

SUBTERRANEAN ESTATES

Life Worlds of Oil and Gas

EDITED BY

Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason, and Michael Watts

Cornell University Press
Ithaca and London

from the cargo far exceed in value what is realized in the commodity itself (for Marx this would be the differential immateriality in materiality). The notion of speed we can derive from oil's physical qualities, the derivatives from oil, stand in sharp contrast to the ab-solution of financialization, the transaction of oil derivatives. In fact, however, these velocities stick to one another, whatever the degree of relative autonomy, and we need to think them together to undo the inevitabilities of their logic, which itself is determinate in the pressing forms of the political and economic that is their solution.

Only 150 years ago Rockefeller's "trust" was in monopolizing refining capacity because of a capitalist fear of the price effects of overabundant supply. That this oil standard has not left the major oil companies is easy to gainsay despite the fact that the specter of diminishing reserves before increased demand is a formula for abundant profit. Rather than simply recount these facts, the remarks offered here seek to elaborate the relationship of oil to modernity by reading its properties as themselves symptoms of the antinomy modernity represents. But is this not in itself an example of subreption whereby what is constitutive of oil is confused with modernity's calibration of things in themselves?

Oil's role in viscosity and velocity does not yield philosophical principles as such but the abstraction of both does throw light on the socio-economic inertia that is oil's own categorical imperative in the modern era. The philosophical discourses of speed, of which Virilio's work is a prescient example, are vital in understanding manifestations of acceleration for the social. Yet viscosity is also crucial in this regard, not because of its function as a mere variable of speed's efficiency but because it exists as a conceptual clue to the challenges facing attempts to think differently in the face of modernity's compulsions. At this level, such an approach is a necessary subreption when considering the metaphysical and theological niceties of oil as the dominant commodity of our time. For such reflections to be more than that would require not just an elaboration of the philosophical foundations of viscosity beyond its illusion for modernity but a recognition of its material base for the sublation of modernity in general. It is at that point that any standard oil narrative is transformed.

Chapter 3

Deep Oil and Deep Culture in the Russian Urals

Douglas Rogers, Yale University

Oil as a material substance has a great many qualities. It is flammable. It can be "light" or "heavy" depending on viscosity and "sweet" or "sour" depending on sulfur content. It is liquid and mobile—"fluid and fugitive," as this volume's editors put it. Which of oil's many "bundled" (Keane 2003) material qualities takes on broader social and cultural significance varies tremendously with time and place and with scale of analysis.¹ It is a quite different thing, that is, to encounter the materiality of oil in the bright gas flares of the Niger Delta than at the corner gas station; oil is one thing in the stickiness of hot asphalt and quite another in the sterile spaces of a corporate laboratory. To attend closely to the social and cultural lives of these many qualities of oil is to grasp some of the fine grains of how oil can

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1. By *materiality*, I mean the sensuous and phenomenal qualities of things and their implication in human social and cultural life, broadly understood, and my approach to this topic derives from anthropologists' use of Peircian semiotics. See Keane 2003 and 2007 for especially instructive expositions that have influenced my approach and Munn 1986 and Meneley 2008 for analyses of the general sort that I pursue here. Rogers 2012 extends this argument to the gas industry and gas pipeline infrastructures in the Perm Region.

come to anchor and transform multiple, overlapping ways of life (see both Huber and Hitchcock, this volume).

