

## The Governmentalization of “Lifestyle” and the Biopolitics of Carbon

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### Abstract

The search for a sustainable civilization—an essential concomitant of dealing with global warming—will be driven, in part, by the “normalization” of a low-carbon lifestyle. To date, most research and discussion of this transition have centered on technological fixes and their psychological equivalent, “getting prices right.” Although both approaches seem to point to reduced levels of consumption as a result of more “efficient” processes and practices, neither really addresses the material and cognitive changes associated with the “low-throughput” economy (along the lines of what Herman Daly called the “steady-state economy”) that is likely to follow from the current economic downturn and the need for drastic reductions in carbon-burning. More specifically, there is a glaring contradiction between the impetus for high rates of economic growth and the major modifications of “lifestyle” necessitated by environmental crisis.

“Lifestyle” is usually approached as an individual attribute: each of us has preferences, linked to basic needs and “expressive functions,” which we seek to fulfill through “choices in the market.” This disregards both the societal and regulative aspects of lifestyle, the first conditioned by subjectivities shaped through socialization from an early age into class, nation, ethnicity, identity, and other groups, the second by the governmentalization of consumption through advertising and other forms of preference-shaping, which serve to link lifestyle to “identities.” In other words, if “we are what we consume,” it is the regulation of “who we are” that will determine not only “what we consume” but also “whether we survive.”

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The biological existence of human beings has become political in novel ways. The object, target and stake of this new ‘vital’ politics are human life itself...as it is lived in its everyday manifestations.... If discipline individualizes and normalizes, and biopower collectivizes and socializes, ethopolitics concerns itself with the self-techniques by which human beings should judge themselves and act upon themselves to make themselves better than they are.<sup>3</sup>

More Doctors Smoke Camels than any other Cigarette.<sup>4</sup>

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined that Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.<sup>5</sup>

## Introduction

Since the 1960s, cigarette smoking has become a socially-unacceptable practice, especially in the Global North. Fifty years ago, there were no such things as “smokers’ rights” or the “right to a smokeless environment.” One need look only at smoking advertisements and films of the 1940s through mid-1960s to see how the “smoking lifestyle” was glamorized by movie stars and legitimated by doctors and to recognize a form of social engineering through the market.<sup>6</sup> Smoking became not only the signifier of an idealized identity but also, through its linkage to the “American Way,” a *moral* practice, especially through the distribution of cigarettes to members of the U.S. military. Indeed, the world was a smokers’ “commons” in which one could light up almost anywhere, at any time. Those who objected to newly-lit cigarettes did not possess a right to a smoke-free workplace or other smoke-free space, whether public or private. Today, by contrast, smokers must seek out specified spaces in which they can engage in their

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<sup>3</sup> Nikolas Rose, “The Politics of Life Itself,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 6 (2001): 1-30, 1, 18.

<sup>4</sup> TV commercial, 1949, at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCMzjJjuxQI> (accessed Aug. 11, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Warning required on U.S. cigarette packets by Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act of 1970.

<sup>6</sup> Many such ads can be found at Euro-Cig.com at [http://www.euro-cig.com/gallery.php?id\\_cap=11](http://www.euro-cig.com/gallery.php?id_cap=11) (accessed July 10, 2009).

nasty and unhealthy habit.<sup>7</sup> This constitutes a significant social lifestyle change, one that has been poorly documented and is not well understood.<sup>8</sup>

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has proposed that, if the very worst impacts of global warming are to be avoided, rich and rapidly-industrializing societies need to reduce their aggregate greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 80% by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> The favored approaches to emission control attempt to raise the cost of burning carbon, through direct carbon taxes or the so-called cap and trade system. Both will rely heavily on self-regulating markets for effect. That is, although there are likely to be surveillance and monitoring systems to quantify greenhouse gas emissions by various producers, a good-deal of self-reporting will be involved.<sup>10</sup> Such a combination of prices and practices in pursuit of a “common good” and “self interest” is highly vulnerable to violation, corruption and collapse (as seen, for example, in the behaviors on Wall Street and the subprime mortgage bubble). In other words, successful control of carbon emissions will depend on individual and collective internalization of a new regime of consumption and new forms of governmentality and biopolitics. Given long-standing conflicts among countries and within them, as well as the complexities associated with internalizing the cost of carbon in consumer goods, there is good reason

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<sup>7</sup> I might also note that when I first went east on research trips in both the United States and Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, such restrictions on smoking were virtually non-existent. Today, these are universalized across North America, most of Europe, and many other parts of the world. Istanbul has recently instituted a ban on smoking in restaurants and bars; see Suzan Fraser, “Turkey Extends Smoke Ban to Bars, Restaurants,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 20, 2009, at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2009/07/18/international/i141945D24.DTL> (accessed July 20, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> So far as I have been able to tell, this particular history of smoking has yet to be written.

