted more followers, Saint-Bunny’s project grew from a kind of personal collection of truck images (mostly framing the trucks themselves) into what is now a “pinup platform for rural and redneck queers,” taking on the new moniker *Truck Sluts* (Parker 2020).⁴ Saint-Bunny tells *Kerrang!*,

You have these Punisher skull-wearing, Thin Blue Line assholes, and they see “Trucksluts” and they think, “Oh cool—trucks, sluts, this is my shit!” Then they get on there and they see it’s a bunch of homos, and they’re like, “What the fuck!” and get real pissed off. I think they feel like Trucksluts is tricking them or appropriating their culture or something. And that comes around to the point of, that’s not their culture. That shit belongs to everyone. (Krovatin 2020)⁵

Disruption is at the center of this mediated becoming. And so is staying. And so is oil.

These days, *Truck Sluts* is still an Instagram-mediated archive. Saint-Bunny and her team source and curate photographs for the account from their more than forty thousand followers, who submit truck love from around the world. The resulting archive has a notably unified aesthetic, “sometimes sweet, sometimes seductive, and at other times an especially campy type of raunch” (Jackson 2019). The sexiness and growing popularity of these images puts *Truck Sluts* at odds with Instagram’s bowdlerizing practices. “With every bump in visibility the Truck Sluts account gets,” writes Jhoni Jackson (2019) for *Paper*, “the potential for shadowbanning and policing by Instagram inevitably increases,” hence the occasional digital sticker covering nipples, genitals, and assholes. This censorship drives the archive toward print publication: “For now, it lives on the internet and in the hearts and groins of freak-ass homos the world over. By spring 2020, it will hit the stands as an honest to goddess porno-mag” (Saint-Bunny 2020). This history of trans mediation through erotic imaging informs *Truck Sluts* as a t4t pornography dedicated to making space by trans sexiness and for trans sexiness—against the odds, as always.

Check out this mission statement:

Truckslutsmag exists for people that would fuck someone just because they have a hot truck. For people that get wet when they hear that perfect exhaust note or engine rumble. For people that see a babe in mechanics overalls and just can’t

contain themselves. *Truckslutsmag* is for people that see a ladder-rack on the back of a work truck and imagine tying someone to it. It's for folks that wanna get banged on a truck, in a truck, or *by* a truck. If you think motor oil looks good on a big round ass, then *Truckslutsmag* is for you. If the bright green glow of fresh coolant somehow turns you on, then you're at the right place. It's like Cronenberg's "Crash," but trashier and more gay. (Saint-Bunny 2020)

I will return to trans-corporeal sex and truck fucking in the next section. For now, though, I would like to focus on how this mission statement operates within and disrupts a particularly rural aesthetic. Countrysides often register as dangerous, forsaken, and dull in metronormative formations of regionality. Jack Halberstam (2005: 27), who coined the term *metronormative*, has written on "the immensely complex relations that make rural America a site of horror and degradation in the urban imagination." The taken-for-granted social and political conservatism, racism, cisheterosexism, and generalized cultural backwardness of US (and international) ruralities put queer and trans rural art between a rock and a hard place. The queer and trans rural, in particular, struggles against the sexually violent and cisheterosexist narratives seared into rural American visual history in the likes of *Deliverance* on the one hand and *Boys Don't Cry* on the other. I'm reminded of trans memoirist Eli Clare's ([1999] 2015: 42) "feeling queer in the queer community" as a backwoods outsider. The results of these pressures, in both popular rural art and criticism, tend toward visibility politics, metronormative assimilation, and apologist aesthetics.

