Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics: The Cultural and Material Politics of Petroturfing

by

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Abstract

This dissertation studies efforts by self-declared grassroots groups, organizations, and campaigns that promote Canadian oil through traditional and social media. Since the emergence of the Ethical Oil campaign following the publication of *Ethical Oil* in 2010, similar groups and organizations have emerged to use popular online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to imbue Canadian oil with the same positive characteristics associated with these platforms, including democracy and freedom. I name these efforts "petroturfing" as a means to situate the content produced by these groups within a broader mediascape that resists or reproduces petroculture. "Petroturfing" is a portmanteau that references the promotional strategy known as astroturfing, a form of pseudo-grassroots promotion that establishes perceived organic support for historically controversial industries.

Framed as voices distanced from industry—from below rather than above—I argue that petroturfing is a counter-counter discourse. It seeks to destabilize counter-movements that oppose extractivism, particularly Indigenous and environmental ones, by intervening at the level of culture. In this intervention, petroturf groups actively construe a mythology around Canadian oil in opposition to the notion of "dirty oil." To critique these efforts, I build on historical materialist accounts that show that for a mode of production to remain dominant, it must continually reproduce itself not only materially or infrastructurally, but culturally or superstructurally as well. I argue that dominant energy sources must also be reproduced in this way. If our material or infrastructural present continues to be overwhelmingly powered by fossil fuels, then it is in the cultural sphere where the persistence of the fossil economy is challenged most publicly. Recognizing this, petroturf groups strategically mimic the form of grassroots environmentalist organizations, such as Greenpeace, to claim this contested space in the name of

Canadian petro-capital by using a process I call "legitimation through circulation" to shape Canadian and international energy consciousness.

I put forward two key claims in my dissertation that contribute to the energy humanities and to media and communication studies. The first is that petroturfing functions as an attempt to maintain and strengthen the cultural and material hegemony of petroculture. It shows that there is a multi-faceted effort to maintain the fossil economy on a cultural (rather than strictly material or infrastructural) level in Canada and to delay or foreclose the possibilities of an energy transition. The second claim is that the material conditions that make social media and the Internet, namely its vast energy consumption and impact on landscapes through infrastructures such as data centres, are key factors in explaining the limits of social media's radical potential.

To demonstrate these claims, this dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I, Chapter I develops an account of the material relationship between petrocultures and network societies, while Chapter II provides a genealogy that traces the origins of petroturfing as a reaction to the successes of Greenpeace and other organizations' "dirty oil" campaign. In Part II, I hone in on the content produced and circulated by these groups more closely. Chapter III examines the rhetorical use of the "economy" and "nation" as means to foreclose possibilities of energy transition. Chapter IV explores the ways in which women and Indigenous peoples are represented in these efforts, arguing that petroturfing leverages a politics of recognition in order to frame Canadian oil as socially beneficial. And Chapter V studies the promotion of oil sands reclamation and other environmental technologies, showing that petroturfing's ecological imaginary is one that sees in nonhuman nature a means of sustaining petro-capital. I conclude by speculating on the future of petroturfing, which continues to be increasingly influential and legitimated as it shifts from a largely online practice to an on the ground one.

Preface

Portions of this dissertation have appeared in a modified form in the following chapters and articles:

Kinder, Jordan. "The Coming Transition: Fossil Capital and Our Energy Future." *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2016, pp. 8-27.

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Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this dissertation took me to places I'd never expect to end up. I am sincerely grateful for all of the relationships I have had the privilege of developing throughout this work. They were an essential component in completing this dissertation and, more importantly, in confirming that I made the right choice to pursue doctoral studies in the first place.

When my partner and I travelled to Edmonton in 2014, we did so with the hunch that the experience would be a positive, transformative one. Our arrival to an apartment without electricity immediately instilled us with uncertainty and doubt. But, some five years later, it's clear that our hunch was correct. This is, in large part, attributable to the personal and intellectual support and generosity of those I have encountered and worked with along the way.

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Imre Szeman, for his continued mentorship and support. I really can't say enough about the impact that Imre's guidance has had on me and in terms of the opportunities that emerged from this relationship, which was often one of collaboration rather than supervision as such. As someone who entered academia without academic pedigree, Imre's openness and reassurance provided me with an understanding of the ins and outs of what is often a closed space by design. I continue to feel extremely privileged to have gone through this demanding and enriching process with someone whose students are a—if not *the*—clear priority. My own mentoring practices take these principles as a starting point.

My first and second readers also played a much larger role than committee members often do. From our first meeting, Sheena Wilson's generosity of attention and support was clear. Several portions of this dissertation owe their completion to writing groups that Sheena organized. Mark Simpson likewise provided sharp and supportive commentary from the beginning that helped me in sorting out fundamental aspects of this work. Between Imre, Mark, and Sheena, I found an intellectual family of sorts represented more broadly in the Petrocultures Research Group. I am also indebted to my external examiners, Laurie Adkin and Jussi Parikka, for their careful reading and productive criticism—this dissertation is much stronger as a result, as is the project's future, however it manifests.

Deep thanks to the other mentors, friends, and colleagues I've met throughout this journey, and whose critical energies and capacities continue to inspire me: Darin Barney, Jessie Beier Brent Ryan Bellamy, Adam Carlson, Marija Cetinić, Jeff Diamanti, Matt Huber, Bob Johnson, Ariel Kroon, Graeme Macdonald, Sourayan Mookerjea, Sean O'Brien, David Thomas, Michael Truscello, Rhys Williams, and many, many others. A special note of thanks to Jacob Goessling for reaching out at Petrocultures 2016. A colleague I recently met says she keeps an active document of those she feels have impacted her, which she draws on when writing acknowledgements like these. I didn't have the forethought to do so over the past several years, which means there are likely many names unfortunately left out.

Further, I was lucky enough to have a cohort of likeminded peers who opted for collegiality rather than competitiveness in an environment that often rewards the latter. Ben Neudorf's immediate friendship made it clear to me that our group was a unique one in this respect. Ana Horvat, Sarah McRae, Chelsea Miya, Will Owen, and Matt Tétreault only further confirmed this. Thanks to Stephen Webb for introducing me to curling and to Matt Cormier for mutual support during the bumpy ride of graduate student life.

Even in the most ideal circumstances, the pursuit of a PhD is an extremely stressful and demanding venture that inevitably spills over into personal life—entropy at work. On this front,

Finally, I would like to offer a note of solidarity to all of the land and water protectors who continue to resist the settler colonial expansion of the fossil economy. I hope my work sheds light on some of the contemporary strategies that aim to undermine these movements.

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Introduction

A search of Google in 2016 with the parameters "Canadian Oil" returned an advertisement as the top result for a website dedicated to the promotion of TransCanada's proposed Energy East pipeline. The hyperlinked title declares that "Canada needs Energy East" while the greyed-text, sub-title description of the site points out that "Energy East will save billions ($) in foreign imports" (Google Search). In many ways, this result is unsurprising. Of the four major pipelines or pipeline expansions proposed since roughly the mid-00s and facing controversy and resistance at every step, TransCanada's Energy East was, at the time of this search in June of 2016, being most aggressively promoted by Alberta's Premier Rachel Notley alongside Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.[1] Following the link led one to a slick website complete with professionally-styled infographics, long-form blog posts, Twitter feeds, YouTube videos, and more, all of which tout, among other things, the economic benefits of the pipeline, promoting a particular imaginary and interpellated user(s), the Canadian everyperson. The website further beckoned these users to pledge their support for the pipeline by joining the Energy East Action and by deploying the Twitter hashtag #BuildEnergyEast, a form of action framed around the feel-good, unifying mantra: "One pipeline. One voice. Take a stand!" ("Energy East").

This method of garnering public participation in promoting Canadian oil sands developments through online and social media is not isolated to TransCanada—now rebranded as TC Energy—nor to its cancelled Energy East pipeline. Garnering support in this manner also followed the proposals of Enbridge's Northern Gateway, the Trans Mountain expansion project currently owned by the Government of Canada, and TC Energy's Keystone XL. Such efforts signal an identifiable, traceable, and, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, *significant*

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[1] The Energy East project has since been cancelled by TransCanada in 2017 ("TransCanada").

emergent relationship between the cultural politics of Canadian oil on the one hand and the dynamics of social media on the other. Deploying broad-stroke, nationalism-inflected narratives tethered to abstract notions of democracy and freedom to characterize Canadian oil as ethical, in implicit and often explicit contradistinction to what is deemed as "conflict oil" found in nations such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Venezuela while construing pipelines as a unifying force are just two pertinent examples of the content of this phenomenon. This phenomenon aims, ultimately, to ascribe particular forms of meaning and signification to Canadian oil at a time when the social and cultural life of Canadian oil remains bleak, situated still in the shadows of its popular characterization as "dirty oil." Such signification stems from Canadian oil's materiality as what is understood as unconventional oil—beginning its life as bituminous sand that requires numerous resources, especially water, to shape it into crude oil.

Importantly, it is not only corporations or industry that circulate these narratives, but dubiously grassroots, largely online organizations as well, such as Ethical Oil, Canada Action, or the now defunct British Columbians for Prosperity. *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* names this phenomenon "petroturfing," a portmanteau that references the well-known, widespread advertising technique of astroturfing that emerged in (at least) the 1980s—promotion of a commodity, company, or industry that seems on the surface to be generated by a kind of democratic, grassroots mobilization that is explicitly distanced from industry. Astroturfing, a term coined by Lloyd Bentsen (Stauder and Rampton 79), occurs when corporations fund groups or individuals to use grassroots strategies to further the promotion of their industry, providing the perception of a kind of authenticity that industry voice itself does not otherwise have.[2] I read

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[2] In a chapter of *Toxic Sludge is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry* entitled "Poisoning the Grassroots," John C. Stauder and Sheldon Rampton describe the context of astroturfing: "As citizens remove themselves in disgust from the political process, the PR industry is moving in to take their place, turning the definition of 'grassroots' politics upside down by using rapidly-evolving high-tech data and communications

petroturfing as an amalgamation of this older promotional strategy and newer forms of social media as a means to culturally refigure the oil sands and petroculture more broadly. Framing its voices as distanced from industry, as voices from *below* rather than above, petroturfing is a counter-counter discourse that seeks to destabilize the social movements—particularly Indigenous and environmental—that oppose extractivism by intervening at the level of *culture*, actively construing a mythology around Canadian oil that aims to displace the domestic and international liberal environmental imaginary (an imaginary committed to existing dominant economic relations) that established its own mythology of Canadian oil as "dirty oil." Petroturf groups or campaigns are defined largely by their expression of grassroots status expressed explicitly or implicitly through a distance from industry, even in the case of many campaigns from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, which is not a petroturf group in these terms but does participate in petroturf campaigns. Moreover, petroturfing uses a process I call "legitimation through circulation" to create conditions of legitimacy for their narratives, calling on users to circulate their content and in turn normalize their discourse. In this sense, petroturfing is a simulacra of activist strategy in a Baudrillardian manner that seeks to erode the boundaries between activism that serves grassroots concerns and lobbying that reproduces already dominant structures and discourses.

Can we read these groups, efforts, and discourses that I call "petroturfing" as a concentrated site of struggle representative of a particular moment in which Canadian oil is reproduced on both a cultural *and* material level? Without question, the everyday materials and infrastructures that comprise what we have come to understand as petroculture—fossil fuels themselves, along with the highways, pipelines, automobiles, and so on that litter contemporary

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systems to custom-design 'grassroots citizen movements' that serve the interests of their elite clients" (79). "'Astroturf' organizing is corporate grassroots at its most deceitful," they write (79).

landscapes—persist and reproduce at a rate that signifies that petroculture is ubiquitous and hegemonic. As a number of critics, including Matt Huber (2013) and Stephanie LeMenager (2013), have pointed out, oil is central to contemporary life in the West and (increasingly) elsewhere, a largely taken-for-granted substance that fuels the everyday life of almost everyone. Oil, then, is a key aspect of the production and reproduction of present social and economic relations, and mythologies surrounding oil continue to proliferate. As Peter Hitchcock writes in "Oil in the American Imaginary," our collective dependency on oil "is not just an economic attachment but appears as a kind of cognitive compulsion that mightily prohibits alternatives to its utility as a commodity and as an array of cultural signifiers" (82). Of course, abstract meanings and "mythologies" being attached to commodities in a manner that veils the productive origins of those commodities in capitalism is nothing new; it is a constitutive function of capitalist processes of valuation, that is, exchange value, understood by Marx as commodity fetishism, a process endemic to capitalism that bestows upon commodities their "mystical character" (*Capital* 164). Commodity fetishism, Marx argues, is the result of "the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (*Capital* 165). One can view these mythologies of oil accordingly as a kind of fossil fetishism,[3] that moves beyond conventional commodity fetishism, since commodities are always already fetishized in this initial way, that imbues oil with abstract characteristics in a similar process of signification that Roland Barthes outlines in *Mythologies*.[4]

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[3] Andreas Malm labels the nineteenth century, bourgeois fascination with coal as "steam fetishism," pointing out that a popular view of the time construed steam power as an immaterial force. Michael Angelo Garvey, for instance, "suggested that the 'real prime mover and director' of steam was 'the mind itself'—the sheer intelligence of Britain's engineers" (*Fossil* 218). We can view a broader contemporary "fossil fetishism" that ascribes to fossil fuels abstract ideals such as freedom and democracy in similar terms.

[4] Myth, Barthes claims, operates as a form of depoliticization through naturalization (142) and we can view fossil fetishism in this way.

Understanding how energies and infrastructures gain meaning in the twenty-first century is an urgent task considering that our energic and infrastructural *habitus* fuels social and ecological inequity embodied most drastically in global warming. With regard to oil infrastructure and especially pipelines in Canada, narratives of innovation, progress, freedom, democracy, and so on are now being brought to the forefront in an effort to maintain the fossil economy, that is, an economy fundamentally premised on the burning of fossil fuels (Malm 2016), through what Keller Easterling understands as "cultural persuasion," a form of persuasion that reduces the organizational complexity of (in Easterling's case) infrastructures such as highways "to simple slogans or broad cultural abstractions" including freedom and patriotism (*Organization Space* 8). These efforts to maintain the fossil economy through *cultural* persuasion add another layer to the already existing *material* persuasion present in petroculture. In these petrocultural narratives, Canadian oil is framed as something unique and positive at a time plagued by ecological degradation, social inequalities, and climate change—all of which the production and consumption of fossil fuels exacerbate.

Prompted by this petrocultural moment at a peak of pipeline proposals and developments and resistance to these developments, roughly between 2010-2015, this dissertation examines the forms of cultural persuasion at work in Canadian oil today through these material and cultural intersections of oil and social media, primarily recent social media campaigns in Canada that promote the oil sands from an allegedly grassroots position. Stemming from recent work in the energy humanities that understands energy as a social, rather than exclusively economic or technological, relation (see Boyer and Szeman 2014; Huber 2013; Malm 2016; and Wilson, Carlson, and Szeman 2017), *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* develops a cultural history of petroturfing while exploring the ways in which these forms of promotion attempt to shape

Canadian energy imaginaries. Framing my analysis through Jodi Dean's concept of

"communicative capitalism," a term that describes the paradoxical and contradictory

confrontation between the democratic impulses of the Internet and its capitalist foundations

(*Democracy* 2), this dissertation examines how Canadian oil is given positive meanings in

networked society through print and social media with an emphasis on the latter. Dean's concept

here serves as a conceptual anchor for the dissertation's intervention into the politics of social

media. Although direct engagement with the concept is sparse, as a concept that theorizes the

outcomes of communicative struggle that privilege the interests of capital, Dean's insights shape

my analysis in a number of ways. As Dean elaborates, "communicative capitalism" names "the

materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and

communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global

capitalism" (*Democracy* 2). The resistance that is captured by petroturfing is the

resistance to the fossil economy, which is accomplished both at the level of form by

garnering online participation in the promotion of Canadian oil and at the level of content

through the signification of Canadian oil as a socially and ecologically positive force.

Ultimately, *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* contributes to the growing body of work in the energy

humanities by examining one specific, though increasingly widespread, instance of the

reproduction of petroculture, asking more generally how, and why, petroculture is reproduced in

a society mediated by ubiquitous networked communication technologies.

This dissertation examines *explicit* efforts from industry and dubiously grassroots groups

such as Ethical Oil to imbue Canadian oil with positive characteristics such as democracy and

eco-friendliness. While many critics in the energy humanities tend to perform symptomatic

readings of a kind of "energy unconscious" in a given text (see Yaeger 2012; Macdonald 2015), I

look to the collective energy *consciousness* in an effort to expand the ways in which we understand our relation to oil and energy *both* consciously and unconsciously. That is, the energy consciousness to be found in petroturfing efforts mediates and in turn reveals fundamental aspects of an energy unconscious and the collective desires embedded in the production and consumption of fossil fuels *en masse*. *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* sees in petroturfing and these other promotional ventures a snapshot of the assumptions and habits that make up our current petroculture, and from that snapshot extrapolates on and interrogates the larger relations that make up the contemporary neoliberal moment, a moment that relies on fossil fuels. In a time when futures are uncertain, except for perhaps a looming certainty of catastrophe via anthropogenic climate change or economic recessions, it is all the more imperative to examine the ways in which destructive modes and forces of production maintain hegemony.

Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics puts forward two key claims that contribute to the energy humanities on the one hand and communication studies on the other. The first is that petroturfing functions as an attempt to strengthen and maintain both the cultural and material hegemony of petroculture and, in doing so, reveals key characteristics of contemporary petroculture and our broader energy unconscious that are otherwise quite difficult to grasp and make visible, particularly how oil gains meaning. It shows that there is a concentrated effort to maintain the fossil economy on a *cultural* (rather than strictly material or infrastructural) level in Canada. The second and more contentious claim is that the material conditions that make social media and the Internet more broadly possible, namely its vast energy consumption and impact on landscapes,[5] are a key factor in explaining the limits of social media's radical potential, a potential that many, regardless of political and ideological affiliations, have been keen to underscore since its inception. What on the surface reads as an odd and, in some ways, inconsequential media event,

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[5] For more on the ecological impacts of networked society, see "Chapter I."

the promotion of Canadian oil via social media, is instead a key site of contradiction that exposes

the ways in which new media and social media operate ambivalently, generally serving

hegemonic interests in reproducing, among other dominant relations, petroculture.

Dominant discourses from both the right and left have characterized the Internet and the

networked society it brings into being as revolutionary in an affirmative sense, enabling, among

other things, a kind of radical democracy that does away with the hierarchies to be found in the

external or material world.[6] Such thinking is an inheritance from early cyberculture when the

Internet was in its infancy and the techno-utopian impulses that characterize it were ripe.

