CRAFTING A WORK PERSONA IN 1970s PETROLEUM GEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Taking inspiration from a 1972 study by Allan Sekula that concerned everyday shifts in subjectivity among a set of industrial and technical workers, this paper looks at work persona production in petroleum geology, a profession at the centre of the global oil industries and oil capitalism. Persona production is part of how petroleum geologists explain themselves and their controversial work to one another, and how they manage individual celebrity within their expert community. Taking as its data source obituaries and death notices that circulated inside the profession over the course of the 1970s, the paper concentrates on a specific persona created by petroleum geologists as part of their ritualized mourning practices. Findings presented within the paper show that obituaries and death notices were used to collaboratively craft a work persona that is thoroughly disconnected from energy politics and controversy: the imagined figure of the petroleum geologist that emerges is someone who is rugged, righteous, loving, fraternal, and deeply connected to nature. The stakes of this research concern not only work personas and their histories, but also the material underpinnings of contemporary cultural production and ongoing debates over energy forms and futures.

KEY WORDS

Occupational culture, Oil, Work persona, Scientific communication, Energy Politics

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970s, before he was a renowned documentary photographer, filmmaker, and essayist, and before he had a long and storied career associated with the California Institute of the Arts (Valencia, Calif.), Allan Sekula (1951-2013) self-identified as a young performance or "action" artist. In his artistic practice, Sekula combined creative expression with site and process-specific activities—a technique that would never entirely leave his work despite its many changes over time. In the winter of 1972, Sekula made a black-and-white photographic study of a large aerospace facility in San Diego, California. Never formally titled, the study came to be known as Untitled Slide Sequence. According to Sekula, this particular project drew its intellectual inspiration from three sources: the concern with the relationship between work and everyday life among sociologists and social theorists (e.g., Erving Goffman, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber); the "social documentary" tradition within American photography and its major practitioners (e.g., Walker Evans, Dorthea Lange); and from radical theater and its provocateurs (e.g., Bertolt Brecht, Jean Genet) (Sekula and Risberg 236-51). Sekula's study involved the following: one late afternoon, the young artist crossed onto the grounds of a private aerospace

facility called General Dynamics Convair Division. Sticking close to the perimeter of the facility, Sekula positioned himself with a hand-held camera on the concrete pedestrian walkway that connected General Dynamics to the employee parking lot and the street. Every employee who worked at General Dynamics had to make use of that walkway to leave the company's property at the end of the workday. It was the only way of departing from the facility to the various beach and hillside neighborhoods that make up the San Diego area. Sekula photographed the workers as they streamed out of work en route to their cars.

In choosing that particular spot and time, Sekula ultimately produced a study of the facility's workers at the exact moment when they crossed over from being machinists, typists, clerks, secretaries, managers, and aerospace engineers to being something else: neighbors, family members, friends, strangers, and other types of quotidian social actors. Unlike Sekula's next project, *Aerospace Folktales* (1973), which had a much stronger narrative component (Sekula followed engineers from Lockheed Martin back to their homes and recorded them in their kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms as a means to make sense of them as social creatures), this first project at General Dynamics involved the young artist acting like a security camera—documenting the various aerospace workers from a fixed position. But after a short period of photographing the workers, Sekula was stopped by the facility's *actual* security system—human guards—and forced to leave the property (Sekula and Risberg 241). Sekula had never asked for permission to be there; he was engaged in unauthorized research or what might be called *tresspassitory ethnography*. This technique, however, allowed Sekula to capture an exceptionally intimate, unusual, and complex portrait of 1970s aerospace workers, and to capture some of the tensions between individuality and social standardization that so often mark cultures of work. Unlike the "lab studies" of scientists, technologists, and allied experts that came to be popularized that same decade, also by way of Southern California, Sekula's idiosyncratic approach allowed him to capture some of the relationships between the workers and their work without reducing his subjects to stock, one-dimensional figures that exist only in what might be called "9-to-5 time."