<sup>9</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2007—Synthesis Report—Summary for Policymakers*. (Geneva: IPCC Secretariat, World Meteorological Organization, 2007), at: [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4\\_syr\\_spm.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf) (accessed 29 April 2008).

<sup>10</sup> On the flaws of self-regulating markets, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon, 2001; new ed.); and Ronnie D. Lipschutz with James K. Rowe, *Globalization, Governmentality and Global Politics—Regulation for the Rest of Us?* (London: Routledge, 2005).

to wonder when this program will actually go into operation and if it has any chance of succeeding.

What, then, is to be done? Inasmuch as carbon is imbricated in all facets of human life—people being carbon-based, with long reliance on the breaking of carbon bonds to provide biological energy as well as warmth for survival—successful control of global carbon emissions will depend on changes in both individual behavior and social practices, that is, lifestyle.<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault called forms of management that attempted to regulate behaviors “governmentality” in order to denote the ways in which administrative apparatuses of modern society operate on populations through “biopolitics.” His particular insight, as we shall see, is that changes in behaviors and practices are no longer effected through discipline, punishment and sovereign power but, rather, via rules, rule, desire and self-regulation. The governmentalization of lifestyle thus becomes linked to the shaping of desire and morality so that people *want* to do what they believe is good for them according to a biopolitical logic. It is in this context that lifestyles are already being reshaped in preparation for a low-carbon future.

In this article, I examine the logics of Foucault’s propositions as applied to the problem of reducing carbon production. I begin with a social puzzle that illustrates how lifestyle changes and is changed without any clear conception of the process whereby it takes place, with a focus on cigarette smoking. I then link this narrative to governmentality and biopolitics, especially as they relate to consumption and the consumer lifestyle. In the second part of the paper, I discuss the notion of “modes of consumption” in order to differentiate among forms of subsistence, industrial and

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Paterson & Johannes Stripple, “My Space: Governing Individuals’ Carbon Emissions, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (forthcoming 2010).

lifestyle greenhouse gas emissions. This last mode is characterized, especially, by the creation and enhancement of individual and collective identities which, in turn, reflect a package of moral beliefs, practices, and consequences associated with particular lifestyles. In the third section of the paper, I examine automobility as a form of biopolitics and its management through governmentality. Finally, I address the relationship of governmentalization and biopolitics to social engineering and carbon reduction, pointing out that, in the United States at least, the market and its advertising have been powerful forces in shaping and changing what people *do*.

### **The End of Smoking: A Social Puzzle**

How did smoking come to be such a reviled practice? Sumptuary laws against smoking have a long history and anti-smoking movements have emerged periodically to battle the habit, without great success. The most recent movement against smoking appears to have originated out of a combination of growing scientific evidence about smoking's health effects and the rise of the neo-liberal injunction to "wellness," the last a prescription of individual responsibility for one's own health and a growing subjectivity about individual "rights to health."<sup>12</sup> In the United States, the 1964 Surgeon General's report on the risks of smoking led to legislation requiring warnings on cigarette packets.<sup>13</sup> Growing numbers of ill ex- and deceased smokers sought compensation through lawsuits, a course that, ultimately, led to large judgments against tobacco companies. It appears

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Rebecca J. Hester, *Embodied Politics: Health Promotion in Indigenous Mexican Migrant Communities in California*, PhD Dissertation, Department of Politics, UC-Santa Cruz, 2009. Note that this is not the same as a "right to health care."

<sup>13</sup> Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, *Smoking and Health* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1964; pub. 1103), at: [http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/NN/B/B/M/Q/\\_/nnbbmq.pdf](http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/NN/B/B/M/Q/_/nnbbmq.pdf) (accessed Aug. 11, 2009).

that the first restrictions on smoking in public were largely normative—the practice came to be viewed as socially-unattractive with public spaces informally designated as “smoke-free zones.”<sup>14</sup> Via administrative fiat and public law, as well as social pressure, smoking then came to be forbidden in growing numbers of enclosed spaces, including airplanes, schools and restaurants. Smokers were required to consciously self-regulate their habit, to find designated locations to smoke, and to ask “mind if I smoke?” All of this involved the instantiation of new practices in and internalization of a new set of social limits by both the world’s smoking and non-smoking populations. The story related here does not really explain the social puzzle, however, because a standard analysis would point to victory by pro-smoking forces, especially given the deep pockets of tobacco companies and their lobbyists and the activities of politicians from tobacco-producing states.

