



Stephanie LeMenager

Stories in Commons

An interview with Caitlin Chaisson



Stephanie LeMenager is a writer, scholar, and educator whose work in the humanities is moored to complex planetary ecologies. Her examination of multigenre cultural forms—from literature, to film, to exhibition practices—suggest the interrelationships of colonialism, racism, neoliberalism, labour, and environmental crisis in coruscating brilliance. LeMenager’s analytical approaches are fortified by sensory, aesthetic, and emotional feelings of love for the world, and grief over climate collapse.

Undeterred by the formidable cultural work needed to dismantle the inequities of climate burdens and to move towards a more sound, sustainable, and just future, LeMenager supports modes of social building that forefront climate citizenship. Working throughout rural America and beyond, her inspired research into culture and media expose the narratives of modernity that have produced certain forms of existence on the planet, while foreclosing others.

Caitlin Chaisson. Offshore Drilling Infrastructure as Viewed through Coin-Operated Binoculars, Long Beach, CA. 2018. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

This conversation emerges out of Far Afield's multifaceted project, *Under the Beating Sun, From Summer to Summer*, which explores the relationship between sound and energy on a rapidly heating west coast through a consideration of two Summerlands: Summerland, British Columbia, and Summerland, California.

LeMenager's contribution to the project took the form of this conversation, which was held at Access Gallery in Vancouver on June 10, 2019. The discussion aligns her influential theorizations of petromodernity with an emerging understanding of new forms of climate-induced media, particularly in relation to the contentious status of public lands in rural America.



Stephanie LeMenager in conversation with Caitlin Chaisson as part of Far Afield's programming for Under the Beating Sun, From Summer to Summer. June 10, 2019. PLOT at Access Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

Caitlin Chaisson: You are a major participant in the field of the environmental humanities, which is a fairly new area of scholarship. Could you speak about how your training in English and American Literature began to crossover with environmental considerations? Was there a moment when these two interests coalesced?

Stephanie LeMenager: I think there were actually two moments. The first was during my undergraduate degree. I was a double major in Anthropology and English, and I was trying to think through questions that I now realize had to do with settler-colonialism and its histories. I was looking at how the Navajo (Diné) reservation had been overwritten by settler cultures in the United States, and the everyday resistance narratives that Navajo themselves practiced. Specifically, I went to the reservation for a couple of months one summer and followed one family's storytelling practices about their sheep camp, their regular movements with the sheep, and the histories that they remembered and retold about those movements. Some of the storytelling was rightfully off-limits to me, but what they did share offered a striking alternative to Euro-Western histories of their region. So, there was an early interest in thinking about narrative, and story, and poetry, and image as cultural forms of making and resistance—bringing new worlds into being, or keeping worlds alive that have been marginalized, or disrespected, or under-funded.

Then, a bit later in my academic career, I became obsessed with this understanding that all of modernity had to do with the production of energy and its consumption. The whole idea of efficient and cheap energy that had run through the twentieth century—up until about the 1970s in the US, anyway—had actually underwritten a lot of progressive movements, and a lot of ideas about freedoms, about liberation. I began to understand the hypocrisy—in

some ways—of US progressivism and its imbrication in fossil fuel extraction. This made me really want to come at the subject from many different angles, but I felt I wasn't equipped to do that with the education I had. I didn't have the skill set to understand histories of energy, or how to conceive of energy within a coherent argument about value.

I think the environmental humanities is where the meaning of life questions happen at university today, whereas individual humanities fields might have claimed that to be the case fifty years ago. What Philosophy and Literature departments may have offered students in terms of sparking an orienting vision, of forming some kind of ethical compass, now needs to happen in the context of global climate change, the sixth mass extinction, and the necessity of moving toward energy systems beyond fossil fuel. Movements within the environmental humanities, or crossing into them from Indigenous studies, race and ethnic studies, and various international studies programs, provoke necessary questions about decolonization, racism, refugee status, and migration. All of these are concerns in a time when our human land base appears to be shrinking, and other crucial resources—like water—are ever more scarce, either due to privatization or climate change, or some combination of both.

