3

Anticipation

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What is the difference between waiting and anticipation? To wait is to attend to a known condition, to focus on its singularity, while to anticipate is to forecast a potentially changing outcome, opening up multiple tracks into the future. The era of the Anthropocene has introduced radical new forms of collective anticipation, as people forecast changing environmental conditions out onto distant time horizons, merging prediction with expectation and fusing fear with desire for alternate outcomes. Living on planet Earth increasingly requires a strange new form of subjectivity, one that mobilizes an ever emerging combination of attention to and, for many, anxious anticipation of radically shifting environmental conditions. The year 2016 was the hottest year on record, suffused with signs of a destabilizing earth system: an atmospheric river flooded the West Coast of the United States, overflowing dams and producing mudslides, while Yemen suffered a mind-bogglingly intense drought. Meanwhile, the North Pole experienced summer conditions in winter even as the Sahel both dried out and heated up. What records will be broken next year or twenty years out? How will we understand and measure storms, droughts, floods, heat waves, and fire by mid-century?

Attentive subjects can now live in a state of constant environmental agitation simply by tuning into a mediascape docu-

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menting radical ecological changes around the world. Experts across the full range of the natural sciences project increasingly extreme ecological conditions into a deep future, deploying complex models of Earth systems in an attempt to identify just when the Arctic might finally be free of all ice or when major cities will be underwater or when food production will cease in various locales or when specific species might hit the extinction endpoint. In doing so, they assess on a planetary scale the effects of human activity — and particularly the multigenerational force of industrial capitalism — as it plays out across land, air, ocean, ice, and biosphere. We are in the early stages of a new age of ecological awareness, but one that operates without the requisite political programs to engage the collective environment: a nervous-making condition, indeed. Anticipation fills this gap between knowledge and action, offering individuals the chance to attune to a vast range of both immediate and distant states of being, reading in their shifting forms the possibility of even deeper and more radically changed future conditions.

Consider, for example, the real-time surveillance of the Larson C ice shelf in Antarctica, a chunk of ice the size of Wales that for years has been slowly breaking off from the mainland. Deploying a variety of remote-sensing instruments as well as direct visual inspection, scientists have followed a monumental crack in the ice shelf, measuring its incremental progress over the past decade. They are devoted to understanding and predicting what the resulting iceberg will do, not only to the stability of the Antarctic region but also to sea-level rise around the world. In December 2016, scientists announced to the world that the growth of the ninety-mile-long rift was unexpectedly speeding up (having traveled more than eleven miles in just a few weeks), leaving Larson C connected by just a few remaining miles of ice. By the time it calved off some seven months later to become a free-floating iceberg, Larson C was a global news story, offering individuals heightened access to the temporal strangeness of the Anthropocene.

Pause for a moment to consider the temporal horizon of this mass-mediated event, the invitation to inhabit the expectation of a continent-sized change in the cryosphere and to anxiously await news of its permanent transformation. There is, of course, no means of stopping an ice-shelf collapse of this kind. Moreover, this event came to have meaning in relation to prior calving episodes — we can ask how Larson C's fate measured up to that of its predecessors, Larson A and B (which broke off some years ago) — but in doing so we also set in motion imagined future episodes. The drama of Larson C ultimately invites contemplation of a future with a radically destabilized polar ice cap or one with no ice at all. Think about this kind of real-time surveillance of hemispheric conditions and the way in which, as political subjects, we are hailed to care about ice on the South Pole as an index of local environmental health. Observation here drives anticipation, enabling engaged subjects to rescale their notion of ecological relation in unprecedented ways. Arctic ice is but one example of a wide range of ecological tipping points that interested subjects can now track in real time, attending to shifts in Earth systems from the mass-mediated vantage point of homes, businesses, and schools. Witnessing and anticipating are generating new political subjectivities, both engaged and overwhelmed by the sheer scale and momentum of industrial effects across Earth systems.

When we anticipate environmental change — asking *When will the ice shelf break? when will carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reach a threshold point? When will rising global temperatures hit the 2°C mark above preindustrial norms?* — we step out of capitalist time and the nation-state to think about collective conditions in a radically new way. This is not a profit/loss mode of calculation, but entry into a transformation of planetary conditions for life itself. What kind of spatial and temporal process is this, which invites urgent public attention to shifting conditions in even the most inhospitable region of the world for humans? Is it possible to calibrate the now mostly urban human sensibilities of seven billion people to a loss of ice or seawater rise or temperature rise in the most distant of locales? How, in other

words, do contemporary attunements to the Earth system, that combination of atmosphere, ocean, ice, geology, and biosphere, structure emerging forms of ecological consciousness today, revealing the violent imbrication of human industry with the total environment on Earth? How, in short, does agitation over a destabilizing ecological domain condition forms of everyday life that are simultaneously stressed and living in expectation of increasing future injury? And, crucially, can we attune to anthropogenic effects to become more than mere spectators, mute witnesses to an ongoing industrial aftermath? When can we also anticipate to live a different politics?