A few examples illustrate the range of possibilities. In late 1970s Nigeria, for instance, the blackness of oil ("black gold") became part of the same "matrix of value transformations" (Apter 2005, 83) as another sense of blackness: pan-African and diasporic black culture promoted through the state sponsorship of spectacular festivals. For Peter Hitchcock, it is not oil's blackness but its viscosity that is most notable, providing a route into theorizing oil as one of the modern world's most confounding yet instructive substances: "If modernity is velocity there is something viscous inhibiting and contradicting the revolutions its speed inspires. And an appropriate name for this dialectic is oil" (this volume). In a quite different vein, Timothy Mitchell argues that the "fluid and transportable properties" (2011, 44) of oil as compared with those of coal played a crucial role in the making of twentieth-century democratic politics and, indeed, in the construction of the networks and kinds of knowledge that continue to organize the global political economy. The relevant materialities extend to the oil industry's infrastructure as well: Andrew Barry shows how the material failures of the coating on a stretch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline became "signs of the state of relations between government and the oil business" (2010, 105, and this volume) in the European Union.

In this chapter, I trace the way in which still another quality of oil—its subsoil depth—rose to social, political, and cultural prominence in the Russian Perm Region in the early 2000s. The Perm Region had been a major oil-producing region of the Soviet Union, especially between the 1950s and the 1970s, but its oil output was in precipitous decline by the end of the Soviet period in 1991. Rising global oil prices and the increasing centrality of natural resources to the Russian economy brought Perm's regional oil industry back to prominence in the late 1990s and 2000s, reincarnated as a subsidiary of Russia's largest private oil company, Lukoil. A resurgence of the oil economy also brought more and greater inequality to the Perm Region as a whole, and it did so precisely as Russians of all social stations were seeking new moorings in the tumultuous "transition" from socialism. It was in this context that talk about the depth of regional oil deposits began to proliferate, and to rub up against talk about depth of another sort: the historical depth attributed to regional cultures.

Oil and Culture: The Depths of Postsocialism

In 2009, the small city of Lys'va, southeast of Perm, staged a yearlong celebration of local history and culture under the slogan "Lys'va—A Deposit of Culture." *Mestorozhdenie* (deposit, literally birthplace) is a term used for underground oil and gas reservoirs; it sounds odd, yet certainly

intelligible, when applied to culture. Significantly, the festival received some of its funding from Lukoil-Perm, which had for several years been on a concerted campaign—in the media, in its grants for social and cultural programs, and in much of its promotional material—to associate itself with traditional cultural ways of life of the Perm Region's oil-producing districts. The association of oil deposits and local culture through the shared quality of depth, I will suggest, can be traced fairly precisely to a broad range of corporate initiatives that worked to deflect critiques of the company by linking oil deposits pumped by Lukoil-Perm—a corporation registered in 1996—to all of the historical depth and authenticity that "culture" in the context of a folklore-heavy festival can impart.

Although the companionability of oil and culture as things sharing the quality of depth was perhaps most succinctly on display in Lys'va's awkward celebratory slogan in 2009, it was hardly unfamiliar to residents of the Perm Region. Beginning in 2002, for instance, Lukoil-Perm sponsored a major festival called "Historical Cities of the Kama River Region." The festival moved among oil-producing districts of the Perm Region each year, fostering local cultural awareness and gathering specialists in the interest of reviving local handicraft production and sale. Exhibits about local oil production—always emphasizing geological depth and the infrastructural technologies used to access it—began to crop up in regional history museums. Even historical exhibits not related to oil often bore Lukoil-Perm's name, logo, and generous sponsorship, including a massive one in the Il'inskii district dedicated to the Stroganov landholding family, masters of the Permian lands in the imperial period.

Indeed, the Stroganov era was recent by comparison to some of the historical depths with which Lukoil-Perm associated itself. In 2009, the company issued an official corporate history entitled *Perm'skii period: Vagit Alekperov i ego komanda* (The Permian period: Vagit Alekperov and his team; see also Neroslov 2009). The title plays on the Permian geological period (the last period of the Paleozoic era) that, as every local schoolchild knows, shares its name with the Perm Region. By linking the Paleozoic to the postsocialist era, the book's title nicely encapsulates its overall goal: inserting Lukoil-Perm as inextricably as possible into the historical, economic, political, and cultural fabric of the Perm Region. Indeed, it projected the company's Permian qualities back to a geological time when the earth's oil deposits were still forming: deep oil and deep culture.