What we see here is an example of governmentality and biopolitics. I argue that the narrative illustrates the transformation of lifestyle through the gradual socialization of various publics into a biopolitics of smoking. According to Mitchell Dean, biopolitics “is concerned with matters of life and death, with birth and propagation, with health and illness, both physical and mental, and with the processes that sustain or retard the optimisation of the life of a population.” He writes that

Bio-politics must then also concern the social, cultural, environmental, economic and geographic conditions under which humans live, procreate, become ill, maintain health or become healthy, and die. From this perspective bio-politics is concerned with the family, with housing, living and working conditions, with what we call ‘lifestyle’, with public health issues, patterns of migration, levels of economic growth and the standards of living. It is concerned with the bio-sphere in which humans dwell.<sup>15</sup>

“Population” refers here not to a discrete group of people living within a specified territory but, rather, a statistical assemblage of individuals who share, in certain terms, a

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<sup>14</sup> Kim, Sei-Hill & James Shanahan, “Stigmatizing Smokers: Public Sentiment Toward Cigarette Smoking and Its Relationship to Smoking Behaviors,” *Journal of Health Communication* 8 (2003): 343–67.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality—Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999), 99.

range or set of characteristics and practices. Individuals comport themselves according to the standards of “normality” of their specific population group or “lifestyle,” which are framed in terms of particular types of behavior. The “right disposition” of things is then maintained through the standardization of populations groups within certain defined parameters, the self-regulation of their own behavior through conformity to these parameters, and the disciplining function of social pressures, civil behaviors, surveillance and law, all of which constrain tendencies to stray outside of those parameters. Taken together, individuals’ practices take place within a “zone of normality” that also serves to constitute “identity.” Applying this notion to smoking, biopolitics is linked to an ethic regarding injury to the self and others, articulated through a “will to the self’s wellness” and an injunction against harming others. Parallel with the rise of neo-liberalism, the rise of “responsibilization,” and a decline in the discourse of *public* health, individuals were increasingly commanded to ensure their “wellness” through changes in health-related practices. Health became an ethical obligation to others rather than an individual attribute.<sup>16</sup>

Stepping back, one can also see governmentality at work, Michel Foucault’s name for the regulation of people and populations.<sup>17</sup> Governmentality is about management, about ensuring and maintaining the “right disposition of things” of that which is being governed or ruled, and bringing those being managed into the process of governing themselves. As Foucault put it, governmentality is “the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of

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<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to date accurately the origins of the “wellness” discourse, although its modern use appears to being in the 1950s ; see James William Miller, “ Wellness: The History and Development of a Concept,” *Spektrum Freizeit* 1( 2005): 84-102.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *The Essential Foucault*, (New York: The New Press, 2004), 229-45.

this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target populations, as its principal form of knowledge, political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.”<sup>18</sup> This “right disposition” has as its purpose not the action of government itself, but the “welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc,” which we might assume also contributes to the maintenance of administrative apparatuses as well as the well-being and productivity of the population.<sup>19</sup> Governmentality is effected, in turn, through “bio-politics.”

The anti-smoking movement worked in tandem with public health representatives to shape consumer consciousness via the very same instruments used to market cigarettes. Because the social and monetary costs of smoking came to be seen as greater than the benefits—although it is doubtful that actual calculation of risk played any significant role here<sup>20</sup>—the practice came to be regarded as morally and ethically dubious. Hence, smoking became not merely a threat to health, it was also a *sin*.<sup>21</sup> Thus, non-smokers acted virtuously by eschewing the habit while smokers became increasingly sensitive to the potential long-term health and social costs to themselves and others of continuing to smoke. Ostracism in out of the way spaces only served to reinforce such sensibilities.

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991), 87-104, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Id, p. 100; see also Dean, Mitchell. 1999. *Governmentality—Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage), ch 1.

<sup>20</sup> The calculation and consciousness of risk are often in conflict.

<sup>21</sup> In the past, some fundamentalist Protestant groups placed smoking in the same league as drinking and licentious behavior. Beginning in the 1960s, such condemnation came to be primarily *secular*. See also Rose, “Politics.”



Finally, while the effect of such governmentality took place in the individual, it nonetheless reflected a *social* sensibility, of what is “right” and what is not.<sup>22</sup>

The example of smoking also suggests that deeply-embedded and widely-accepted social practices related to lifestyle can, and do, change over time, albeit not via the much-vaunted market and its concern with prices and internalization. Although we tend to regard lifestyles as a matter of “freedom of choice,”<sup>23</sup> they are, in fact, heavily-regulated in terms of what we are permitted to do, what we are encouraged to consume, and what happens if we “violate” the rules and regulations that constrain our “freedom.” The governmentalization of lifestyle thus becomes a set of internalized norms and practices through which individual members of specified populations shape themselves so as to comport with their statistical placement in specific categories of consumers. Data on these practices can be collected to generate statistical norms about group “preferences” that, in turn, can be applied to further shape and stimulate the biopolitics of consumers. All of this serves the imperative of economic growth and accumulation, although it would be inaccurate to say that there is strong intentionality present in this process.<sup>24</sup> A further point here is that the processes, practices and effects of governmentality serve as much to *create* those populations as they do to keep them contained within normative limits.