Truck Sluts makes no such concessions. This archive simultaneously respects, fetishizes, and lampoons prototypical rural aesthetics. But at no point does this mixed-up approach invite queer and trans city slickers to laugh at the rural petro-masculine, rather than with or alongside its revision. In other words, the elaborate disidentification at work here does not rely on a metronormative apology. *Trucks Sluts* reimagines rural trucking from within as a disidentification emerging from both frustration and understanding. In this regard, what we can notice right away through this archive is an ethic of salvage. These aren't the "souped-up" megaton trucks of the petro-masculine ideal, which is largely a gentrification of rural trucking that seeks to ironically bedazzle working-class reliance through chromatica, expensive lift kits, woof-ed up sound systems, and countless other enhancements, both cosmetic and (dys)functional. These aesthetics speak to Daggett's point that petro-masculinity embroils American wealth, energy exceptionalism, and militarism as wards against economic anxiety, a veneer that pretends toward working-class utility but is really anything but (29). Instead, *Truck Sluts* vehicles are the mostly practical, used, workhorse, and "living" trucks of a presumably low-income contributing collective. Moreover, as with any



Figure 1. Blue and Vidisha tease BDSM aesthetics on the back of a carpentry truck (*Truck Sluts Magazine* 2020).

disidentification, *Truck Sluts* is not finished with its reference culture. It does not intend to leave behind or forsake its unchosen petro-masculine starting place. Rather, *Truck Sluts* intends to stay, and salvage, to better understand rural trouble.

Figure 1 captures rurality in a strange light. Blue, bracing on the tailgate of this working truck, presses their boot down onto Vidisha's face. With their chains and leather (or maybe pleather, a petroleum product), these two limn the iconographic space between working-class rurality and urban trans club scene, both potentially and serendipitously signified in the icon of the hammer. The deep indigo of Vidisha's ensemble tethers with the hammer, a likewise blue headlight shining on this scene where queer and trans people *are* the rednecks, performing within that iconograph's relational field. The truck bed cache of busted rocks, accumulated from a day's work, imbues the diegesis with the heft of labor. Vidisha's goat-horn strap, upcycled from a roadkill, is both a threat to the pelvis and a fetishizing of the road's many dangers. They hold it at the ready.

What does it mean to "sweat together towards a new universe," as the caption of this image reads? A "new universe" could be one where the spaces between public and private, work and sex are not so sanctioned, a gap cleaving rural conservatism and metronormativity. Figure 1's trashed-up, salvaged pornography reorients the working truck as a site for bucking the kinds of surveillance and regulation many queer and trans people experience as particularly strong in rural spaces, from both petro-masculine and metronormative censors. Blue and Vidisha's BDSM instantiates what trans labor scholar Anne Balay (2017: 100)

#t4t	#ilovemytruckandmytrucklovesme	#ACAB
#unknownpleasures	#bigtrucksnofucks	#blacklivesmatter
#makingtrucksgay	#1800sludgenation	#giveyourmoneytoxworkers
#t4t4t4ever	#dirtydirty	#generalstrike
#truckslutsinternational	#apocalypseWOW	#shitshovelhustle
#scrappyardqueers	#keepontruckin	#countrylife
#worldisafuck	#WeSeeUs	#misstrucknuts
#queerfutures	#cosplayasyourowntruck	#twotruckshavingsex
#enemyofthestate	#gearfemme	#femme4femme
#censored	#dieseldyke	#butch4butch
#makingrustgay	#southerncumfert	#oldtrucksneverdie
#builtfordbuff	#rustedbutnotforgotten	#pussyfingersforjesus
#truckfuckersincorporated	#offgrid	#assclappalachia
#homosintheholler	#fuckthecistem	#transtrucksfromhell
#artist4artist	#horny4cornbread	#buttcchug4christ
	#lifeisahighway	
	#whathappensinthewoodsstaysinthewoods	

Figure 2. The *Truck Sluts* tropology.

calls “sex as a form of retaliation.” The new universe runs parallel to the theater of the petro-masculine, and that very proximity could be the petro-masculine’s undoing, a prying away of its foothold on rural aesthetics. Blue and Vidisha simultaneously disidentify with not just cis-heteronormative petro-masculine rurality and working-class order but also metronormative queerness, transnormativity, and environmentalist sanctimony, all on the back of a gas guzzler.

