The aesthetic emergency of the avian flu affect

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The hunt for security leads to a worldwide civil war which destroys all civil coexistence. In the new situation—created by the end of the classical form of war between sovereign states—security finds its end in globalization: it implies the idea of a new planetary order which is, in fact, the worst of all disorders. But there is yet another danger. Because they require constant reference to a state of exception, measures of security work towards a growing depoliticization of society.

Giorgio Agamben

Introduction

The recent film Chicken Little presents an interesting twist on a classic childhood fable. In it, Disney rewrites the story of a chicken that believed the sky was falling when in fact it was not; it was only an acorn. Instead of being a variation on the story about the boy who cried wolf, Disney’s new rendition replaces a false claim with a real claim. In the new film, the sky is falling. No longer a story about the desensitizing effects of perpetually using fear and hype to motivate people, Chicken Little’s about the problem of getting people to act on an unlikely catastrophic scenario (an alien invasion). The reversal of a cautionary tale into the story of the End of Days, replacing prudent tales with those of Armageddon, is exemplary of a troubling contemporary trend in the American geopolitical imaginary. To justify a national or international response, this contemporary trend requires making something an emergency before it has become one.

In this chapter, I argue that the avian flu emergency embodies a preemptive paradox that develops an aesthetic/affective mode of governance. This mode of governance engenders obedience and political will by producing strong emotional responses. The danger of the avian flu, in effect, lurks in the affect of its representation. The second section of the chapter explores the character of this affective governance in light of a troubling development. I suggest that a critical shift in contemporary sovereignty occurs in the zone between a preemptive state of emergency and an actual state of emergency. In order to match the aesthetic composition of emergencies like the avian flu, the character of sovereignty shifts. As such, a general internationalized state of exception is replacing nationalized states of exception. The avian flu both illustrates and facilitates the shift from a mode of sovereignty that is organized around “national life” towards a mode of sovereignty that defines itself on the basis of “human life.” In the final section, I argue that the preemptive paradox of the avian flu embodies a unique
transformative political potential. Intervening in the avian flu's aesthetic composition can contribute to politicizing the real state of emergency because human life and animal life become expressions of the same sovereign exception. The material aesthetic in which the majority of the world's populations (humans, chickens, or otherwise) have become affectively domesticated can be politicized because, in the name of protecting humanity, human life is revealed to be as expendable as poultry life.

The aesthetics of emergency and its affect

Like other contemporary crises in the American geopolitical imaginary, what is fascinating about the avian flu is that, in order to justify a national or international response to the globally mediated situation room, it has to be made an emergency even before it becomes one. In a language familiar to both George W. Bush and Tony Blair (and their "first strike" justification for the war in Iraq), Klaus Stohr, Coordinator of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Influenza Program, states: "One of the most difficult things to explain to the public after a pandemic would be why we weren't prepared, because there have been enough warnings. Any other decision or discussion appears to be irresponsible. The age has become exemplary of a preemptive state of emergency."

In addition to being a logical problem between the chicken and the egg, the preemptive state of emergency involves aesthetic practices that represent a fact and an interpretation. The distance between a thing and the social language used to describe it cannot be definitively stabilized. Constituting a threat to representation, this gap destabilizes the prevailing ordered of self, community, and world. Securing this gap and smoothing over the aesthetic distance between a thing and its sign (the nation, national interest, or the people) have become the cornerstone of responsible politics (representative democracy, advocacy, recognition). Specifically, the discipline of international relations (IR) seeks to annul and/or contain this stealthy gap in the name of securing the self via the state in the world. In this sense, peace becomes the government-management of change and the pacification of calls for global justice.

In order to decide whether the risks concerning the emergence and spread of the avian flu are warranted, those inspired by traditional approaches to IR might survey the facts. In the spirit of empirical approaches to biosecurity, Influenza A is best described as a dynamic virus that is "constantly emerging" because of its ability to mutate. These mutations entail the ability of a virus to recombine hemagglutinin (HA) and neuraminidase (NA) with amazing evolutionary speeds. Although rapidly mutating viruses are natural and harmless to their host wild birds, when a mutation leaps the species barrier (for example, from ducks to chickens), it has made a potentially dangerous "antigenic shift" (a shift that occurs when different virus strains form a new subtype). The fallout of a shift like the H5N1 avian flu virus has been an epidemic across Asia's, Europe's, and Africa's poultry stocks. With the current spread, the avian epidemic has also caused about 163 human deaths since 1997, mostly in the Indonesian archipelago. It is important to note, finally, that a pandemic is different from an epidemic. We are currently in the midst of an epidemic (animal-to-human transmission). A pandemic emerges when H5N1 "reassorts" with a human flu so that human-to-human transmission becomes possible. With this antigenic shift, a pandemic human influenza is born.