Inspired by Sekula's *Untitled Slide Sequence*, this paper focuses on a different set of 1970s workers and on a different kind of crossing over or transitional moment. It specifically looks at petroleum geologists—the people who work inside the oil industries and help sustain, though the extraction of materials internal to our planet, contemporary societies scattered across the surface of our world. Through a string of scientific, technical, and industrial processes, petroleum geologists search for and retrieve what eventually becomes the endless array of materials (e.g., plastics, gasoline, etc.) without which present-day life as currently constituted would instantly collapse in many places. General histories of petroleum geology have shown how petroleum geologists convinced oil companies of the potential for science to create wealth and value, as well as traced how work practices inside petroleum geology shifted from relatively crude forms of surface analysis to data-driven techniques of deep exploration and discovery (Owen). This paper focuses on the petroleum geologist as a scientist-subject. Specifically, it examines how petroleum geologists working in the 1970s crafted a collective work persona to make sense of their group self, to explain their controversial work to one another, and to manage individual celebrity within their community of scientific experts.

METHODS, SOURCES, SCOPE

To produce this study of persona production in 1970s petroleum geology, I took as my data source obituaries and death notices, a form of cultural record that other historians have used effectively to learn about the values and sensibilities of specific categories of actors or the "Zeitgeist" of pre-selected periods of time (See Hume; Fowler) but not, to my knowledge, to study occupational self-presentation and display. Although customarily written as singular remembrances of individual lives, obituaries and death notices can also function as something like a biographical "snapshot" or "portrait" of whole communities at exact chronological

moments when looked at in the aggregate. I focused on the obituaries and death notices (N=297) published in one of the leading English-language petroleum geology journals between 1970 and 1979: the American Association of Petroleum Geology's *AAPG Bulletin*, a peer-reviewed U.S. publication that adheres to the formal codes of a normative geoscience journal with proprietary industry investments (i.e., a journal that supplies knowledge to industry). The obituaries and death notices within the *AAPG Bulletin* are biographical works that are written by petroleum geologists about other petroleum geologists; they circulate inside the petroleum geology community as an event-specific practice of self-authoring and as a form of ritualized remembrance. What I discovered in carrying out this research is that the sources in question yield a trove of "open data," including data about intimate health issues, occupational risks, personal habits and interests outside of working life, character traits, and social relationships. Despite this diversity and range of data in the obituaries and death notices, the imagined figure of the scientist-subject that emerges from 1970s petroleum geology is heavily organized into a discernible persona: a romanticized, blameless, faith-driven man (over 99% of the memorials published in the 1970s profiled a male scientist) who works until the bitter end in what can be a dangerous field— a rugged man driven by a love of natural environments and by a strong sense of homosocial kinship. As a public self that circulated semi-privately only within the profession, the image of 1970s petroleum geologists that emerged from the pages of the *AAPG Bulletin* was one of a hardy, grounded, and companionable man who combined the morality of an altar boy with the muscular know-how of a boy scout. The question of whether this particular persona actually animated or currently animates scientific practices within petroleum geology exceeds the scope of the research and analysis presented here, as does the question of whether this persona actually affected or currently affects the material availability of energy resources. Instead, this paper first outlines the petroleum geologist persona as it came to be crafted throughout the 1970s within this specific set of records and then discusses what cultural work this persona performed within this particular scientific community.