This process is codified into searchable language through phrases like #hornedstrapsummer and #makingtrucksgay. Hashtags function in *Truck Sluts* as a parsing of the disidentifications imagined visually in the archive. It’s a kind of tropo-wayfinding through rurality as it exists in other (cishet) terms and a disidentifying with that cartographic enmeshment. I’ve gathered a partial collection of the *Truck Sluts* topographical imaginarium (see fig. 2). The language is parodic in the sense that few Instagram users will be searching for terms like #1800sludgenation, #fuckthecistem, or #assclappalachia. Then again, this metadata now exists in the broader Instagram compendium. A portal to the new universe opens, inscribed in a dirty new/old love language.⁶

Using both visual and topological disidentifications, this new universe might further be one where the stratigraphies of racialized gender collapse in on themselves under the increasing, fossil-fueled pressure of their own rhetorical and visual grammars. Petro-masculine countrysides are white and cis-male. This nightmarish ideal is as false as it is pervasive, empowered over and again by the post-2016 invigoration of rural exclusionary politics, voter restriction campaigns, All Lives Matter counterprotests, anti-trans legislation across rural America, neo-Confederate Jim Crow nostalgias, and conservative panic in the face of high-profile gender and climate trouble. *Truck Sluts* works to disprove this fiction by simply making visible white queer and trans lives as well as queer and trans lives



Figure 3. @jerkdusoleil poses on hay bales (or “gay bales”) in a truck bed (*Truck Sluts Magazine* 2019c).

of color being lived in rural spaces, especially in highly contested rural spaces like Appalachia and the Deep South (#homosintheholler, #hornyforcornbread, #southerncumfert). Perhaps more significantly, *Truck Sluts* revises the language and aesthetics of the “traditional” working-class rural to erode those exclusionary politics at their insidious foundation, while preserving the fabric of rural belonging as something worth holding onto for those who can’t/won’t afford (financially, culturally, spiritually) a migration to the queer and trans urban strongholds. Black trans in the rural is, in this way, already overdetermined by a politics of staying across the Plantationocene and its diasporas. Expressing rural trucking culture differently, and with greater attention to oil’s animacy, could function as a kind of reparative fugitivity (even while staying where the captivity trouble is supposedly louder and more visible). This maneuver potentially unblocks a legacy of fungibility between Black bodies and fossil fuels—through a machine that might otherwise be used for the chase, not the escape.⁷ The missing “backstory” in figure 3, for example, is glossed by its revision of Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*. @jerkdusoleil, with legs provocatively spread across the pitchfork and top-surgery scars drinking in the sun where their overall strap has fallen tantalizingly aside (#overallbabe), has placed themself between the anachronism of American agricultural frontierism and its exaggerated legacy in contemporary petro-masculine rurality, neither of which foregrounds Black bodies as either the agents of nationalist hegemony or component to its homogeny. @jerkdusoleil stays right there with the trouble.

José Esteban Muñoz's original fascination with disidentification emerged from crossings over gender, race, sexuality, and materiality in often surprising and counterintuitive ways—ways that are indeed more complex than either the assimilationist or anti-assimilationist images they partially resist/revise/revisit.⁸ In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Kathryn Yusoff (2019) speaks to material fungibility as foundational to Anthropocenic trouble, a mixing of both the substances and identities of Black(ened) people and the resources they have been forced to both extract and absorb in the toxic fallout. That original extractionist, racial capitalist, racially gendered fungibility between Black bodies and fuel can be reimagined through a trans-corporeal intimacy with oil in an affective transformation of rural space and its white petro-masculine iconographies. Through cultural and material disidentification, fungible fugitivity takes back oil and rurality from the greedy hands of the petro-masculine. Perhaps, in this instance, environmental justice looks like a Black trans redneck firing on all cylinders, making fungibility with fossil fuels fugitive in a Black Anthropocene.