However, none of these facts, in themselves, amount to saying that this threat will become a pandemic. Hence, the paradox of preemption. The gap (therefore, the threat) persists. Nobody really disputes the potential risk of the current epidemic. But nobody can guarantee the facticity of a dangerous pandemic emergence. To borrow David Campbell's phrase, "danger is not an objective condition." The next mutation might lead to a deadly pandemic or to a harmless sniffle. It is impossible to know whether it might happen tomorrow, next year, in a decade, or never again. The difference between a representation of risk and actual danger is a question of political aesthetics. How the story is told matters. The facts of the avian flu, as much as they are less interesting than the aesthetic practices involved in representing the avian flu as an emergency that requires immediate global action. The practices are political since representing something as an enemy has a transformative effect on the very order that is to be protected from this enemy influence.

In keeping with the desire to understand the implications of the political aesthetics used to represent an event as an emergency before it has become one, it is useful to explore the practices of representation, or what Daniel W. Smith introduces as "aesthetic comprehension." The term "aesthetic comprehension" is drawn from Gilles Deleuze's engagement with the paintings of Francis Bacon and with Immanuel Kant's philosophical exploration of "the role of the imagination (when it is) freed from the legislation of the understanding." Specifically, Bacon's attention to aesthetic comprehension restores the problem of deciding what should count as a sensible part or measure when attempting to understand an event, thing, or composition. The phrase evokes a "lived evaluation" that resides in all practices of understanding. This is slightly different from the important assertion that Roland Bleiker makes in relation to the fall of New York's Twin Towers; namely, that, when faced with a sublime event, artistic creativity fills the void of understanding. Instead, in order to understand any event (not just sublime ones), aesthetic practices are always already involved in processes of practical and pure understanding. Again, they are involved because the gap between a thing and its sign can never be closed; there is always a little sublime in everything.

The textures, tensions, frames, contexts, amplitudes, and durations of a representation also contribute to the affective experience of an event. An affective experience is generally understood to be synonymous with an emotional response. Fear, sadness, and happiness are all affects. However, an attention to affect also emphasizes the somatic intensity that surrounds an emotion. Whereas emotion is a subjective experience, affect is something that is not localized within an individual. Affect might be experienced through the tissues of the mind-body, but it also embodies collective constellations of competing intensities. Panic is as much an individual experience as it is a collective expression of an intense event. A state of becoming panicked can turn into a habit and, sooner or later, become an affective ontology. Manipulating affective intensities by framing certain stories or magnifying particular images can constitute a kind of affective governance (for example, outrage, tolerance, or melancholy). As Brian Massumi explains, "to treat the emotion as separable ... from the activation event from which it affectively sprang is to place it on the level of representation ... It makes it seem comfortably controllable." Affective governance,
Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), topped everyone by projecting 1 billion deaths. At the other extreme, WHO estimates that the deaths from the avian flu pandemic are likely to be between 2 million and 7.4 million globally. The huge difference between 1 billion and 2 million is due to extrapolating from the mild pandemic of 1907 that killed 1 million people or, instead, from the deadly pandemic of 1918.

However, both the aesthetic analogy between 2006 and 1918 and the cyclical refrain about an overdue pandemic minimize the doubts that this virus will ever become a pandemic. These doubts are justified, for instance, because the analogy between 1918, 1957, 1968, or 1997 and 2003 is based, not on a cyclical phenomenon, but on a random set of events. Only unpredictable "cycles" happen in increments of 39, 11, 29, or 6 years. Therefore, elaborate preparation for a random event is not "reasonable." Rather, it is hype. The analogous and cyclical aesthetics of the avian flu emergency is a mode of political representation that generates a (de)mobilizing fear. It is part of what Timothy W. Luke calls, in his chapter in this volume, hype-power.

Although temporality provides the political anticipation and magnitude of the emergency, the spatial aesthetics adds its texture, character, and frame. The daily reporting of virus detection is as much a spatial mapping of an imminent disaster as it is a countdown to doomsday. The updates map a geopolitical trajectory from "here" to "there," and back again. Today, it is country "X" yesterday, Nigeria; the day before, it was Turkey and Russia. And everything prior to that (Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Hong Kong, and so on) is the so-called Asian source. From this Asian source the virus' cousins are linking Western civilization and getting closer. In Cold War geopolitical form, the West again facing the "Coming Plague" and the "Coming Anarchy," instead of the global other being Communism, Africa, and/or Islam. Asia has now become (to use the title of Mike Davis' alarming book), the "Monster at our Door." The spatial framing is crucial to intensifying fear, since hype is indeed about risks being at our door. If the risks were at their door, to paraphrase the chilling line from the film Hotel Rwanda, people would go back to eating their TV dinners. And, for the most part, people do. The spatial frame gives the political character of the crisis to be faced; it is not only urgent because of its magnitude, but also because of its geography. In other words, it becomes important only because it could infect us here.