However, recent critical work illustrates how, among other things, the Internet's market-based

origins undermine its radical potential (e.g., Berardi 2011; Dean 2002, 2009, & 2010; Taylor

2014, Terranova 2004), which is perhaps most aptly articulated in Jodi Dean's provocative

notion of "communicative capitalism," a term that *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* adopts and

develops. Indeed, these myths of decentralization, of democracy, and so on perpetuate an

idealistic conception of the potentials of social media and the Internet in general—one that

sidesteps the realities of the Internet's domination by capitalist interests and impulses, a reality

that is increasingly apparent as, for instance, questions of privacy, surveillance and the

monetization of personal data pervade headlines.[7] One of the contributions *Liquid Ethics, Fluid*

Politics makes is to develop the conversation that along with economic exploitation *built in* to

the everyday operations of the commercial Internet, a material exploitation exists in, for instance,

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[6] Discussions of the revolutionary political potential of the Internet underscore the slipperiness of the ideological moment we find ourselves in. Distinguishing between Neoliberal accounts (see Schmidt and Cohen 2013) and leftist or progressive ones (see Mason 2016) is admittedly difficult, due in large part by the ambivalence I underscore.
[7] See, for instance, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's testimony to the United States Senate on the 10th of April, 2018, as a result of controversy surrounding Cambridge Analytica's alleged misuse of private data during the 2016 U.S. election campaign.

the running of servers and the extraction of resources for building the devices that access the Internet.[8]

In terms of oil and social media, the Canadian case is a particularly curious one. The oil that flows from Alberta's oil sands occupies a contentious space in both the Canadian and global imaginary. As a number of proposed pipelines loom over the Canadian and American landscapes, resistance from environmentalists and many Indigenous groups continues to make headlines.[9] Along with physical resistance in the form of blockades and demonstrations in particular, concentrated social media efforts from organizations like 350.org, Greenpeace, and the Sierra Club, have, in some way or another, shaped and influenced the discourse around the future of the production and consumption of oil in Canada, especially with regard to the oil sands, and elsewhere. In response to this multi-faceted critique and resistance, there have been increasingly strong efforts to frame Canadian oil in positive social, economic, and environmental terms beginning largely around the turn of 2010. In 2011, after the release of Ezra Levant's *Ethical Oil*, Alykhan Velshi founded EthicalOil.org, a website that uses social media to promote Canadian oil as ethical. In 2012, Joe Oliver, former Conservative Minister of Finance, wrote an open letter condemning opponents of the oil sands while touting the benefits of pipeline developments for the Canadian everyperson ("An open letter"). Following on the heels of Ethical Oil, British Columbians for Prosperity emerged to promote, among other industrial ventures, oil sands developments in B.C. such as Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline. Around this time, Canada Action was constituted with the aim of "fighting back by sharing the truth, positivity and facts about Canada's natural resources" (Canada Action "About").

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[8] This claim is not necessarily novel and finds its echoes and origins in (new) materialist media studies (e.g., Hogan 2015). For more on this, see Chapter I.

[9] See, for example, media surrounding the Burnaby Mountain protests against the Trans Mountain expansion and the Elsipogtog First Nation protests against fracking.

This brief timeline of petroturfing, which Chapter II develops in more detail, underscores the ways in which such efforts are best understood as responses to growing pressures around pipeline projects and highlight the ways in which the contemporary mediascape is a space of contestation over the meaning of Canadian oil. They also represent an ongoing, ever-expanding phenomenon that Mark Simpson has called "smooth oil." Smooth oil, through a process Simpson names "lubricity," attempts to discursively differentiate Canadian oil from alleged conflict oil by imbuing it with positive characteristics and "offers smoothness as cultural common sense, promoting the fantasy of a frictionless world contingent on the continued, intensifying use of petro-carbons from underexploited reserves in North America" (289). Prompted by this circulation of smooth oil and the condition of lubricity, *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* examines how media, and particularly forms of new media, are used to culturally reproduce fossil fuel society. It ultimately asks: what does the cultural reproduction of fossil fuel society look like in networked society, and how does it contribute to the naturalization of fossil fuel consumption in a time when continued reliance on fossil fuels as the dominant energy source is all the more socially and ecologically treacherous?

On the Reproduction of Petro-Capitalism: Notes on Method

To answer this question, this dissertation situates itself in the intersections of the disciplines of the energy humanities, communication studies, and media studies. It adopts a cultural and historical materialist methodology to provide a foundation for its thinking through the relation between the cultural and political dimensions of oil and the cultural and political dimensions of media that is central to the phenomenon of petroturfing in particular and the symbolic economy of Canadian oil in general. While the two approaches are often viewed as dissonant, incompatible, or antagonistic—embodied in tensions between British cultural studies (e.g.,

Williams) and French theory (e.g., Althusser)—in my view, both are not only compatible, but aid in addressing potential gaps or limits that both strands of materialism encounter. In understanding the totality of relations that exist today—cultural, social, economic, ecological, and so on— as *materially* constituted and historically situated while recognizing that subjects exist and have agencies, desires, and so on, structures also exist that restrict or shape what is possible and how. Accordingly, such a cultural-historical materialist methodology not only takes as its premise that dominant modes of production and the dominant energy forms are symbiotic, but that the entire dimensions of what can be bracketed off as the social and cultural are shaped by *and* shape these "base" relations.

This perspective is heavily influenced by Louis Althusser's work surrounding the cultural and material reproduction of capitalism. In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser argues that for capitalism to persist as a dominant mode of production, it must continually reproduce itself both materially, infrastructurally, or economically (Marx's base) as well as socially and culturally (Marx's superstructure) at all the levels, in other words, that comprise the totality of relations in a given historical moment. In developing a systematic understanding of the dimensions of this process of reproduction, Althusser suggests that the superstructure reproduces these relations through Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (ISAs and RSAs), defined as the two apparatuses that operate in tandem to make up state power in its entirety. Whereas RSAs "[make] direct or indirect use of *physical violence*", ISAs "are distinguished from the state apparatus in that they function, not 'on violence', but 'on ideology'" (78, emphasis original). Quick to address the possible objections he may face in characterizing cultural institutions from the private sector as part of a *state* apparatus, Althusser writes that "the distinction between public and private" is "based on a

distinction drawn in bourgeois law" (79). "All the private institutions we have mentioned, whether owned by this or that individual or the state, *function* willy-nilly as component parts of determinate Ideological State Apparatuses, under the State Ideology, in the service of the state's politics, the politics of the dominant class" (81, emphasis original), he clarifies. Together, ISAs and RSAs reproduce relations of the dominant mode of production and, I argue, dominant energic relations, and, importantly, this process of reproduction does not occur without struggle and tension.

Althusser's focus on the economic overlooks the key role that energy plays as both a force of production and a social relation. Andreas Malm links Althusser's arguments to energic relations near the end of *Fossil Capital* when he names fossil fuel consumption an Ideological State Apparatus. I would like to push this link a bit further and, rather than suggest that fossil consumption is an ISA, argue that that fossil fuels, especially oil, flow more deeply through the entirety of Althusser's structural understanding of capitalism and its reproduction—saturating the "base" of infrastructures and economy up through the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses. The claim that animates these foundational aspects of *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*, and it is not exactly a novel one, is simply this: that oil, a substance resulting from what energy historian Vaclav Smil has called "ancient accumulations of dead organic matter" (51), is offered as a free ecological-historical, metabolic "labour" to be, in McKenzie Wark's parlance, "liberated" from the ground by the bourgeoisie and released into the atmosphere (see *Molecular Red*). With this substance, capitalism has found a fuel that sustains its accelerated drive towards unlimited growth within the confines of a limited planet. Such a dynamic is precisely why Antii Salminen and Tere Vadén begin their excellent book *Energy and Experience* with the declaration

that "After God was killed in the bourgeois revolution, He went underground in order to be

utilized as oil by its descendants" (1).

Althusser's theory of the reproduction of capitalism helps to draw out the intertwined

relationship between oil and capitalism. Commenting on the capitalist system as a totalizing

system, Althusser's structural understanding of what constitutes a mode of production, aptly

illustrates the significant role of *forces* of production in the entire schema from which larger

relations occur.
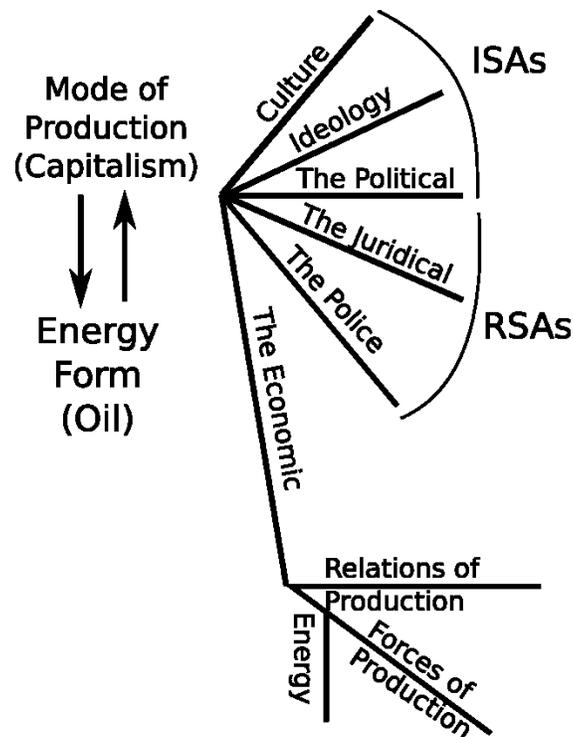
Figure 1. Jameson's Schema of Althusser's Topology with Energy Focus

Fredric Jameson's model of Althusser's structure, found in *The Political Unconscious*, illustrates

these nuances of Althusser's thought. What Jameson's representation shows is the

interrelatedness of the pieces which make up the totality of the mode of production, and the co-

determinate relationship between the economic or infrastructural "base," comprised of the unity

of forces of production and relations of production, and the superstructure, comprised of, in

Althusser's language, Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses. Oil, I argue, saturates Althusser's structure and flows through each branch, both economic or infrastructural as well as socio-cultural or superstructural (Fig. 1). At the level of infrastructure and economy, petro-capitalism is most aptly approached through one of its privileged pieces of infrastructure: the pipeline. Our petro-modernity is tethered to the pipeline, proliferating across landscapes, strategically evading visibility while disproportionately affecting the environments and peoples near sites of extraction and along transmission lines for the primary benefit of transnational capital. For now, it proves productive to simply emphasize that, in the pursuit of profit, capitalism's primary drive is to *extract at all costs*, and alongside the spheres of the economic and the infrastructural, the Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses of Althusser's schema of capitalism aid in reproducing this drive materially and culturally.

For Althusser, ideology does not simply operate as immaterial "belief." Ideology is material, constituted through a plethora of rituals and behaviours that fall under the banner of culture as such. Speaking of the social and historical quantity of the wages necessary for the reproduction of labour-power, for instance, Althusser points out that Marx said "English workers need beer … while French proletarians need wine" (50). These "historically *variable* minimum[s]" (50) persist, but the commodities necessary for the social reproduction of labour need to be transported and distributed through complex fossilized commodity distribution chains. These practices and rituals that rely on oil can be broadly understood as comprising what Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden call oil culture, or others call petroculture. Frederick Buell describes the deepening of oil into our everyday practices in this way: "it has become impossible not to feel that oil at least partially determines cultural production and reproduction on many levels" (70). "Nowadays," he writes, "energy is more than a constraint; it (especially oil) remains an

essential (and, to many, *the* essential) prop underneath humanity's material and symbolic cultures" (70, emphasis original). In its deepening, oil pervades and establishes an imaginary in which, as Imre Szeman has shown, no alternative is conceivable, a dynamic I describe as petro-capitalist realism. I understand petro-capitalist realism in relation to the late Mark Fisher's (2009) notion of capitalist realism, which sees in contemporary modes of capitalism (neoliberalism) a form of ideological enclosure that makes conceiving of alternative modes of economic organization impossible. If oil and capitalism are linked in the ways that I propose here, then the neoliberal mantra that "There is No Alternative" (or "TINA") applies to both capitalism and fossil fueled society.

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) work in tandem, and I locate petroturfing efforts within the realm of the ISAs, particularly at the levels of ideology and culture. Althusser's arguments in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* detail how ISAs and RSAs rely upon and in turn aid in reproducing relations of the economic "base" and the dominant mode of production. In this conception, RSAs such as the law repressively condemns acts of resistance against the state and corporations—including infrastructure and means of production as violence—while the power to exercise "legitimate" violence remains held exclusively by the domain of the state. As such, in highlighting the role of oil in the development of capitalism and vice-versa, physical threats to the oil infrastructure and petro-capitalism—via blockades, targeted bombings, or other forms of sabotage, for example—and (to a certain degree) the viewpoints that oppose oil-related developments function as illegitimate and are subsumed under the banner of "criminal" in the Repressive State Apparatus' imaginary. This is true for ISAs as well, as cultural institutions including newsmedia and the broader mediascape reproduce

through cultural-symbolic measures the conditions of petro-capitalism. Petroturfing, this dissertation argues, is one explicit way in which these conditions are actively reproduced.

There are, of course, limits to this methodology and the model largely related to the question of determinism—whether in terms of economic determinism, energic determinism, technological determinism, or an interplay of these registers. However, what I propose here functions both as a methodological foundation and an entry point to begin theorizing the role of petroturfing and promotional oil sands media in a manner that moves beyond deterministic understandings of infrastructures and superstructures where the former *entirely determines* the latter. While Marxism has long been plagued by accusations of economic determinism, figuring the totality of social, cultural, ecological, and economic relations through the vectors of a nuanced view of base and superstructure need not be determinist. At the peak of Althusser's influence on Marxist literary and cultural theory in the 1970s, backlash occurred in the form of accusations of determinism and rigidity, claiming that Althusserianism put forward a "one-dimensional Marxism."[10] Althusser's topology of the totality of relations is admittedly reductive in its own way, as any model is that attempts to distill complex relations into schematized ones. However, as Jameson shows above in his schematization of Althusser's topology that I modify above (fig. 1), rather than figure the dimensions of culture or superstructure as constituted by a one-way relation with the base, he nuances this position. Considering Althusser's continued insistence that "[t]he *base is determinant in the last instance*" (162), it is not surprising that his views are often seen as wholly deterministic, but these claims only suggest that the economic is an originary *determinant* force and "the superstructure 'reacts back on' the base" (163).

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[10] See in particular a 1980 collection of essays featuring Simon Clarke, Terry Lovell, Kevin McDonnell, Kevin Robins, and Victor Jeleniewski Seidler entitled *One-Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture*. According to the very brief introduction to the collection, its authors "share a rejection of the most fundamental tenets of Althusserianism" (5), tenets the authors that comprise the collection view as reductive and deterministic.

Although he is firm to emphasize the relative autonomy of the base, it is clear that the base and superstructure are sites of struggle that affect the totality of relations.

If we are to build an account of the relation between cultural production and the material conditions (including energic conditions) of a given moment, and how the former affects the latter, Althusser's formulations prove invaluable. It is within this dialectical space of struggle that I situate petroturfing, which seeks to displace the influential position that liberal environmentalism holds over the Canadian *cultural* imaginary but, arguably, not its *material* reality, which continues to be powered by fossil fuels. An aim of petroturfing, then, is to displace liberal environmentalism from the Canadian cultural imaginary by actively constructing an energy consciousness that views Canadian oil in positive social and ecological registers.

If coal was the fuel that intensified and cemented capitalist relations in Victorian England (and following that, much of the rest of the globe at various points in history), as Andreas Malm argues in his 2015 book *Fossil Capital*, then oil serves as the fuel that cemented twentieth century capitalist relations and continues to cement *late* capitalist relations. In *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*, Matthew T. Huber argues that oil provided and continues to provide the material base of neoliberalism, which is underpinned by an imaginary of "entrepreneurial life" (xiv). Neoliberalism is both an *ideology*—what David Harvey describes as "in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2)—and a *practice* that has increasingly come to define contemporary capitalism seen in widespread "[d]eregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (Harvey 3). While the neoliberal phase of capitalism is often understood as coming to fruition in

the 1970s through policies of "creative destruction" (Harvey 3) from figures such as Margaret Thatcher, Huber challenges this conventional periodization by suggesting that we must look to the postwar period to understand neoliberalism's emergence, that "the postwar period must be viewed as neoliberalism's *incubation period*" (xvi) both materially and culturally. In viewing neoliberalism in this way, Huber shows how oil operates as a key material means through which to prop up neoliberal tenets, showing how fossil fuels, and oil in particular, "actively shapes political structures of feeling," in turn embedding oil "within … cherished ideas of private property, freedom, family, and home" (xvi).

Equating oil with these abstract positive characteristics that underpin the (North) American imaginary is a form of naturalization that Huber denaturalizes. Petroturfing, however, explicitly deepens this dynamic as another phase in the symbolic life of oil that aims to further tether abstract, positive characteristics to (primarily) Canadian oil by leveraging social media's cultural and social capital as a perceived space for enacting freedom and democracy and achieving legitimation through circulation.

Media, Communication, and the Reproduction of Capitalism

One of the larger contributions this dissertation makes is in showing how Althusser's theory of the reproduction of capitalism can be understood as a kind of media theory, one that understands the mediascape and communicative practices within it as shaped by and shaping cultural and material conditions of the present and future. The internet and, later, social media have often been figured as positive technologies of disruption that will bring about a more just society,[11] but

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[11] These techno-utopian accounts emerged alongside the rise of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s, and remain prevalent in different forms. Fred Turner's 2006 account of the rise of "digital utopianism" describes the spirit of the day in this way: "Ubiquitous networked computing had arrived, and in its shiny array of interlinked devices, pundits, scholars, and investors alike saw the image of an ideal society: decentralized, egalitarian, harmonious, and free" (1).

work that theorizes the limitations of the internet has developed as an undercurrent to these

celebratory impulses. Moreover, the critical study of new and social media is fragmented.

Indeed, the ways of studying and approaching new media have as many names as they have

factions and divergent commitments: critical Internet studies (Lovink), the study of connective

media (van Dijk), software studies (Manovich), and so on. While there is an inherent

problematic in conflating these divergent critical and intellectual streams of what can now

broadly be termed as "new media" studies, as various media continue to converge it seems as

though *all* study of media today is necessarily bound to questions surrounding new media as

such. Overarching logics and conflicts also become apparent when attempting to thread this

tradition together, with the most clearly noticeable shifts in discourses materialized in what is

understood as the shift from web 1.0 to 2.0.

The determinisms to be found in these early accounts of cyberculture were often

unapologetically celebratory and optimistic, arguing that, for example, the rise of computers

signalled a kind of *information* revolution akin to the industrial revolution, complete with a

massive restructuring of social, economic, and ecological relations. As Nick Dyer-Witheford

discusses in his exceptional account of the politics of early cyberculture, Alvin Toffler was an

early, influential proponent of these sentiments, which saw in cyberculture the erosion of class

relations and a kind of transformation of society beyond capitalism. For Dyer-Witheford, such a

sentiment is strikingly similar to the types of views that see the information revolution as one

that establishes a "better" capitalism (*Cyber-Marx* 26-30). "Yet despite their apparent

divergence," Dyer-Witheford writes, "both the 'beyond capitalism' and the 'better capitalism'

versions of the information revolution point in the same direction: to a future in which the

capitalist development of technology leads to social salvation, whether through the perfection of

the market or its transcendence" (30). These celebratory impulses, an uncanny and indeterminable mixture of left and right politics, hinged upon a perception that while computers and the Internet were established as fundamental, almost necessary aspects of daily life, and information became more "free," the ideals to be found propping up social, political, and economic relations in cyberspace would spill over into the physical world, making a change in socio-economic relations that was to be both desirable and inevitable. "Walls were coming down, hierarchies were crumbling," Alexander R. Galloway recalls, "the old brick-and-mortar society was giving away to a new digital universe" (377). While Marx certainly professed, and following his historical materialism maybe even admired, the revolutionary characteristics and determinations of energy technologies like the steam engine, such enthusiasm so prominent in discussions of the Internet and new media is unparalleled in studies of, for example, the fossil economy or potential energy futures.