Things from the depths—and the quality of depth more generally—were, to be sure, central to aspects of the Russian postsocialist experience before Lukoil-Perm arrived on the scene, in troubled transitional times when yearlong celebrations of culture were far from most people's minds. Former collective-farm workers I knew often joked about digging up and putting to use the items their great-grandparents had buried rather than allowing them to be collectivized in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Not

long after the end of socialist regimes, phalanxes of dead bodies literally and figuratively emerged from the ground to play a role in struggles over history, land, and political power at all levels (Verdery 1999). As they confronted new uses for money and new kinds of commodities, many Russians agonized over the surfaces and deeper essences of things, finding in this distinction a rich language with which to apprehend and navigate a variety of social and cultural transformations (Lemon 1998). Depth also featured prominently in the proliferating talk about the Russian soul so evocatively traced by Dale Pesmen (2000). In such talk, invocations of soul's depth were closely linked to widely circulating stereotypes of Russian national character and distinctiveness: the deeper the soul, the more authentic, the more authoritative, the more Russian.

That "culture" can be treated as an object with qualities such as depth is a common enough phenomenon in conditions of modernity (e.g., Handler 1988), and this process assumed a particular shape in the socialist project and its aftermath. As Bruce Grant put it in his study of the Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island, culture in the Soviet Union was "something to be produced, invented, constructed, and reconstructed" (1995, 11). After a century of such projects that whipsawed between framing Nivkhi culture as socialism's Other and as socialism's exemplar, between painting "their" culture as deep past and bright future, the Nivkhi whom Grant knew saw themselves as living among ruins—crumbled, discredited, meaningless bits of objectified and discarded culture. Much the same could be said of the 1990s state of cultural construction in the Perm Region.

The association of deep oil and deep culture in the Perm Region was made in the 2000s out of building blocks—or ruins—present in the first postsocialist decade. But, as I shall show, it took a capitalist corporation to create the conditions under which an acquaintance of mine could respond to my news that I had just come from a folk-handicrafts exhibition sponsored by Lukoil-Perm with the comment, "Of course—where there are folk handicrafts, there is Lukoil." Her smile, like the minor awkwardness of the slogan "Lys'va—A Deposit of Culture," points to the recently cobbled-together nature of this relationship.²

Corporate Critique

In drawing attention to oil's depth, Lukoil-Perm sought to deemphasize some other qualities of oil that were, in the early 2000s, far more present

2. Such links between geological formations and imaginations of community have long been noted in the literature on mining (e.g., Ferry 2005), in which they often serve as ways to counter or divert corporate strategies. In the cases I explore, corporations themselves are forging these links at substantial remove from local experience at the point of extraction and then placing them at the center of CST programs.

in the imaginations of residents of the region—and far more troublesome to the corporation. The first of these predates Lukoil's arrival in the Perm Region but occupies an enormous place in the regional imagination. In 1987, in the early days of glasnost, a remarkable article appeared in *Evening Perm*, one of several Communist Party newspapers. Called "Clouds Overhead," the article was a public indictment—the first of its kind—of Perm's oil refinery, Permneftorgsintez, for systematically failing to prevent oil spills and harmful emissions that posed a major health risk to a significant part of the city. This was not news to residents—whose eyes had long been watering—but the public airing of the matter in a long series of replies and correspondence published by *Evening Perm* was a signal event that placed the potentially harmful qualities of oil at the very center of regional imaginations. Over two decades later, long after Lukoil acquired the refinery in the early 1990s, "Clouds Overhead," with its emphasis on the toxic qualities of oil, was still recalled as the opening wedge of the end of socialism in the Perm Region.