Collaboratively Crafting a Work Persona Micropublicly

In the 1970s, the *AAPG Bulletin* ceremonially placed what the journal calls its "memorials" in the space following the original research papers and just before the "reviews" section that detailed recent publications in the geosciences. This positioning suggests that the memorials had a liminal or in-between status— they were personal, but at the same time still tied to professional practices. But each memorial was shorter than a formal research paper, making them closer in length (and appearance) to the journal's book reviews. And much like book reviews, the memorials were commonly organized around a stock formula, which was comprised of five general parts. The typical memorial began by announcing the death of the scientist in question, usually with a short opening paragraph that summarized the manner of dying. The various deaths recounted largely stemmed from illness and disease intermixed with some unexpected deaths by accident. Something else frequently included within this opening section was a longer physiological history of the scientist, providing intimate details about the subject's prior bouts with illness and injury. In the 1970s, heart attacks were reported as the dominant cause of unexpected death (e.g. Newcombe; Vogel; Blair et al.; Feruson; Carpenter and Patton; Crunk; Slocum; Caylor; Gow). In terms of accidental deaths, various helicopter crashes and plane crashes are mentioned, as well as car crashes and falls. Interestingly, a number of accidental deaths described within the memorials appear to have been work related. For instance, more than one helicopter or plane crash involved small aircraft traveling for the purposes of geological surveying or fieldwork (e.g., Reeves; Palmer; Nanz). According to one such memorial, "the cause remains speculative, but from analysis of crash-site debris, it appears that the helicopter hit a large boulder on the ridge, then tumbled hundreds of feet down a steep slope" (Mann et al. 1903).

The inclusion of these kinds of details, however, does not appear to have been a micropublic critique of the risky conditions within the profession of petroleum geology. The

profession's methods and practices are not explicitly criticized within the memorials that specifically document work-related accidents. Instead, such details are part of a larger "died-while-working" trope undergirding the memorials more generally, regardless of how the scientist in question actually died. Beyond work-related accidents, other examples of this trope include a geologist who "died with his lecture notes in his hand" (Lintz 1416); another one who "died with his boots on...still working on drilling deals in Utah and Wyoming" (Curry 2234); one who "saw the exciting results from the first line of data just before he was stricken" by "a massive cerebral hemorrhage" (Worzel 2192-94); and another who "suffered a severe heart attack" while "presenting a paper on his favorite topic" (Link et al. 1953). More than one geologist died at the field's major annual meeting or in close proximity to that meeting (e.g., Wissler; Mason et al.). In addition, more than one geologist is said to have died just before, or immediately following, the publication of new research (e.g., Houston and Boyd; Braunstein). These commemorations, as rituals operating just inside the personal lives of scientists but just outside their professional lives, were insistent on the centrality of professional identity even in this intensely vulnerable and intimate moment of death and dying. Not only did these memorials bring intimate and personal details into the profession within the pages of the journal, they also extended and embedded professional identities into the embodied lives of the scientists.

After announcing the death, the typical memorial then offered a short account of the individual's upbringing. A major theme that emerges across the memorials from the 1970s is religion. Examples include a geologist described as having been raised by "a school teacher turned pastor" (Armstrong 1573); one described as "the son of a Baptist minister" (Keller 1576); and another as "the son of a Methodist clergyman" (Conselman, "Heroy" 2537). Along these same lines, many of the dead petroleum geologists are said to have maintained a close relationship with a denomination of the Christian church over the course of their lifetimes and scientific careers. Examples include a geologist described as having lived dutifully by "Christian principles" that "endeared him to all" (Rouse 601); one described as having been "First and foremost…truly a Christian" (Dickey 1543); and another remembered for his "Christian virtues," which were "evident in his decisions and actions" (Mackey 2165). One geologist was a "regular attendant at [church] services when not in the field" (Kirk 170). Another geologist is described as having used a "'country preacher' style" when giving talks at "local, regional, and national geologic societies" (Braunstein 2301). Thus, in this liminal space just inside the personal and just outside the professional, petroleum geologists imbued themselves with a sense of godly purpose and piety. The scientists represented themselves as having lived mission-driven lives in the service of something larger than oil companies, something divine and otherworldly. What petroleum geologists do for a living is not only rooted in morality, but also perhaps directed and sanctioned by incontrovertible forces, according to the representational logic of these tributes.