Now, of course, you also need engineers and you need people from all sorts of fields to weigh-in on these kinds of questions, but I think the humanities—as an interdisciplinary field—can give a fairly integrated view of many sociocultural problems. I'm lucky to have colleagues in the sciences who actually think the humanities are valuable. The environmental humanities forces an integrated liberal arts education to confront the environmental sciences and policy—the best science that we have about climate change—in ways that are absolutely necessary. No big questions can be asked, or answered, without a knowledge of what's happening to climate, and what's happening to planetary futures.

CC: I agree that interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary modes of working are really critical to transition. I've tried to allow that interdisciplinary perspective to seep into the questions that are being posed by this particular project, *Under the Beating Sun, From Summer to Summer*. It does this through a consideration of the relationship between sound and energy. As soundscape artist R. Murray Schaffer suggests, sound represents escaped energy. In industrial terms, the perfect machine would be silent—but clearly, this is not a reality the modern world has achieved. I'm curious about the noisiness produced through energy industries, in contest to energy industries, where and how energy might escape, and what it might do once it has left. This interest in sound is also meant to be an alternative to



the privileging of imagery in cultural production, where our encounters of oil and other energy episodes appear most often as glossy photographs in magazines, or bathed in the glow of light from a tablet. You have made compelling arguments for a deeper consideration of the relationship between narrative and energy, which I think bears some relationship to this aural, sound, or noise-based perspective. What power does narrative have in these conversations?

SL: I do think that narrative has a tremendous amount of power, but I'm also distrustful of narrative, so it is interesting to me that you associate me with it so strongly—and that kind of makes me want to rethink my own work a little bit...

CC: [Laughs] Oh, no...

SL: ...Because I think that narrative is about harnessing energy to exert power of some kind. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it can be. For instance, Suncor's energy tour is a really compelling and coherent narrative about what the oil sands—in fact the tar sands—have been and can be, and so I think that narrative is, again, about power. The exertion of power. There is a certain amount of closure, and a therapeutic quality to narrative. In some circumstances this is good for utopian thinking, which I think is actually necessary for doing any kind of difficult work of resistance or structural change.

Caitlin Chaisson. Moon Diesel, Okanagan, BC. 2018. Photo: courtesy of the artist.



It's interesting to consider industrial noise versus storytelling, which prides itself upon being an opposite to noise. Storytelling is meant to be understood, even if what is understood is recognized to be a riddle or a provocative question. But I do feel like noise is a wonderful compliment to narrative—which has its own purposes, but also tends to be a little too closed as a structure to fully capture any kind of lived space.

I was very excited to hear you thinking about noise, because I see noise as what is remaindered from narrative. There's always something that narrative leaves out. There's something that spills. There's somebody—or many bodies, maybe—who aren't heard, and so noise represents to me that: those bodies that are unvoiced within any given narrative. Conjuring industrial noise almost feels like a historical exercise because when I think "industrial noise" I think more of the earlier twentieth century to mid-twentieth century, a moment when landscapes of production were much more intrusive and apparent than they are now. This idea of industrial noise means being aware of the bodies that are involved in production. The noise of imperfect machines—escaped energy—humanizes processes of production which can be quite malignantly silent. Industrial noise can also document the presence of vulnerable human bodies within extractive landscapes, bodies prone to accident and injury.

The materiality of sound is a salient feature in the film *There Will Be Blood* (2007), where sound makes various arguments—initially about industrial accidents in the oil business, and about how many human bodies

are expended into the making of a supposedly seamless, remarkably efficient energy source. A lot of the sound in the film has to do with bodies pressing up against other forms of matter and impacting with them, sometimes being profoundly injured in the process. I think that way in which embodiment is called forth by this escaped energy, or noise, reminds us of what labour is. How much actual human work, and how many precarious and vulnerable human bodies have gone into this form of industrial production. Or perhaps what it shows is that the externalities—energies escaped and spilling who knows where, at what volume—were always a part of these processes, which attempt to occlude their material footprint. Sound, like smell, is a form of atmospheric pollution not easily contained except by sequestering its source—moving that source into some sacrifice zone where it can no longer be seen or heard by most. In that sense, sound mimics pollution as smell indexes it. So sound, rather than narrative per se, is like our newest and most deadly pollutants, the greenhouse gases which, in smaller amounts appear to be something other than the externalities of industry—but, as the volume increases, they begin to drive us mad, or more simply, make our habitat uninhabitable. I think sound offers a crucial complement to story. Story forms aspire to power, that is the harnessing of energy. Sound tends to show us

Caitlin Chaisson. Soundproofed Oil Derrick with Diesel-Powered Raft, THUMS Island, Long Beach, CA. 2018. Photo: courtesy of the artist.



how power miscalculates, what is remaindered, what spills.