A second widely discussed quality of oil when Lukoil began operations in the Perm Region was its convertibility into money. That oil as substance is transformable not only into other substances at refineries but also into massive wealth is a widely shared popular view (see Golden Timsar, Guyer, and Gelber chapters, this volume), but it was not so during the Soviet period. Despite the overall heavy reliance of the Soviet economy on oil exports, the workings of the socialist mode of production and central planning meant that oil towns and districts in the Perm Region never saw capitalist oil booms or their associated inequalities. In the post-Soviet period, both oil as substance and its associated infrastructure were old and familiar, but oil's convertibility into massive wealth was new. It was linked to still another important aspect of oil: its ownership.

At the national level, Lukoil's main corporate structures and early leadership emerged from the Soviet Ministry of Oil and Gas and the insiders' networks commanded by Vagit Alekperov, former deputy minister of oil and gas and president of Lukoil since 1991. The Perm Region, with its old Soviet oil fields and a major refinery, was not originally part of Lukoil's holdings. Alekperov and his team in Moscow began to take an interest in Perm's oil only in the mid-1990s, as part of a concerted effort to build a vertically integrated oil company. Lukoil's efforts to gain control of the Perm Region's oil industry, however, quickly became tied up with notions of regional belonging and identity. In the concluding section of a long article summing up the competition among Moscow- and Perm-based oligarchs for control over Permneft, the central Perm newspaper *Capital Weekly* lamented, "and now who will determine where Permian oil will flow?" (1995, 2).

It is worth pausing over "Permian oil," a phrase that still resonated when I mentioned it to friends over a decade later. The invocation of, and

worry over, oil's Permian characteristics in the context of an impending corporate takeover by a Moscow-based company indicates some of the ways in which oil began to be associated with regional identity in the Perm Region after socialism. At this point, oil's Permian qualities—its link to something distinctive about regional ways of life—constituted an element of a simmering critique of a corporation, a version of the widespread and highly visible critiques of oligarchs, “new Russians,” and social stratification in general as threats to existing communities of various shapes and sizes (see, e.g., Humphrey 2002).

In her analysis of the Egbesu warriors of Niger Delta, Golden Timsar (this volume) attends carefully to the material and symbolic terrains on which youths' armed resistance against the oil industry and its supporters in the Nigerian state apparatus play out. To be sure, the clouds, fabrics, rivers, and other materials and transformations—both visible and invisible—that Golden Timsar describes have very different local cultural histories than those in Russia, and they have been far more often linked to brute physical violence than their analogues in the Perm Region. Yet, read together, these accounts of the Niger Delta and the Russian Urals point to some common ways in which oil manifests itself materially in the making and contestation of ways of life—in clouds, rain, soil, skin, and bodies as much as in gas tanks or bank accounts. In the Perm Region as in the Niger Delta, these configurations of “petrolic semiosis” (Appel, Mason, and Watts, introduction to this volume) challenge corporate projects. In turn, they demand corporate responses.

Indeed, the ecological problems associated with Perm's refinery in the perestroika period, coupled with the articulation of the Permian qualities of oil in the 1990s and early 2000s, became impossible for those making deals at the commanding heights of the Russian economy to ignore. When Moscow-based Lukoil acquired Permneft in 1996, it was eminently clear that one of Lukoil-Perm's early challenges would be countering the widespread impression that both Permian resources and aspects of regional particularity had just been expropriated to Moscow. Although not by pre-arranged plan, depth featured centrally in the company's emergent efforts.

Fixing Signs: Corporate Response as New Material Politics

One of Lukoil-Perm's responses to the critiques circulating in the Perm Region—an aspect of what Benson and Kirsch (2010) classify as the “engagement” stage of corporate response to critique—was to create a Connections with Society Division tasked with public relations, government relations, and the development of what, with one eye on Western oil companies, it would soon begin calling “corporate social responsibility”

(CSR).³ To run the Connections with Society Division, Lukoil-Perm executives hired well-connected players from the region's Soviet-era networks, including former high-level party members from the region's respected arms factories. The skilled networkers of the region's old factory elite were, that is, morphing into the skilled networkers of the region's new oil elite. They, in turn, looked to experts in cultural construction.