This networked faith can be broadly understood as one which implants into (or onto) the Internet a kind of Promethean power of deterministically ushering in new positive material social, economic, and political relations. In other words, the shift from web 1.0 to 2.0 brought with it a disruption of the dynamics of past forms of media. Such disruption leads critics to characterize new media as *conversational* media (Spurgeon); a space for *participatory* politics or culture (Elmer 2012; Jenkins 2006; Soep 2014); or the harbinger of *network culture* (Terranova 2004). In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it has become increasingly clear that the vision of a decentralized utopia that the early proponents of cyberculture described was, and will continue to remain, a fiction. Many of these celebratory impulses have since faded from the critico-theoretical imaginary, but there remains a tangible, powerful residue in the discourses of network culture, both in academic and popular accounts. Early criticisms of visions of a

revolutionary and democratic Internet, found in the pages of works such as Nick Dyer-Witheford's 1999 book *Cyber-Marx* and Darin Barney's *Prometheus Wired* (2001), are all-the-more pertinent and valuable today. Dyer-Witheford's arguments challenge techno-utopian narratives as he critiques high-technology capitalism through a revival of a form of Marxist critique that he saw being overshadowed at the time. Barney's account of the social and political implications of networked technologies historicizes the Internet by tracing the ways in which communication technologies have developed throughout history. In doing so, he shows how notions of democracy have been adopted to describe networked technology: "Perhaps the key article of *faith* concerning the essentially revolutionary series of social, economic, and political changes *promised* by digital networks is the conviction that these are democratic media par excellence" (19, emphasis added). But Barney is quick to point out that "democracy—the great floating signifier of contemporary political discourse—means different things to different people. To some it means consumer capitalism; to others it means anarchy. To some it means liberalism; to others it requires socialism" (19-20). What Barney signals is that the forms of democracy that networked technologies supposedly enable are equally as contentious as the notion of democracy in general. Understanding the basis of this array of methodologies, observations, and ideological tensions regarding what the Internet *is* and *does* is absolutely crucial when performing even the most empirical studies of new media and contemporary networked society as encapsulated in web 2.0.

For now, though, we must ask: what exactly is new media, and how does it differ from "old" or traditional media? In a review piece that revisits Lev Manovich's seminal study of new media, *The Language of New Media*, ten years after its publication, Alexander R. Galloway traces the myriad of definitions of new media beginning with Manovich:

It is clear where Manovich puts his favor: new media are essentially software

applications. But others have answered the same question in very different ways. There

are those who say that hardware is as important, if not more so, than software (Friedrich

Kittler or Wendy Hui Kyong Chun), or those who focus on the new forms of social

interaction that media do or do not facilitate (Geert Lovink or Yochai Benkler), or even

those who focus on networks of information rather than simply personal computers

(Tiziana Terranova or Eugene Thacker). (379)

New media, then, is a contested terrain with some critics emphasizing the role of infrastructure

or hardware (e.g., Kittler), and others emphasizing the social (e.g., Lovink) or networked (e.g.,

Terranova) aspects. That said, the dichotomy established here between infrastructure and culture

is, like elsewhere, a slippery one. Separating hardware from software, as Manovich does to a

degree, is in some ways a categorical error—the two rely on each other to operate, and any

materialist account of new and social media must begin from this recognition. Wherever one

places their emphases on what precisely constitutes new media, certain common residues remain.

Indeed, we can isolate a few overlaps in these understandings and contrast them with what can

be deemed "old" or traditional media to develop an understanding of new media that is

productive and multifaceted, accounting for the nuances of our converged, hyper-mediated

society. As many critics, such as Elisabeth Soep, Christina Spurgeon, Astra Taylor, and others

are quick to point out, the contemporary web is unlike traditional mediascapes. Whereas

traditional mass media is often understood as enacting a kind of top-down relation between

producer and audience, new media disrupts this hierarchal relationship. Indeed, a *structural*

divergence between old and new media that is often commented upon is that "old" media is top-

down, whereas new media is decentralized or horizontalized, with content generated by users in a bottom-up relation.

Such an understanding is embodied in the distinction between concepts of *mass* versus *social* media. New media is interactive, it is connective, and it is social; social media is often considered to be analogous to new media although it is more accurate to think of the former as a subordinate piece of the latter. Whereas new media functions as a kind of descriptive term, totalizing the digitized convergence of various media forms (newsprint, television, film, and so on), social media represents what Nick Couldry and Jose van Dijck call "the infrastructures of web 2.0" (1). Geert Lovink briefly explains this shift from 1.0 to 2.0: "Web 2.0 has three distinguishing features: it is easy to use, it facilitates sociality, and it provides users with free publishing and production platforms that allow them to upload content in any form, be it pictures, videos, or text" (5). These features described by Couldry, van Dijck, and Lovink demarcate the shift from an earlier networked society to the one we are currently experiencing.

Another significant feature of new media is its ubiquity. As Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker put it in their provocative 2007 book *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*:

> New media are not just emergent; more importantly, they are everywhere—or at least that is part of their affect. Computers, databases, networks, and other digital technologies are seen to be foundational to contemporary notions of everything from cultural identity to war. Digital media seem to be everywhere, not only in the esoteric realms of computer animation, but in the everydayness of the digital (e-mail, mobile phones, the Internet). Within First World nations, this *everydayness* —this banality of the digital—is precisely what produces the effect of ubiquity, and of *universality*. (10)

Following Galloway and Thacker, I am inclined here to suggest that part of the difficulty in critically discussing new media, web 2.0, or the Internet, is precisely this *everydayness*, and we encounter this very same issue when discussing energy as well, which can result in a kind of intellectual road block.

Whatever the particular definition, the fragmented nature of the study of new media in any capacity makes it difficult to thread through; as a result, much of the scholarship fails to provide significant insight regarding new media more broadly. "A frank assessment to begin: There are very few books on new media worth reading," Galloway announces (377). Galloway's sentiments are intentionally provocative and perhaps reductive, but for anyone who has glanced at the number of texts in the field repeating the same arguments or falling into the same techno-utopian traps, they are also apt. Indeed, Galloway's paragraph-long summation of significant approaches to new media cited above is effectively exhaustive. Why is this? As suggested earlier, accounts of new media often do one of two things. They either valorize the perceived democratic or participatory impulses of the internet to an almost dogmatic extent, or they are so concerned with the dynamics of particular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube that they fail to account for the significant historical and socio-cultural nuances of the contemporary new mediascape. For my own contributions to this field, I am primarily interested in building on work that acknowledges the socio-historical nuances that pertain to new and social media. That is, work that sees that there are indeed some vague remnants of what is understood to be democracy in the "practice" of the Internet and networked society, but that also views the Internet as an entity and phenomenon which has *always* been enmeshed in service to the market, to capital, and to the free-marketeers of Silicon Valley and elsewhere. As such, technical or empirical accounts often fall short by isolating and detaching the mediated online experience

from broader social and political experiences, while espousing the Internet to be a novel if not previously inconceivable space.

Social media's perceived emphases on or enabling of horizontalized and democratized notions of communication, community, and identity is a significant focus for much work in the field. In the introduction to their 2012 anthology of essays, *Social Media and Democracy: Innovations in participatory politics*, B.D. Loader and D. Mercea historicize the notion of digital democracy by examining early drives and impulses "to produce virtual public spheres" (1). "For left-of-centre progressives[,]" they write, "it could enable stronger participatory democracy through the emergence of online agoras and Habermasian forums" (1). Here they reveal the optimism that accompanies many perceptions of social media and web 2.0 more broadly: "Despite these setbacks to digital democracy, a fresh wave of technological optimism has more recently accompanied the advent of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, wikis and the blogosphere" (2). Sharing this optimism, in the same collection Tamara A. Small performs a content analysis of Twitter hashtags related to Canadian politics while arguing for the ways in which Twitter as a platform enables certain forms of democratic participation due to its very form. She makes her views on the medium clear: "Twitter is a democratic media [sic] because it allows for democratic activism" (109). Small's understanding of democracy here is questionable as she tautologically defines Twitter's democratic potential while unreflexively celebrating whatever democratic activism is. But she is not alone in these impulses that equate somewhat vague, positive notions of democracy with web 2.0—the very same ambiguities that Barney identified back in 2001. In *Participatory Politics* (2014), Soep warns against this impulse: "it is easy to get excited about the new openness that can be facilitated by less hierarchical structures for communication, but we also need to watch the new inequalities that

can block access to the knowledge and networks that drive today's change" (12). Soep is certainly correct on both accounts, but we must also look for the *old* inequalities cropping up in transformed or veiled ways; and the concept of democracy must be interrogated, here and elsewhere, as it is inevitably wrapped up in ideologically saturated notions of progress and modernity.

The contemporary web, then, has proven itself to be a space for facilitating varying degrees of activism. In "Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical/Reconstructive Approach" (2005), Richard Kahn and Douglas M. Kellner argue that the ever-changing political strategies found on the internet suggest that theorizing the Internet is a kind of never ending project. "In our view," they write, "the continued growth of the internet as a tool for organizing novel forms of information and social interaction requires that internet politics be continually retheorized from a standpoint that is both critical and reconstructive." (76). For some critics, online activism is often seen as banal and inconsequential, leading some to label particular kinds of online activism as "slacktivism." Slacktivism is a neologism that describe a particular kind of activism, a "low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity" (Rotman et al. 3, footnote one). In other words, slacktivism is a kind of dialectical opposite to otherwise legitimate activism, a potential and disappointing response to the types of "awareness building" activisms that the Internet offers as a potential political strategy. Especially in terms of radical activism, then, the ways in which the Internet enables or fosters political action must be interrogated. Indeed, such discourses of slacktivism, however cynical they may be, highlight the contentious effectiveness of the participatory politics of the Internet and its *real* political limits, which are tied up not only in economic and cultural limitations, but material ones as well. Such critique is

important for my work because the petroturf groups I will be examining appropriate these strategies of online activism for the purposes of promoting Canadian oil and fossil fuels.

Many attempts from the social sciences to theorize and understand new media and the Internet, as shown above, continue to be deterministic, shrouded in an empiricist impulse that overlooks the nuances of networked society. In *Network without a Cause*, new media studies pioneer Geert Lovink muses: "Why, after a good two decades, does no (general) 'internet theory' exist? Are we all to blame? We need a contemporary network theory that reflects rapid changes and takes the critical and cultural dimensions of technical media seriously" (23). Lovink's sentiments here highlight two significant issues. First, that there continues to be a lack of comprehensive, substantial theoretical commentary on the Internet, despite its pervasiveness as a medium or platform. Second, and more importantly, that, were such a theory developed, certain conditions must be met: it must move beyond the tempting discourses of determinism or valorization that give the Internet a mystical, ahistorical agency. A comprehensive internet theory, Lovink argues, *must* take into account the socio-cultural—I would also add political-economic—*and* technical features of new media. This is precisely the point made above when reacting to the residual determinisms and uncritical valorizations that seem to break through in critical literature on new media. Taken together, these positions signal a possibility of critical synthesis of methods and perspectives that do indeed account for the complex mix of relations that shape and are shaped by the contemporary mediascape.

Even though *critical* studies of the Internet are being produced with more frequency, work that valorizes the democratic potentialities of the Internet seem as common as their peak in the late 90s utopian fever. There remains, it seems, a residual mystification of the Internet that finds its way into critical discourse even on the base level of diction. In a recent work, *The*

Culture of Connectivity (2013), José van Dijck argues against dominant, fashionable conceptions of contemporary networked society that emphasize online sociability. Rather than view participatory encounters on the web as social ones by default, he posits that social media should instead be understood in terms of a culture of *connectivity*, since encounters with social media are not inherently social. Thus, social media is understood instead as *connective* media. Van Dijk explains: "Sociality is not simply 'rendered technological' by moving into an online space; rather, coded structures are profoundly altering the nature of our connections, creations, and interactions" (20). While I hesitate to adopt van Dijck's specific terminology regarding cultures of connectivity, his heightened attention to the ways in which certain terminology is deployed in the context of web 2.0 is useful here. The relations enabled by contemporary networked technology are necessarily multilayered: economic, historical, cultural, and so on.

The strongest and most substantial accounts are those that have an impulse to theorize more broadly the ways in which networks and new and social media affect and reproduce existing social relations and power dynamics. While the Internet has certainly reconfigured— and, in turn, arguably intensified—the power relations of the bygone, top-down mass media era, the age of utopian cyberculture has long since passed. For all these horizontalizing impulses, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the Internet is determinately bound to the economic system from whence it emerged. Jodi Dean correlates this point in her concept of "communicative capitalism," which in part describes this paradoxical *mélange* of democratic and capitalist, neoliberal impulses that are key tensions in the hybrid, public-private space of the Internet. In Dean's words: "I define [communicative capitalism] as the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism" (*Democracy* 2). It is this space of tension and

contradiction that I am interested in: how are networked, communicative technologies used in ways to capture resistance to the fossil economy, and how are they simultaneously used to intensify and promote it?

Other theorists extend and echo Dean's critique. In *The People's Platform* (2014), Astra Taylor shows how new media have indeed transformed social and economic relations, but not in the ways that the techno-utopians of 90s cyberculture once dreamed: "New technologies have undoubtedly removed barriers to entry, yet, as I will show, cultural democracy remains elusive" (4). The Internet's capitalist underpinnings, for many critics, are thus at-odds with its perceived democratic, participatory impulses. Taylor sees these origins as the particular reason why the paradoxes of communicative capitalism pervade web 2.0: "There is no such thing as a public Internet: everything flows through private pipes" (224). That which is "public" is always-already privatized, bound up in the promotional impulses inherent in commercial media. Not only has the Internet, new or connective media, web 2.0, and so on failed to significantly erode the very types of hierarchical relations it was supposed to counter, it has intensified them. As Taylor puts it: "Networks do not eradicate power: they distribute it in different ways, shuffling hierarchies and producing new mechanisms of exclusion" (108). Indeed, a growing body of critics and theorists, including Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2011), Jodi Dean (2002; 2009; 2010), Astra Taylor (2014), McKenzie Wark (2004) and others, express the ways that the techno-utopian vision of a free and democratic Internet has not held up, and the hierarchies of old media have manifested themselves in new media as well.

The ways in which capitalism as an economic system is bound to social and new media suggests that the analysis of social and new media is perhaps best accomplished through the lens of political economy. Several critics have attempted this, including Dyer-Witheford and, to some

degree, McKenzie Wark (2004). More recently, Christian Fuchs' *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media* (2015) performs a comprehensive critique of social media from the vantage point of critical political economy. "Understanding social media[,]" he writes, "requires us to engage with the individual and collective meanings that users, platform owners/CEOs/shareholders, companies, advertisers, politicians, and other observers give to these platforms" (1). Fuchs points out that "Understanding social media means coming to grips with the relationship of *culture* and the *economy*" (1, emphasis added). Underscoring the dialectical relation of culture and economy in the context of new media, Fuchs demonstrates that neither can be isolated from one another. It is from this broader understanding of the dialectical relationship between culture and economy that *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* frames its intervention into the spheres of new media.

Due to culture and economy being central to a productive account of new and social media, it is perhaps unsurprising that some of the most significant and compelling accounts of new media are made by those outside of the otherwise narrowly defined field of new media studies. This becomes particularly apparent when sectioning off conventional accounts of (new) media from such disciplines as political science and communications studies. As for broader yet substantial accounts, we encountered Jodi Dean above, whose notion of communicative capitalism provides a sharp entry point for destabilizing our understanding of the ways in which capitalism appropriates notions of democracy. Even more broadly, in their discussions of immaterial labour (Lazzarato) and Semiocapitalism (Berardi), many Italian autonomist Marxists approach and theorize the New Economy (Marrazi 2008) directly and the Internet by extension. For Lazzarato, immaterial labour describes forms of labour not tied to the production of physical goods or commodities as Marx's understanding of labour describes. Critics such as Greg Elmer,

Ganaele Langlois, and Fenwick McKelvey in *The Permanent Campaign: New Media New Politics* (2012) extend Lazzarato's thought on immaterial labour to articulate how the Internet and social media provide a platform for a "permanent" political campaign (67). "The advantage of Lazzarato's approach is that it redefines control as the management of the ensemble of processes and conditions that make specific situations real and visible," they write (67). Elmer, Langlois, and McKelvey's observations are important here, as petroturfing operates as a kind of permanent, never-ending campaign for Canadian oil. These theorists and critics, then, see in the Internet another "social factory" from which general intellect[12] is accumulated and appropriated. In "Digitizing Karl Marx: The New Political Economy of General Intellect and Immaterial Labour" (2015), Serhat Koloğlugil provides a compelling and timely reading of the relationship between the Internet, general intellect, and immaterial labour. "Whereas the Internet and information technologies have created the conditions of possibility for general intellect (or 'cooperation between minds') to create a sharing economy," Koloğlugil writes, "capital has been able at the same time to show the reflexes necessary for profiting upon this cooperation" (126). For these critics, the Internet is an example of the social factory par excellence, as it relies on automation, on machines, and on generally unpaid labour in the form of user-generated content creation. Indeed, we can see Wark's notion of the vectoralist class echoed here, as the shift to

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[12] General intellect is a concept developed by Marx in the "Fragment on Machines" from the *Grundrisse* that was later taken up by Italian (post-)Autonomist theorists. Paolo Virno summarizes Marx's concept as "an attractive metaphor to refer to the knowledges that make up the epicentre of social production and preordain all areas of life" (n.p.). In *Cyber-Marx*, Nick Dyer-Witheford elaborates: "Marx points in particular to two technological systems whose full development will mark the era of 'general intellect'—automatic machinery, which, he predicts, will all but eliminate workers from the factory floor, and the global networks of transport and communication binding together the world market" (4). As Dyer-Witheford points out, the concept describes an advanced form of capitalism, and one in which Marx saw the potential for revolution. "For by setting into motion the powers of scientific knowledge and social cooperation," he writes, "capital undermines the basis of its own rule" (4). While I am not necessarily advocating the entirety of this argument—I remain skeptical regarding the supposedly inherent, almost deterministic revolutionary characteristics of general intellect—it is an important concept to engage when discussing social relations in high tech capitalism.

general intellect marks a process in which time and labour power are subsumed by new media

for the profit of transnational corporations like Facebook Inc. and Google.

Following these (post-)Autonomist Marxist lines of thought regarding immaterial, unpaid

labour and the social factory, it is important here to reflect on the manner in which content is

produced on the Internet. Authenticity as formulated by some Internet scholars[13] is seen as a

crucial characteristic of web 2.0. It is precisely this authenticity, in my view, that the pseudo-

grassroots groups are attempting to achieve. "The Internet," Astra Taylor writes, "it has been

noted, is a strange amalgamation of playground and factory, a place where amusement and labor

overlap in confusing ways" (18). It is in this space, one where labour and amusement overlap,

where, through the paradoxes of communicative capitalism, collective concern and private

interest are often indistinguishable, that the petroturf groups that I intend to study are

strategically situated. To manufacture their authenticity, these petroturf groups explicitly portray

themselves as volunteer run by one or several "concerned citizens" who produce content via

unpaid, immaterial labour, a marker of supposedly legitimate web-content. Further, they

emphasize operating entirely on donations, but do not declare their budgets. Often, they

emphasize characteristics that frame their group as an underdog up against what they perceive as

a widely held belief, like environmentalism. This is all to say that the championed aspects of the

supposedly emancipatory and democratizing characteristics of new and social media are being

leveraged to promote the production and consumption of Canadian oil. Yet, as we have seen

above, even the democratic character of the Internet is a contentious topic in itself, let alone the

democratic character of oil. Following these criticisms of new media's perceived democratizing

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[13] Authenticity, particularly in an age when media is produced by user themselves and seen as genuine, is something that marketers are actively trying to mimic or perform in the social mediascape. In *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (2007), James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II describe what they call the Experience Economy, a term that demarcates the consumer experience after the service economy (2), and we can link this to the very types of authenticity that petroturf groups perform in this nexus.

impulses, *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* will examine how and why communicative capitalism *circulates* and *strengthens* petro-capitalism. Canadian oil, I suggest, is imbued with the very same (tense and dubious) characteristics as new media—such as democracy—as a means to maintain petrocultural hegemony.