Similarly, locating the source in Asia, for instance, puts a specific face on the problem and situates the solution within a geopolitical discourse that seeks to contain the enemy over "there." The critique of spatial frames like those presented in "The Coming Anarchy" remains compelling. As Simon Dalby argues, the "danger of the [threat] from 'there' compromising the safety of 'here' ... never countenances the possibility that the economic affluence 'here' is related to the poverty of 'there.'" These encroaching representations, Jorge Fernandez argues, signal a deep anxiety in the Western geopolitical imagination. The fear is that "accelerating cultural and political encounters ... threaten the nation-state's political viability by heightening the likelihood of conflicts." The imagined cosmopolitan geography is thus at risk.

Furthermore, underlying statements made about the source of the avian flu—cohabitation with chickens, people eating wild birds—is a geopolitical racism that vilifies other cultures through the aesthetics of hygiene and civilized stratifications (public/private, human/animal). In other words, where threats are localized within their dangerous/irresponsible cultural practices (instead of our international political...
economies of modern agribusiness), global poverty and environmental destruction become urgent matters only when they threaten our cities, our economies, and our standards of living.

Given that, in times of emergency, it is "not polite to point fingers" to the root causes of discrimination or exploitation, the avian flu's local contexts have been repackaged by national and international organizations as a universal global threat. The Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), for example, elides the specificity of particular challenges (poverty, tuberculosis, tsunami, or International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies) and, instead, expands the flu's spatial ecumene through a universal warning about global economic disaster. In the 2005 APEC meeting on "Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response," for example, Dr. Karen Becker reported: "There is danger *everywhere*. No economy on Earth can afford to ignore this threat [since] interruption of supply chains could leave us without essential goods and products, particularly in this day of just-in-time manufacturing."36 Through this universal spatial representation, the whole world is back to the image of the West's lifeboat, and everything that led to the flood is forgotten.

Attending to the aesthetic representation of the avian flu emergency gives a different context to Stohr's cumulative warnings that "there is no doubt there will be another pandemic,"37 and that "we are living on borrowed time."38 The danger exists in WHO's representation of the 10 key facts that *everyone needs to know*:

1. Pandemic influenza is different from avian influenza;
2. Influenza pandemics are recurring events;
3. The world may be on the brink of another pandemic;
4. All countries will be affected;
5. Widespread illness will occur;
6. Medical supplies will be inadequate;
7. Large numbers of death will occur;
8. Economic and social disruption will be great;
9. Every country must be prepared;
10. WHO will alert the world when the pandemic threat increases.39

In the above list, the use of indicative (factual) verbs ("is," "are," "will occur," and "must be prepared") contrasts with the singular use of a subjective (conditional) verb ("may be") and justifies the authority of WHO to decide on the governing protocols for political action ("must" and "when"). Beyond the capacity of any one particular state, an imminent danger has been created out of a transcendental "unknown" by rooting an aesthetic emergency in a substantiated act of fear. Therefore, everyone must become prepared for when/where/how WHO decides it is time to act.

State decision makers and international officials have blurred the boundary between a preemptive state of emergency and an actual state of emergency. This blurring requires transforming the way decisions are made and how sovereignty functions. In the next section, I argue that, in order to match the aesthetic composition of emergencies like the avian flu, an internationalized state of emergency is replacing nationalized states of emergency. This occurs when peace becomes a form of war waged through perpetual humanitarian interventions.

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**International relations and the state of emergency**

The proliferating attention to the term "state of emergency" could be embraced as a confirmation of Walter Benjamin's eighth thesis on history. It reads: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule."40 History is replete with examples that support this thesis.41 A state of emergency refers to the proliferating interpretive-aesthetic- affective frameworks that normalize human and environmental life. How the avian flu emergency is politically reproduced reveals the degree to which a state of emergency has become a rule of everyday life.

This is not the same thing as saying that the reproduction of a state of emergency coincides with the numerical frequency of events that necessitate emergency powers (the Katrina and Rita hurricanes, the Indonesian tsunami, 9/11). Nor does it reflect what has been called a "culture of fear" in the media.42 Instead, something more interesting is occurring. The state of emergency is the actualization of a particular view of IR and American foreign policy that defines peace as the constant preparation for war. Giorgio Agamben explains:

President Bush's decision to refer to himself constantly as the "commander in Chief of the Army" after September 11, 2001 must be considered in the context of this presidential claim to sovereign powers in emergency situations. If, as we have seen, the assumption of this title entails a direct reference to the state of exception, then Bush is attempting to *produce a situation* in which the emergency becomes the rule and the very distinction between peace and war (and between foreign and civil war) becomes impossible.43 Instead of saying that Bush's politics lead towards contemporary fascism in America,44 a more politically important point needs to be developed. What is interesting in the American example is that, from wiretapping US citizens and the suspension of habeas corpus to rendering enemy combatants, and from Iraq to Kosovo and back to Iraq again, US security discourse is embodying a *shift* from national juridical law to international exceptional politics. A nationalized state of emergency has made *an antigenic shift*—to borrow the epidemiological term—to an internationalized state of emergency. This shift pivots around the concept of sovereignty.