The biopolitics of carbon consequently rests on such processes, through the governmentalization of the everyday practices of the world’s population and the

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<sup>22</sup> Lee Thompson, Jamie Pearce & Ross Barnett, “Nomadic Identities and Socio-Spatial Competence: Making Sense of Post-Smoking Selves,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no. 5 (Aug. 2009): 565-81.

<sup>23</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> That is, it is the “business of business” to shape consumer preferences and behaviors, as we shall see.

associated biopolitics.<sup>25</sup> Such practices are, after all, the major source of greenhouse gases and the primary cause of global climate change.<sup>26</sup> Excessive carbonization of the Earth's atmosphere poses a number of threats to the security, well-being and "lifestyle" of that population taken *as a whole*, albeit not as a single undifferentiated one. It is, therefore, necessary to acquire knowledge about (i) the causes and sources of the threat, which arise from that "lifestyle"; (ii) to regulate those "lifestyle" practices that generate the carbon; and (iii) to acquire the technical and social knowledge necessary to modify those practices and reduce carbon emissions.<sup>27</sup> There is something a bit chilling about such a biopolitics: everyone and everything comes to be seen either as a stock or flow of carbon, and a potential threat to global survival. If one is a stock, it is to be maintained at a constant or reduced level; if one is a flow, it is to be regulated. Babies might become very expensive as carbon sources.<sup>28</sup>

### **Modes of Consumption**

Although consumption appears to be a well-understood concept, its content and practice are not as evident as they might seem. Clearly, we consume in order to live but beyond this consumption has as much to do with societal reproduction, and the production of

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<sup>25</sup> Angela Oels, "Rendering Climate Change Governable: From Biopower to Advanced Liberal Government?" *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 7, no. 3 (Sept. 2005): 185-207;

<sup>26</sup> Angela Druckman & Tim Jackson, "The Carbon Footprint of UK Households 1990-2004," *Ecological Economics* 68 (2009): 2066-77, 20074-75; Shui Bin & Hadi Dowlatabadi, "Consumer Lifestyle Approach to US Energy Use and the Related CO-2 Emissions," *Energy Policy* 33 (2005): 197-208.

<sup>27</sup> We might even expect that breathing will be regulated, since humans currently emit something like two billion tons of carbon per year into the atmosphere. Indeed, according to one on-line story, "Al Gore has been having the same thoughts too: 'We breathe out carbon dioxide, and this in turn causes global warming. I'm going to start holding my breath for two minutes, thirty times per day, in order to combat global warming. I would suggest everyone follow my lead and hold your breath every day. It will prevent the earth from being destroyed'." At: <http://www.firetop.co.uk/2006/11/15/cut-co2-emissions-stop-breathing/> (accessed 9 Jan. 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Paul a. Murtaugh & Michael G. Schlax, "Reproduction and the Carbon Legacies of Individuals," *Global Environmental Change* 19 (2009):14-20.

identities and subjectivities, as it does with the assimilation of food, water and other things necessary to life. In this sense, we do better to think in terms of *modes of consumption* and their associated practices, differentiating among those involving basic needs, societal reproduction and identity creation. I borrow the notion of “modes” from Marxism<sup>29</sup> in order to contrast the different means and ends of consumption and consumerism and how the practices associated with each have been shaped by social regulation and, indeed, social engineering. While the parallel is not quite accurate—differing modes of consumption do not correspond to “stages” of development in some teleological sense—it does help to distinguish material from symbolic means and ends (even though the material and symbolic are not wholly distinct). It also points to the ways in which everyday practices related to consumption constitute both “lifestyle” and represent a primary source of greenhouse gas emissions. In particular, it is consumption for identity creation that is most important to the high rates of economic growth associated with carbonization, and it is a mode particularly subject to the governmentalization through the market.