In this way, by imbuing Canadian oil with positive characteristics through social media and calling on users to share petroturf content or pledge support, petroturfing aims to create an audience of *prosumers*, a portmanteau that identifies the melding of consumer and producer that is becoming increasingly central to discussions of cultural production and value in the age of social media.[14] In "Labor in Informational Capitalism and on the Internet," Fuchs argues that the figure of the prosumer "does not signify a democratization of the media toward a participatory or democratic system, but the total commodification of human creativity" (192). Petroturfing leverages this commodification for the sake of promoting Canadian oil. In other words, in petroturfing, audiences are users who are beckoned to actively participate (that is, a kind of labour) in reproducing through their networks media that contain or communicate already dominant Canadian petro-narratives. While the central focus of *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* is not this particular dimension of labour that social media compels, or the value (in a Marxian sense) it produces, this is one of the key ways in which petroturf groups aim to legitimize their grassroots position by penetrating what is increasingly referred to as the "attention economy" (see Crogan and Kinsley 2012). It is an *active* process that requires users to participate as a constitutive feature. As Fuchs points out in "Towards Marxian Internet Studies," "Attention and reputation can be accumulated and getting attention for social media does not happen simply by putting the information there – it requires the work of *creating* attention" (Fuchs "Towards" 45,

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[14] The concept of the prosumer can be traced back to Alvin Toffler's 1980 book *The Third Wave*, which puts forth the view that contemporary society is eroding the distinction between producer and consumer (Ritzer and Jurgenson 17).

emphasis added), and it is petroturfing's aim to create that attention. Building on these critical

accounts of social media, *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* ultimately looks to petroturfing as a

means through which to intervene in two spheres that are culturally and materially intertwined,

that is, oil and media.

Chapter Summaries

Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics is organized into two parts. Part I provides the conceptual,

methodological, and historiographic foundations from which I approach promotional petroturfing

and social media by examining the relationship between petrocultures and networked societies.

To this end, Part I includes chapters that examine the material energic and ecological context

from which petroturfing emerges (Chapter I), and another that traces petroturfing's origins as a

reaction to successful grassroots efforts (online and off) to name Canadian oil "dirty oil" and

links petroturfing with Canadian right wing think tanks, particularly the Fraser Institute (Chapter

II). Following these theoretical, methodological, and historical chapters, Part II develops and

explores the notion of petroturfing more closely by examining digital media produced and

circulated by British Columbians for Prosperity, CAPP, Canadians for Clean Prosperity, Ethical

Oil, and others, from several vantage points.

Chapters III, IV, and V focus on three relations that these media speak to directly:

economic relations, social relations, and environmental or ecological relations. These are

relations that fossil fuels mediate and they are inspired by Debeir et al.'s observation that "the

modes of production, of the social formation, and of the biosphere, account for all human

activity" (1). To some degree, it seems counterintuitive to separate these relations when a key

part of my argument is that they are fundamentally interrelated and co-dependent. Indeed, I view

these as overlapping in the sense that they are co-reliant, acknowledging that in the Anthropocene (as contentious a notion it is) cultural politics are always already ecological politics.

Chapter III examines promotional oil sands media that discuss jobs and economy and deploy rhetorics enframed by notions of promise and prosperity. Much of the media from petroturf groups, for example, frame oil sands developments like pipelines as primarily job creating and ultimately beneficial for the Canadian everyperson. Rather than simply challenge these claims about job creation, I show how petroturf groups use the ideas of the employment, nation and nationalism rhetorically as a means to support neoliberal logics and processes. To do so, I rely on critical readings of neoliberalism from critics like Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval to describe how neoliberalism operates on global and individual levels, showing how these media appeal to hegemonic neoliberal sentiments like individualism and entrepreneurship in the fossil economy. Chapter IV explores the "social" as it appears in promotional oil sands media, especially the ways in which recognition politics are leveraged to promote Canadian oil as ethical and democratic due to Canada's status as a parliamentary democracy, and that the consumption of Canadian oil supports women and Indigenous peoples. It is telling that much of the media from petroturfing groups, especially Ethical Oil, define Canadian oil in contradistinction to oil from unstable regions like Saudi Arabia or Nigeria that are often associated with notions of petro-violence (see Peluso and Watts 2001). By framing the chapter around Canadian petro-violence and the ways in which its Repressive State Apparatuses maintain and reproduce petroculture, this chapter shows that "conflict free" is as paradoxical as broader notions of ethical consumption in an examination of the gendered and racialized politics of petroturfing.

Finally, Chapter V develops three theses on petroturfing's environmental imaginary with a focus on media that promotes the idea that technological advances will eventually make fossil fuel consumption sustainable. These technological advances include the only certified successful reclamation project in Wood Buffalo, Alberta and other environmental mitigation technologies. Significantly, not much has been critically written on these projects beyond the hard sciences, despite the fact that promotional accounts tout the projects as harbingers of new ecological relations.[15] It argues that reclamation projects seek to erase the metabolic rift inherent in production while functioning as a material manifestation of what Timothy Morton calls "ecomimesis." In other words, reclamation projects are an aestheticized conception of nature constructed by scientists for the service of petro-capitalism. As Morton understands it— "ecomimesis," found especially in the pages of early nature writings from writers like Henry David Thoreau or Romantics, maintains and perhaps strengthens the problematic binary between culture and nature while effectively glossing over the complex relations that exist within what can be understood as external nature and attempting to transcend the "metabolic rift" that exists between humans and nature (Foster 1999). Following this, I argue that petroturf groups, and the oil industry *en masse*, put forward a post-environmentalist view of nature, a term I developed in my MA thesis to describe the contradictory ways that greenwashing efforts appeal to environmentalist sensibilities as a means to sustain consumer society (see Kinder 2013).

Together, these chapters that make up *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* investigate the shifting meanings of oil and the ways that petroculture is reproduced in a networked society— how hegemonic and in this case damaging socio-ecological relations are reproduced in a society whose methods of communication are rapidly transforming. While some theorists, such as

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[15] There is a body of scientific literature that challenges industry claims of the viability of reclamation. See, for instance, Rooney et al. 2011 and Foote 2012.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2004), claim that the tools for dismantling the apparatuses of neoliberalism are to be found within its structures, the intensification of fossil capital bound to what Bernard C. Beaudreau and others call the process of energy deepening and the hegemony of neoliberalism suggest that this is likely not the case. By examining the socio-cultural meanings or versions of oil and the novel ways in which petroculture continues to be culturally reproduced and normalized or reified, we can be better equipped to lay the foundation for conceiving of life after oil. In this sense, *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* is concerned with the future, as petro-capitalism continues to be a major barrier to more positive social and ecological relations. At the core of this dissertation, then, is the recognition that as we approach and perhaps even move beyond the ecological "point of no return," there is an unavoidable urgency in interrogating the bond between old and new capitalist interests that persist in the current energy impasse.

PART I

MATERIALS | HISTORIES

Chapter I

Machines of Petro-Modernity: Network Societies and/as Petrocultures

Introduction

In his 2004 book *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*, cultural theorist and

programmer Alexander R. Galloway traces the ways in which computer protocols—"standards

governing the implementation of specific technologies" (7)—operate as a dominant mechanism

of power in the twenty-first century. Protocol is defined generally as a system of rules and, as

Galloway argues, is "a new apparatus of control that has achieved importance at the start of the

new millennium" (3). It is "the principle of organization native to computers in distributed

networks" and, scaling this mechanism[16] up to society in general, the "*management style*" of the

new millennium from which Galloway writes, a millennium characterized and defined primarily

by Deleuze's diagnosis of the present society as a "society of control" (3).[17] Like such recent

concepts as Keller Easterling's "infrastructure space" (2014) and Benjamin Bratton's "Stack"

(2016),[18] Galloway's protocol is described as a kind of dominant operative force or mechanism

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[16] A key example of the types of pervasive protocols that Galloway is scaling up is TCP/IP, the Internet's protocol.

[17] Deleuze's notion of "societies of control" builds on Foucault's earlier characterization of disciplinary societies—societies that operate primarily through mechanisms of discipline. In his oeuvre, Foucault traces the origins of disciplinary societies through a number of vectors, especially in relation to the establishment of asylums (see *History of Madness*, 1961), the birth of modern prisons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see *Discipline and Punish*, 1975) as well as the emergence of sexuality as such in the nineteenth century (see *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 1976). Deleuze argues that a shift has occurred and we are no longer in societies of discipline, but societies of control. Deleuze's periodization has produced a number of compelling responses and elaborations, including Galloway's and perhaps most prominently in Maurizio Lazzarato's work on debt as a mechanism of control in neoliberal societies (2012; 2015).

[18] Both Bratton and Easterling come from the field of design as a disciplinary background, and their most prominent interventions centre on ambivalent, yet persistent forces in contemporary social and political life. For Bratton, "The Stack" designates the intermingling and co-dependent layers of power and agency in contemporary society: the Earth layer, the Cloud layer, the City layer, the Address layer, the Interface layer, and the User layer. For Easterling, "infrastructure space" is a powerful spatial mechanism that has largely been ignored in architecture and design, seen instead as a benign characteristic of architecture. It operates ambivalently, but importantly it—and this is where Easterling's work primarily intervenes—can be "hacked." Her 2014 book *Extrastatecraft*, along with furthering the concept of infrastructure space, provides a programme for hacking it and, in turn, challenging dominant spatial logics of capital. I point towards these examples because they exemplify a particular tendency in contemporary critical design-oriented theory to identify a singular, but widespread dynamic which Galloway's protocol likewise exemplifies.

that contains within it the simultaneous potential to re-inscribe as well as to challenge the hegemonic forces of the twenty-first century, such as global capital or, perhaps more accurately, neoliberalism. By underscoring protocol's distribution as a kind of foundational, but deeply ambivalent process that underpins the Internet's functioning, Galloway problematizes techno-utopian accounts of the Internet from a materialist standpoint. Challenging perspectives from those who view the Internet as the *de facto* space of radical, horizontalized participation that it was once thought to (and indeed hoped to) be—an image that, as the Introduction points out in detail, persists in certain circles well into the 2010s.[19]

While developing a framework of periodization to underpin his analysis of protocol as a dominant mechanism of power and control in the twenty-first century, Galloway mobilizes Gilles Deleuze's oft-cited thesis regarding the shift from disciplinary societies to societies of control. The periodizing claim from Deleuze's later work that Galloway draws attention to links and theorizes the role that dominant machines play in the maintenance and reproduction of these societies of control. In an interview with Antonio Negri, Deleuze argues that "[e]ach kind of society corresponds to a particular kind of machine—with simple mechanical machines corresponding to sovereign societies, thermo-dynamic machines to disciplinary societies, cybernetic machines and computers to control societies" (qtd. in Galloway 22). Galloway explains how Deleuze arrived at this observation: "Just as Marx rooted his economic theory in a strict analysis of the factory's productive machinery, Deleuze heralds the coming productive power of computers to explain the sociopolitical logics of our own age" (4). But linking

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[19] For a particularly representative example of this pervasive, neoliberal-in-flavour techno-utopian impulse, see Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen's 2013 book *The New Digital Age: Transforming Nations, Businesses, and our Lives*. In it, Schmidt and Cohen espouse a form of techno-utopianism that, for example, asserts that as individuals become increasingly connected through technologies like the Internet, "the boom in digital connectivity will bring gains in productivity, health, education, quality of life and myriad other avenues in the physical world—and this will be true for everyone, from the most elite users to those at the base of the economic pyramid" (n.p.). At its core, it is ahistorical in its arguments and ignores the vast disparities that persist in network society, including access to the very forms of technology that Schmidt and Cohen champion.

dominant machines—whether steam engines, personal automobiles, personal computers, or smartphones— to a larger social and political moment reaches a limit when we ask the following: what fuels many of the dominant machines today, as Galloway understands them, and what has fuelled them for over a century? This chapter, in the first instance, is an attempt to answer this question and in turn to problematize, to complicate, and to push forward these significant claims regarding machinery, society, and power made by Galloway (via Deleuze). It does so through a focus on energy, namely fossil fuels, in relation to this form of periodization that thinks through the relationship between the machines of modernity and fossil fuels as notions such as Matteo Pasquinelli's "cyberfossil capital" are beginning to confront and theorize (314). In an exploration of the twin histories of energy and information as carbon and silicon in three stages—the industrial factory, the cybernetic society, and planetary computation (312)—Pasquinelli proposes the term "cyberfossil capital" to name "the ultimate assemblage of the perennial flows of energy" (314). The productive methodological mix of new materialism and a kind of Marxist historical materialism that Pasquinelli employs to draw attention to the relationship between petro- and cyberculture is both compelling and exciting and this chapter hopes to indirectly build on this emergent critical tradition.

Network societies—societies made possible by the kinds of protocol Galloway examines—and petrocultures are intimately connected. In exploring this intimate connection, the arguments in this chapter simultaneously disrupt the periodization deployed by Galloway and others while also complementing and extending the kinds of analyses of the materials that function as the bases of the larger historical logics and systems that underpin them. In an epoch increasingly referred to as the Anthropocene or Capitalocene, to shape a methodology around a centralized focus on dominant machines themselves while not in turn exploring the energy

sources that fuel (and have historically fuelled) them establishes a significant blind-spot from the outset, as it masks the impacts that the building and operation of these machines have on the social, the political and also the ecological. In an age when dominant technologies affect the human and nonhuman in seemingly infinitely adverse ways, it is as important to identify and name these dominant technologies as it is also to examine how they are fuelled, and what they rely on (and, indeed, exploit) both socially and ecologically. If, as Galloway claims, protocol is a kind of governing dynamic or mechanism in an age intrinsically linked to the personal computer (broadly conceived), then we can also point out that there is, simply put, no protocol without materials, no protocol without *energy*.

Energy, I argue following the work of thinkers such as Elmar Altvater (2007) and Timothy Mitchell (2011), provides a significant site of investigation from which to account for the relationship among dominant technologies and infrastructures along with dominant modes of production. And such a link is necessary to make before confronting petroturfing as a discourse reliant on a particular moment constituted by twin hegemonies of petro- and network culture. It is through intensification of extractive practices in tandem with energy production and consumption, what some critics call "energy deepening," that make possible the kinds of relations that are a pre-condition for Galloway's "protocol" or Bratton's "Stack". My reasoning for focusing on periodization in a dissertation that primarily writes directly into the "present" is because, as Imre Szeman points out, "[t]he way one establishes epochs or defines historical periods inevitably shapes how one imagines the direction the future will take" ("System" 805). The urgency necessitated by the social and ecological crises bracketed off within the concept of the Anthropocene, however flawed the concept may indeed be,[20] demands an attention to the

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[20] For critiques of the Anthropocene and its effectiveness as a critico-historical concept, see Donna Haraway's 2015 article "Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin," Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg's

future that takes seriously the past and the present. Following this recognition of urgency, my aims for this chapter are ultimately twofold. First, I want to problematize a periodization of recent historical shifts that relies on dominant *machines* without significant attention to the energy sources that fuel those machines. In both questioning and further developing Galloway's periodization, this chapter makes clear the overlapping registers that comprise our contemporary moment (petroculture and network society) while also attempting to think through the larger socio-political and socio-ecological implications of these registers, which are founded upon a shared ideological basis of extractivism characteristic of petro-capitalism. Second, I intend to build a case for showing how a cultural-materialist orientation can explain the emergence of petroturfing as a phenomenon and, in doing so, underscore the cultural and material contexts makes petroturfing possible in the first place.

The claims in this chapter, and throughout *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*, are situated within larger, emergent discussions about the relationship between ecology, energy, media, and materialism that have crystallized in such recent works as Sean Cubitt's *Finite Media* (2017), Tung-Hui Hu's *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (2015), Jussi Parikka's *A Geology of Media* (2015), Nicole Starosielski's *The Undersea Network* (2015), and two articles by Mél Hogan (2013; 2015). All of these works share an impulse to demystify and (re-)materialize that which has become predominantly immaterial in the digital popular imaginary—whether in the form of the cloud (Hu 2015), network society and data centers (Hogan 2013; 2015) or undersea cables (Starosielski 2015). Indeed, many of these works share a critico-intellectual origin of sorts, each beginning with a riff on the observation that the wireless world so often taken for granted in the contemporary social imaginary fundamentally relies on material infrastructures, and these

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2014 article "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," and Jason W. Moore's *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015).

materials and infrastructures have an impact in terms of social and ecological relations. Hogan's work is particularly revealing for my purposes here as she quite clearly demonstrates the intensities of contemporary communications infrastructure, including the intensive energy and landscape use in data centers.

The infrastructures that the Internet rests upon, I argue, produce and rely on what Christopher F. Jones has called "landscapes of intensification" (*Routes* 4-5), which are directly related to the larger process of "energy deepening" that I and others take as an axiom of broader human history. Jones' concept is used to describe energy transportation infrastructures and landscape that "both initiated and maintained energy transitions" (5), but it takes only a small critical leap from his usage to the claim that communications infrastructures *also* produce and rely on these landscapes of intensification. In the forward to Galloway's *Protocol*, Eugene Thacker identifies Galloway's work as materialist media studies. "This type of materialist media studies shows how the question 'how does it work?' is also the question 'whom does it work for?' … In short," Thacker writes, "the technical specs matter, ontologically and politically" (xii).Such a materialist media studies premised on the "technical specs" is pushed to its limits in the work that populates this recent materialist turn outlined above and ultimately provides a basis for linking network society and petroculture. This link between network society and petroculture, vis-à-vis their relationship to landscapes of intensification broadly understood, is the thread that runs through this chapter, forming the crux of its arguments surrounding a periodization that accounts for the complex matrix of dominant modes of production, dominant machines, and dominant energy forms.

Petro-(Post)modernity: Network Societies as Petrocultures

To name network society as a petroculture is to attempt to reveal how these spheres—so seemingly disparate on their surfaces—are intimately connected. Perhaps this is obvious in the gesture itself, but it is worth clearly declaring from the outset. The network societies and petrocultures that we have found ourselves embedded in, whether we like it or not, are part of the same historical, cultural, and material contexts, as they rely on a certain set of ever-increasing cultural and material intensities found throughout the *longue durée* of petro-modernity. To carefully flatten out the distinction between network societies and petrocultures is to work against the sometimes divisive or dichotomous understanding of the relationship between the material and (what is often deemed as) the immaterial in the twenty-first century cultural imaginary. That which may initially seem material on its surface, I maintain, often *also* has "immaterial" properties and effects, and that which may seem wholly immaterial is either based on the material or affects the material. There is no escaping this interdependency between the material and the immaterial, at least not in the perceivable future, especially if fossil fuels remain the dominant energy source well past the threshold dates projected by scientists and groups such as Greenpeace and the United Nations.[21] I take it is a pressing social and political task today to underscore and to think through these relationships. The notion of petrocultures and its study perform and accomplish this larger, methodological "linking" work, whether those who deploy the concept acknowledge it explicitly or not.

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[21] There are, of course, a number of competing claims and figures around the necessary dates for the "end of fossil fuels" along with contention over what comes after this end, and indeed whether or not an end is even necessary given the future potential for climate change mitigation through technologies such as Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and geo-engineering. The consensus regarding the threshold date by which fossil fuels must be phased out to avoid major ecological catastrophe, however, seems to be some time in the mid-twenty-first century, as 2050 marks the date that, for instance, Canada has committed to an 80% reduction in net emissions compared to 2005 levels under the COP21 Paris agreements (Government of Canada 2016). NASA climate scientist James Hansen et al. argue for the necessity of a complete phase out of coal by 2030 to "[keep] maximum CO_2 close to 400 ppm" (11). Greenpeace has pointed out an ideal date of 2050 for a shift to 100% renewable energy in a joint report with the Global Wind Energy Council and SolarPowerEurope (11).