I first met Oleg Leonidovich Kut'ev when he worked as a specialist in the Perm Region's Department of Culture in the early 2000s. I quickly learned that, in addition to being an accomplished ethnographer, local historian, and museum specialist, he was a quintessential networker and fixer, and his jovial stories of how impossible Soviet and post-Soviet shortages could be transformed into bounty—cultural and otherwise—served as important background for an article I wrote on the topic (Rogers 2006). In 2003, Oleg Leonidovich left the Department of Culture to take up a new position in the Connections with Society Division at Lukoil-Perm, where he helped to oversee the corporation's rapidly expanding grant competitions for social and cultural projects.⁴

Scholars of socialist and postsocialist societies in transition have paid ample attention to fixers and operators like Oleg Leonidovich and his superiors in Lukoil-Perm's Connections with Society Division (e.g., Ledeneva 2006). Transplanted into the world of corporate capitalism, I suggest, these figures have often devoted their skills to resignifying the meanings of material objects as much as to facilitating business deals. For this is what Oleg Leonidovich did, now in oil-boom conditions of almost unimaginable plenty rather than the socialist and postsocialist shortage to which he was accustomed. In the four years he worked at Lukoil-Perm, the new association between the depth of oil and the depth of culture was, in significant part, forged by Oleg Leonidovich and the networks he facilitated: in the grants for local culture he helped write and award, in the museums he helped build, in the festivals he helped organize, and in the ways all of this reshaped the politics of the Perm Region's oil-producing districts. The move was, in fact, a double one: emphasizing the geological depth of oil beneath the region as against toxicity and convertibility into wealth and, through omnipresent sponsorship, seeking to borrow the authority

3. On the recent anthropology of corporations and corporate social technologies, see, e.g. Welker 2009; Welker, Partridge, and Hardin 2011; Rajak 2011; and Bensen and Kirsch 2010; in the oil industry more specifically, see Shever 2008, 2010.

4. The excerpted portions of my conversations with O.L. Kut'ev were conducted “on the record,” and he was fully aware that I expected to quote them in a study of corporate involvement in social and cultural projects. Lukoil-Perm also made significant contributions to other sorts of projects, including the construction of schools and hospitals, but the Connections with Society Division was most often concerned with promoting and projecting the company's cultural work.

and legitimacy that might be associated with the depth of another object: culture.

Culture, that is, also had to be revived from its post-Soviet ruins and repurposed in a new position of authority; in the Perm Region in the early 2000s, Lukoil-Perm's CSR projects were the primary vehicles for this revival, at that point far outstripping the efforts of the regional state apparatus. Indeed, the opportunity to revive culture—rather than any corporate strategy or endorsement of Russia's nouveaux riches—drew Oleg Leonidovich to his new job. As we walked through his hometown of Il'inskii with a mutual friend in 2008, Oleg Leonidovich was greeted solicitously at nearly every turn. He answered questions about when the library's most recent batch of construction materials would be appearing and inquired how sales were going at the folk arts and crafts center (founded with support from Lukoil-Perm). The town priest eagerly showed us the most recent renovations to his church, also supported in part by a grant from Lukoil-Perm. Our tour of the new regional-studies museum—the place of Oleg Leonidovich's first job as a young man—revealed expensive glass cases, spotlights, and video screens that, I was told by our tour guide, had begun to win federal awards. Indeed, perhaps the most significant grant-funded addition to Il'inskii has been this newly renovated and expanded sixteen-hundred-square-meter regional studies museum dedicated to the famous Stroganovs, whose large family estates in tsarist-era Perm Province were administered from offices in Il'inskii.