 Sovereignty is both an epistemological and ontological event. It is a way of becoming organized in the world. In an epistemological sense, sovereignty becomes the means through which some statements come to have legitimacy (for example, "rational," "fact," or "progressive") while others are negated (for example, "emotion," "opinion," or "tradition"). These decisions are made in theontological sense, sovereignty unfolds "by exercising (the) right to kill, or by refraining from killing."46 It also includes the more contemporary manifestation of simply "letting die."47 Sovereignty is simultaneously the decision between who lives and who dies and the qualification of a life worth living. The political problem of sovereignty, therefore, does not lie with the *proper* categorization of this life versus that other life. Instead, the political regime of sovereignty functions in the very act of *categorization* of life.
As such, sovereignty makes a declaration of emergency possible through the act of categorization itself. To modify Carl Schmitt's definition in an important way, sovereignty is how the exception is made.\(^{49}\) It is how a risk becomes a danger, an inside becomes an outside, and a state of peace becomes a state of emergency. Drawing a staunch line between friend and enemy, for example, evokes an aesthetic practice of metaphysical conceit. This conceit, or founding violence, has become normalized as state sovereignty and as a nationalized state of exception.

Returning to my earlier point, an antigenic shift has occurred between the nationalized state of exception and an internationalized state of exception that organizes itself around the proliferation of global emergencies like the avian flu. Michel Foucault identified an "earlier" shift between a classic form of sovereign power and a disciplinary mode of sovereignty where "wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence (national life) of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital."\(^{50}\) Another shift is occurring today. Instead of protecting life in national terms (defending citizens), an internationalized state of exception is organized around the protection of humanity.\(^{51}\) An internationalized clamor of global friend/enemy decisions and normal/abnormal classifications is thus materializing. Whereas a nationalized state of exception emerges through an aesthetic-affective framework of international emergencies, an internationalizing state of exception is now materializing through the proliferation of global emergencies (avian flu, terrorism, financial crises).

The pressing question, however, becomes what form(s) of sovereignty emerge(s) when wars are fought and emergencies contained, not for a national biological population, but, instead, for humanity’s biological survival or for human life itself? How is the line drawn in this context? And what type of line can be drawn? When categorization loses its sovereign function, the result is a shift to preemption, responsibility to protect, and the precautionary principle. If this proposition holds, the line between friend and enemy is no longer drawn spatially; the line has become a temporal function. Preemptive governance, as such, is the governing of the future from the standpoint of the future. It pivots on the disappearance of the nationalized individual and the biopolitical emergence of a different ontological face.\(^{52}\)

Anne Caldwell argues that humanitarian intervention represents a new form of global power called "bio-sovereignty." Her argument pushes beyond Schmitt’s hesitancy about creating a political category called humanity. Schmitt had argued that the category "humanity" would negate the defining moment of politics (deciding who is friend and who is enemy).\(^{53}\) For Caldwell, however, "[a]t least since the end of the cold war, humanity has emerged as a material political group in the same manner that the ‘people’ became a concrete group with the rise of the representative nation states. What political power represents humanity is less apparent."\(^{54}\) In other words, new preemptive humanitarian actions constitute the nascent normalization of an international state of exception. She states: "The impossibility of locating sovereignty in a precise territory or group does not signal a collapse of sovereignty, but its transformation."\(^{55}\) As such, the United Nations and WHO do not check sovereign power; they open up avenues for sovereign transformation, redemption, and rejuvenation (on this point, see also the argument advanced by Julian Reid in his chapter in this volume).

This sovereign transformation, or transformation of sovereignty rather, proceeds in, through, and upon the new materializing body called humanity. Reflecting on Agamben’s work, Caldwell argues that “[h]umanity, rather than serving as a limit on sovereignty, appears as its medium and product.”\(^{56}\) In other words, Caldwell explains, "[a] sovereignty expands beyond the nation state form, it increasingly operates as bio-sovereignty; a form of sovereignty operating according to the logic of exception rather than law, applied to material life rather than juridical life, and moving within a global terrain now almost exclusively bio-political."\(^{57}\) Pushing Caldwell’s definition further, one could say that bio-sovereignty preemptively decides between life and a life unworthy of life in a radically decentralized and highly mobile set of decisions, technologies, networks, and affective constellations.

As such, new preemptive global practices of sovereignty are emerging and becoming recognizable in the name of protecting humanity from the next pandemic. In his opening statement to the APEC Health Task Force, an initiative born out of an earlier SARS scare, Dr. Amar Bhat suggests that the "human and economic cost of an uncontained influenza pandemic could be horrifying. We have a humanitarian obligation (as officials and individuals) ... to do our part."\(^{58}\) Bhat’s plea appears innocent. However, we do not know what “doing our part” entails. Who lives, who dies, and who decides, and how, why, and when?