CC: This made me think about how these noisy sounds are made from frictions, and are the result of intense pressures rubbing and grinding up against one another. I find myself thinking about narratives that attempt to minimize frictions and alleviate pressures, or narratives that attempt to create frictions and intensify pressures. These can be harnessed for such disparate aims and objectives.

SL: Yes, absolutely. Well, when you think of a terrific ethnography like Anna Tsing's book *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005), the processes of economic globalization break-down or come to a halt in these moments of cultural friction, often with Indigenous communities that have very different cosmological values towards what are called "resources" by extractive culture. If you want to think about friction as getting in the way of some of the silent and deadly narratives of hypermodernity, that would be a terrific text to revisit.

CC: Well, one of the stories that I've been thinking about in relationship to *Under the Beating Sun, From Summer to Summer*, is the story of the 1969 Union Oil spill in Santa Barbara. The devastating event was quite proximate to Summerland, California, according to the GPS pin I dropped into Google Maps, and so I've considered it an important aspect of study for this project. Your book, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (2013), offers a thorough analysis of the 1969 spill and the

subsequent effects it had on American environmental policy and movements. Could you build-out some of the ideas that emerged from that research?

SL: Sure. I lived near Santa Barbara for about 13 years, and taught at the university there. I began going to the library's archives at the University of California, Santa Barbara, looking at the materials people had assembled around the spill. There were a lot of extremely affecting, very personal pieces of art and writing. For instance, somebody created a scrapbook out of articles from the local newspaper that had all sorts of different allusions in it. The transcendent and weightless futurity of the space race was juxtaposed with images of oil tankers leaking, spilling, and running into one another in the Santa Barbara Channel. You could see that somebody was thinking through—in a really interesting way—how accident, and the collision of these great heavy, material bodies, was every bit as much a part of the story of the "American Twentieth Century" as the the more fantastic ideas of bodies in space. There was a strong sense of the impactfulness—ecologically and socially—of oil culture.

I also found an archive of photographs by a man named Dick Smith, who was a somewhat well-known photographer in the region. He did a whole series of

Coordinates of the blowout at Union Oil's Platform A as pinned on Google Maps. 34°19'54"N 119°36'47"W. Santa Barbara Channel, Pacific Ocean.



Dick Smith. California Murre. Slide photograph. Courtesy of the Dick Smith Estate, Get Oil Out! (GOO!) Collection, SBHC Mss 10. Department of Special Research Collections, University of California, Santa Barbara.

photographs at San Miguel Island for LIFE Magazine, where the seal population was very badly affected by the spill. It was quite heartbreaking because even if the baby seals could be cleaned—once they had the smell of oil on them they would be abandoned by their mothers and die. There were devastating images and stories of the death of these—and other—beautiful marine mammals. At the same time, Smith was also doing a whole archive of secret, private photographs documenting the panic around the spill. A panic that included residents throwing kitty litter into the water, thinking it might work as some kind of surfactant; or the California Fish and Game Commission's attempt to hide the body of a porpoise that had floated onto the beach with its blowhole clogged with oil, because it was considered to be too destructive to the whole image of the oil regime in the area.

Dick Smith wrote—in his own hand—on the back of the photographs, these sort of angry, grieving notes to someone—whomever—might encounter the images and actually look at his commentary. I began to realize that although this oil spill could be looked at as just another example of a major pollution event in the late 1960s (that ultimately spurred all of the regulatory measures that were taken in the early 1970s), what was also happening was that a whole community was being radicalized in this moment. This is interesting because it was a wealthy community, a Republican community, a conservative community. In this regard, Harvey Molotch has written about what it means to radicalize an affluent community and how these things happen. For me—that story is relevant to our current moment, where we are seeing so many effects of climate change. I think the poorest communities of the world are—as always—on the frontlines of the kinds of climate crises that we are all affected by, but I also think these are the kinds of crises that wealth actually cannot fully protect anyone from. There is a lot of anxiety on the part of the rich, and a growing potential to understand that in the great battle of money versus life, money is going to eventually lose. It might be hard to believe, and it might be that life loses first, or alongside it, or maybe it will be a pyrrhic victory for life, but I think that is something that's becoming more and more clear as environmental changes—which are, at this point, inevitable—start to take place. So, in that way, I think Santa Barbara offers a narrative of how a more radical social force is born, even in communities that have very little to recommend them for that sort of radicalization.