The third part of a typical memorial was directly informed by instructions that were given by the *AAPG Bulletin*, which expressly asked authors to emphasize the subject's contributions to the field of petroleum geology. The *Bulletin* provided the following guidelines:

> Memorials fittingly record the loss of an Association member by death and should include a good glossy photograph of the deceased, with a short caption generally limited to the name. The high cost of printing and an increasing number of memorials have made it necessary to restrict the length to 500 words. A memorial should stress particularly the member's professional contribution to geology. (Wengerd 1856)

These instructions were typically enacted by listing what oil companies, universities, and consultancies had employed the scientist in question; by noting any major oil discoveries; and by identifying people's major research areas. Here, the petroleum geologist's life was squarely reckoned as a professional life. In no way were the memorials devoid of occupational content.

Instead, occupational content was sandwiched inside a larger rendering that situated workplace identity as a central component of a broader selfhood.

Following the public re-telling of the deceased's employment history, the fourth component of the typical memorial described the person's temperament, character, and personality. In doing so, the memorials reveal what traits were valued, at least micropublicly, within this particular scientific community. Scientists who were generous, curious, sympathetic to others, and quiet were particularly well regarded. The resulting effect is that the petroleum geologists are made to appear as not only helpful, but also as non-intrusive. The extractive, nature-altering character of their everyday scientific work is submerged into an image of affability, benignity, and nurturing. In addition to discussing the person's character and temperament, this section of the typical memorial catalogued the person's hobbies and interests outside of work. The bulk of the hobbies mentioned in the 1970s pertain to the outdoors. Highly cited activities include fishing, hunting, nature photography, camping, backpacking, hiking, and bicycling. Put simply: there was a collective attraction to and valuation of "outdoors" that bridged the professional and personal practices of self within this particular community of scientific workers. The scientists are presented as land protectors, stewards, and shepherds in a manner that ultimately obfuscates just how much of their professional work is tied to probing, removing, wresting, drilling, and draining. The profusion of details describing the salutary and reciprocal ties between the scientist and his natural environment verge on cliché: one geologist is described as having "loved the outdoors" and to have "regularly supplied visiting friends with oranges and grapefruits from his yard" (Borden 1793), while another is remembered for having had his own private property "dedicated and posted as an official tree farm" due to his "passion for the outdoors" and to "preserve the beauty of his mountain environment" (Verville 1225). In a similar manner, another geologist is described as having had "an intense interest in the outdoors and wildlife, and in the ranch which he loved. He was a member of the Audubon Society, a proponent of strict land management, and a self-taught expert on feed grasses" (Begeman 128). Another geologist is remembered for having taught others about "the pleasures of nature's gifts—and of the importance of treating those gifts with reverence and responsibility" (McCulloh 119). According to their memorials, petroleum geologists do not work in a controversial extractive industry lurking deep within oil capitalism and within larger debates and contestations over how people and the planet should and can interact but, instead, work in and through an embodied sense of love, closeness, and connectedness with nature.

The typical memorial then closed with a short list of the person's surviving family members, and with a direct expression of feeling on the part of the individual author(s) who researched, composed, and published the account. These expressions of feeling are often quite simple and straightforward. As expected, highly cited feelings include "a sense of deep personal loss" and "sadness" as well as "gratitude" and "regret." Other times, however, the feelings expressed appear more complicated and even awkward—due in part, perhaps, to the micropublic form of feeling in which the person writing the memorial was engaged. These expressions of feeling were constrained by the particular modes of masculinity that were privileged within the profession. Such expressions were also constrained by the fact of their appearance within one of the field's major scientific and technical journals. It also seems reasonable to presume that some of the dead scientists might have had contested legacies or might have been part of on-going controversies within the profession. Questions of who to remember and how to remember them were likely connected to occupational politics within the field. Another complicating factor was the demographics of the profession. With the exception of just one instance— a memorial published for micropaleontologist Esther Richards Applin (Maher 596-7)— every memorial published in the *AAPG Bulletin* during the 1970s involved a man writing about another man. This homogeneity within the profession seems to have produced specific effects on the field's grieving practices and collective self-authorings, exacerbating what was perhaps an already uncomfortable exercise. One scientist writes: "It is difficult to write objectively…because to know Erich well was to find oneself personally

intrigued by his character and personality" (Taylor 2141). Speaking of a different petroleum geologist in strikingly similar terms, another scientist writes: "It is hard to write objectively…for one inevitably becomes emotionally involved with the man's character and personality" (Penn 2470). According to yet another memorial: "Men don't usually think or speak of 'loving' other men, but in [this] case the word comes very close— certainly we were awfully, awfully fond of him" (Conselman, "Tompkins" 1511).