In the midst of an international state of emergency, a new global triage constitutes its own necessity. A centralizing and decentralizing sovereignty becomes an “objective condition.”\(^{59}\) Citing the “lack of international harmony,” a permanent global task force is called for to deal with the next pandemic.\(^{60}\) Such a force would include international agencies like WHO, the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). The task force would need to seamlessly integrate US organizations like the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It would also need to incorporate the European equivalents. Other regional organizations like Asia’s APEC, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asian Resource Foundation (ARB), or the Asian Development Bank (ADB) could not be omitted, nor could Europe’s or even Africa’s. And we have not even mentioned getting the local authorities and the multinational pharmaceutical companies to cooperate. A governmental nexus himself, Osterholm declared that "pandemic planning must be on the agenda of every school board, manufacturing plant, investment firm, mortuary, state legislature and food distributor (in the world)."\(^{61}\) The scope and scale of planning is simply awesome.

What we are witnessing is not a unified global government; instead, this global triage amounts to empowering a monotony of people to make seemingly mundane choices about the characteristics of life.\(^{62}\) The APEC Health Task Force, for example, convenes to discuss regional and global responses to the avian flu threat and claims to do nothing more extraordinary than have its “members simply share information, lessons, and advice to help facilitate more efficient and effective responses.”\(^{63}\) A typical call to global action includes nothing more exciting than claiming that specific monitoring of virological, serological and clinical parameters is urgently
needed for people at risk. Also needed are detailed autopsies to characterize the disease, and the subsequent establishment of appropriate animal models to evaluate available intervention strategies. For poultry, bird populations should be actively surveyed for all types of flu viruses, using high-throughput technology; production and distribution systems should be modified, and stricter adherence to contamination measures achieved when there is an outbreak. 

However mundane they might sound, these choices will amount to extraordinary circumstances for someone somewhere.

The implications from this global triage are most obvious in the relations between humans, viruses, and birds. In this threat scenario, birds and viruses will be exterminated to save humans. The decisions become more difficult, however, when choosing between human lives. Osterholm has warned that only about 500 million people could be vaccinated, about 14 percent of the world's population. On April 1, 2005, Bush issued an "executive order authorizing the use of quarantines inside the United States and permitting the isolation of international visitors ... if one country implements such orders, others will follow suit." This is no prank. Given the US precedent of not sharing vaccines during the 1976 H1N1 crisis, it is unlikely that all humanity will be saved. To the degree that a global biological apartheid does not already exist as the de jure norm of IR, there is simply not enough Tamiflu to go around. The global triage will decide how, when, and where to create quarantines, cull populations, establish no-travel zones, and distribute antiviral drugs. If the occasion arises, how will the decision between your life and death be made?

Once again, in the name of humanity, the affluent will likely be saved from the imposed fate of the rest. In order to meet the needs of the rest, the Ontario Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic (OHPP) convened a working group of clinicians with expertise in critical care, infectious diseases, medical ethics, military medicine, triage, and disaster management in order to create a critical care triage protocol. Deciding who lives and dies (in the emergency) will depend on your Sequential Organ Failure Assessment (SOFA) score. The triage has "4 main components: inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, minimum qualifications for survival, and a prioritization tool." Life and death decisions will rest in someone's hands. Backed by a set of guidelines, they will prescribe courses of action as if these were not in themselves ethically, politically, and emotionally contentious propositions.

However, conversations about life and death are much more complicated when the illusion of modern sovereignty slips from the hands of a single individual (the president, or the doctor). Aihwa Ong and Steven Collier call these new ways of deciding, new moments of decision, and new kinds of governance "global assemblages." These global assemblages are constituted by a series of overlapping calls to emergency, demands for preemptive action, and a contemporary episcene that slowly claims the name of "humanity." The result is a new population, a new essence of humanity, and a new appreciation of life called "biovalue." Biology establishes citizenship, rights, and responsibilities. According to this means of valuation, Nikolas Rose explains that biological citizenships "encompass all those citizenship projects that have linked their concepts of citizens to beliefs about the biological existence of Human beings, as individuals, as families and lineages, as communities, as population and race, and as a species." These linkages occur well before an emergency has begun through a medicalization and pharmaceuticalization of life (with initiatives like the human genome project, stem-cell research, AIDS research, and organ harvesting). A biological-technological indistinction emerges in the encoding, recoding, and decoding of contemporary biomedical research. Eugene Thacker calls this the optimization of biology. Signaling a radical transformation and dislocation of thinking about the future of human life, biological citizenship and biomedical research protect and optimize life by simultaneously minimizing what it can mean.

As the indistinction of biological life becomes possible, the conditions for a preemptive global triage emerge. Human life becomes chicken life through sickness, and chicken life becomes viral life through infection. "What would thus be obtained," Agamben explains, "is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a bare life." What emerges, in fact, is infected life. In the narrative of the "next pandemic," the same technologies of control, surveillance, containment, vaccination, and extermination will constitute the indistinction between human, chicken, H5N1, and antiviral life. Quarantines and dead zones will be shaped around how life is appreciated through a battlefield triage.