CC: What gave me pause towards the end of that chapter was how this was a moment where people were really angry, grieving, and energized to make change happen—but, instead of thinking about various kinds of public

safeguards—it became more about a rights-based discourse, which has since proven to be so flawed.

SL: I actually don't think it was a rights-based discourse at the time of the spill. Paul Relis, for instance—who was very involved in the response—was really thinking about systemic change in the whole way production and consumption cycles work, and is now doing a lot of really interesting work with anaerobic waste management. Another man, Bud Bottoms, was thinking about changing the whole gender hierarchy. I mean—these were twentieth-century white guys who don't necessarily seem like they would be capable of that kind of radical thought... [Laughs]...but, you know, they were! And what is really tragic is that that kind of thinking—which, to some degree, both of those individuals continue to try to practice—was not what took hold. It was more of a rights-based discourse, ultimately, that took hold. Environmentalism is something that could potentially be radical and always allied to questions of social justice, but those larger structural changes dropped out fairly quickly for most people in the wake of the spill. And yet, the first responders did really have more structural and social justice-based thinking in mind. So there was a moment of real radicalization, and then a movement towards something that's much more in line with liberal individualism.

CC: You mentioned earlier about the panic the spill incited, and I'm curious about that in relation to the various forms of media that transpired throughout the whole event. In reading Robert Easton's *Black Tide* (1972)—an account of the blowout of the platform—I was struck by the fact that in the early and disorganized scramble to contain the spill, the U.S. Coast Guard urged Union to “speed containment measures in the vicinity of the platform by making a boom of telephone poles and emplacing it at once...near the harbour mouth.” While Easton writes this as just one small item—among many—in his journalistic accounting of the event, I think every detail of this is important in relation to understanding the story of the oil spill. I am struck by the sheer materiality: that telephone poles—the communication highways at the time—were used in an attempt to contain, moderate, and mediate the effects of the spill at the very “mouth” of it all. In *Living Oil*, and elsewhere, you've staked out the importance of matter, or of materializing what is at stake in energy and extraction projects. Does an attentiveness to materiality make it possible to consider the telephone poles as more than incidental? Perhaps as useful materials to think through the inadequacies of spill-response, either literally or symbolically?

SL: This mundane but poetic fact about the telephone poles coming into use by first-responding bricoleurs after the spill could be put into conversation with Nicole Starosielski's excellent work on the trans-oceanic cables that now sustain our communication technologies by way of the Internet. That said, the almost absurd fact of the telephone pole "booms" reminds me of other, seemingly throwaway moments in reportage of the spill in Santa Barbara. To me these efforts are actually quite poignant, suggesting how painful it must have been to see the oil coming in to shore, and the animals who were victim to it. This is about panic and grief and simply not having the skill set to respond to a kind of industrial accident which in fact was not—is still not—containable, or even sufficiently studied. So much research and development has gone into extracting oil and other fossil fuels, but so little research and development has gone into studying the common accidents involved in extraction, and devising effective and safe means for responding to them.

CC: Moving into a broader discussion of extraction, you've written extensively on the aesthetics of petroleum and oil media, specifically through this idea of "ultradeep petromodernity." Can you describe what you mean by this? Does oil media subtend all others?

SL: Ultradeep, initially, was a word that I used because it relates to offshore drilling down to five thousand feet, which has since become relatively normal in the industry. It was a bit of a pun on that practice, but the name also relates to what I think is a really profound, affective attachment to media that are deeply entangled within the fossil fuel infrastructure. I would say oil media not only subtends all others, but in certain parts of the world—and again, I'm speaking about the US and other wealthy parts of the world—there is such a profound entanglement of the modern mediascape and the "fossilfuelscape" that one cannot be imagined without the other. Even digital culture, which appears to be a bit lighter than the cultures of earlier media, is very much indebted to the same fossil fuel infrastructure.

