



# Cultures of Energy


ENERGY POVERTY AS A FUNCTION OF THE IDEOLOGY OF PROGRESS

ASHLEY SAUER

MASTER'S CANDIDATE, APPLIED BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS





*"Electricity is arguably the central symbol of globalizing modernity and its associated urban consumption styles.*

*Lacking it, [people] are placed in situations of both material and symbolic poverty."*

CULTURES OF ENERGY: POWER, PRACTICES, AND TECHNOLOGIES (2013)

SARAH STRAUSS, STEPHANIE RUPP AND THOMAS LOVE EDS.

# Tale of the Turbines

## Village of Alto, Rural Cajamarca, Peru

- ▶ One of the poorest regions of Peru; 24% of the population did not have access to electricity as recently as 2007
- ▶ Local gold mine had electricity years before, but refused to split its overhead lines to allow access to the village
- ▶ A renewable energy project by General Electric brought electricity to Alto; improving education, healthcare, water supply – creating a general feeling of connectedness and a sense of community
- ▶ “Breaking down the feeling of being too rural and disconnected from wider modern society.”
- ▶ One man would only allow turbines on his property if he could dictate which villagers received power from “his” turbines



# Sociomaterial Relationships & Electricity

## Rural Zanzibar

- ▶ Electricity arrived in the 1990s, representing increased well being for all, quickly becoming normalized and engrained in every day life
- ▶ The electrification of rural Zanzibar brought on moral dilemmas between Zanzibari Islamic values (purity, modesty, sharing, strict gender roles) and the desire to be modern
- ▶ Light itself becomes an object with agency, empowering men and women, increasing gender equality






*“General scarcity or dearth, or the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money.”*

*“...deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education.”*

*“...economic inequality in the location or society in which people live.”*

## New York and Southern California





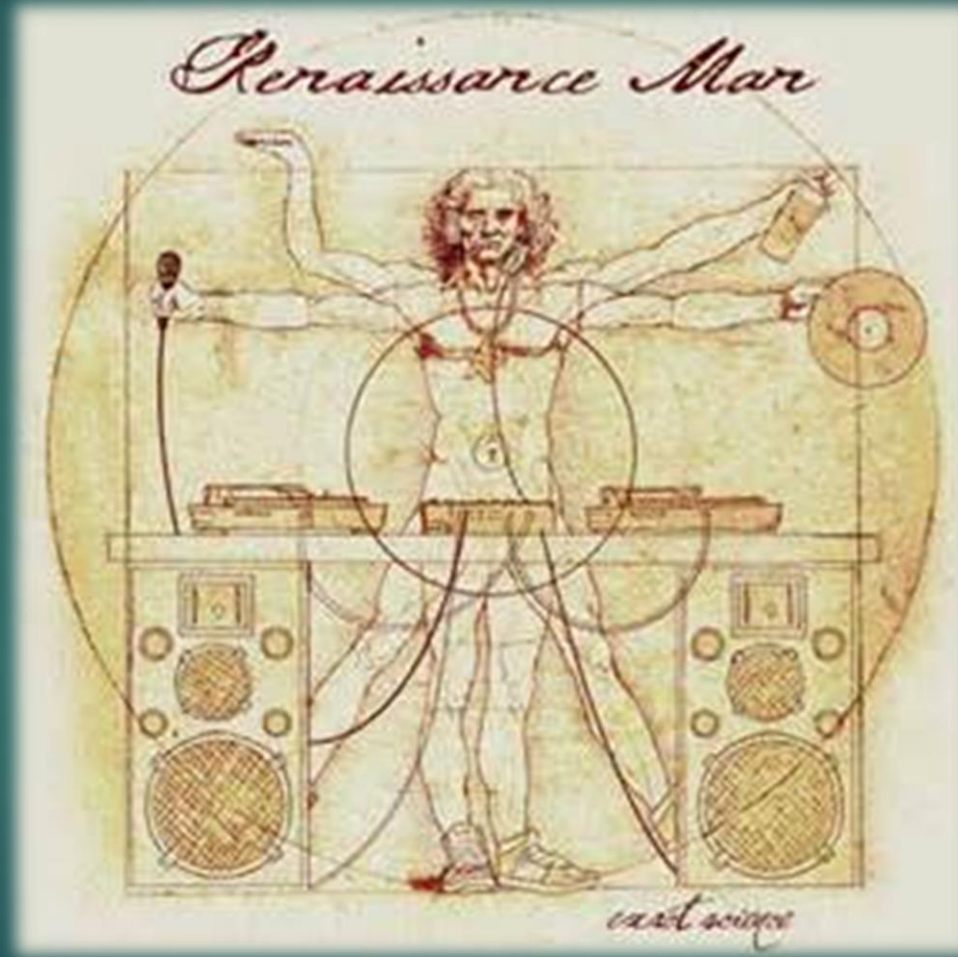
*Where does this seemingly  
universal meaning of electricity  
come from?*



# Energy Intensification as Progress



# Progress as a Doctrine



Beard, Charles.

2010 [1932] "Introduction," *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry Into Its Origin and Growth in The Energy Reader*. Nader, Laura, eds. Pp. 149-161. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