Built into the concept of petroculture itself is also an implicit periodizing gesture—whether it is named as such or not—that in effect complicates the impulse of linking dominant *machines* to any given historical or contemporary moment, however understood. Making this implicit periodization found within the broader study of petrocultures more explicit, Imre Szeman calls into question conventional Marxian understandings of the phases of history and dominant modes of production by asking in "System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster" (2007): "What if we were to think about the history of capital not exclusively in geopolitical terms, but in terms of the forms of energy available to it at any given historical moment?" (806). What Szeman develops here is an alternative, provocative understanding of the epochs of dominant modes of production, of capitalism, and of history more generally, by placing (long overdue) attention on the role that forms of energy play in shaping the characteristics of a given historical epoch. This leads him to conclude that we can then, and indeed *should*, critically read cultural production—whether novels, films, television series, or Twitter posts—via their implicit and explicit cultural and material relationship to dominant energy forms.

The implications of such a periodization in relation to dominant forms of energy and to cultural production are also explored by a number of other critics working in the energy humanities in a special editorial section of *PMLA* in 2011 (Yaeger et al.). In it, they provide a provocative mapping of energy forms onto the conventional literary-historical epochs that underpinned them, arguing that cultural production of a given literary epoch contains residues of both its dominant and marginal energy forms, and that identifying those residues as they register in literature is a mechanism to think through the complex relationship between energy and culture then and now. Whether wood from pre-history to the second half of the eighteenth

century (Nardizzi 313-315), whale-oil in the Elizabethan era (Shannon 311-313), coal as a yet-to-be dominant fuel source in the fifteenth century (Hiltner 316-318), or petroleum in what can be viewed as the long twentieth century (Ziser 321-323), these energy sources shape the cultural and material relations of the moment in which they were produced, relations that are revealed in literary and cultural production.

The claim here, following prominent thinkers such as Fredric Jameson, is that cultural production has *always* been dialectically linked to the material circumstances from whence it has emerged, and that this relationship became especially pertinent in postmodernism as the aesthetic dimensions of the economy were made more visible, brought to the fore through the development of marketing and advertising industries and discourses that crystallized consumer society. This materialist logic finds echoes or repetitions in Deleuze, despite his tenuous relationship with materialism, and others periodizations that are explored in this chapter. Indeed, these periodizations are based on a certain cultural materialist understanding of how a given society functions and *produces* in relation to its material conditions—an account that stems largely from Marxist notions of totality, a concept refined by theorists such as György Lukács (1971[1923]) that names entire set of relations that make up the whole of society. In the case of Galloway and Deleuze, however, the category of the cultural seems to operate as a kind of spectre, as it haunts their observations without being clearly labelled or engaged with at any length. As my Introduction points out, Jameson's work in *The Political Unconscious* underscores the role that culture plays in the reproduction of the relations of a given dominant mode of production and epoch of capitalism; in Jameson's case, and ours, this is (late or lat*er*) capitalism (100). And if it follows that, as I and others argue (Huber 2013; Malm 2015), dominant modes of production are also dialectically linked to the dominant sources of energy that fuel them, then the

cultural sphere also takes part in reproducing relations of dominant energy regimes, or, as it is today, petrocultures.

Epoch of Capitalism (Lenin, Jameson)	Classical or Mercantile Capitalism	Monopoly Capitalism/ Imperialism/Industrial	Postmodern/ Postindustrial
"Type" of Society (Foucault, Deleuze)	Sovereign	Disciplinary	Control
Dominant Energy Source (Altvater, Debeir et al., Mitchell, Szeman)	Bio, Wind, Hydro	Fossil Fuels (esp. Coal)	Fossil Fuels (esp. Oil)
Dominant Machine (Deleuze, Galloway)	Levers, pulleys, clocks	Steam Engine	Personal Computer

Table 1: Dominant Epochs of Capitalism in relation to energy sources and machines.

Table 1 sketches out the linkages between the categories described above, synthesizing conventional Marxist accounts of the epochs of capitalism, Deleuze's Foucauldian shift from disciplinary societies to societies of control, dominant energy sources as gestured towards by Szeman and others, along with the periodizations provided by Galloway and others[22] with regard to machines. In concretizing these historical relationships, I am by no means suggesting that Marxist, Foucauldian, or Deleuzian accounts of social and political relations map smoothly onto each other; indeed, the relationship between these thinkers is a historically tense one. The aim here is to be provocative and to think through the linkages between these theorists' respective categorizations of a given historical moment. One can see how a given theorist's focus shapes their understanding of the forces that make up a given historical moment. And while their histories are arguably fraught with tension and conflict that reside in larger methodological differences, such as those historical tensions between the work of Foucault—and Deleuze—and Marxism more broadly, it remains, I think, productive to place them together when conceptualizing the relationship between network societies and petrocultures.

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[22] Other prominent critics that develop periodizations based on machines and media include the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986).

When considering periodization, it must be emphasized that transitions—whether from dominant modes of production to others, from one "society" to another, from dominant energy sources to others, or from dominant machines to others—are never "clean breaks" from previously existing circumstances or arrangements. By necessity, such an account as I have constructed in Table 1 abstracts and flattens out nuances and antagonisms while also underrepresenting the complexity of the actually existing relations between the categories in at any given moment. These echoes and reverberations of complexity reside throughout transitions from one period to another, regardless of the category one's critical focus leads one to employ. As Galloway is quick to point out, when one machine becomes dominant, the previously epoch-defining machine and other aspects of previous epochs do not simply disappear—they co-exist. "[W]hen history changes," Galloway writes, "it changes slowly and in an overlapping, multilayered way, such that one historical moment may extend well into another, or two moments may happily coexist for decades or longer" (27). Put more concretely, when smartphones became dominant, pervasive, and ubiquitous pieces of communicative technology in the early 2010s, for example, previous mobile devices such as "flip phones" continued to be in use. When television became a dominant cultural form, radio did not disappear. Complete obsolescence of a given technology or "machine" is often a long and drawn-out process, if it actually happens at all.[23] This complex transition with regard to machines—broadly conceived—

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[23] Consider, for example, that the last VHS player was produced in 2016 (Hodak), and also that collectors of VHS still desire them. The resurgence of vinyl records speaks to this dynamic as well. Obsolescence is troubled by the notion of collectors and their collections, which function as a kind of higher order commodity fetishism that, in the case of obsolete technologies and objects, is related to the broader symbolic economy of antiques. In *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard explored this symbolic economy of antiques, which is centred on an "atmosphere" of "historicalness" that the antique produces "as an authentic presence" that "enjoys a special psychological standing" (79). Such observations can be extended to technologies such as records, VHS, and other media formats that continue to have followings despite their obsolescence; however, in the case of technologies like records, the special standing is as much material as it is symbolic (i.e., sound quality is superior to many contemporary formats).

is true of both modes of production and energy systems as well, which provides further bases of linkage as explored above.

In the case of modes of production and the emergence of capitalism as a dominant system, Marx's historical materialist conceptualization of the phases of history and pre-capitalist epochs is instructive. As Luca Basso argues in *Marx and the Common: From* Capital *to the Late Writings* (2012), "the transition from one mode of production to another displays more articulated coordinates, since within one same social structure there emerge a series of differentiated levels and heterogeneous forms – sometimes coexisting, sometimes clashing – giving rise to confusion and even fractures" (111). "In the capitalist system, therefore," Basso continues, "there are still elements from previous modes of production, existing on a more or less temporary basis" (111). Thus, during the historical process of capitalism's emergence as a dominant mode of production, other non-capitalist systems functioned alongside it. But these elements of previous modes of production did not disappear entirely. As Jameson argues in *The Political Unconscious*, in late capitalism "all the earlier modes of production in one way or another structurally coexist" (100).

The degree to which capitalism's totalizing impulses subsume any alternatives to it continues to be debated and challenged. Anarchist political theorists such as Richard J.F. Day, who argues in *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (2005) against hegemony as a totalizing and politically immobilizing theory. Dene theorist Glen Sean Coulthard, for instance, shows in *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) the ways in which Indigenous modes of living have persisted in spite of (and often in struggle against) capitalism's totalizing colonialist tendencies.

Energy historian Vaclav Smil illustrates this complex dynamic with regard to energy systems quite clearly in his 2010 book *Energy Transitions: History, Energy Requirements, Prospects*, where he explores the dynamics of past energy transitions while speculating on future ones. Smil's assessment of the energy mix that comprises our global energy history and present underscores the role that formerly dominant energy sources continue to play today, making clear that transition is not clean, and, moreover, that complex legacies remain as residues. As such, predicting future energy systems is a daunting task. The makeup of energy regimes in the early 1900s, Smil asserts, served as no indicator for future regimes:

> there was no gasoline and no mass ownership of cars, there was electricity but barely any household appliances, there was energy-intensive chemical industry but no synthesis of ammonia, now … the single most important synthetic product and a key reason why the planet can feed seven billion people. And, of course, there was no flight, no gas turbines, no nuclear generation, and not a single item of consumer electronics. (149)

For these reasons Smil concludes that "[t]rying to envisage in some detail the global energy system of 2100, or even that of 2050, is an exercise bound to mislead as the past record is of little help" (149). Smil's commentary on energy systems can be scaled out and applied to the totality of relations I focus on throughout this chapter, including modes of production and technologies. Indeed, this is all to say that, of course: capitalism is the currently dominant mode of production; computers, including especially smartphones and other mobile communication technologies, are dominant machines today and in the foreseeable future; and fossil fuels serve as the dominant energy source today. Yet, there remain latent, recessive, *antagonistic* or *alternative* modes, systems, and structures that exist alongside these respective hegemonies or dominants. In

building an analysis that recognizes these dominant forms and relations in the first instance I do not aim to actively overlook or passively ignore the complexities that make up a given historical or contemporary moment.

The point of the table, then, is not an exercise in a kind of *crude* reductivism, but instead an exercise in a *productive* abstraction—an attempt to synthesize several topographies of the present. When dealing with such historically complex relationships, reducing them to their dominant tendencies proves worthwhile when searching for a starting-point from which to critique our petrocultural moment. To say that we are in a petroculture, that oil is hegemonic and saturates our everyday lives, is not to commit an act of what Christopher F. Jones calls "petromyopia," a perceived tendency of those who study oil to see everything through petrol-coloured lenses ("Petromyopia"). While petroculture is indeed hegemonic, there remain societies, nations, individuals, and so on that, for instance, use bio-mass as a primary energy source. And there are individuals or communities whose energy comes primarily from solar power or other renewables. This does not change the fact that for almost a century the dominant energy source—and one that has been at the centre of wars, civil wars, mass struggle, and more—has been oil.

In *Facing the Anthropocene*, Ian Angus traces the ways in which the material bases of society have intensified, citing a number of "Great Acceleration" graphs—atmospheric carbon dioxide, tropical forest loss, methane, primary energy use, world population, fertilizer consumption, to name a few—that all exhibit a sharp turn upward following the 1950s (44-45). These "hockey stick" graphs illustrate the ever-increasing intensities that contemporary society and everyday life take as given, which are, of course, exacerbated by the production and consumption of fossil fuels in general and oil in particular. To not account for this cultural and

material ubiquity of oil, crystallized especially in these demonstrations of oil's *exponentially*

increasing ubiquity since the 1930s, out of a fear of lapsing into a state of petromyopia is to

willfully ignore a significant force that shapes the contemporary social and ecological

experience, even if there *are* other significant forces that do so as well. It might just be that such

myopia is needed today as an antidote to address the overwhelming complexity that one

confronts when trying to think through where we are, how we got here, where we are going, and

how we can shift this trajectory—a trajectory that desperately grasps onto petrocultures and the

abundances it affords to an influential few in the face of overwhelming evidence that exhibits the

very real, increasingly catastrophic consequences of these processes and behaviours. If the aim is

to transition out of the cultural and material confines of petroculture, then we *must* first account

for the relationship between culture and energy, between culture and oil. Indeed, this observation

functions as a starting point from which an analytic of the contemporary moment can develop,

and it stems not from an obsession with all things oil, but from a sober recognition of the ways in

which oil has shaped and made possible many facets of contemporary culture that have since

become naturalized.

Rematerializing the Immaterial: Energy, Extraction, and Landscape

To say that culture, broadly understood, is influenced by the material circumstances and

conditions it exists in or is produced in relation to is not to desperately grasp onto a crudely

deterministic, pseudo-technocratic understanding of the development of culture as such.[24]

Instead, it is to recognize that the sphere of culture is one aspect of a larger totality comprised of

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[24] Some critiques of Marxist analyses, and especially of certain materialisms—whether historical, cultural, etc.—is that they are in essence determinist, especially in an economic sense. As discussed in the Introduction, however, work from such Marxist critics as Louis Althusser, or Fredric Jameson *pace* Althusser, reveals that materialism does not consider that material conditions produce culture, or superstructure, in a one-way manner, but rather a dialectical one.

a number of forces, circumstances, and conditions. My engagement with Althusser *qua* Jameson

in the Introduction aims to show as much by underscoring the ways in which the infrastructures

and superstructures of a given society operate dialectically rather than in a directly causal, one-

way manner; that is, culture, as a superstructure, is influenced by the relations of the base, and

the base is influenced by superstructure. This is Jameson's observation in *Postmodernism, Or,*

The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism regarding postmodernism's "cultural turn" wherein

> the dissolution of an autonomous sphere of culture is … to be imagined in terms
>
> of an explosion: a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to
>
> the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state
>
> power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to
>
> have become 'cultural' in some original and yet untheorized sense. (48)

And energy is very much part of this "social life" that Jameson identifies to a much greater

degree than has been hitherto emphasized by critical theorists and cultural critics. Debeir et al.

masterfully illustrate this in their comprehensive study of the relationship between societies and

energy, *In the Servitude of Power* (1984). In their analysis, Debeir et al. point out that societies

are best understood through their relationship to energy and energy sources. From here, they

argue that the *longue durée* of human history more generally is best understood in terms of a

quest to endlessly expand energy sources, increase their efficiency, and so on.

Although such lines of thought tend towards a kind of energy determinism that is

problematically rigid in both its method and conclusions, they need not be read in such a way.

Certainly, there is a kind of determinist, or at least *determinant*, impulse at work in these

observations, as is the case in reading the ways in which, for example, thinkers such as Deleuze

or Galloway view the role that machines play in shaping the conditions of a given socio-

historical moment. However, the ease with which determinism operates is continually

problematized in these accounts. In the context of network society, to see it with a cultural

materialist eye is to view with clarity the relationship between the materials—the *foundations*—

of network society on the one hand, and the cultures of network society on the other—cultures

that are predominantly associated with ideals of progress, democracy, radical participation, and

so on.[25] The materials and substances of both network society and petroculture overlap in the

sense that both are bracketed off in popular parlance under the umbrella notion of "natural

resources"—rare metals, for example, that make up microelectronics so ubiquitous today and oil

in its conventional and unconventional forms. But these connections run deeper than the sterile

category of "natural resources" implies—a category that stems from a worldview that sees the

environment exclusively in terms of that which can be extracted and valuated on the global

market. Developing a materialist sensibility—or, indeed, methodology—that accounts for the

relationship between the infrastructures of network society and the infrastructures of

petrocultures provides a foundation for complicating the widespread notion of the fundamental

immateriality of the Internet and other ubiquitous communications infrastructure.

In examining these materialist elements or foundations of network society, one avoids the

pervasive and admittedly tempting trap of viewing the Internet, personal computers, and

communication technologies as existing in a wholly wireless dimension and, by implication, an

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[25] At any given moment since its emergence, it seems that the entire political spectrum has fallen prey to identifying network society, or cyberculture, with these positive, quasi-revolutionary characteristics. For a more recent leftist account of this dynamic, see Paul Mason's (underwhelming) account of the ways in which capitalism, via communicative technologies, has begun the process of its own subtle destruction or sabotage in *PostCapitalism: A Guide to our Future* (2015). Mason's arguments emerge from a crude understanding of historical materialism, arguing that contemporary network society is the site from which communism (or in this case, post-capitalism) emerges, instigated by capitalism itself. One need only look to the inequalities that are normalized through what has been understood as the "sharing economy" through platforms like Uber and Air BnB, what Nick Srnicek and others call "platform capitalism," to see the gaps and problems in Mason's account. For an unapologetically neoliberal counterpart to this argument, see Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen's *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business* (2013).

immaterial one. Internet critics such as Geert Lovink call this tendency to view network through

the lens of the immaterial as subscribing to a kind of 'vapor theory,' which in his own oeuvre he

aims to challenge.[26] Other critical theorists and critics of network society use a variety of terms

to identify this very same problematic tendency, often building on Maurizio Lazzarato's

pioneering work on what he calls "immaterial labour," a dominant form of labour in post-

industrial economies that involves different skills sets than labour in industrial economies,

including "intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the

ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labor; and entrepreneurial

skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation of

which they are a part" (4).

The shift from Fordist to post-Fordist, or industrial to postindustrial, modes of production

in late capitalism is thus a *key* event in formulations such as Lazzarato's; the allegedly

"immaterial" sites of production become a privileged site of struggle in post-Fordism.[27]

McKenzie Wark's 2004 book *A Hacker Manifesto* argues that *information* is the raw material on

which contemporary society is now based. The struggle over information, in this view, is akin to

the struggle over the means of production, fought out between the vectoralist and hacker classes

rather than bourgeoisie and proletariat—a class struggle for the twenty-first century that no doubt

owes plenty to the kinds of theorizations of immaterial labour from thinkers such as Lazzarato or

Tiziana Terranova, whose 2000 article "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy"

shows how the digital economy and the Internet as a "social factory" appropriates and valorizes

free immaterial labour via participatory cultural production (34). This brief account suggests not

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[26] Galloway explains the problems in overemphasizing the immaterial aspects of the information age. Vapour theory, he writes, "elid[es] a specific consideration of the material substrate and infrastructure with a general discussion of links, webs, and globalized connectivity" (xiii).

[27] For an early account of the shift from industrial to postindustrial society and its effects on labour, see Alain Touraine's work on what he calls the "programmed society" (4-5).

only that the "immaterial" has become a privileged space in recent political theory since the early

twenty-first century, but that immateriality requires complicating. While what is produced by

immaterial labourers may be immaterial at first glance—smartphone apps, social network sites,

and so on—there is no doubt that they have material consequences and, in the first place, rely on

complex material relations to be both produced and consumed.

Galloway challenges this immaterialist turn in Internet criticism and theory, and critical

theory more generally, by looking at the essential characteristic of computing and of the

Internet—protocol. Protocol, for him, materializes these immaterial tendencies in theories and

accounts of the Internet by placing due attention on the material processes that make up network

(or information) society. As Galloway writes, in accounts that swoon over immateriality, "[t]he

computer is often eclipsed by that more familiar thing, information society" (17). We can push

Galloway's (re-)materialization project further, pointing towards the material assemblages that

establish the infrastructure on which network societies are built, which includes the materials that

make up hardware both on a micro- and macro-scale, expanses of server farms, of undersea

network cables, and so on. While Marx famously described the tendency of capitalism to make

"all that's solid melt into air"—that is, to veil actually existing social relations—one way we as

cultural critics can push back is to re-materialize what, on its surface in its appearance, has

melted. To abstract and not underscore the relationship between the material and the immaterial

is to ignore the social and ecological impacts of digital technologies. Indeed, as Sy Taffel writes

in "Towards an Ethical Electronics? Ecologies of Congolese Conflict Minerals," "rhetorics of

immateriality frequently conceal pressing ethical and political issues whereby digital

technologies have detrimental impacts upon social and environmental systems" (19). To expand

on this point, it is worth tracing out and exploring the direct and indirect material connections

between both fossil fuel infrastructures and network infrastructures while also connecting this exploration to other critiques of the Internet and of new and social media.