I think media interfaces with a sense of liveliness in the world. I don't know that there is any way of thinking without mediation, and I don't think there's really a way of thinking without media in a modern sense, in many parts of the world. Even when I try to think beyond media, in terms of in situ modes of sharing attention—that fundamental part of human sociality—we tend to share attention as teachers, as learners, as students, as entertainment figures, within a built infrastructure that runs on fossil fuel. It is my contention that the material consequences of seemingly immaterial work (for example, utopian imagining) must

be considered. I am grateful to scholars such as Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller for consistently reminding us of the costs of thought, of communication, of entertainment. It is very hard to see an efficient space where we can shelter, and be together, and communicate with one another outside of this fossil fuel infrastructure entirely. Now, is it impossible? No! Of course not! There are many acts of thought, communication, and entertainment which do not cost so very much...at least not so very much beyond the status quo of keeping up a built environment that ought to be more efficient than it is. We need sociability, and conversation, and teaching, and learning, and music, and song, and poetry, and story, and beauty, and prayer—in whatever forms make sense to us—now more than ever. Finding ways of acting together, of sharing attention, in ways that do not require chugging and guzzling HVAC systems is crucial for now and the future.

CC: I'll take this notion of environmental conditioning as an opportunity to think about your more recent work, which seems to exhibit a climactic orientation. You recently wrote an article for *e-flux architecture* called "Living with Fire (Hot Media)" (2018), which takes the Horse River Fire in Fort McMurray (2016) and the Thomas Fire in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties (2018), among many catastrophic others, as a departure point to begin thinking about megafires and what you describe as hot media. What is hot media?

SL: Well, I think hot media is the unrecognized step-child of oil media. We are killing ourselves with human-made fire, with the externalities of fossil fuel production, with the modes of overconsumption that cheap energy gave the wealthier world, and with the kinds of spatial configurations that life enabled. When I think of hot media, I think of wildlands and their incredible fuel potential in the United States. By wildlands I mean lands that are managed by the Federal Government and are lands that are not intended to be lived upon, but designed for recreational or agricultural use. One of the reasons why they are so necessary for many people—psychologically and economically—has to do with urbanization and suburbanization, and the desire for green spaces to use or to recreate in. Because of years of settler rhetoric around fire suppression, Indigenous modes of effective fire management through controlled burn techniques, and early rural and agricultural models of fire management, are typically not legal anymore. Because of colonization, the wildlands themselves are full of fuel, including all kinds of shrubbery and younger tree stock that burns readily and easily. Considering the psychological desire of people wanting to live near wildlands, we are creating giant tinderboxes. That is a problem that has to do



with a miscalculation of how to use space.

A profound and inadvertent misunderstanding of fire builds upon years and years of suppression activities that do not deal with the problem of fuel in the forest. We have built a kind of fossil fuel infrastructure that's created a suburban/urban landscape, and has segregated out wildlands in a particular kind of way, which in turn produces megafire. Then, we also sometimes have oil pads and frack pads in wildlands, that can spark and ignite the other surrounding natural fuels. It's a process that builds and builds upon itself, and then add in climate change and the drying and heating of the North American West, and you have much more of a possibility for this kind of "mega" conflagration. It is tragic.

I'm a little bit hesitant to speak of the megafires we now face in terms of "hot media." I used that term, in part, for an article I wrote, to link the new, western landscapes of fire to oil media, and to think about the way that fire is mediated by mapping technologies on the web. I'm a bit hesitant to say "hot media" again and again because these fires also represent an incredibly painful loss of life and the painful loss of a vision of what the world is for many, many people. There are Indigenous communities who've lost so much, whilst being blamed for attempting fire management techniques; and then there's people who came to the North

American West to try to get away from the worst parts of extractive culture in their own Euro-American worlds, who wanted to see the west coast of the US as something that was a sanctuary from the greed, from the competitiveness, from the violence, even, of that extractive world. To watch these places like Paradise, California, burn is quite painful, and I wouldn't want to lessen that by thinking of it as somehow "media" and not really as the end of a certain kind of countercultural worlding that has had admirable aspects to it. Hot media marks the end stage of what was imagined as "the good life" afforded by fossil fuels, the horrible end-stage of a long-evolving and, in some respects, generative regime of oil media. It is an excruciatingly painful ending to so many aspirations.