The basic mode of consumption has to do with life itself. Clearly, there are certain things that humans must consume to survive; we might even say that human societies exist only as a result of collective efforts to ensure group and individual survival through adequate levels of consumption.<sup>30</sup> While these basic necessities are implicated in climate change, especially through agriculture, they are not, for the most part, engines of capitalist growth and accumulation or accoutrements to particular forms of status and

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<sup>29</sup> See e.g., Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Wolf, “Europe,” and Kees van der Pijl, *Nomads, Empires and States. Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy*, vol. 1 (London: Pluto, 2007).

signification. This does not mean, of course, that all consumption of food and water involves survival—think here of meals at French restaurants or “designer water,” consumption of which is representational or signifying. I will, therefore, put aside consideration of the basic mode of consumption.<sup>31</sup>

The “classic” mode of consumption is premised on the churning out of industrial and white goods, automobiles and the various other accoutrements of middle and upper class life of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of whose production were and remain very carbon intensive. Many of these goods are imbricated in various aspects of lifestyle and a primary focus of contemporary consumer biopolitics as in, for example, the structuring and regulation of automobility.<sup>32</sup> The car is not simply a mode of transportation or even a feature of lifestyle; it is better understood as a Bourdieuan “field” or a Foucauldian “*dispositif*.” The latter is

firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid... The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.<sup>33</sup>

There is no comparable term or concept in the British or American literatures, but it has been translated as “apparatus” or “assemblage.” I return to automobility below.

The third mode of consumption has to do with the production and reproduction of one’s body and identity. While Cartesian dualism might warn us against linking the two, it is clear that modification of the former often has to do with shaping of the latter,

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<sup>31</sup> This point is not entirely correct: production and trade of grains is big business and can be a source of considerable profit to those in the middle. In terms of profit per unit of good, however, bottled water is much more profitable.

<sup>32</sup> John Urry, “Inhabiting the Car,” *Sociological Review* 54, no. s1 (Oct. 2006):17-31; Matthew Paterson, *Automobile Politics: Ecology and Cultural Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. ((New York: Pantheon, 1980; trans. Colin Gordon), p. 194.

especially for purposes of signification and status. Such changes include fashion, cosmetic surgery, tattooing, piercing and scarification, as well as practices associated with status groups, such as RVs, big houses and motorcycling.<sup>34</sup> The decoration of the body is an ancient practice, but the commodification of “identities” linked to “body work” is a fairly recent trend.<sup>35</sup> “Identity” itself is an increasingly problematic concept,<sup>36</sup> largely dependent on an individual’s material position within the global system of capitalist production, and it is based on a complicated combination of cognitive reflexivity and practice that relies on display of various items of consumption.<sup>37</sup>

It is at this point that the individual consumer meets governmentality and biopolitics through production and consumption of the self in the pursuit of lifestyle. More generally, the panoply of credit, advertising, status indicators, and “rights” all serve to shape and regulate the sovereign consumer, allowing her to be “free to choose” within those limits offered and allowed by the market.<sup>38</sup> Note how such “freedom” operates on the body and mind. On the one hand, the consumer is bedazzled by overloaded store shelves and the belief that s/he can acquire anything she wants—so long as she can afford it. On the other hand, s/he cannot acquire anything that is not available or is expressly

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<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Nestor M. Davidson, “Property and Relative Status,” *Michigan Law Review* 197 (2009):757-817; John W. Schouten and James H. McAlexander, “Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers,” *The Journal of Consumer Research* 22, #1 (June 1995):43-61.

<sup>35</sup> Ronnie D. Lipschutz, *Political Economy, Capitalism and Popular Culture* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming 2010), ch. 3.

<sup>36</sup> I ignore here the biological sources of identity; see Benedict Care, “After Injury, fighting to Regain a Sense of Self,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 10, 2009, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/09/health/research/09brain.html> (accessed Aug. 10, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> This point could be challenged: the makers of revolutionary banners, posters and buttons almost certainly meant to market them to the proletariat—although they were, in all likelihood, members of the movement, too. Contrast this with Che Guevara t-shirts, whose message is unclear and whose producer is almost certainly not a worker-owned enterprise.

<sup>38</sup> Friedman’s famous dictum that “Each man can vote, as it were, for the color of tie he wants and get it” conceals the possibility that not all colors are on offer and that one’s freedom not to wear a tie at all might be limited. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, op cit., Chapter 1, “The Relation Between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom,” pp. 7-17.

forbidden. To what degree such identity construction is linked to greenhouse gas emissions is unclear, although there are many identity-linked practices involved.<sup>39</sup>