The risk of war, as Carl von Clausewitz presented it, rests in the escalating logic that leads towards total war. From a war to the war to end all wars, greater and greater applications of violence are justified in the majesty of the objective—saving humanity. Replacing the nuclear shadow of World War II, the twilight of the next pandemic makes civilian casualties managerially expendable. This risk, however, rests as much with peace as it does with war. When overlapping appeals to emergency powers govern everyday life, then, as Stohr warns us, "we are living on borrowed time." Most of us (now speaking inclusively to chickens and viruses too) are already planned casualties, biomedical collateral damage, in the very war to protect human life. As such, the living-dead wait in suspended tension between panic and docility, caught between stockpiling Tamiflu and nervously consuming Kentucky Fried Chicken. This global triage, in particular, and emerging preemptive governance in general, are what Benjamin called the "real" state of emergency that is "the monster at the door."

The material aesthetics of resistance

The monstrosity of an internationalized state of emergency with a global triage sounds less menacing when put in the context of the aesthetic-affective governance of the avian flu emergency explored in the first section. The only threat greater than the avian flu emergency, experts warn, is the danger of becoming complacent against an imminent danger. In one of its surveys, the APEC task force reports that the greatest barriers to influenza preparedness are the Ministers' lack of "interest," absence of "funding" and "international collaboration" on surveillance, poor risk communication, and the difficulty of securing vaccine and antiviral supplies. When the barriers to creating a global system of societal controls are mainly motivation, funds, and collaboration, then, it seems completely reasonable that the remedy consists in generating an appropriate aesthetic-affective political will, like panic.

Creating panic amounts to emotional brinkmanship. Any other course of action besides panic appears to be simultaneously irrelevant and suicidal. Emotional
The aesthetic composition of this image is compelling because of the way the viewer is drawn into the diagram of the painting (the edges are darkened and it almost looks like smoke is looming in the background). This tension builds through Klee’s childlike bridge between abstraction and realism in the awkward figure of the Angel. Perhaps the fact that this Angel of History looks remarkably like a chicken is inconsequential. However, it allows a further analogy to be made about framing. The same modern aesthetic composition blackmails the Angel and the alarmedists who demand that we act responsibly in the face of the avian flu emergency. Together, the new pandemicists and the Angel of History stand eyes staring, mouth open, and wings spread, paralyzed, docile, stupefied, and caged with fear.

The second component of this political paralysis, however, is Benjamin’s insistence that we overcome the fate of Klee’s “angelic chicken.” To this end, Benjamin differentiates between a state of emergency and a real state of emergency. The “real” state of emergency transforms it into a political struggle that radically reorganizes the material conditions of modern society. Benjamin asserts that the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm ...

Bringing about the real state of emergency is a messianic project of reinvigoration of the political. This occurs in two steps. The first is to politicize the historical norm of the state of emergency already underway. The second is to build a material aesthetic resistance sufficient to this development. It is at the juncture of these two political vectors or steps that the political question of aesthetic composition becomes a critical political resource.

The first vector requires reinvigorating the political that, Agamben argues, “has suffered a lasting eclipse because it has been contained by law.” To reinvigorate the political, in this sense, would require re-politicizing the relationship between life and law. Law and its sovereign founding violence would no longer be the constitutive condition of modern life. Instead, politics would occupy the “emptiness” in-between law and life, and become a space for “human action.” Politics would become “a counter movement that, working in an inverse direction in law and in life, always seeks to loosen what has been artificially and violently linked.” Subverting the very state of emergency that gives law in general or, in this case, global surveillance, its legitimacy and ontological necessity, a creative politics would not attempt to re-impose a normalized sovereign rule of law. Instead, by revealing the political nature of the state of emergency’s normalized rule of law, it would politicize the aesthetic-affective boundaries that manage and produce the state of emergency.

Although its development exceeds the scope of this chapter, such a creative politics requires keeping the metaphysical boundaries between human, animal, and viral life open in order to offer the possibility of a new future solidarity. If the avian flu is a form of human governance that requires thinking about other animals as either food, pets, or wild, then politicizing this sovereign exception would engender a “human politics” that would involve developing a different relationship with the animal inside the human and the human inside the animal. Without politically opening the insecurities that constitute humanity, the fate of animals will become the fate of some humans.
The second vector requires affirming political openness while pluralizing the political tactics available. As I argued in the first section of this chapter, the paralyzing force of the avian flu emergency's affective blackmail operates by making an uncertain future a governable resource. In this formulation, fear of the future does not precede the operability of this uncertainty; fear is the affective governance of a preemptive state of emergency. That affective governance, or what Massumi calls "activation," is the production of fear itself. In other words, we are not afraid first; fear is the experience of an operation (political control). Citing William James, Massumi explains: "We don't run because we are afraid, we are afraid because we run." Paralysis sets in because of the "emergence of emotion preempts action. Actual action has been short-circuited." Political paralysis becomes a habit, a habit of becoming, in which an affective consensus constitutes the political limits of life itself.