There is a large, ever-growing body of criticism that explores the ways in which the Internet, and social media in particular, re-inscribes already existing, unequal power relations through affective, social, or cultural dimensions as well as in the algorithms and operations themselves (or through Galloway's "protocol"). As the Introduction points out, critiques of the Internet's social and political potential have existed as long as techno-utopian narratives themselves, developing in tandem with each other despite the arguable dominance of the latter. Critiques along these lines are many in number, and can be found in the pages of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi (2011), Jodi Dean (2002; 2009; and 2010), Astra Taylor (2014), and Tiziana Terranova (2004). All of these theorists, with their own respective focal points, argue that far from being a radical space of hyper-democratic participation, the Internet's intimate enabling and symbiotic relationship with surveillance, with capital, and so on, reveals its true tendencies. But little work exists that builds on these social, political, and economic critiques by examining the ways in which infrastructures and energy sources also re-inscribe relations of inequality that are to be found in ideologies like petro-capitalism and extractivism in general. For this reason, it is worth turning to the conceptual and infrastructural parallels between network society and petroculture, alongside what also *immediately* connects them: energy.

Before examining these larger material and conceptual parallels between network society and petrocultures, some figures are worth relaying here regarding the clear, immediate relationship between dominant energy sources and network society in terms of the generation of electricity both globally and in North America in particular. The International Energy Agency estimates that over 40 percent of electricity globally is generated from coal ("Coal"). In 2015 in

the United States, 33 percent of total electricity was generated by coal, and natural gas also accounted for 33 percent ("What is U.S. electricity generation by source?"). Unlike the United States, Canada's reliance on coal for generating electricity is relatively minimal with exceptions in provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan that rely on coal for 51 percent and 42 percent of their electricity generation in 2015 respectively ("Alberta Energy"; "Our Electricity"). "Fossil fuels are the second most important source of electricity in Canada," Natural Resources Canada (NRC) states. "About 9.5 per cent of electricity supply comes from coal," they write, while "8.5 per cent [comes] from natural gas and 1.3 per cent [comes] from petroleum" ("About Electricity").

Canada's most significant energy source in relation to electricity generation is hydropower. "The most important source in Canada is moving water," NRC writes, "which generates 59.3 per cent of electricity supply" ("About Electricity"). The language used by NRC regarding "moving water" as the most important source of energy exhibits a kind of green nostalgia as they emphasize the alleged renewability of hydroelectricity by invoking images of previous forms of water-power energy generation. Such an emphasis, however, is misleading in terms of the social and ecological impacts of hydroelectricity. Hydroelectric dams have historically been at the centre of equally as much conflict as many of the major proposed pipelines in Canada. Indeed, many activists and critics see these mega-projects as inherently connected, especially considering that electricity generated by such projects as the proposed Site C Dam in the Peace River region of British Columbia will be for industry purposes, and those industries are primarily extractive ones. Network society, then, is fuelled by extractive energy regimes—regimes in which fossil fuels continue to play a significant role. As the title of Mark P. Mills' 2013 report makes clear, "The Cloud Begins with Coal." While it would be extremely

misleading and categorically inaccurate to say that the infrastructures which make network society possible are *wholly* and *literally* fuelled by petroleum, or even by fossil fuels in general, the governing logics and relationships are notably similar, as are their material, ecological and socio-cultural effects. These connections and relationships are not coincidental ones, but are symptomatic of life in petroculture and in petro-capitalism.

Petroculture and network society share more than a one-way energic relationship wherein fossil fuels generate a significant amount of the electricity upon which the machines of network society rely. Indeed, fossil fuel infrastructures such as pipelines and the infrastructures of network society, especially communication networks, share a number of features beyond their metaphorical characteristics as material networks. Communications scholar Darin Barney elaborates this connection between pipelines and communication networks through the notion of media as a connective concept. In a short piece entitled "Pipelines" from *Fueling Culture: 101 Words on Energy and Environment*, Barney draws attention to the parallels between pipeline and media infrastructures as he astutely observes that pipelines are perhaps best understood as a kind of media. "Pipelines," he writes "are things that daily surround us, distress us, to which we must attend" (267). "They are media in, with, and through which we come to be in the world as the sort of beings we are" (267). He continues:

> Like all media, pipelines aspire to the dream of invisibility and the fantasy of immediacy. Just as it is best when digital networks deliver us images, sound, and text wherever and whenever we want them without bothering us to register the infrastructure at all, it is best (at least from the perspective of energy capital, energy states, and energy consumers) when pipelines deliver energy without anybody noticing them (Barry 2009). (269)

For Barney, then, viewing pipelines as media opens up a space from which to critique the ideal (in)visibility of its infrastructures. Visibility operates as a key site of overlap between petroculture and its pipelines, and network society and its material necessities. Hu corroborates Barney's points with regard to the cloud in *A Prehistory of the Cloud*, carving out a space to connect petroculture and network society on the grounds of extractivism. As Hu writes, "the cloud is a resource-intensive, extractive technology that converts water and electricity into computational power, leaving a sizable amount of environmental damage that it then displaces from sight" (146).

These observations lead the way for a provocative claim—*oil and its infrastructures and social media and the network society they are embedded within are extractivist technologies at their cores*. It is no coincidence, I argue, that, at the same time as Canadian oil is being re-figured as ethical by groups like British Columbians for Prosperity and Ethical Oil in the allegedly democratic spaces of new and social media, server farms and data centers that prop-up the networks that fuel the contemporary social experience are rhetorically being made green. The energic intensities upon which these systems rely are part of a larger cultural and material milieu that create the conditions of possibility for petroculture on the one hand and network society on the other, and these *discursive* attempts to make "ethical" or make "green" the energies and infrastructures reveal the significant socio-cultural dimensions of energy and infrastructure.

This "greening" of data centres at the discursive level—that is, material and discursive attempts to mitigate the ecological impact of data centres—ultimately exposes the ways in which network society relies on certain forms of cultural and material intensification that is to be found especially in the maintenance and reproduction of petroculture. Hogan describes these intensive processes and characteristics of data centers as they currently exist:

> They are large infrastructures that take up a lot of space (often equivalent to
> several football fields). They locate in small rural towns. They consume the
> electricity equivalent to small cities. They use a discourse of innovation and an
> 'economy of scales' argument to justify their consumption. They employ only a
> small number (if any) of local inhabitants (proportionally to the size and
> excluding construction contracts). They are proliferating at exponential rates.
> And, they do not function without water—millions of gallons of it each day.
> ("Data flows" 4)

"They use a discourse of innovation"; "[t]hey employ only a small number (if any) of local

inhabitants"; "[a]nd, they do not function without water—millions of gallons of it each day"—

these features of data centers that Hogan accounts for could just as easily be lifted from a critique

of contemporary oil sands developments and from a critique of extractivism in general.

Discourses of innovation, for example, have been central to the development of the oil sands

since the initial process to separate the bitumen from the sands using hot water was developed

and patented by Karl Clark, a former professor at the University of Alberta, in 1929. Moreover,

these discourses shape the ideologies of progress and prosperity that are so essential to the

promotion of oil sands developments in the present. And, of course, Alberta's oil sands are well

known for their intensive water use.[28] How might we begin to draw on these connections in order

to form an account of the present that is productively attuned to the ways that the machines of

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[28] Water is a central issue for many activists who oppose oil sands developments, and especially the First Nations groups that do. Much of the recent opposition to pipelines and other oil sands expansions has been centred on the potential to pollute water systems used by communities and also the impact on water usage that increased production would necessarily entail. David Schindler's work on the effect of oil sands developments on water systems around Fort McMurray is especially revealing. See also "Keepers of the Water," a British Columbia-based group and movement "comprised of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples; environmental groups; concerned citizens; and communities working together for the protection of air, water, and land - and thus, for all living things today and tomorrow in the Arctic Drainage Basin" ("Home: Keepers of the Water").

network society and the energics of media and the infrastructures of petrocultures function together?

The relation between pipelines, a privileged piece of infrastructure within petroculture, and the materials that enable network society, including data centres and undersea cables, occur more broadly in what has been termed as the process of "energy deepening." As theorized most prominently by the economist Bernard C. Beaudreau in *Energy and the Rise and Fall of Political Economy* (1999), energy deepening describes the ways in which energy systems become more complex and intensive as they are further embedded in the dynamics of industrial activity as well as in everyday life while increasing productive capacities. Such intensifications through the process of energy deepening must not be separated from other socio-economic contexts. Indeed, this process is inextricably linked to what could be called "capital deepening"—as capital deepens, so does energy.

Jeff Diamanti explores this relationship between capital and energy deepening since the 1970s in a piece from a special issue of *Postmodern Culture* on "Resource Aesthetics," entitled "Energyscapes, Architecture, and the Expanded Field of Postindustrial Philosophy." In this article, Diamanti develops the notion of "energyscape" in an effort to account for this relationship between energy and capital in a postindustrial economy. "Energyscape," he writes, "names the expanded field—the historical and physical settings—in which capital accumulation is provided its energy infrastructure" (n.p.). Figuring energy deepening in terms of the relation between base and superstructure in the postmodern moment, Diamanti writes:

> Energy deepening is a "root cause" because it made possible not only the
> financialization of the global economy—which, erupting on the back of the
> energy futures market in the late 1970s and early '80s, impacted currency

delinking, rapid expansion in resource industries, and the artificially cheap energy

for consumers and businesses available for a period—but also a whole host of

digital technologies that enable and shore up the so-called immaterial, creative,

and affective turns in the global economy. Energy deepening, then, provides the

infrastructural link between what in an older vocabulary would have been the base

(postindustrialism) and superstructure (postmodernism) of our current era. (n.p.)

Following Diamanti's push to materialize the immaterial vis-à-vis energy deepening, this

chapter, and *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* as a whole, begins and (in many ways ends) with the

examination of this relationship and its implications regarding media in the twenty-first century.

Moreover, Diamanti's account likewise underscores the problematics located in the relationship

between the digital and the energic where Galloway's materialist analysis grinds to a halt (with

the machine) that can be substantiated with the following question: whither energy?

    It is through this process of energy deepening that emerge what energy historian

Christopher F. Jones has called "landscapes of intensification" (4-5). As Jones argues in *Routes*

of Power, the major successful energy transitions that occurred in the United States over the past

150 years or so fundamentally relied upon the transportation systems that were developed after

the initial discoveries of these respective energy sources. For coal, canal systems were

developed; for oil, pipelines; and for electricity, the grid. With each of these respective energy

transportation infrastructures came a reconfiguration of environment through various landscapes

of intensification that share a number of overarching characteristics, including an uneven

material and economic benefit between the rural and urban experience of the rise of the fossil

economy, wherein rural communities were disproportionately affected negatively by extraction

and urban communities reaped the benefits of access to, for example, coal to heat their homes.[29]

Moreover, the colonial implications of the development of these infrastructures is also quite

clear—canals, pipelines, and grids require vast expanses of land. Such colonial dynamics are

endemic geopolitical characteristics of energy extraction and distribution, including, for instance,

with regard to coal and British imperialism in India and oil in the Middle East. In the cases of

both the United States and Canada, the landscapes intensified through these processes are

Indigenous lands (see Chapter IV).[30] Landscapes of intensification, in this context, are

simultaneously (and perhaps *constitutively*) landscapes of ongoing colonialism deeply tied to

contemporary communicative processes and infrastructures.[31]

But energy transportation systems are not the only infrastructures that can be framed and

understood through Jones' provocative concept. Communication networks, as Barney gestures

towards through his focus on pipelines, contain within them their own "routes of power" that

also rely on the very landscapes of intensification that Jones describes. Hogan corroborates this

observation when she recounts the standard routes of transport that data travels in material terms.

"Most users are unaware of the processes involved in being online," she writes, "where a simple

Facebook status update can *travel thousands of kilometers in Internet conduits through numerous*

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[29] Residential consumption of coal, Jones argues, was a key factor in its widespread adoption and established a divide between the rural and urban effects of coal mining and transport. As Jones shows in *Routes of Power*, coal mining disproportionally affected rural areas negatively as they experienced little of the benefit that coal provided in economy and in use, which was mostly used in urban areas at the time (51). In terms of oil, pipelines in Canada (and indeed elsewhere) operate with a similar dynamic and, of course, they are scattered on indigenous land.

[30] A number of recent, high profile protests and struggles in Canada and the US illustrate the continued resistance of extractivism from many indigenous groups. See, for example, the Unist'ot'en camp in British Columbia, which is currently blockading three major oil and gas pipelines, TransCanada's Coastal Gaslink, Chevron's Pacific Trails Pipeline, and Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline ("UNIST'OT'EN"); the legal resistance against the Site C dam in Northern British Columbia from the Prophet First Nation and the West Moberly First Nation, who claim that the dam would violate treaty rights by flooding traditional territory (Kane); and the 2016-17 protest and blockade of the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota at Standing Rock.

[31] Cubitt develops this point further: "The fate of communication in the modern world is tied up in the translation of the commons through enclosure, environmentalization, and externalization. These processes are not only historical but major features of the contemporary geopolitics of ecology, features that make it essential to consider the aesthetics of media and communication in direct relation to contemporary forms of colonialism" (9).

data centers, processing tens of thousands of individual pieces of data, before 'arriving'—in a matter of seconds—to its (various) destinations" ("Facebook Data Storage Centers" 9). Just as energy forms travel through their respective routes of power, so too does the data and information that endlessly circulates in network society. In other words, how energy and data are stored and transmitted share properties and effects that parallel each other, which informs my claim regarding the intimate relationship between petroculture and network society. Indeed, the broader cultural and material effects of network society are not dissimilar to the ways in which fossil fuels continue to shape everyday life. "With these processes [of uninterrupted access and immediate communication]," Hogan argues, "the Internet has completely thwarted our notion of time and of space" ("Facebook Data Storage Centers" 11). Before the Internet thwarted these notions, however, fossil fuels did so as well by radically shortening the travel time over long distances, first by train, then by personal automobile, and then by airplane. Such a line of thought illustrates the ways in which network societies and petrocultures are bound to one another in terms of their respective effects and what could generally be understood as their ecologies, both in a material and immaterial sense, if the distinction can still productively be made. Both hinge upon a certain notions and experiences of *speed*—a simultaneously spatial and temporal concept—that shape the relations of the present on an individual and collective level. Speed, for thinkers such as Wolfgang Sachs (1996) and Paul Virilio (2006), is a condition of capitalist modernity, found at the core of a range of technologies such as automobiles and weaponry, and the relation to landscapes of intensification vis-à-vis petro- and network culture is arguably a clear one.

Other interconnections are worth briefly exploring here, especially in terms of the hardware that sustains network society, or the physical makeup of the "microelectronic-devices"

that Sy Taffel suggests function as "the architectures of the internet and networked cultures" (20). Personal computers, smartphones, and the many other electronics that seem to ubiquitously underpin our contemporary moment are composed of petrochemicals such as plastic as well as minerals such as columbite-tantalite (colton). The pursuit of these materials is indistinguishable from the very types of extractivism that drive petro-capitalism. While much of the world's supply of oil is considered to be what is termed "conflict oil," a significant amount of rare mineral extraction is geared towards "conflict minerals," minerals that are extracted under harsh conditions to fuel war and conflict. Through the concepts of energy deepening, of extractivism, and of landscapes of intensification, the parallels between the social and ecological effects and contexts of both network society and petroculture become even more apparent here on micro- and macro-scales.

These parallels are especially clear when considering the relationships between resource extraction and social and ecological conflict in the mining of rare metals as well as the production of fossil fuels. Notions of conflict and violence are the heart of vocabularies that frame Canadian oil as ethical—but to what degree are *all* instances of extraction a form of conflict or violence? As Taffel shows, tungsten, tantalum, tin and gold (3TG) played a significant role in the Second Congo War, "implicated in funding brutal warlords whose actions have prolonged the civil conflict which has lingered since the international phase of the Second Congo War ended in 2003" (20). "Since the cessation of the international phase of the conflict," Taffel writes, "various militias and warlords have fought for control of the 3TG mines which finance the continuation of armed struggle" (23). Taffel's analysis reveals the ways in which the mining of metals and minerals for microelectronics in the DRC echoes the types of issues

regarding control of the flow of oil in countries such as Nigeria.[32] Through war, deforestation,

and general destruction, the socio-ecological history of petroculture's premier substance, oil, is

virtually indistinguishable from the socio-ecological histories of the materials of network society,

which are both contingent upon (neo-)colonial apparatuses.

In *Animal Capital*, Nicole Shukin critiques the discourse of immateriality surrounding

telecommunications infrastructures that imply a lack of social and ecological impact as she ties

the extraction of coltan to a broader colonial history in the DRC. "It is indirectly, through the

artisanal mining of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo," she writes,

> that animals, land, and laborers suffer the pathological costs of telemobility's
>
> promise of 'painless transmission' … The mining of coltan extends the history of
>
> Belgian colonialism in the Congo (from the 1885 Berlin Conference to the
>
> Congo's independence in 1960) into neo colonial economies related to
>
> telecommunications capital. (172)

The colonial histories of extractive and telecommunications industries converge here, but they

are not strange bedfellows, including within Canada. Marian Bredin, for instance, observes that

as the "digital divide" between First Nations and other Canadians deepens in the twenty-first

century, it is clear that "the present exclusion of First Nations in the information economy

follows from and contributes to the historical underdevelopment of Native communities by the

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[32] Since the 1990s, the extraction of oil in Nigeria has been centred on struggle and conflict. Adam Yeeles and Alero Akporiaye describe these struggles:

> Beginning in the 1990s, socio-political unrest broke out in Nigeria's oil producing region, and has continued in one form or another until present day. The Ogoni environmental conflict (1992–1995), the Warri crisis (1997–1999), and the emergence of a broader militia movement in Niger Delta (2003–2009) represent at least three distinct epochs. Conflict began as protests against energy firms over the combined economic and environmental harm caused by exploration and production. (188)

For a detailed account of Royal Dutch Shell's human rights abuses in relation to these earlier epochs of unrest, see Oronto Douglas and Ike Okonta's 2003 book *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil*.

dominant society" further cemented by the fact that "information technologies … are designed within a capitalist political economy" (192).

On a number of *material* levels—levels beyond mere analogy, metaphor, or other sometimes naïve *conceptual* correlations—petroculture and network society are intimately bound. This intimacy is not only because of their respective reliance on such *ur*-commodities to be attained exclusively through processes of extraction, but also in the larger logics and intensities that are constitutive to (petro-)capitalism. What kind of frameworks does underscoring this intimacy generate? Such an insight moves beyond the immaterial roadblock that one inevitably faces when examining the contemporary mediascape without attention to the materials that comprise it, which ultimately rematerializes that which tends towards the immaterial. These material intimacies that have been attentively traced throughout this section provide the foundation to move beyond the purely material and to turn attention towards the *cultural* relationship between network society and petroculture as crystallized in petroturfing. Through this crystallization, petroturfing mobilizes the perceived social and democratic characteristics of the internet to attach an array of positive cultural signifiers to oil through a process of legitimation through circulation. In other words, the extractive political ecology of the Internet outlined above identifies the material circumstances and the historical junctures through which petroturfing has emerged.

Communicative Petro-Capitalism: Preliminary Notes on the Political Economy of Petroturfing

A prominent vector through which this connection between fossil fuels and social media on a *cultural* level is through what I have termed "petroturf" groups. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the birth of petroturfing can be traced to 2010, when well-known Canadian

conservative, Ezra Levant, penned a book called *Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands*.