### **Automobility as governmentality, consumption and practice**

I use the term “automobility” here to refer to the *dispositif* or assemblage that is the automotive “system.”<sup>40</sup> This *dispositif* includes not just the car itself but also the material infrastructure (highways, gas stations, parking lots, streets, pipelines), the production system (mining and manufacture of raw materials, shipping, parts production, assembly plants, tire plants, gasoline refining), auto-related labor, tourism, advertising, the arrangement of cities and suburbs, patterns of mass transit within and without major urban areas, and individual’s and people’s subjectivities and mentalities regarding both car and system. In the United States, those who lack cars find their mobility highly constrained and getting around expensive and time-consuming. Life is much easier if one possesses an automobile. Possession also constructs and reinforces “normality,” as do the existence and use of other elements of automobility. The result is that practices associated with that *dispositif* are, for the most part, assumed, unquestioned and regarded positively, while proposals to reduce or eliminate it are regarded as heretical, marginal and unfeasible. When the assemblage imposes externalities on society, these are either treated as a problem of individual agency (e.g., auto safety) or matters to be addressed instrumentally (by technological and economic fixes). The assemblage, as a whole, is not subject to transformation or conversion in any way that reduces its expanse.

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<sup>39</sup> So far as I have been able to determine, most research focused on “lifestyle” has tried to quantify the carbon footprints (or similar metrics) of distinct practices rather than broader “assemblages.”

<sup>40</sup> Urry, “Inhabiting”; Paterson, *Automobile Politics*.

Indeed, notwithstanding a host of externalities arising from the automotive dispotif, the consumer of automobility comes under social pressure to sustain and support it through a variety of biopolitical inducements and practices focused on status, freedom, economic necessity, health and safety, and the mobile imaginary. Advertising, in particular, operates on the consumer's subjectivity, as do a number of other social mentalities. Consider pickup truck advertising as a typical example. During the height of the automobile boom in the United States, advertising of pickup trucks was ubiquitous on television, quite clearly targeted toward a male demographic in the 25-60 age range. Commercials offered repeated imaginaries of vehicles engaged in "manly" activities, such as driving through mud or up rugged trails, pulling other trucks, carrying hay, herding cattle, etc. The "moving power" and capacity of these trucks were also emphasized as, presumably, a point of concern to men, who have "chores" that involve moving heavy or unwieldy things.

Note how such advertising works on the viewer/consumer's identity and subjectivity. First, men only are the target! No women need apply and, if they appear in these ads at all, it is as decoration (women compete with trucks for men's attention, and note that "pickup" has a double meaning in U.S. English). It follows that if one is not interested in trucks and the manly practices they facilitate, one must be insufficiently masculine. Second, one can improve one's self-image and shape a new identity by driving a big pickup and doing the things men do—and there's always stuff to be moved, isn't there?<sup>41</sup> Third, pickup trucks are generally less expensive and more durable than cars, so they can be abused without fear of damage or being punished (notice the

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<sup>41</sup> Caution! Men at work! Dare I point out that if men are out driving trucks, there is probably more work for the women left behind at home.

gendered implications). Finally, they tend to get poor fuel mileage and thereby contribute disproportionately to global carbonization

Note, too, how such advertising offers “freedom” even as it induces forms of biopolitical self-regulation. The driver of a pickup can go anywhere he wishes, through mud and meadow, up hill and down dale, and even through city streets. Because trucks tend to be bigger and higher than cars, the driver can also assert himself on the road and avoid being intimidated by others’ road rage and unsafe practices. And driving a truck helps to reinforce that sense of masculinity associated with being “on the move” and dominating over others. At the same time, however, being a pickup-driving man also imposes constraints on behaviour. One becomes subject to various regulatory regimes, including traffic law, credit and banking systems, energy supply, repair shops, and gender roles and rules. One is free to drive anywhere, so long as one can pay for the loan, insurance, fuel and repairs, the truck does not break down, and there are no fences or other obstacles in the way. And to the extent that the driver fully internalizes the beliefs and practices conveyed by the advertisement and its associated discourse, he self-regulates his own “freedom.” Indeed, there is not a lot of difference between the old trope of “brainwashing,” the mass social engineering that is so feared in liberal societies and biopolitical regulation of consumer behaviour through various governmental mechanisms.

Although consumers are urged routinely to utilize other forms of transportation—bicycles, buses, trains—in order to reduce their environmental impacts and carbon emissions, these alternatives generally involve considerable expenditures of time and effort, and are not appropriate for the elderly and infirm. Moreover, only limited time and



funding are devoted to transforming the practices and infrastructures associated with automobility in ways that would make society less dependent on it and the carbon it generates. Automobility has been internalized as normal practice, which seems to preclude any significant structural change in either organization or subjectivities or, at least, render it marginal.

