

After Oil Collective, *Solarities: Seeking Energy Justice* (edited by Ayesha Vemuri and Darin Barney), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-5179-1414-1 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-4529-6811-7 (ebook)

Solarity (sō'lārī-tē): *n. a state, condition, or quality developed in relation to the sun, or to energy derived from the sun.*

Under skies darkened by smog, we turn towards the sun. As solarians deriving life from the sun, we find ourselves existentially preoccupied with a climate crisis characterized by the death caused by our combustion of hydrocarbons derived from ancient life. The solarity of settler peoples is nothing short of necropolitical. The climate crisis emerges from colonial production relations that degrade the environment and racialize marginalized populations—a climate coloniality with continuity in the neoliberal present (Sultana 2022). Contrary to the apoliticizing (yet very political) mainstream climate discourses, we are not all in this together. Sacrifice zones spawn and sprawl in the service of capital; hellscape enclaves of industrial extraction and toxicity, inhabited by banished more-than-humans besieged with deprivation and precarity. Survival in colonial-capitalist ruins requires a breakneck transition to renewable energy. Solar power holds promise as a panacea for planetary maladies and to power our carbon-constrained futures. And yet solar power is a paradox. Staggering sums are circulated towards solar to rewire the circuits of our energy regime, erecting a phalanx of photovoltaic infrastructures that safeguard our collective future. But today, we find ourselves beset by the aporias of solar development.

Much like our dirty fossil fuel forebears, clean solar power is characterized by an uneven distribution of benefits and burdens. As if blinded by the light, our rapid transformation of energy regimes is a recapitulation of energy injustices wrought by fossil capital; photovoltaic solarities of extraction and erasure, albeit sustainable. Gargantuan solar interventions illuminate urban and industrial centers with photons from the rural frontiers but leave many adjacent

peasants in the dark. Theft as corollary to profit, many global smallholders are alienated of their land and livelihoods by developers. Encircled by solar but excluded, solar-related dispossessions often compound peasant vulnerabilities to premature death within the overdetermined agrarian milieu of the global South (Stock 2022). As evidence of our great derangement (Ghosh 2016), solar coloniality is implemented as a solution to climate coloniality. Northern nations chasing green comfortably offshore solutions to their climate transgressions in the shade while sun-scorched Southern nations who endure the violence of petroracial capitalism are also forced to mitigate the climate crisis on grabbed land against the ever-retreating horizon of the just transition. A windfall for some is a hurricane for others. Solar power is rife with power asymmetries. But an alternative solarity “...is not only possible, she’s on her way...on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing” (Roy 2003:75)

Enter the After Oil Collective. Born out of a hyper-generative three-day collaboration in Montreal in 2019, *Solarities: Seeking Energy Justice* is an ambitious manifesto for radical solarities. This tome is a trebuchet. Reconfiguring solar power relations requires a reckoning and a reimagining. Accomplishing both with the book, the Collective compels us to consider solar power as “a condition and terrain of contingency and political struggle” (p.22). They reveal the hierarchies of mattering in the transformation of matter by exhuming the bodies rendered disposable and surveying landscapes laid to waste. At once illuminating injustices and forging solidarities, this knowledge project is a blueprint for altering nature–society relations to establish an energy regime grounded in equity. “Solarity is the condition we inhabit as we struggle to make worlds and build futures out of the ruins of petrocapiatalism” (p.1). Solarity invites us to reconsider growth and relinquish expertise, instead opting for sufficiency and uncertainty. Solarpunking our way out of petroracial capitalist ruination will provoke states of indeterminacy while requiring relations of reciprocity and redistribution. Blink and we may have missed the radical solarities already taking root. The Collective highlights numerous feminist and decolonial solarities with different production relations that light the path forward. The Lubicon Lake Band of Alberta launched the 20.8-kilowatt Piitapan Solar Project, a shining example of Indigenous

energy sovereignty that strikes at the heart of tar sands extractivism (Sacred Earth Solar 2022). With beginner's mind, we are asked to unlearn from the growth-oriented politics of solar knowledge that reproduces dispossession and degradation, instead conceiving of abundance as balance and interconnection. As an example given of antiracist energy alternatives, Soulardarity near Detroit defied the utility company's energy deprivations by installing solar streetlights, cooperatively owned and operated by the Black victims of blackouts (Soulardarity 2022). Alternative solarities are not only possible; they arrive rapid and gasping.

Hope is abundant in these pages. Readers are electrified with ideas for equitable energy regimes, mirroring the excited electrons that ambulate to generate electricity in solar panels. However, often absent in this text is specificity. At the risk of becoming prescriptive, the After Oil Collective could have more precisely articulated the forms and function of decolonial and anticapitalist solarities. Passages can also become capacious, leaving rapt readers at times unmoored. The book establishes a near infinite scope that occasionally obscures insights by way of vague declarations. For solar power to rival fossil fuels, the Collective asserts that solidarity is required to achieve the requisite scale and celerity. Yet scalar biases perpetuate solar injustices presently (Sareen 2022), and the proliferation across disparate geographies inhabited by heterogenous populations sadly precludes transnational and intersectional solidarity movements at the moment. After a white-knuckled excursion through solar dystopias and utopias, the book throttles down at the end, imploring us to humbly fumble toward radical solarities. I would like to believe that embracing indeterminacy is not a clever cover for the authors' insecurities or uncertainties about the ideas therein. Indeed, failure may impede progress. But this much is clear: to ensure vibrant and abundant futures for all, it is imperative that we manifest redistributive and emancipatory solar interventions that are decolonial, anticapitalist, feminist, and antiracist. Let's be clear about the solarities we strive for. Dismantling must be accompanied by building; the seed must follow the hatchet. Minor critiques notwithstanding, this manifesto is a triumph for nurturing solarities unborn or barely breathing. "If there was ever a time for fire in the belly and a radical politics of hope, it is now" (Davis 2006: ix). We are ready for a radical

reorientation of solar relations. The After Oil Collective wields the torch and it is time we step out of the dark.

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