Burnin' Gas and Eatin' Ass

Oil wants. We want oil. We want *with* oil. The prefactual state of trans is a prepositional orientation—becoming with, of, across, over, in, and through.⁹ It's not a stretch to say that crude oil and its derivatives (re)made the human earlier in the Petro-Capitalocene. But it is necessary to think anew about how oil remakes the human ongoingly and remakes itself through the human. Attending to this transference becomes a matter of matter's desire and our desire for matter, and how that exchange reframes presumably nonliving material as capable of “casting a trans light back on the human” (Chen 2012: 128). This section looks at how other-than-human materials have the animate power to make, unmake, and remake human-animals and themselves in processes that heretofore have been overvalued and overdetermined as already gendered in specific registers (petro-masculine), rather than as processes that are enmeshed with gender emergence and world building (t4t*). I'm thinking, too, about how this exchange is engorged through the truck as machine and rural iconograph, leaning into trans strategies of allowing the body to become as it emerges with other materials, multibodied and trans-corporeal. It's pivotal that the *t** in this t4t* exchange is situated around trans/gender, because both climate and gender trouble are at stake in petro-masculine world eating, which cannot be underestimated in its power to generate particular apocalypses for the excluded in favor of white cis-male supremacy.

Most energy scholars are prepared and even giddy to admit that human entanglements with oil have crossed into a maddeningly dense network of (inter)dependencies. As fuel scholar Heidi C. M. Scott (2018: 178) puts it, “We can't even see oil because we look through oil glasses . . . we are, ourselves, petroleum products, cyborgs.” Oil has worked itself into our bodies through food,

water, cosmetics, vapors, medicines, ability-enhancing technologies, and, even more insidiously, desires and ideas. It powers our mobility and momentum. It gives our machines strength when our bodies have none. It vibrates our flesh energetically until the source of arousal becomes indistinguishable as either outside or in. Yet its constitutivity with our emergent sex, gender, and sexuality goes unnamed. Scholars of the “geo-social,” like Yusoff, have shown how fossil fuels exact control over human interactions, how they shape our sociality around extraction and fuel use, thereby expressing their own potential to desire. And scholars of the “petrosexual” have revealed connections between petro-politics, petro-violence, and misogyny by focusing on violence against women’s bodies as a practice foundational to petro-masculine motives of extraction and matter control.¹⁰ But if I change the valence of *petrosexual*, moving these gendered petro-relations firmly into the erotic, I can also move closer to what Scott (2018: 183) calls the “orgiastic power in oil’s repertoire.” If, as she puts it, the “epistemic inability or unwillingness to name our energy ontologies” in the twenty-first century has developed into what seems an unshakable habitus, how, then, does the orgasm shiver through (13)? And what can that orgasm tell us about the mutually constitutive relations between energy, oil, and our sexed and gendered bodies?

Truck Sluts gets at this inflected petrosexual by instantiating and foregrounding oil’s otherwise invisible libidinal, gendering energies. Figure 4 concretizes an elusive feeling of #ilovemytruckandmytrucklovesme. Here, a trans person fucks the trailer hitch of her truck with a strap. From her perspective, both the strap and the truck might function as appendagic extensions of gender and pleasure, as well as tools for bodily becoming. From another perspective, the truck, strap, and the human might all be extensions of oil’s desires from the start, rather than oil acting as incidental lubricant. Pleasure is the nexus of oil’s, the truck’s, and the trans person’s becoming, underpinning all of those possibilities routed back to oil’s technical versatility and combustibility.¹¹ This is what Seymour (2015) has called a “trans-corporeally affective” relationship, a wild synergy of utmost acrossness parodying the boundaries built up between machine, human-animal, and oil. The revision is, again, of the petro-masculine desire, perilously suppressed, to fuck oil (and all matter) into submission. Admitting to the pleasures of trans-material fucking relaxes this suppressive pressure on oil’s animacy and constitutivity such that genderings emerge that are not toxic, despite the carbon toxicities, because they are not predetermined. Transness, in other words, is shown to thrive in this materiality, which is antithetical to petro-masculine cultural astringency. Whereas petrocultures typically go hand in hand with the insistence on stable, binary genders, here we have the opposite.