The book argues, among other claims, that oil produced in Canada is more ethical than oil

produced from "conflict" regions—regions that are unstable, but make up a large percentage of

global oil production. Canadian oil, then, should see an increase in production and distribution to

provide a sort of fair-trade source of oil, primarily for the United States, the largest consumer of

Canadian oil (and also the largest consumer of oil on the planet, accounting for a share of 19.7%

of all consumption in 2015) (BP 9). *Ethical Oil* was a #1 National Bestseller and the "ethical

oil" argument has been referenced in policy debates in the Canadian Parliament thereby

enhancing its legitimacy.[33] Petroturfing is a *form* that attempts to shape directly the symbolic

economy of Canadian oil in its favour. It recognizes that energy is a social relation and through

this recognition attempts to shape the superstructures of petroculture. It is beyond the scope of

this chapter to provide a detailed genealogy of petroturfing's origins (see Chapter 3), but where

there are material struggles over the expansion of the fossil economy, there are also

superstructural struggles over what Canadian oil *signifies*, and petroturfing is one voice in this

struggle. Petroturfing emerges out of this recognition of the relationship between the material

contexts of oil and its cultural ones that opponents of the oil sands and of petroculture in general

have recognized from the beginning.[34]

For now, it is worth recounting some key dates and events in the emergence of

petroturfing. As the Introduction outlines, not long after the book's launch, a "grassroots"

campaign, which was largely social media-based, emerged from a blog started by Alykhan

Velshi, which was used to promote *Ethical Oil* and its arguments. In their own words,

EthicalOil.org "encourage[s] people, businesses, and governments to choose Ethical Oil from

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[33] A search of "ethical oil" in *Open Parliament*'s database returns 28 results although some of these uses are critical ("Search: ethical oil").
[34] See especially Greenpeace's "dirty oil" campaign that I discuss in more detail in Chapter II.

Canada, its oil sands, and from other liberal democracies. Unlike Conflict Oil from some of the most politically oppressive and environmentally reckless regimes in the world, Ethical Oil is the 'fair trade' choice in oil" ("About EthicalOil.org"). The online movement, due to alleged support from its readers, "has become an online community that empowers people to become grassroots community activists on the frontlines of the campaign for Ethical Oil" ("About EthicalOil.org"). And "[t]he median size of our donations to date," they write, "is $38" (n.p.), up from $5 when in 2013 I first wrote about EthicalOil.org in my MA thesis "Sustainable Appropriation." As I point out in that thesis, a median is not a representative measure for donations in the way the organization suggests. Were EthicalOil.org to get three donations, for example, one for $5, one for $38, and another for $3 million, the median would still be $38, whereas the *average* donation would be around $1 million ("Sustainable Appropriation" 106). While I am not particularly concerned with the exact source of the funding of EthicalOil.org or other petroturf groups in this dissertation (an admirable task for a serious investigative journalist), such a statistical sleight of hand is worth dwelling on as it has a rhetorical function in framing the campaign as a grassroots, citizen-funded one.

One of the key functions of EthicalOil.org is to take part in what they call "mythbusting" by publishing online op-ed articles through venues like *Huffington Post Canada* (Ellerton) and their own blog, making and sharing slick YouTube videos, and maintaining Facebook and Twitter presences. As of 2018, their Facebook page boasts 2,728 "likes"—people who follow the page—while their Twitter has 6,137 followers (@EthicalOil.org; @Ethical_Oil). *Ethical Oil* and its social media counterpart seemed—and arguably continue to seem—relatively fruitless. The amount of followers they have in general is modest, their Facebook page is relatively inactive, and the last post they made on their own blog was in 2014. Indeed, it seems as though the

campaign has run its courses, relegated now to "re-tweeting" articles that mention Ezra Levant, criticizing Rachel Notley's Alberta NDP on their energy and climate change policies, or discussing Indigenous groups and peoples that support pipelines in Canada. But Ethical Oil remains worthy of attention, which it has generally received little of in scholarly discourse. Jon Gordon (2015), Mark Simpson (2017), Imre Szeman (2013), and Sheena Wilson (2014) have all engaged with the Ethical Oil campaign—and I rely on their accounts throughout *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*—but a sustained, critical discussion of what Ethical Oil signifies in relation to petroculture has yet to be done. Indeed, while sales of *Ethical Oil* may have slowed (or indeed halted entirely) and while EthicalOil.org may be largely inactive, the promotion of oil sands and other massive industrial developments in Canada through pseudo-grassroots organizations is increasingly pervasive. This boom and bust of petroturfing mirrors constitutive aspects of the process of extraction; just as extraction erodes the landscapes it disturbs and then moves on to a new site to exploit, so too does petroturfing circulate content in key moments related to oil production in Canada while quickly moving on to the next event or lying dormant until the next megaproject makes headlines.

Since the rise, and arguable fall, of Ethical Oil, a number of other similar groups have emerged across Canada and they continue to proliferate. One notable group is British Columbians for Prosperity (BCP), which came into being around 2013, lining up with major pipeline debates surrounding Enbridge's Northern Gateway, TransCanada's Energy East, TransCanada's Keystone XL expansion, and especially Kinder Morgan's proposed expansion of the TransMountain. As of 2017, when the BC Liberals were ousted by the NDP, all BCP presence was erased from the internet. Another group to emerge around 2013 is Canada Action, which asks users to "take the pledge" to support, for example, Enbridge's proposed Northern

Gateway pipeline, TransCanada's proposed Energy East pipeline, or Canada's oil sands in general. Along with what could be considered as conventional uses of social media, including the Twitter account @OilsandsAction, Canada Action also has an online storefront that sells t-shirts and other apparel with such slogans as "I 'heart' pipelines," "I 'heart' oil sands," and, perhaps most strikingly, "I am Oil" with a maple leaf superimposed between "am" and "oil" ("Canada Action"). There is a significant gesture to a kind of petro-nationalism that underpins much of petroturfing discourse here and elsewhere that, as the dual names of Canada Action and Oilsands Action implicitly gesture towards, slyly equates support for the oil sands with support for Canada as a nation. Despite the global makeup of many of the companies at the core of oil sands developments both historically and contemporaneously, oil is strategically framed here as wholly Canadian (see Chapter III). And, notably, these shirts, and to some degree the narrative contained within them, seem to transcend established political divides that often characterize the oil sands in the Canadian cultural and political imaginary—even politicians from Alberta's New Democratic Party can be seen wearing them in images posted to Twitter (MargMcCuaig-Boyd; S. Anderson). Particularly in Alberta, there is a kind of unity in the politics of oil that transcends political leanings.

Although the origins of petroturfing as it relates to the ethical oil argument and campaign are Canadian, it is no longer only to be found in Canada. Ethical Oil's American, for-profit counterpart, the Center for Industrial Progress, founded by Alex Epstein, makes similar arguments to *Ethical Oil* in *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels* (2014). In it, he correlates statistically high standards of living with the consumption of fossil fuels and argues that instead of curbing fossil fuel production and consumption, we instead need to consume *more* fossil fuels as a kind of moral imperative. As Epstein views it, "there is little to no focus on the *benefits* of

cheap, reliable energy from fossil fuels" (15), and these benefits can be understood through a human standard of value. Elaborating on this point, he states: "I think that our fossil fuel use so far has been a moral choice *because it has enabled billions of people to live longer and more fulfilling lives*" (30). The arguments themselves are, like Levant's, reliant on a very basic logical sleights-of-hand that seem to be lifted directly out of a high school debate or rhetoric class. Epstein's social media presence continues to grow, with 25,900 followers as of September 2016 and 40,700 as of May 2019 (@AlexEpstein). Epstein also offers courses, consultation, and private and public speaking events, including a keynote address at the well-attended 2016 Canadian Crude Conference in Lake Louise, Alberta. Ezra Levant also appeared as a keynote at the same event ("Speakers"), which demonstrates an ideological relationship between the two and the overlapping of their networks. Like Levant, Epstein is intentionally provocative and controversial, using Twitter to promote his ideas and also attack his critics, such as sharing an email of his to one attorney general behind the subpoena of Exxon's emails regarding climate change, who he told to "Fuck off, fascist" (Epstein 2016). While such discourse is certainly more explicitly aggressive than official communication from earlier groups construing themselves as liberal or centrist, this strategy of unapologetic brazenness is characteristic of certain forms of petroturfing, especially the Ayn Rand worshipping, libertarian flavour to be found in the US and Alberta by transmission.

It is also worth pointing out that these groups and figureheads are not the first to deploy this method of appropriating methods and discourses of politically antagonistic groups and communities for their respective purposes. Melissa J. Durkee has termed this process "grassroots mimicry and capture" (238). Such a technique is, of course, embodied in the notion of greenwashing—in which key environmentalist signifiers are discursively repackaged for the sake

of promoting the consumption of products deemed "green" or environmentally friendly. And as I argue in my Introduction, the advertising technique of astroturfing, associated with industries like tobacco (see Durkee 2017), is a means to neutralization oppositional voices.

The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) has begun an initiative called *Smoke and Fumes*, which collects documents that show how both the American tobacco and oil industries have worked together by sharing resources and strategies to mislead the public. The *Smoke and Fumes* initiative traces this partnership, where, through a database of a number of documents including communications and advertisements, they expose the depth of this relationship and reveal the ways in which the oil industry provided aid to the tobacco industry in terms of advertising techniques and shaping public opinion ("Smoke & Fumes"). My aim in bringing up this initiative is not to reproduce narratives that, perhaps naively, analogize oil and tobacco in the cultural imaginary, but rather to show the very real ways that the two industries intentionally supported each other in the twentieth century United States through the sharing of advertising and other public influence methods. Further, Levant himself was a lobbyist for a major tobacco company, Rothman's Inc., between 2009 and 2010 where one of his "communication techniques" was "Grass-roots communication" ("Office of the Commissioner"). And while much of what is stored in CIEL's database is from pre-Internet decades, it is worth underscoring that astroturfing in the twenty-first century has another widespread dimension of media from which to circulate their respective narratives—social media.

Propaganda is plenty and shills run rampant on the Internet and through social media. This is longer a controversial claim given the ways the alleged manipulation of social media shaped journalistic discourse in the 2016 American election and, likely, many future elections to

come.[35] Methods of manipulating social media content using paid labour are becoming increasingly apparent and commented upon in conventional media. Beyond conventional uses of social media to champion individual causes and interests, various industries and companies take part in pseudo-grassroots advertising by hiring employees (or robots, as is the case with "click farms") or contracting out the promotional immaterial labour as a kind of astroturfing 2.0 that can be indistinguishable from legitimate circulation of content through social media networks. In fact, this slippage, a process of legitimation through circulation, is precisely what makes this action so effective. Jodi Dean's concept of "communicative capitalism" names this tendency of communication technologies to reproduce already-existing dominant, capitalist relations by leveraging the perceived democratic characteristics of the Internet. Petroturfing is communicative capitalism *par excellence* in that it mobilizes social media to reproduce petro-capitalist relations—as a cultural form petroturfing is nestled comfortably between two defining aspects of contemporary life: networked society and petroculture. It is, in other words, a *legitimation strategy* for both capitalism and petroculture.

But how does petroturfing link with the other kinds of material relationships I have explored in this chapter between network society and petroculture, and what does it reveal about social media's limits as a tool to instigate meaningful political change? An answer to this question can be summarized through the observation that what initially reads as a kind of weird media event is instead right at home, cradled comfortably between network society on the one hand and petroculture on the other. Petroturfing as a process demonstrates in its form and in its content that petro-capitalism is inescapable, that transition is not only impossible but undesirable, and that, whether we like it or not, fossil fuels are here to stay, so we may as well start liking it.

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[35] See, for instance, the *Business Insider* article "It looks like Russia hired internet trolls to pose as pro-Trump Americans" (Bertrand).

Such an *enclosure* of imagination, and in turn enclosure of possibility, is precisely what the late

Mark Fisher powerfully gestures towards in his 2009 book *Capitalist Realism*. Fisher shows the

ways in which capitalism has been promoted as the only viable—and indeed possible—economic

system since the fall of actually existing communism in the early 1990s. Such an observation can

be extended to petroculture as well in terms of framing oil as the only viable energy source now

and, importantly, in the future. What occurs with petroturfing is a kind of petro-capitalist realism

circulated via the means of communicative capitalism that seeks to enclose possibility by

disseminating narratives that unrelentingly insist on in the impossibility and undesirability of a

future beyond fossil fuels. In doing so, petroturfing functions as a vehicle for particular

narratives about oil and society in the twenty-first century. In the case of either Canadian or

American petroturfing, arguments are centred on ethics, morality, and, ultimately, democracy. It

is not insignificant that these are the very same aspirational notions that are consistently tied to

network society, at least by its proponents. Such a framing is characteristic of certain forms of

technological utopianism—a utopianism that is to be found spreading and propelling what could

be called the myths of petroculture and the myths of network society. Yet, perhaps

unsurprisingly, both fall short in their ability to meet these idealized, abstracted characteristics as

a result of their respective social and ecological effects.

Conclusion

In 2016, the popular scotch company, Johnnie Walker, sponsored a campaign to "green" search

engines through a Google Chrome browser extension called "Earth Mode," which boasts the

ability to "Switch to Carbon-Neutral Browsing" ("Earth Mode")—an effort that recalls other

attempts to "green" historically polluting industries like coal, oil, and mining that are discussed

above. "Earth Mode tracks your online energy use: from browsing, to streaming, to updating your social status," the Google Chrome extension write-up states. "Once we know how much you use," it continues, "Johnnie Walker will calculate your carbon footprint and plant trees to neutralise it" ("Earth Mode"). What is significant here is not the misplaced faith in the carbon offset economy, which of course comes with its own various sets of problematics,[36] nor is it the fact that permissions in using the browser allow for the gathering of personal browsing data. What is significant is rather the implicit naming of the direct, material relationship between carbon missions, energy consumption, and the use of the ubiquitous technologies that make up network society—between network society and petroculture. Although superficial in its execution of solving the problem—and to some degree in naming it as well—such an ineffectual campaign as Johnnie Walker's begins to acknowledge and recognize the relationship I have been exploring throughout this chapter, namely, that the cyber-culture or network society that informs our present and future is intimately connected to the culture that significantly shaped the twentieth century—petroculture.

Exploring this intimate relationship helps to further substantiate the many critiques of network society's origins in a capitalist system, as this chapter has exposed. Critiques of network society often aim to expose the limits of a communication technology grounded in capitalism to disrupt that self-same system. As this chapter has pointed out, and this dissertation echoes throughout, Jodi Dean's notion of "communicative capitalism" is the epitome of this line of critique—and it is indeed a compelling and powerful one. The capitalist impulse that Dean and others pull up the veil on is arguably also to be found in a number of communication technologies throughout history—early critiques of television and other mass media forms were

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[36] Not the least of which is that market-solutions such as "green capitalism" turn to the market to solve a problem that the market is responsible for initiating and accelerating.

leveraged on this assumption as well.[37] In the contemporary moment, however, there seems to be no shaking the persistence of the techno-utopian, whether from the political Right or Left. Dean's argument underscores a tendency for contemporary communication technologies to reproduce already dominant relations, but these technologies are simultaneously a site of struggle over our collective futures and, in turn, a site of *possibility*.

The limits of social media and network society more generally exist not only in relationship to capitalism *in toto*, but also in specific operations of capitalism that are tied to "landscapes of intensification"—extractivism, petro-capitalism, and so on. *Specifying* these relationships is an urgent and necessary task when naming capitalism, and capitalists, as culprits and harbingers of the Anthropocene or what some have more specifically labelled as the Capitalocene (see Malm and Hornborg 2014; Moore 2015). Communicative capitalism, for Dean, is a kind of foundational, ubiquitous, and totalizing tendency of contemporary communication technologies and the mediascapes it participates in enabling. This chapter has initiated the argument that petroturfing establishes a relationship between communicative capitalism—a constitutive aspect of social media and network society as we experience it—and petroculture. And it has also argued that in this circulation, petroturfing shapes and reproduces cultural narratives that underpin our collective material reliance on oil and other fossil fuels.

This is the *form*, *tendency*, and *purpose* of petroturfing—to circulate and to reproduce itself as a kind of petrocultural realism that shapes Canadian oil into a meme that signifies positive social and ecological relations. While the banalities of petroturfing at this stage are clear, the narratives it circulates achieve a certain degree of legitimacy through their very existence, amplified through their circulation. Taking seriously the urgency with which we must

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[37] See, for example, Raymond Williams' essay on television, "The Technology and the Society," and, of course, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's seminal work "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" from *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

collectively begin to understand the related cultural underpinnings of the fossil fuel energy regime, the rest of *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* examines more closely the ways in which petroturfing operates as a means to disrupt efforts to build a future beyond oil. The implications of this argument that reveals the intimate cultural and material relationship between network society and petroculture are far reaching, ultimately speaking to the potential social and ecological futures of both social and connective media as well as energy. There is no doubt that the logic of capital governs contemporary network society (including Galloway's "protocol" and Bratton's "Stack") along with petroculture, but the ways in which both network society and petroculture *reproduce* capitalist relations are worth exploring. There is, as this dissertation will make clear, a tendency within network society and within petroculture to symbiotically reinforce capital.

Chapter II

From Counter-Discourses to Counter-Counter Discourses: A Brief History of Petroturfing

Introduction

Petroturfing's Canadian prehistory can be traced back to 2006 when then Prime Minister Stephen

Harper articulated his scheme to make the development of the oil sands a national priority,

labelling Canada an "energy superpower" to an international audience (qtd. in Way 74). Now a

meme within the study of Canadian oil, this declaration signifies a twenty-first century discursive

point of origin for intensive bitumen extraction in Alberta that would in the years to follow

become a defining characteristic of Alberta, further solidifying Alberta as the "Texas of the

North" while symbolically tethering oil extraction to Alberta's provincial and Canada's national

identities. Yet Harper's declaration brought attention to Canada not only as an energy

superpower capable of producing enough oil to become a globally competitive petro-state, but

also as a major industrial polluter, a producer of unconventional, "dirty oil" that ushered in, and

in turn signified, a new stage in the history of oil extraction as such: extraction at all costs. As the

social and ecological costs of the development of the oil sands become increasingly apparent at

the local scale—from elevated cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan residents[38] to ever-expanding

tailings ponds contaminating surface water while leaching into groundwater—environmental

non-governmental organizations (ENGO) such as Greenpeace have led the charge in denouncing

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[38] The elevated cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan have been documented, but remain controversial. Erin N. Kelly et al. describe the controversy, stating that while

> [s]ome residents of downstream Fort Chipewyan are convinced that the oil sands industry is responsible for higher than expected cancer rates … government, industry and related agencies, relying in part on the joint Regional Aquatic Monitoring Program (RAMP), report that effects are minimal, that natural sources cause elevated contaminant concentrations in the Athabasca and its tributaries, and that human health and the environment are not at risk from oil sands development. (22346)

RAMP is, as Kelly et al. point out, funded by industry and "lacks scientific oversight" (22346). Their study concludes that "Due to substantial loadings of airborne PAC, the oil sands industry is a far greater source of regional PAC contamination than previously realized" (22350).

Canadian extractivism at both local and global scales, underscoring the negative social and ecological impacts of oil sands development through reports, documentaries, social media efforts, and more. Such campaigns would prove to be effective, generating an array of star support from the likes of Leonardo DiCaprio, Jane Fonda, James Cameron, and Neil Young, all of whom have received considerable negative attention from petroturf groups and others for their support of anti-oil sands efforts.[39] While Canada was on its way to becoming an energy superpower at a material and economic level, the cultural character of Canadian oil was and continues to be dubious. And it is out of this dubious status of Canadian oil's social and cultural life that petroturfing emerged, whose multimedia communicative strategies are structurally similar to those used by the very same environmental groups that petroturf groups react to as a foil.