As a complement to the new regional studies museum, Oleg Leonidovich published a book to commemorate the town's 425th anniversary in 2004. *Il'inskii: Stranitsy istorii* (Il'inskii: Pages of history; see also Kut'ev 2004) charts the town's beginning in the prerevolutionary period and concludes with a chapter on "Il'inskii's Big Oil," an extensive account of the geology and labor history of oil production in the Il'inskii district. This book sought to accomplish much the same work as the official Lukoil-Perm history *Permiskii period*, mentioned above, but at a district rather than regional level. The "Permian" qualities of oil that were featured in the critique of Lukoil-Perm as a corporation in the 1990s were, a decade later, redeployed in a much different way through CSR: Permian oil and Il'inskii's oil became chapters in the recounting of the best and deepest of regional and local cultural traditions.

Il'inskii was perhaps especially fortunate under the patronage of Oleg Leonidovich, a native son, but it was not atypical of the districts of the Perm Region where Lukoil-Perm operated production and refining facilities. At a 2005 ceremony awarding grants, the director of Lukoil-Perm lauded a "virtual museum" about the Stroganovs for presenting the "deep traditions and unique culture of the Perm Region." The citation for a project collecting wedding folklore in the Cherdyn district noted expert

opinion that the district's wedding songs pointed to "deep national Russian" traditions. In these and dozens of other instances, Oleg Leonidovich and his colleagues used CSR projects to shift the visible and relevant qualities associated with oil as substance in the region. They built the rhetoric of corporate involvement in communities on these shifts. As one of Oleg Leonidovich's former coworkers put it to me, things like cultural festivals and folk handicrafts "became the mechanisms by which we brought people to a place at which they weren't offended that oil workers were living so well."

My research has not turned up a conscious semiotic branding strategy at the heart of the Connections with Society Division's efforts, at least in the early days that I focus on here. Indeed, the story, as recounted to me by many of its key players, was one of improvisation, of experienced Soviet-era networkers seizing opportunities in a new corporate context, with massive funds and a mandate to remake the corporation's relationships with the region. Although a language of corporate social responsibility imported from Western corporations played a role (see Sawyer, this volume), as did the technology of grant competitions (borrowed from Western foundations active across Russia in the mid-1990s), the central focus on shifting the relevant qualities of oil that I have described here emerged largely from an improvised repurposing of what was at hand: the ruins of Soviet cultural construction and a pervasive concern with the surfaces and deeper essences of things—from souls to dollar bills—in the 1990s.

These new associations had powerful and large-scale political effects. Lukoil-Perm's use of CSR, with its distinctive emphasis on building authentic culture, increased in scope and scale from 2000 to 2010 and gradually came to occupy the very center of the company's relationships with oil-producing districts of the Perm Region. In good part because oil companies' taxes did not accrue directly to oil-producing districts (filling federal and regional coffers, instead), district-level politicians came to see answers to many of their problems precisely in Lukoil's CSR efforts. Complaints about joblessness were answered—however ineffectively—with Lukoil-Perm's attempts to create and then make profitable a tourist industry through museums and folk-craft centers. Complaints that the Soviet period had left culture in ruins were answered with corporation-funded festivals, celebrations of local culture, and the reconstruction of churches and mosques. District head after district head relied on Lukoil-Perm's social and cultural programs to blunt critiques of their own past work, speaking ever more clearly in the language of cultural depth and distinctiveness supported by the oil pumped from deep under their districts. By the late 2000s, the words of the head of the Orda district had become standard fare: "We are delighted that the oil industry organized [a festival celebrating 75 years of Permian oil] on our territory. It's not a coincidence