In his *Countersexual Manifesto*, Paul B. Preciado (2018) describes a prosthetic trans-material ontology in which the dildo precedes the dick, or artifice



Figure 4. @woodsqueer penetrates a truck with her strap (*Truck Sluts Magazine* 2019a).

precedes the natural in a history of sexuality. “Dildonics,” in his terms, is a way of rupturing the biological determinism underpinning a cis-heterocentric regime by leaning into technosexuality, or the fabrication of trans sex through prosthetic means. *Truck Sluts* might likewise seem at first glance like a movement away from “nature,” fusing together the sexual becoming of queer and trans people with machines, dildos, and other material technologies—a process several *Truck Sluts* photos humorously extend to the truck itself by revising the petro-masculine stereotype of hanging steel balls from the trailer hitch, this time as an image of gender emergence, rather than determinism.¹² However, it’s important to acknowledge that trucks and even dildos are petroleum products.¹³ Oil undergirds all these technosexual devices—the dildo, the steel balls, the truck, and even the human body. Oil animates the kind of trans sexual fabrication Preciado describes, powerfully pointing trans back at the human as a way of being that is consistently fabricated over and again by oil’s own desirous technicity.¹⁴ This, in turn, diminishes the petro-masculine conceptualization of either truck or human gender as predetermined, rather than a process of ongoing trans-corporeal, co-constitutive becoming. *Truck Sluts* reveals that the technosexual is, in fact, not a removal of the body from nature but instead a traversal through oil-as-nature. If oil makes up the total climate in which we live, as so many energy scholars rightfully claim, acknowledging it as underpinning the technosexual would provide a more thorough theorization of the human body within a trans-corporeal environment, as well as gender writ large. *Truck Sluts* performs this back-to-nature move as a trans-for-trans* exchange.



Figure 5. @mxboombastic straddles the engine of a truck while vaping (*Truck Sluts Magazine* 2019b).

Figure 5 is an even clearer rendering of this trans-corporeally affective synergy. @mxboombastic straddles the engine of a 2007 Toyota 4Runner in a petrol-slick fuck session between human and machine. Recall the *Truck Sluts* mission statement from above. Like David Cronenberg's 1996 technosexual fetish film *Crash*, *Truck Sluts* curates a cyborgian sexiness between human and machine, powered by oil, actively gyrating on propriety. While @mxboombastic is only vaping here (#vapemastergeneral), the framing creates the illusion that their body is siphoning fumes from the truck engine, like a human flue, pulling smoke up through the genitals and dispersing it out through the mouth. Their exhalation graphs oil passing in many forms through machine, human, and environment. Alaimo (2010: 2) writes, "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.'" This goes not just for clean materials but also the toxic. @mxboombastic's fumes rise to meet the clouds, and a clear line forms between oil and climate with the body as ozonic transition point. Liberal environmentalist and sexual-moral sensibilities will make this a difficult image to take in for some. In the phrase "shootin guns, jumpin trucks, blowin clouds," clouds figure not only as meteorology or pollution; "blowin clouds" is also a rural euphemism for smoking methamphetamine, typically used in relation to having sex. Its evocation here puts further forms of toxicity in proximity to sexual and gender becoming.

Staying with these troubles, toxic as they are, is surely more effective than pretending they have no constitutive meaning. To be sure, as evidenced by this euphemistic cunning, not all viewers are meant to fully understand. The important point is that petro-masculine iconography has been allowed to tell only one story about oil, trucks, and pollution for too long. An invitation to a greater petro plentitude is here: #cumandtakeit.

Expanding the petro narrative, however, will not be easy. As Scott (2018: 13) points out, the collective Global North and Western human habitus around oil tends toward either an “unwillingness to name our energy ontologies” or else a doomsday modality. There’s barely room for an in-between. Yet, as petro-cultural scholar Stephanie LeMenager (2014: 4) claims, with the right analytical perspective, scholars might reveal an “unprecedented devotion, even love” for oil that runs “ultradeep.” *Truck Sluts* complicates oily ontologies by revealing the sexualizing and gendering potential already residing in that relational habitus. This is the technicity of oil as a material capable of generating “ultradeep” entanglements, as well as the technicity of trans as an embodied translation of that process. The iconography of the working truck and all it touches is being wholly reimaged as a movement across matter and ontology. The ultradeep surfaces.