It would not difficult to devise biopolitical tools that offered alternative imaginaries oriented around notions of status, identity, costs and necessity and linked to new material infrastructures.<sup>42</sup> Such imaginaries could be framed in terms of “freedom from the automobile” and its associated costs and discomforts, and linked to other forms of transport, a more relaxed life, better health, less time spent in traffic jams, etc.<sup>43</sup> While some shift in public sentiment about automobility is detectable, it is focused primarily on fuel efficiency and new automotive technologies, rather than the broader dispositif and its associated *habitus*. Over time, driving could become as distasteful a practice as cigarette smoking is today.

## Governing Lifestyles

Sam Binkley frames lifestyle as follows:

Lifestyles are at once expressions of the autonomy and choice of a self-aware lifestyle practitioner who takes his or her self, body, life, and happiness as an object of aesthetic investment and creativity, but also inscriptions of social power and reproductions of social structures through which hierarchical symbolic boundaries are maintained, and through which the stratification of social groups is reproduced and naturalized. As such, lifestyles bring together processes central to sociological analysis: they describe both the subjective outlooks and the creativity of individuals, while accounting for the structural constraints that come to bear on these outlooks.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Shove & Mika Pantzar, “Consumers, Producers and Practices: Understanding the Invention and Reinvention of Nordic Walking,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 1 (2005): 43-64.

<sup>43</sup> There is some discussion on-line about such freedom. The late Paul Newman and others have pointed out that the average driver works one day a week to pay for automobility; see <http://theoverheadwire.blogspot.com/2008/03/you-work-on-friday-to-pay-for-your-auto.html>

<sup>44</sup> Sam Binkley, “Governmentality and Lifestyle Studies,” *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 1 (2007): 111-26, 4.

Invoking Mike Featherstone and Anthony Giddens, both cultural sociologists, Binkley also points out that “lifestyles are increasingly made the object of advice and instruction. The new advisability of lifestyle resonates well with Giddens’s suggestion that individuals turn increasingly to expert discourses for the undertaking of a reflexive project of self-identity...”<sup>45</sup> Binkley cautions, however, that the application of governmentality to lifestyle is problematic, because

these realms function according to a very different logic of representation and persuasion, one less defined by the demand to act economically, and more by the invitation to imagine and dream of oneself transformed by a new purchase. Indeed, these two influences on everyday life seem antithetical: the voice of the social worker and the career counselor, instructing us on how to prepare for job interviews, seems opposed to the seductive image of the fashion model showing off a new line of clothing.<sup>46</sup>

To be sure, the process of identity construction is highly-individualized and the various “pieces” that comprise an individual identity can contribute to very idiosyncratic ones that barely resemble one another (hence, defying biopolitics).<sup>47</sup> At the same time, however, the imaginaries associated with lifestyle are highly structured in terms of specific cultural logics, since this is the grammar that makes them intelligible to consumers who pursue their dreams and visions. There is, of course, greater space for variation but identities shaped through consumption are not without boundaries or constraints, as noted above. In other words, consumers do not practice in a realm of “freedom” or “free choice,” as is so often claimed. S/he must have money and permission to consume, the desired object or practice must be available for alienation in the market, and the item or practice must not threaten the self, others or society as a whole. These do not seem to be onerous limits, given the wide range of goods and opportunities supplied

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<sup>45</sup> Binkley, “Governmentality,” 7.

<sup>46</sup> Binkley, “Governmentality,” 10.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, alternative lifestyles are often celebrated as forms of “resistance” although they partake of much the same notions of self as do more conventional practitioners of identity shaping.

to those who are able to participate in regimes of consumption.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, lifestyle is being regulated through norms, culture, credit, surveillance and other biopolitical tools.

I would argue that efforts to regulate consumer practices through markets and prices are too instrumentally focused and do little to change the relevant assemblages in which carbon is burned. That is, consuming practices and associated lifestyles are conceived in terms of individual preferences and choices influenced by the appropriate price signals and, at the margin, moral suasion. Thus, we focus on raising the price of energy as a means of making automobility more costly, and try to persuade consumers that it is a “good” to use less energy (“good” for whom is rarely addressed). In this equation, lifestyle is regarded as the *consequence* of preferences and choices rather than their motivator or something shaped through social norms and practices. As the case of automobility suggests, consumer preferences are strongly shaped by visions of idealized lifestyles as status-enhancing and identity creating, which also come to be deeply internalized as guides to what is “proper behavior” for particular lifestyle categories. A cowboy would never be caught driving a Prius, and no advertising ever mentions the lifetime cost of maintaining a car and paying for insurance.

Which then comes first, belief or practice?<sup>49</sup> Here it may be useful to refer to recent work by George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton which examines how organizations “inculcate non-economic motives” in their members in order to change norms,

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<sup>48</sup> As the old saw has it, “Under communism, everything that is not explicitly permitted is forbidden; under capitalism, everything that is not explicitly forbidden is permitted.”