In the middle of an affective build up, it is unlikely that a calming call to reevaluate the categories used to frame the problem will break the panic habit. The affect is too great. The ABC drama Fatal Contact, for example, represents a total reification of fear. In this TV program, dead bodies are dumped in parking lots, the death toll spirals out of control, and helpless fathers commit suicide in front of their children. In the face of such a representation, docility seems justified. Perhaps the drama would be harmless if the result was only a spike in sales of canned goods and emergency candles. On the other hand, if it bolsters contemporary justifications for fueling proliferating states of emergency, then the aesthetic composition of the pandemic needs to be targeted as a site of political significance.

It is possible to disrupt the aesthetic composition of the avian flu emergency and invite a pluralization of creative political possibilities. This is already underway. For example, the proliferation of political satire is illustrative of a strategy that re-contextualizes the aesthetic comprehension of the avian flu pandemic by employing measures other than the 1918 flu analogy. David Letterman's Late Show, the Colbert Report, or the Daily Show with John Stewart, in particular, have opened up a different way to comprehend the "unavoidable Armageddon." Their satirical accounts of the drama Fatal Contact, for instance, have used a different lived evaluation (for example, the Cold War, the Killer Bees, Y2K, or the War on Terror) as an aesthetic measure. Instead of trying to solve the problem of the avian flu, the constitutive relationship between emergency law and life is targeted and opened to political evaluation.

In other words, with a different aesthetic measure, the nature of the emergency and the form of governance could change. For example, the world community is spending US$1.9 billion to confront a potential risk of 2 to 7 million deaths. But what if these funds were directed towards more routine pandemic killers like tuberculosis (8.8 million cases and 2 million dead people a year), malaria (5 billion episodes and over 1 million deaths a year), or AIDS (2.9 million dead people a year and 25 million deaths in total)? Similarly, the US contribution to the global avian flu effort actually diverts funds from existing emergency and preparedness commitments (like the tsunami relief for Southeast Asia, a region where the economic and political vulnerability to avian flu is actually greatest). Such examples show where the line between qualified and unqualified life resides and whom the "international" community cares about most.

When the aesthetic measures shift from mapping migrating birds, human-induced emergencies themselves become a potential cause of future global pandemics since they (like all aspects of globalization) create the very web of interconnections that the avian flu cannot develop on its own. In a chilling tale, for example, we learnt that, in October 2004, the American College of Pathologists mailed a collection of mystery microbes prepared by a private lab to almost 5,000 labs in 18 countries for them to test as part of their recertification. The mailing should have been a routine procedure; instead in March 2005 a Canadian lab discovered that the test included a sample of H2N2 flu—a strain that killed 4,044 million people worldwide in 1957. H2N2 has not been in circulation since 1968, meaning that hundreds of millions of people lack immunity from it. Had any of the samples leaked or been exposed to the environment, the results could have been devastating. On learning of the error, the WHO called for the immediate destruction of all the test kits.

Repeatedly, the very problems that stalk humanity are created by human attempts to contain the threats they face. The way emergencies are produced and managed constitutes the real emergency. There is a failure to recognize that threats are not isolated from the affective governance that created them.

Similarly, the emergency looks different when the threat of the bird flu has less to do with birds than with the political economy of industrial food production. For instance, an article in the New Scientist in January 2004 reported that the source of today's emergency, the 2003 H5N1 super-virus that emerged in Hong Kong, is the result of "a combination of official cover-up and questionable farming practices." Specifically, Chinese growers actually accelerated the evolution of the H5N1 strain by using an inactivated virus to immunize their chickens and safeguard industrial scale production. Simply put, if Tyson Foods incarcertates and slaughters 2.2 billion chickens annually, it creates vast amplifiers of viral risks. The expedient way to minimize the avian flu risk, therefore, is not color-coordinating surgical masks or organizing photo opportunities for government officials to eat chicken lunc hes that imply that something "real" is being done. Rather, it involves changing the most basic material relationships that constitute the current "human picture." The industrial production of agriculture needs to be made a political problem if the future of viral infections is to be, not managed, but renegotiated.

Failing to condemn capitalism's "human-induced environmental shocks" and "corporate livestock revolutions" that are actively championed by the World Bank (WB), the IMF and regional organizations like APEC, ASEAN, or the ADB only serves to reproduce a hysterical danger that stands in for political debate. These responses mask the very practices of impoverishment that champion industrial agriculture and economic specialization while reducing culturally specific and traditionally rooted support networks. Modernity panics because its abstract plans cannot be rooted and rehearsed in local historical knowledge practices that create pluralities of well-being.
Conclusion

Instead of reproducing the contemporary theme of Disney’s Chicken Little, a material aesthetic resistance invokes the political skepticism engendered through the prudent story of The Boy Who Cried Wolf. This fable ends with the moral statement that, even when liars tell the truth, nobody believes them. The beginning of the fable might prove more instructive, however: it presents a boy who is so bored with his own existence, as if it were as dull as a chicken’s, that he decides to entertain himself by crying wolf. In a world where the human-chicken-virus distinction has already collapsed in the singularity of boredom and fear, the call to emergency not only becomes more likely, but also apolitical. Perhaps as appreciations of different degrees of fear develop, a wider affirmation of lived risks will replace the pandemic blackmail of fear. When opened politically, the aesthetic emergency loses its affective weight. In turn, it becomes more palatable to call for sustained social, economic, and environmental transformation.