This Environmentalism Is Trash: #fordfemtheplanet, #apocalypseWOW

Peak oil, pollution, and conservationist rhetorics make the petrosexual a dangerous aesthetic. How easy it would be to brush *Truck Sluts* under a queer anti-future analytic of the Lee Edelman variety, like some propane torch burning at the end of time or a Mad Max–ian guzzoline eschatology. But there’s much more to this archive than learning to love the bomb. To reiterate: if climate change is predicated in large part on a white-nationalist petro-masculinity, its mitigation could be imagined only by an approach that takes the mutual constitutivity of gender, sex, and oil seriously. My goal here is not to bring *Truck Sluts* into the popular environmentalist fold. Moralizing environmentalists don’t like this kind of fun, anyway. Instead, through *Truck Sluts*, I’m trying to understand what a different environmentalism could look like if it took this enmeshment seriously, particularly as situated around queer and trans rural living.

Beyond the plentiful theses on oil cultures as evil wholesale, some critiques seem to have already disavowed the specific kind of petro-relationality I’ve been exploring. Alaimo (2010: 16) writes, in a book otherwise provocatively focused on the intimate trans-material relations other environmentalists overlook: “Huge McMansions, giant trucks, and gas-guzzling SUVs (all of which contribute to the vast amounts of carbon being emitted into the atmosphere) serve to insulate their inhabitants from the world . . . fantasies of transcendence or imperviousness.” This swipe at “fantasies” forecloses a desirous trans-corporeality between gas-guzzler, the gasoline guzzled, and the machinist themself—not to mention the

claim toward individual responsibility for planetary salvation. There is also LeMenager's (2014: 7) affective read on the ultradeep: "We are loathe to disentangle ourselves or our definition of life from [oil]." And this "destructive attachment" constitutes what she calls a "bad love," one that impairs a healthy sense of life and environment (12). These are bad feelings with bad consequences. Leaving them to die in the ultradeep becomes a moral and ethical imperative. But LeMenager's implication that we are even capable of disentangling ourselves from oil elides our co-constitutivity with oil. There is, in this sense, a fantasy of inseparability (to play off Alaimo's term) here in LeMenager's claim.¹⁵

Raising these ultradeep feelings from their murky depths can help answer Seymour's (2018: 22) pivotal question: "What makes an artwork environmentalist?" Cultural works like *Truck Sluts* that wriggle around in dissident affects trouble a centralized, metronormative, and, frankly, cisgenderonormative ecocritical and environmentalist approach. *Truck Sluts* features no explicit environmentalist rhetoric or functional sustainability message. Mainstream environmentalists would almost certainly dismiss this archive as environmentally ambivalent at best or anti-environmentalist at worst. Seymour's "bad environmentalism," on the other hand, makes space for the dissident and dysfunctional. A bad environmentalism is an environmentalism performed wrongly—unsanctimoniously, as it happens. It poses peculiar questions that do not always lead to easy-to-equip answers. Above, I've shown how *Truck Sluts* certainly lacks any serious moral-environmentalist claims. The archive sits with a camped-up irreverence toward pollution, propriety, and petro-masculinity—inappropriately foregrounding "how matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways" (Chen 2012: 2).

Truck Sluts is, more importantly, a "trashy environmentalism" in that it surfaces the erotic feelings of the ultradeep through a pointedly class-critical t4t* exchange, toxic all the way down. Trashy environmentalisms are countermodels to a middle-class taste-making performance of environmentalism (Seymour 2018: 199). Let me say in clearest terms: mainstream environmentalists don't understand, nor do they care to understand, how fossil fuels can be so intimately intertwined with (rural) life as to become erotic. Trash, in this sense, is often taken to index a yearning for a better life—which, from a mainstream environmentalist perspective, could never necessitate an erotics of gasoline. That is dirty and wrong. Rurality, oil, and transness taken together, however, craft a revision of the petro-masculine that is not melancholic for modernity, in the condescending environmentalist sense. LeMenager (2017: 472) defines what she calls "petro-melancholia" as "an unresolvable grieving of modernity itself, as it begins to fail." This is the complex feeling of "losing something not quite anticipated," an oily future of riches and tech, as well as a past spent earning it (478). She goes as far as to say that