<sup>49</sup> Kersty Hobson, “Bins, Bulbs, and Shower Timers: On the ‘Techno-Ethics’ of sustainable Living,” *Ethics, Place and Environment* 9, no. 3 (Oct. 2006):317-36.

preferences and practices.<sup>50</sup> The point is to transform *identities*, so that individuals come to identify with a different idealized norm and, indeed, come to feel incomplete or like failures if they cannot live up to those ideals. Akerlof and Kranton use the military as their model organization and examine specifically the socialization of West Point plebes from their entry into the academy until their departure. West Point is not the only organization they describe—it is, perhaps, an unfortunate choice, given the political and historical associations with forms of military discipline—but it nicely illustrates my point: to change lifestyles, it is necessary to work with and through the “psychology and sociology of workers and organizations.”<sup>51</sup> Because lifestyle is so deeply imbricated with identity as a *social* category, it becomes necessary to find ways to change those idealized norms that constitute the “normal” or “virtuous” individual identity. If this sounds faintly totalitarian, or evocative of Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty Four*,” it is—but, then, so are most social norms and practices, including current norms and practices of high individualism and consumer sovereignty.

Akerlof and Kranton’s research and model do not, anywhere, mention governmentality or self-regulation, and they make no attempt to discover the sources and origins of organizational norms and practices internalized at West Point or how they might change or have been deliberately changed. For them, individuals remain self-interested holders of preferences who, under the influence of appropriate stimuli—in the case these cadets, it is abuse and humiliation—will shift their behaviors in the desired direction (desired by whom?). The important point to note here is that it is not *education* that is effecting such normative change; rather, it is *socialization*. Whereas education

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<sup>50</sup> George Akerlof and Rachel Kranton “Identity and the Economics of Organizations,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, #1 (Winter 2005): 9-32, 9..

<sup>51</sup> Akerlof and Kranton,, “Identity,” 10.

assumes calculating rationality—if you have the appropriate information you will become convinced that a certain course of action is to your benefit—socialization does not (small children are easily socialized, but not because they have been formally educated in social norms). This observation, too, might give us pause.

The line of argument presented here points to two insights: First, significant changes in the *practices* of carbon consumers will be necessary if the emission reductions proposed by the IPCC are to be achieved. Second, such changes cannot rely merely on appeals to either economic self-interest or moral principles. In the former instance, although technological innovations and financial (dis)incentives can alter behaviors, a new “normality” will be required to internalize more significantly-changed subjectivities and practices. In the latter instance, individual calculations of self-interest have been seen to change according to circumstance and opportunity even as moral behavior is an individual choice and not binding on the individual.<sup>52</sup> To return to the story of smoking, both self-interest (one’s health and income) and morality (others’ health) are factors in an individual’s decision to smoke or not. In a broader sense, however, it is through governmentality and biopolitics, expressed via social pressures and norms, that practices and the status and identity linked to them can be transformed on a large scale. For the most part, people do not want to be regarded as “abnormal” or “marginal” and will change their behaviors as new forms of belief and practice become normative and normalized.

Would socialization of populations into a new normative frame addressed to carbon burning constitute social engineering of the worst sort, or would it be very much like common practice today? I suggest that selected populations are being socially-

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<sup>52</sup> Lipschutz, *Globalization*, ch. 7

engineered at all times via the ubiquity of advertising, commercials, brand names and performance, and that this practice is more than a century old. We call such manipulation “protected speech” and only interfere with it if it can be shown demonstrably to be false. Inasmuch as little of this social engineering dwells on the defects and shortcomings of products and practices, how does it differ from “government propaganda” in any significant sense?

## **Conclusion**

Governmentality and biopolitics are not merely a hypothetical concepts or a particular forms of social power; they are also an instrumentalities that regulate people’s behavior in lieu or the absence of direct mechanisms of social control. Even duly-authorized agencies, possessing the requisite police power to monitor, discipline and punish those who violate society’s rules and laws, cannot keep track of the many and various opportunities for individuals to transgress the social norms of Anglo-American globalized capitalism. There are few ways to stabilize and reproduce social relations and arrangements other than through the self-regarding consumer. Ultimately, moreover, we all are carbon “sources,” not only via basic needs but also through the myriad of activities in which we engage, the things we consume and the services we utilize that, taken together, constitute “lifestyles.” In one sense, therefore, a biopolitics of carbon involves moving the world’s high-consumption populations toward modes of life and practice that consume less and generate lower levels of CO<sub>2</sub>. Whether this can succeed will only become clear if it is tried. Effective management of carbon will be extraordinarily complex, but the case of smoking suggests that it such a biopolitics is not impossible.