The irony is that the expedient and responsible political response to the avian flu does not involve empowering a global plutocracy to manage every risk as if it were a world-ending danger. It involves changing the way human organization relates to the world in which it is embedded. Simple “conservative” solutions like empowering local food networks or taking responsibility for socio-ecological footprints will do much more to reduce future threats than “utopian” solutions like global surveillance or full spectrum dominance. This is not about avoiding the scale of the avian flu problem. On the contrary, what is required is nothing short of a sustained reorganization of humanity’s relationship within its animal and environmental self. What form this aesthetic material affirmation may look like, however, is unknowable because, in each instance, resistance writes its own aesthetic and affective geography. This spread of political possibility might also constitute a world that is viable and resistant to future man-made problems, like the avian flu, or America’s global model of industrial food production.

Notes

5 Davis, The Monster at Our Door, p. 11.
9 Ibid., p. xvii.
10 Ibid., p. xviii.
14 Ibid., p. 27.
21 Dr. Klaus Stohr, the head of WHO’s H5N1 outbreak response, reports that the 1997 Hong Kong strain did mutate into a form that was transmissible between humans, but because of its relative weakness, it caused few illnesses. See Andersen, “Avian Flu,” p. 777.
22 Davis, The Monster at Our Door, pp. 4–8.
24 Redliner later clarified that he meant to say 1 billion sick people. See Fumento, “Fuss and Feathers,” p. 24.
25 Ibid., p. 29.
26 Ibid.
27 Every day I worked on this chapter I debated whether I should change this country to reflect the current news reports. As such, I will leave it as country X.
28 One can check out the interactive map showing how the contagion is getting closer at news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/world/05/bird_flu_map/html/1.stm.
31 See Davis, The Monster at Our Door, my emphasis.
32 See the film Hotel Rwanda, dir. Terry George (MG, 2004).
35 See Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest (London: Routledge, 1995), chapters 1 and 5.
38 Stohl, quoted in Davis, The Monster at Our Door, p. 125.
See Comments

For example, see Ashley, "Living on Borderlines," pp. 250-321.


Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I, p. 137.


Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London: Routledge, 1989).

See Schmitt, The Concept of the Political.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Agamben, State of Exception, p. 29.


To see how this materialized in US military policy under the leadership of Donald Rumsfeld, see Robert D. Kaplan, "Supremacy by Stealth," The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 292, No. 1 (July/August 2005), pp. 60-85.

See APEC, "Regional Health Threats," available at www.apec.org/apec/apec_groups/son_special_task_groups/health_task_force/apec_information_on.html.


Osterholm, "Preparing for the Next Pandemic," no page given.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

See eds. Ong and Collier, Global Assemblages.


Ibid., p. 440.

10 Over a barrel

Cultural political economy and oil imperialism

Simon Dalby and Matthew Paterson

How did our oil get under their sands?

Protest slogan

A completely new basis for everyday life is required which we can term "conspicuous asceticism," the nemesis of Americanization built on conspicuous consumption ... Any sustainable non-Fascist future will require the development of a popular world view that condemn unnecessary consumption as anti-social behaviour.

Peter Taylor

Introduction

For many critics of contemporary US geopolitical strategy, the anxieties provoked by US imperialism are directly tied to the material practices that give rise to it in the first place. Geoffrey Whitehall’s chapter in this volume concludes by contrasting strategies to deal with avian flu through global surveillance or through agricultural restructuring and localization. If the avian flu is undoubtedly one of those contemporary anxieties produced by material practices, another set of material phenomena related to oil and automobility are even more crucial to the maintenance of US imperialism. As the connections between oil, imperialism, and automobility become clear to many, questions about how these links work have led to protests and debates about consumption and war. But how should we understand and respond to these links? Attempts to deal with this sort of question can be seen in two prominent recent forms of resistance politics that have been organized around intertwined critiques of the Sports-Utility Vehicle (SUV) on the one hand, and oil imperialism on the other.

Our overall aim in this chapter is to suggest that both sets of critiques misunderstand the character of the problematic at hand and, therefore, do not have an appropriate normative vision that could underpin resistance. Specifically, to focus on the SUV alone is to erroneously take a particular type of car as "the problem" when it is in fact the whole complex of automobility that is at the heart of increased oil dependence. At the same time, critics of oil imperialism tend to ignore the social purposes to which oil is being put, principally, the energy to sustain the vast complex of automobility that remains central to the American way of life. As a consequence, dealing with the problems posed by contemporary US imperialism requires us to address the centrality of automobility to contemporary economic and social life. This becomes even clearer