DISCUSSION

In the provocative photographic study that Allan Sekula produced of 1970s aerospace workers leaving their worksite (and shedding their work personas) at the end of an ordinary workday, Sekula reminds us that cultures of expert work fundamentally hinge on larger circulations of people moving into and out of their workplace selves. Sekula's larger argument was that making critical sense of work and labour formations requires starting with the knowledge that workplace cultures are sites where professional and extra-professional identities collide and intermix, even in scientific, technical, and industrial fields that frequently have a pretext of depersonalization. The nearly 300 memorials published by the *AAPG Bulletin* in the 1970s offer a collective portrait of petroleum geologists in their own words, self-authorings, created in the aftermath of a specific category of event (death) and during a moment of tremendous significance for petroleum geology as a field. Oil had seeped deeply into American life by the 1970s. Looking for oil was a major industry unto itself. Oil also figured heavily in other industries and within everyday culture. By 1970, a list of the ten largest U.S. corporations included three oil companies; it also included three automobile manufacturers (Pursell 106) whose technological makings were entirely reliant on petroleum and encouraged further petroleum usage. Oil was also important to what were, at the time, still new and emerging ideas and industries. For example, one of the key actors within the early history of biotechnology was a lab-made microorganism that could break down oil spills. Efforts in the 1970s to gain patent rights to that specific, oil-related organism (i.e. to make it a marketable commodity) played a significant role in establishing the legal framework for what would become, in the 1980s and 1990s, the biotechnology sector (Rajan 6). In this regard, oil figured heavily within efforts to make and commodify new kinds of life. It was also crucial to the advent of personal computers and network technologies. One of the earliest U.S. microchip manufacturers, the firm Texas Instruments (TI), began as a maker of geodetic instruments used for the exploration of oil (Chandler 30). Likewise, some the earliest efforts to make computers interlink and network involved experts who had previously worked on the layout of oil pipelines (Abbate 59). Amid these developments, the worldwide environmental movement and the 1973-74 oil crisis spurred widespread critique of oil companies (Merrill). It also led to the cultural revival of a "running out of oil" discourse that had first surfaced in the early twentieth century (Olien and Olien 119-140). By the 1970s, Americans had come to perceive themselves as confronting new types of material limits (Bailey and Farber 4). Oil was at the centre of many such discussions, and therefore petroleum geologists were too.

The particular work persona crafted by petroleum geologists in the 1970s through their obituaries and death notices was certainly not a simple reaction to these broader events and developments, yet neither can this specific work persona be conceptualized as something wholly uninformed by wider currents of culture and politics. The persona that emerges from obituaries and death notices in 1970s petroleum geology expressly, even aggressively, distanced petroleum geologists from any external controversy; it conjured an image of themselves, for themselves, by themselves that thoroughly, even theatrically, removed the everyday work of petroleum geologists from energy politics, from debates about oil dependency, and from critiques of global economies predicated on mass extraction. But this particular persona also distanced petroleum geologists from the cycles of dependency and interdependency that would have knowingly rested on their shoulders. People living in the 1970s, as now, needed petroleum geologists. Rather than create a persona that acknowledged

the trickiness of their footing in society, and the stickiness of their social positioning in a world wedded to oil and troubled by its future, what petroleum geologists created instead, through mourning in print, was a remarkably unified front or screen that adhered to repetition and rhetorical simplicity: a persona organized around overlooking and assuaging tensions, something square and safe and straight, something likeable-by-design, non-threatening, agreeable, and comforting.