that the festival was held in our district. More than four hundred thousand tons of oil are pumped from our territory every year, and our traditional folk crafts are recognized not only in Russia, but in many foreign countries as well" (Star 2004).⁵ The side-by-side invocation of the depths of oil and the depths of culture in the context of Lukoil-Perm CSR projects had become central to the rhetoric of regional politics, at least in the approximately half of the region's districts that produced oil. In a particularly postsocialist twist on the oft-noted enclave nature of oil (see, e.g., Ferguson 2005), the conditions of political, social, and cultural life in the Perm Region were influenced by the material qualities of oil as they appeared in the oil-producing districts where Lukoil-Perm's CSR projects predominated and, correspondingly, they could not easily appear in other districts. Speaking with the elected head of one of the Perm Region's non-oil-producing districts one day, for instance, I asked why his district did not follow others in declaring itself a "Cultural Capital of the Kama River Basin" to bring in tourist money. "We can't be a cultural capital," he replied. "We don't have any oil!"

This arrangement is quite different from both the Soviet period, when unified party-state organs sought to apply a somewhat more evenly distributed set of social and cultural technologies to the population, and the early post-Soviet period, when neither major corporations nor state agencies were in much of a position to embark on such explicit projects. These two earlier periods, however, provided the crucial ingredients—from objectified senses of culture to political networks to circulating talk about depth—out of which experienced operators like Oleg Leonidovich could, in new corporate contexts, help usher in a new age of social and cultural projects.

I have shown how one material quality of oil—its subterranean depth—came to provide crucial semiotic anchors for the pervasive talk about oil in the post-Soviet Perm Region. Indeed, through its central role in Lukoil-Perm's CSR projects, oil's depth played a key role in shaping political, social, and cultural possibilities in the Perm Region's second post-Soviet decade. This configuration of oil and culture is, to be sure, highly contingent, the outcome of an intersection of factors specific to the Perm Region in the 2000s. Although I believe it provides a useful starting point for an examination of the broader Russian case, it would not obtain in precisely this way even at a smaller scale of analysis, such as a single town or village in the Perm Region, let alone in, say, a gas producing region

5. See Comaroff and Comaroff 2009 for an argument that situates the kinds of juxtaposition discussed here at the intersections of the anthropology of the corporation and global-scale shifts in the making of ethnicities.

of Russia or other segments of what Michael Watts terms the global "oil complex" (2005).

Nevertheless, despite all of this contingency and local specificity, this account can still illuminate larger trends and transformations. It is useful, for instance, to situate the struggles and projects I have traced in the Perm Region in longer historical and comparative perspective. Matthew Huber (this volume) shows how the activities of a variety of corporate, state, and hybrid institutions—especially the U.S. Bureau of Mines—made oil central to ways of life in the United States after World War II. Cultural institutions of various sorts have their place in this story, too. Until relatively recently, the cultural production associated with the oil industry most often took place through independent philanthropic foundations (such as the Rockefeller Foundation in the United States) or through state-led projects that relied on oil revenues to sponsor cultural spectacles (such as Nigeria's pan-African festivals in the 1970s [Apter 2005]; see also Damluji, this volume).

Since the 1990s and the global spread of CSR, however, natural resource companies themselves have done an increasing amount of "culture work," in Lukoil-Perm's Connections with Society Division and in its analogs around the world.⁶ This shift has drawn cultural politics ever closer to the core extracting and refining activities of oil companies. It has set the stage for a new configuration of long-running material and semiotic struggles, a configuration in which one division of a corporation emphasizes certain qualities of oil—qualities, like oil's depth, that are not necessarily directly related to use value—in ways that deflect attention from the more harmful or controversial material qualities of oil associated with the very same corporation's extraction and production divisions. It is, in other words, in the increasingly common contexts in which a single corporation is both producing oil and producing culture that we are most likely to find social and political dynamics of the general type exemplified by the Perm Region's pervasive semiotics of depth. Exploring the material and cultural semiotics of corporate social responsibility, therefore, illuminates some new twists in an old story of how oil's many qualities have become central to struggles over human ways of life.

6. States are by no means absent from these projects; on the role of state agencies in the Perm Region, see Rogers 2014. On neoliberal state retreat and reformulation in an oil-producing state, see also Sawyer 2004.