“the inclusion of US southerners,” for instance, “within the South as a *global* region has become clear” (474). This likening sees a specifically American form of rurality, a romanticized class-conscious partner to empire’s industrial metro-symbolic, as a global wash with regions that have also spurned or been denied petro-progress to its furiously gleaming ends. Imperial petro-capitalism hasn’t “paid off” for the rural. Yet the *Truck Sluts* archive demonstrates that petro-melancholia does not saturate its t4t* project. This archive is instead about dis-empowering rural American petro-masculine control over its own iconography, even and perhaps especially when those icons manifest American-like in other geopolitical regions. That figure 1 comes from New Delhi may surprise some readers.¹⁶ *Truck Sluts* resists both queer cultural imperialisms and oily affective imperialisms. The queerness and transness imaged are wholly incompatible with metronormative tastes, as they don’t effectively spread a message of Western queer assimilation or visibility proper. And the desires for oil and machine do not constitute a form of petro-masculine melancholia, as the desire is not for progress or power over others, whether economic or cultural. Pleasure and belonging in this archive elide LeMenager’s claim that “feeling at home in a petrol ‘world’ creates an affective drag on thinking through human survival” (112).

Staying with the trouble is not melancholic. It is a kind of survival and homemaking practice. Muñoz (1999: 12) writes, “As a practice, disidentification does not dispel . . . contradictory elements; rather, like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life.” He would later dispel this melancholic simile altogether for a radical futurity. But, even here, staying is antithetical to stagnation. It’s an investment in the already here. This is a counternarrative running against the “slow death and abandonment” written onto ruralities (Clare [1999] 2015: 65). Finding a way of staying is reparative. *Truck Sluts* holds the history of the iconography of the working truck, with all its contingent racism, misogyny, and anti-queerness/-transness, just as it pulls that imagery into another story, one that has been held hostage in the rural for some time.

There have to be ways of thinking oil outside wholesale foreclosure, if oil is indeed home. Exposing ourselves to oil’s claims on our lives (Alaimo 2016), its constitutivity at nearly every level of our various ontologies, including sex and gender, seems like a terribly important strategy for beginning to understand and therefore mitigate our reliance on its powers. As oil drips through their quivering bodies, the queer and trans media makers contributing to the *Truck Sluts* archive are showing a way. Their way is t4t*, not just trans* as identity but as practice and outlook. They help us see how energy ontologies actually develop and, more specifically, how rural energy ontologies are much more important than the festering mistakes they are so often thought to be.

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Notes

1. I'm thinking here of Chen's (2012: 225) read on the 2010 Macondo Prospect oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Chen claims that the news media's coverage of the well as "dead" (as in, no longer spilling out extraction-released toxins) linguistically sublimated the "pure animation of the oil" as a gendered tactic to mitigate anxieties around toxicity, or "hysteria."
2. Dana Luciano and Chen (2015: 184) have poetically imagined the potential in "an in/organic identification" between queer and trans bodies and material forms such as stone. They wonder whether "lifting that prohibition" of desire between the in/organic "multiplies not only the possibilities for intrahuman connection but also our ability to imagine other kinds of trans/material attachments" (185).
3. We might think about how this language of staying resonates with movements like The STAY Project (n.d.) in Central Appalachia. Though, moving for personal safety should never be confused with abandoning the rural. Staying with the trouble can be ideological and aesthetic work, if not always a physical practice of exposure to toxicities (material, ideological, petro-masculine, etc.).
4. In some instances, this archive is called *Truck Sluts Magazine*. The Instagram site name, for instance, is truckslutsmag. I've shortened to *Truck Sluts* throughout to reduce confusion.
5. Saint-Bunny is referring here to other Instagram accounts that use #trucksluts. For example, there is @trucksluts (not to be confused with @truckslutsmag), which curates images training an explicitly cis het, white male gaze on heavily modified or souped-up trucks and mostly white women with small body types posing pinup style.
6. In *A Dirty South Manifesto*, L. H. Stallings (2020: 70) argues that "sexually decolonized land politics" will be pivotal for undermining the moral semantics, and semiotics, of the so-called New South. Dirtying up, as in exposing and engorging, the latent desires in the rhetorical and iconographic staples of petro-masculine rurality weakens its exclusivity from underneath, wearing away at its project of cultural conservancy.
7. I'm thinking here of C. Riley Snorten's (2017: 55–97) invocations of Hortense Spillers and Snorten's own thinking on "fungible fugitivity," or a reworking of gender fungibility toward fugitivity. What would it look like for Black trans bodies in the rural to lean into material fungibility with fossil fuels as an inversion of histories of enslaved and incarcerated extractive labor, as well as racialized gender politics, in predominantly rural