This particular persona also seems to have helped manage and mitigate any celebrification within the profession. It enfolded everyone, even stars, into what looks to have functioned as a group standard, social template, or ideal. One interpretation is that petroleum geology was simply less oriented around, or willing to tolerate, celebrities within their profession in the manner of, say, astronomy (e.g., Edwin Hubble, Carl Sagan), biomedicine (e.g., Jonas Salk), physics (e.g., Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking), and the like. But something else seems to have been accomplished as well. The effect of this particular persona appears, in retrospect, as almost protective in its logic(s): no single scientist is made famous or unique enough to be blamable for what petroleum geologists do. Individual identities are absorbed back into a larger figuration that remains difficult to pick apart and probe in terms of individual complicity; distinctions between the scientists are muted and muddied by the overwhelming power of the persona and its rote, formulaic telling and retelling.

These ritualized, scripted forms of mourning in print extended professional commitments into the realm of the personal and physiological all while extending the personal and physiological into the pages of an otherwise technical publication. The typical memorial published in the *AAPG Bulletin* in the 1970s performed a valuing of a specific version of the scientist-subject: stoic, quiet, attached to landscapes, working to the bitter end, and driven by faith, brotherhood, kinship, and environmental care. They were reckonings of a scientist-subject working in oil that accounted for his life as godly, fraternal, and on the side of nature. In them, petroleum geologists forged themselves as an "imagined community" of more-than professionals, and collaboratively crafted a work persona grounded in valor and virtue—despite working in what, for many outsiders, was and still is a controversial extractive industry with dubious claims to any higher purpose beyond enabling oil capitalism.

In addition to the repetition and simplicity built into the texts, the memorials reveal a scientific community marked by, or at least invested in projecting, a tremendous level of homogeneity, not just in terms of gender. The memorials also reveal (or perform) a scientific community marked by remarkable degrees of whiteness, heterosexuality, Christianity, and bourgeois values. To look, then, at obituaries and death notices from 1970s petroleum geology is to engage with a performance of dominant culture, in anthropological or sociological terms, but also to engage with a culture of dominance— one wholly organized around finding and retrieving oil, extracting something from the planet so that it can be processed and monetized. But to look at these notices is also to engage with science as a service: a community of experts working on-demand in a "boom and bust" industry that has not always appreciated scientists and their abilities to create wealth and value. Along these same lines, a complex form of co-dependency almost certainly informed how 1970s petroleum geologists marked the passing of life. What an "altar boy" crossed with a "boy scout" ends up sounding like, both then and now, as a manufactured presentation of self, is a figure grounded in obedience, protocol, duty, and selflessness (i.e., someone worth knowing, someone worth trusting, and someone worth employing).

Through the *AAPG Bulletin*, petroleum geologists that died in the 1970s each departed in roughly the same way, but also did so as someone for whom "9-to-5 time" was but one fraction of a larger social, psychological, and interpersonal repertoire. Each of the individual subjects captured within the *AAPG* memorials may have worked in the business of oil, but each was also far more than merely an oil worker. Thus, a key part of how petroleum geologists collectively made sense of their world and work was by putting into words and performing this particular

surplus of subjectivity, and by diligently documenting these extra-professional aspects of their lives. In these memorials, petroleum geologists clearly wanted to know themselves as more than petroleum geologists, and they worked hard through awkwardness and feelings to conjure themselves as more than professional workers, albeit along very particular scripts, boundaries, and guidelines. The scientists represented themselves as multi-dimensional scientist citizens with families, hobbies, faith, leisure pursuits, and avocations, in addition to (if not surmounting) their identities as petroleum geologists. At the centre of oil capitalism and oil science, according to petroleum geologists working (and dying) in the 1970s, was a fleshy, embodied economy of homosocial and person-planet attachments that continuously crisscrossed work-life divides and transcended the economy of tools, instruments, ideas, theories, debates, controversies, facts, and counter-facts that populated their "9-to-5 time."