CC: You've touched on this in your discussion of wildlands, but I wanted to ask about your present research which has to do with the notion of public lands. Rural and non-metropolitan constituencies factor into much of

Caitlin Chaisson. Dry, Dusty Haze, Cahuilla Hills Park, CA. 2019. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

your earlier research, but your current book, *To Speak of Common Places*—an oral history of Oregon’s public lands, and a meditation on rural American life in the shadow of climate change—is a more direct consideration. What are some of the common places you’ve been encountering through this project, and what are the rural regions you’ve been visiting? Why are they so important?

SL: I think something that many of us are probably aware of is that the rural has a certain sort of nostalgia to it for city dwellers, but it also tends to be perceived as—to some degree—a resource sacrifice zone that feeds metropolitan areas. The emptying out of rural economies is one of the results of that. In the case of Oregon, the loss of the logging economy has been devastating to many rural communities. Many towns in rural Oregon have fallen into economic scarcity since the early nineties, and there is not much work left in these communities except for hospital work, or teaching work, or work for federal entities like the Bureau of Land Management. The ranching and farming lifestyles that are extremely important to a lot of the settler communities in these regions are not nearly as economically viable as they once were. And then, of course, we have Indigenous nations whose land has been overwritten by so-called federal and public lands. Our research focuses on Oregon in part because Oregon has a lot of public lands, but also because we have a very divided state culture with both extreme right wing and extreme left wing communities. We also have quite a few—right now, ten—federally recognized native tribes. There is a lot of contestation about what it means to be a public, and you really see it most fiercely in the subject of public lands. Who actually owns these lands? Are these lands traditional territories of tribal nations? Are these lands traditional territories of sixth-generation ranching families? Do these lands belong to everybody who has the rights and privileges of citizenship within the US? Do environmentalist groups get to say what can and cannot happen on the lands? Should we all be able to find ways of accessing them according to our own particular needs and cultural histories? These are really big questions.

I think the idea of a public can be manipulated in a variety of ways. Michael Warner has written about publics and counter-publics and he makes the idea of public seem very contingent on a given moment and a given kind of activity or practice. But, when you get to public lands, you are really talking about the foundation of democratic nationhood. And whether it has any legitimacy. I think we are at a moment in the US where the legitimacy of our democracy is very much in question. Whether or not we have a functioning democracy is very much in question. How do we rebuild something that is more inclusive? That

actually does throw off the white-supremacist assumptions that have always been a part of our nation? That actually does attempt some form of reconciliation with Indigenous communities? I think, in a way, the tragedy that I’m seeing in my own country right now is also an opening for change. And my hope is that change is possible. I don’t have high hopes. But I feel like this public lands project is very much about what is a public, and how we think about democratic land ownership and democratic resource management. Those are absolutely the fundamental questions about whether or not the nation is legitimate.

My great regret as a middle-aged remnant of the late twentieth century is the destruction of the value of “the public” as a call to action and solidarity. The US Right understood quite brilliantly how to dismantle the idea of public everything—from public lands to public education—by pointing to the inconsistencies and inequalities built into the public ideal in a country that could host chattel slavery, the persecution of immigrants, and Indigenous dispossession. Emptying out the public as a civic ideal has left us without a viable public in the US and unfortunately this only results in resources falling more and more into the hands of the rich, whether they be local elites or multinational corporations. It is in the rural US where you see the strongest dis-identification with the idea of a national public amongst white Americans, and that is both a result of self-segregation within racist geographies and a result of the economic collapse of rural economies that are now wholeheartedly the extraction zones of metropolitan elites. I think that the ability for urbanites like myself to misunderstand what might be useful for a tribal government or for settler ranchers, and to misread my own hopes about environmentalism—is much greater than I had known before beginning these discussions with people.

As wrong-headed as certain approaches to reclaiming common places and public rights have been insofar as they have used rhetorics of “occupation” without any apparent sense of colonial histories of dispossession, the commons still has purchase—as practice and aspiration—against privatization. Stories in which we see commons-ing working for multiple stakeholders, including those whose traditional lands pre-exist the commons, are of great interest to me, because I think such stories make possible, still, the imagination of democratic culture.



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