spaces? This would inflect the use of *matter* in Snorton's observation that "there is no absolute distinction between black lives' mattering and trans lives' mattering within the rubrics of racialized gender" (x).

8. Muñoz (1999: 18) writes, "If the terms *identification* and *counteridentification* are replaced with their rough corollaries *assimilation* and *anti-assimilation*, a position such as disidentification is open to the charge that it is merely an apolitical sidestepping, trying to avoid the trap of assimilating or adhering to different separatist or nationalist ideologies." This, as Muñoz argues, is not the case with disidentification, since its strategies are housed primarily in anti-assimilation while still resisting the normativizing practices of anti-assimilationist work (e.g., metronormativity). Disidentification is the "queer-er" position (#trufreeex).
9. Eva Hayward's (2008) "becoming *with* starfish" resists the division between metaphoric and material relations; it's a metaphor that reshapes material intimacy between two ostensibly untethered life-forms, taking on a trans-corporeal significance. My treatment of oil is likewise metaphoric and material. Trans is like oil, but it is also with oil, and the two remake one another's material being.
10. Heather M. Turcotte (2011), who coined *petro-sexual*, and Sheena Wilson (2017: 273) use this term to describe how "histories of feminism and oil are intertwined," particularly in terms of petro-violence against women.
11. Balay (2018: 8) has shown how queer and trans people who drive semi-tractor-trailer trucks often conceive of the truck as both supplemental to their own strength of independence—"sharing [the truck's] power," which is to say sharing in oil's power—and a protective barrier against the threats of a marked queer or trans life on the road.
12. Cishet people, mostly men, do this to telegraph their stable masculinity, but in queer and trans hands it demonstrates that such accessories are appendagic tools, expressing a Butlerian idea that supposedly natural, stable genders (ironically) need prosthetics to achieve their appearance as natural and stable.
13. Not all but many sex toys, like those fabricated with silicon, are made from materials derived from fossil fuels, as are many lubricants—which deeply reiterates Scott's point that we *are* petroleum products.
14. I'm thinking here of Jules Gill-Peterson's (2014: 406) model of "trans as an expression of the originary technicity of the body." By relinquishing, as in acknowledging, animacy to other-than-human materials, like oil or the testosterone molecule, trans emerges alongside the material's "technical capacity for differentiation as living matter" (408).
15. I'm bringing up Alaimo and LeMenager in this way because their arguments are so important to my thinking. They trouble desire, oil, and animacy. And yet here we see that even the most provocative claims about oil remain tinged with normative thinking. I don't bring up the many cishet white men scholars who reify rural and petro demonization, because that would be too cumbersome and obvious.
16. At several United Nations climate change conferences, India has repeatedly said that it needs fossil fuels to become a more "developed" nation—and that Global North nation-states are getting to have it both ways—gobbling up fossil fuels to develop themselves, then turning against fossil fuels. Development, in this way, and as it relates to figure 1, resonates with the kind of constitutivity I've covered in this essay at the level of national sovereignty. It's a matter of unseating the petro-masculine imperial control over extracted matter, which is a global problem (Daggett 2018: 29). Rural American petro-masculine iconography is a fitting language for disidentification precisely because of its gendered and nationalist overdeterminism.

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