Conclusion

Work personas vary. They can be individual or collective. They can also be ongoing— requiring continuous maintenance and stewardship— or they can be event-specific, one-off, periodic. For instance, a promotion at work might lead someone to rework the persona they coordinate on social media platforms. A company-wide reorganization might spur an in-house project team to present themselves and their work in new ways, or return to old ways, depending on perceived management preferences— using reports, presentations, websites, and enterprise software platforms to make a new mask or resurrect an old one. On the other end of the spectrum, a long-time executive might leave a personal website unchanged for years, broadcasting the same travel photos and professional development certificates as the day she began, broadcasting a type of consistency, reliability, evenness.

This paper looked at one type of work persona production, with a focus on 1970s petroleum geology and on practices of collective self-authoring in the wake of death within a community of scientific experts. While individual petroleum geologists crafted and managed individual personas, as well as other collective personas (at conferences, annual meetings, etc.), the routine inclusion of obituaries and death notices in one of the profession's major scientific and technical journals provided an opportunity for petroleum geologists to write about themselves to themselves. Writing and publishing memorials allowed petroleum geologists to engage in self-presentation and self-authoring within a relatively managed access environment (i.e., semi-privately, although not in any official sense) and, in doing so, the scientists in question inadvertently shared a significant amount about how they wanted to view themselves. Several things make this case of work persona production worth adding to the growing literature on personas and self-display. For starters, this paper provided an example involving a uniquely controversial group of workers. Today, petroleum geologists continue to work at the heart of the oil industries and thus in the midst of messy debates about hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), and at the centre of controversies surrounding major oil spills and oil transport methods such as multinational pipelines. Depending on one's views about the relationship between oil and recent U.S. war-making, American petroleum geologists also arguably work deep inside U.S. geopolitical strategy. Looking, then, at when and how petroleum geologists make sense of themselves and at how they engage in self-display among themselves opens up new possibilities for critically engaging with a set of workers who hold a considerable amount of quiet power. What new conversations might be possible about energy forms and futures were ardent critics of oil capitalism and oil-driven war-making to confront the surreal reality of how petroleum geologists wish to be viewed and view themselves?

Petroleum geology also has a unique significance within our socio-material world. Regardless of one's environmental politics or personal thoughts about energy forms and futures, what petroleum geologists do has the ability to impact "downstream," across space and time, cultural production elsewhere, including practices of self-display and persona production in other domains: nail polish, mascara, and hair gel each contain petroleum products, and cloud-

based software services underpinning many social media platforms run on very real energy grids. Indeed, one of the reasons why our world "works" the way it does, and one of the reasons that persona production has found the material means to intensify and multiply across social domains, is because of who petroleum geologists are, what they do, and how they engage in individual and aggregate sense-making in not just their field sites and labs, but also in sites like living rooms, backyards, churches, hospital emergency rooms, and funeral parlors. The case of petroleum geologists reminds us that work personas are not always about work alone and that work personas in one social domain have the ability to affect other social domains.

Directions for future research might include broadening the temporal scope of this paper to chart whether and how the imaginal figure crafted by 1970s petroleum geologists as part of their group mourning ritual(s) has changed or stayed consistent over time. It would also be fruitful to map commonalities and differences between the self-display tactics that manifest in petroleum geology and those that manifest in other occupational realms, both around mourning but also around other key moments of individual and group sense-making. Doing so would further illuminate what is or is not novel about petroleum geologists, and potentially reveal broader cultural patterns around work and workplace persona production. In addition, some important and unique questions that arise from this work are whether and how persona production affects resource availabilities. The material underpinnings of contemporary life are created in part with the help of a human infrastructure involving the people who find and retrieve, for a living, the material(s) in question. As Allan Sekula pointed out more than forty years ago, expert work is carried out by people who toggle back and forth between expert and lay subject positions, not by people who live, work, and die trapped in "9-to-5 time." In the case of petroleum geology, routinely inhabiting a figuration something between an "altar boy" and a "boy scout," at least micropublicly, may in fact be a critical component to how petroleum geology and oil capitalism function, persist, and prosper.

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