Petroturfing, it follows, is fundamentally reactionary. And as a reactionary project and discourse, one way of understanding how petroturfing came into being is to examine its relationship to what it is reacting against, to the kinds of counter-discourses from Canadian environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace Canada and the Sierra Club. In the first instance, petroturfing is a reaction to these largely successful campaigns that frame the oil sands as an incredibly resource-intensive development—what activist Tzeporah Berman called in a 2014 op-ed "the single largest and most destructive industrial project on earth" (n.p.). These campaigns further serve to underscore the contradictions between Canada's popular historical image as a nation with a historically high regard for the natural environment, evidenced perhaps most clearly in disparity between its status as the first country in the world to create an agency to

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[39] As Geo Takach points out in *Tar Wars*, a Fort McMurray radio station "banned Young's music for a day, then polled listeners on whether or not to extend the ban indefinitely; the majority voted no, but when the majority voters' e-mail addresses were from out of town, it banned his music anyway" (121). Celebrities such as DiCaprio, Fonda, Cameron, and Young are increasingly represented in the petroturfing mediascape as both out of touch and hypocritical.

manage its national parks on the one hand, and its carbon-intensive, ecologically destructive present on the other. The effects on *material* production that these campaigns have had are negligible—or as a somewhat cynical reading of these efforts would suggest, ineffectual, since oil sands production increased from 1.31 million barrels per day in 2008 (Energy Resources Conservation Board) to 2.8 million barrels per day in 2017 (Government of Alberta "Facts"). However, there is no doubt that on a *cultural* level, campaigns against the oil sands that have sought to frame Alberta's extraction as "dirty" were quite effective in drawing attention to the scale of ecological damage that the production of oil sands oil entails, and indeed they continue to be effective in this way today. Documentaries, reports, Hollywood actors' media statements, and social media campaigns have shaped the social and cultural life of Albertan oil production in significant ways.

Developing the claim that petroturfing is, in the first and last instance, a reactionary project, this chapter situates petroturfing within the larger oil sands activist media context into which it first entered, showing how it functions as a *reaction* to the relative global success of the environmentalist counter-discourses surrounding the oil sands and, furthermore, that through this reaction it emerges as a *counter*-counter discourse, struggling with and against those who oppose continued and expanded oil sands development over who gets to represent and signify the oil sands in the popular imaginary and how they get to do so. First, I construct a brief, selective, and condensed genealogy of environmentalist counter-discourses anchored to efforts that frame oil sands oil as "dirty oil" from the period roughly between 2008 and 2014. Then, I examine petroturfing as a *reaction* to the success of these efforts, looking at how petroturfing structurally appropriates communicative strategies and social media technologies to counter the "dirty oil" counter-discourses with versions of Ezra Levant's "ethical oil" arguments. Finally, I situate

petroturfing within a larger context of neoliberal media efforts, showing how petroturfing is an embodied response to Friedrich A. Hayek's 1949 critique of the figure of the progressivist intellectual and his call for (neo-)liberals to shape public opinion in a similar manner. As close kin to the Calgary School (with key figures such as Barry Cooper, a Professor of Political Science at the University of Calgary, Tom Flanagan, a U.S.-born Professor of Political Science at the University of Calgary known for books challenging First Nations land claims such as *First Nations? Second Thoughts*), and Stephen Harper, as well as think tanks such as the Fraser Institute, petroturfing and other pseudo-grassroots groups such as Friends of Science (FoS) are the contemporary propaganda machine of neoliberalism in Canada.

Ultimately, these groups enact a process of what I am calling *legitimation through circulation* wherein groups such as Ethical Oil and fossil-fuelled think tanks such as the Fraser Institute[40] attempt to penetrate the attention economy through social and other media as a means to foster neoliberal perspectives on economy, energy, resources, and so on in the broader public imaginary. In this way, petroturfing—and other structurally and ideologically similar groups such as FoS—answers what Hayek suggested was lacking in the social and political climate of his day, namely influential (neo-)liberal voices active in the public sphere to shape public opinion. Petroturfing achieves this by using social and other media as a means through which to disseminate these neoliberal perspectives, in turn enacting and demonstrating a communicative capitalism with a tangibly neoliberal flavour.

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[40] The Fraser Institute has reportedly received $765,000 from the Koch brothers (Bramham).

On Dirty Oil: Environmentalist Counter-Discourse and the Oil Sands

"[I]t is … clear that the term 'dirty oil' is being widely used and is defining the oil sands."

- Peter Silverstone, *World's Greenest Oil: Turning the oil sands from black to green*

In 2009, Greenpeace published a report on the oil sands written by Andrew Nikiforuk entitled *Dirty Oil: How the Tar Sands are Fueling the Global Climate Crisis*, which was premised upon Nikiforuk's best-selling book *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of the Continent* (2008). A documentary film of the same name was also released in 2009, featuring Neve Campbell as the narrator and interviews with Nikiforuk alongside other environmental commentators. A now-defunct website, DirtyOilSands.org, was launched to aggregate information surrounding the oil sands, an effort spearheaded by a consortium of environmental and Indigenous organizations including the Dogwood Initiative ForestEthics, Greenpeace, and the Sierra Club ("Dirty Oil Sands"). This book, report, documentary, and website mark the crystallization of a fundamental discursive shift in the ways that the Athabasca oil sands were discussed and understood both nationally and internationally: the oil sands took centre stage in debates about climate change, peak oil, and more. As a result, the oil sands were, and continue to be, discursively tethered to "dirtiness." In these episodes, Alberta's oil sands became signified as the *tar sands*.[41]

This concentrated, multi-formatted media event of the "dirty oil" campaign brought together disparate efforts by various groups to contest bitumen extraction. It solidified these efforts through a coherent strategy. In turn, the popular imaginary of Canada's landscapes as pristine, preserved, and untouched was forever altered and destabilized at a fundamental level. So, too, altered was the image of Canada as a nation comprised of those who are respectful of the natural world—an image that persisted since the early days of Westward expansion and, for

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[41] For an analysis of the use of "tar" or "oil" sands in newsmedia, see Laura Anne Way's 2013 dissertation "Canadian Newspaper Coverage of the Alberta Oil Sands: The Intractability of Neoliberalism."

instance, the establishment of the first national parks in Banff (1885) and Jasper (1907). Images

of Banff and Jasper, with their sublime mountainscapes, lush glacial waters and vibrant hot

springs, marketed to affluent Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries as

health retreats,[42] have since been juxtaposed with images of strip mines and tailings ponds,

murky, toxic, and vast, perpetually increasing ecological destruction—lush, complex

environments have given way to dirty oil and vast landscapes of ruin that populate Alberta's

geography some 900 kilometres away. This shift in signification was not unintentional. Its

success is due in no small part to persistent campaigns from ENGOs and other groups who

sought precisely this outcome: to discursively link the oil sands to signifiers associated with

dirtiness, with toxicity, and so on (Adkin and Stares 201).

This "dirty oil" campaign—a name that I use to refer to the broadly conceived archive of

media efforts to frame the oil sands as such, largely during the period between 2008 and 2010—

is a multi-faceted but highly-focused campaign that both transcends and supersedes Greenpeace

as a singular organization, spanning a number of media including books, reports, films, and

social media efforts. Initiated in part with the publication of Environmental Defence's 2008

report *Canada's Toxic Tar Sands: The Most Destructive Project On Earth*[43] and Nikiforuk's

Dirty Oil, the label persists today. Greenpeace has since published ten reports and thirteen fact

sheets, backgrounders, and guides that cover topics such as the social costs of the oil sands and

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[42] Of course, Canada's National Parks, and especially Banff and Jasper, have always existed in a tense space between preservation and (economic, touristic) development, with the latter generally guiding the reasoning behind their development. In "Nature's Playgrounds: The Parks Branch and Tourism Promotion in the National Parks, 1911-1929," John Sandlos asserts that Canada's National Parks as we understand them today depend on the very fossil economy that we can juxtapose the lush landscapes with. "While park advocates tend to decry resource extraction activities such as mining, logging, and hydro-carbon development," he writes, "they often fail to acknowledge that automobile tourism in the national parks can only be supported through dependence on these industrial processes" (73).

[43] In a discourse analysis of four decades of media that discuss the oil sands, J.G. Paskey, G. Steward, and A. Williams found that the publication of *Canada's Toxic Tar Sands: The Most Destructive Project On Earth* marked the moment when "these types of negative add-ons started to appear" (vi).

the impacts of the oil sands on global climate change ("Resources"). Nikiforuk's report, among other findings, shows that "[e]nergy exports to the US and tar sands production have made Canada one of the most energy- and carbon-intensive nations in the industrial world" and that "Canada is one of the world's highest per capita GHG emitters" (1).

The picture painted by Nikiforuk demonstrates the ecological consequences of Canada's efforts to become an energy superpower, some three years after Stephen Harper's initial declaration. In the same "Tar Sands" section of its website, Greenpeace also hosts a detailed report that aggregates official government pollution data with commentary authored by environmental scientist Kevin Timoney. Timoney's report compiles data and provides commentary on bird mortality rates, wildlife mortality, chronic pollution, and more, underscoring the ecological damage of oil sands extraction. Furthermore, the report highlights that much of this data, especially related to bird and wildlife mortality rates, is underreported by government. As Timoney puts it, the report aims ultimately "to document a failure of the Alberta government to uphold the public trust" (3). Other groups made similar interventions around this same time. The Sierra Club Canada Foundation, a prominent ENGO whose American parent organization was founded in 1892 ("History"), hosts an archive of oil sands-related facts sheets, blog posts, and initiatives dating back to around 2008. In a 2008 fact sheet, the Sierra Club emphasizes the scale of the ecological effects of oil sands extraction, citing, for instance, figures surrounding how much land is affected by development and the permanence of this disruption. Speaking of scale, they write that "Approximately 23% of Alberta is affected by oil sands development - 50 times the area of the actual mining zone." In terms of the permanence of these effects, they point out that "Companies such as Suncor and Syncrude claim to have performed land reclamation- 9% and 22% (1,160 ha and 3,404 ha) respectively," but "These amounts are

insignificant in the face of the total land disturbed (10,000 ha and 18,335 ha respectively)" ("Tar Sands & the Boreal Forest"). Other groups that have done and are doing similar work include the Parkland Institute, Pembina Institute, and 350.org.

The "dirty oil" archive found in ENGO reports, an eponymous documentary, and elsewhere highlights some important aspects of the ways in which the oil sands are a highly mediated site of struggle. A Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded digital archival project, *Mediatoil*, comprehensively collects "competing media representations of Canada's bituminous sands … as seen through the promotional images and documents created by key stakeholders" into a searchable database ("Home"). The project, spearheaded by Patrick McCurdy at the University of Ottawa, compiles media from a number of stakeholders, categorized under the banners of Aboriginal Peoples, Civil Society, the Federal Government, Industry, and the Provincial Government. It is also home to a timeline that highlights key media events in recent oil sands history. The timeline begins with Alberta opening an office in Washington's Canadian Embassy in late 2004 and ends with the visit of Bernard the Roughneck[44] to Parliament Hill in 2016 to deliver a petition that asks for support of Canada's energy industry ("Timeline"). As an a kind of interactive cognitive map of Canada's oil sands mediascape, *Mediatoil* explores the competition over who gets to represent the oil sands in the popular imaginary. The project further demonstrates that the relationship Canadians and others, including multinational corporations, have with the oil sands (and, indeed, energy in general) is a highly mediated one and, as such, that intervening in these representations through media is one way to challenge the hegemony of petro-capitalism in Canada. As a result of this recognition of the social and cultural life of the oil sands—a recognition that seems to have first been

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[44] Bernard the Roughneck is a caricature figure of an oil sands labourer, complete with dirtied face and coveralls, who has spouted petroturfing talking points throughout the Canadian mediascape since the 2015 crash in oil prices.

understood and intervened within by ENGOs such as Greenpeace—there are structural similarities between groups with conflicting interests towards and relationships with the oil sands as they vie for sole influence over the signification of what the oil sands "are." It is within this space of conflict that petroturfing emerges as a foil to ENGOs and other groups that had successfully mobilized media to construct and disseminate a vision of oil sands extraction as fundamentally and exponentially destructive.

Geo Takach's work in his cleverly titled 2017 book *Tar Wars: Oil, Environment, and Alberta's Image*. He examines the competing images of Alberta from environmental groups, industry, and government that are at the core of how Alberta's oil sands are represented and in turn understood in the popular imaginary. Among other archives, Takach looks at a staggering array of 16 documentaries and other media campaigns that attempt to signify the oil sands (ranging from 2005's *Pay Dirt: Making the Unconventional Conventional* to 2014's *Above All Else*) in an effort to trace the ways in which opponents, proponents, and neutral parties frame the oil sands. One can find in several of these documentaries the origins of the "dirty oil" narrative as well as the strong backlash to this framing (of which petroturfing is one part), including multimedia efforts to re-brand Alberta as a transparent and open province (e.g., *An Open Door*) or, among other things, a green touristscape (e.g., *Rethink Alberta*).[45]

Greenpeace's role in this archive is an influential one. Along with its role in the DirtyOilSands.org initiative, the organization was also a producer of *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands*, "a landmark in filmic discourse about the resource" (Takach 63). The film, Takach writes, is "an extended aerial tour of the bit-sands region in conspicuously long shots, accompanied occasionally by onscreen text culled from work by

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[45] For an extended analysis of these campaigns in relation to competing images of Alberta and the oil sands, see Takach, pp. 57-62 and pp. 80-82.

Nikiforuk and by a haunting, tonal soundscape with a rhythm suggesting a heartbeat" (63).
Petropolis features a convergence of media efforts with images depicting the vast scale of
ecological degradation paired with statistics from Nikiforuk, showing how media forms can
work together across a vast mediascape to produce or reinforce particular oil sands imaginaries.

One incident that stands out in the visual and affective environmental history of the oil
sands is when, in 2008, Syncrude's deterrents, comprised of propane cannons intended to scare
off bird populations, failed and 1,606 ducks landed in one of their toxic tailings ponds. This
breech resulted in the death of almost all of the ducks. Tailings ponds are a by-product of oil
sands production, containing a mixture of "residual bitumen, suspensions of clay, and various
toxic compounds such as phenols, benzene, cyanide and arsenic, the typical by-products of oil
sands production (Nikiforuk 2010, 84)" (Nelson et al 346). Their scale is massive, individually
reaching as large as $10km^2$ with a cumulative volume of 1.18 trillion litres (as of 2015; McNeill
and Lothian), a quantity that continues to increase by about 25 million litres per day
(Environmental Defence and Natural Resources Defense Council). Over time, a number of
auditory and visual deterrent systems have been implemented, including the timed propane
cannons that failed in 2008. If there is one single event that was instrumental in crystallizing the
"dirty oil" trope in the popular imaginary, it is arguably the death of these 1,606 birds. Indeed,
the disaster spurred a major media event and shaped the trajectory of a number of already
existing campaigns against the oil sands, such as those from Greenpeace discussed above.

Prior to this disaster, tailings ponds were rarely discussed and represented in popular
media. "Relative to the infrequent media attention dedicated to the tailings ponds in the past,"
Paul Nelson et al. point out in "Dead Ducks and Dirty Oil: Media Representations and
Environmental Solutions," "the landing event of April 2008 appeared to create a sudden rise in

newsprint coverage, potentially constituting an environmental focusing event" (346). The slow violence—particular instances have been framed as a "slow industrial genocide" (Huseman and Short 228) of Indigenous peoples living near the sands in communities such as Fort McKay— had in this event been concentrated into a kind of "fast" or "accelerated" violence worthy of the Debordian spectacle, solidifying the status of the oil sands project on the whole as an ecological disaster. For Rob Nixon, slow violence names the long-term, drawn out forms of social and ecological violences that are difficult to figure through any kind of spectacular representation— the kinds of representation that popular newsmedia are drawn towards. Think of the media effects of the Exxon Valdez spill versus the virtual non-effects of persistent Great Lakes pollution.

Slow violence does not complement the accelerated cycles of popular newsmedia. Literature, art, and cultural production in general prove, to some degree, to be avenues through which to represent and engage the environment and the slow violence committed against it beyond the confines of the spectacle—at least as Nixon views it when he argues that slow violence is a primarily a representational problem and that in order to halt the exponential reproduction of slow violence "we also need to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence" (2). Jon Gordon echoes this formulation in his 2015 book *Unsustainable Oil*, which argues that literature (and other forms of cultural production) can provide alternative narratives to dominant-hegemonic ways of discussing and signifying Alberta's oil sands. Not bound to the same normative, restrictive textual and visual economies that popular media like newsmedia are bound to, creative cultural production can incorporate a broader array of representational strategies to engage and expose the slow violences that enable our petro-modernity while operating on a complex affective

register beyond the temporary, one-way shock-and-awe found in the fast violence spectacle. The duck disaster provides important insight into the ways in which the oil sands enter (or do not enter) popular discourse, as well as in terms of the politics of representation. But as important as representation is in activating political sensibilities, representation alone does not create conditions for effective action.

The possibilities of social media for organizing and addressing this gap between base and superstructure in manners beyond representation are evidenced by ENGOs and other groups involved in campaigns against the oil sands through the use of social media as a tool for political organization. Since the emergence of the "dirty oil" campaign, social media have become an important means of disseminating environmentalist counter-discourses, especially Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. And these media move beyond the purely representational dynamics found at the core of much traditional media as they not only represent, but garner participation from users on various levels. Twitter is perhaps the most effective platform in this way as it uses hashtags to tag and control flows of information in the form of "tweets," statements with a limit of 140 characters that often hyperlink to other websites or social media. A number of hashtags emerged from the campaign that continue to be used today, including the catch-all #dirtyoil and more oil sands corporations and infrastructure specific ones such as #NoEnbridge and #StopKinderMorgan. But these efforts also underscore the limits of social media, as these campaigns can become a form of clicktivism-turned-slacktivism, two popular and largely pejorative designations of the kinds of activisms that social media tend to promote. Clicktivism or slacktivism subsume material activist efforts, revealing certain limitations to the *form* of social media, and it is precisely this limitation that petroturfing simultaneously exploits and reveals.

Yet there is a significant divergence between the cultural effectiveness of environmentalist and other oppositional efforts and the effectiveness of petroturfing in relation to reach and influence. The discrepancies in followers are large. For instance, Greenpeace's Canadian branch has 42, 300 followers (@GreenpeaceCA) on Twitter, which far outweighs those of, say, British Columbians for Prosperity's 4, 542 (@BC4Prosperity) or Ethical Oil's 6,227 followers (@Ethical_Oil). Aside from the discrepancies in numbers of followers and participating users, ENGO campaigns also attract a high level of "star power." As mentioned above, several of the key "dirty oil" documentaries, from *Dirty Oil* to the more recent *Before the Flood* (2016) featuring Leonardo DiCaprio, have Hollywood star power to back their respective critiques of the fossil economy. Riding on the success of *Avatar*, James Cameron's 2010 visit to the oil sands and, for instance, his call for a moratorium on tailings ponds received considerable attention (Wingrove 2010). And in 2014 Neil Young toured with an intentionally political message to "Honour the Treaties," raising funds for Northern Alberta's First Nations' resistance to oil sands developments (CBC News). This is important to note because this chapter focuses on the *cultural* work of the "dirty oil" and other environmentalist campaigns, arguing that it is in the context of this cultural work that petroturfing aims to intervene.

This brief genealogy of media campaigns against oil sands extraction is far from exhaustive (to do so would take an entire dissertation—or several), but it underscores key events and conceptual foundations of anti-oil sands discourses. Above all, it reveals that the discursive success of the "dirty oil" campaign hinges upon its recognition of the social and cultural life of oil and energy and the ability of these campaigns to signify Canadian oil in a particular way. Indeed, it is indisputable that in the popular global imaginary the oil sands are signified by the very images that make up documentaries such as *Petropolis* or photo series such as Edward

Burtynsky's *Oil*. A grand scale of toxicity and destruction, visually rendered as vast decimated

landscapes populated with a greyed rainbow runoff that has been theorized as a form of "toxic

sublime" (Peebles 383) is hard to avoid when one imagines the Athabasca oil sands. This process

of signification is in part possible because of the ways in which ENGOs and other groups have

framed the oil sands and these counter-discourses against the oil sands have become relatively

mainstream ones. The success of the "dirty oil" campaign and other largely social media-based

campaigns against the oil sands raises questions about the *material* effectiveness of these efforts,

considering that production has only increased since the peak of these campaigns. If production

has only increased in recent years, then why the need for petroturfing? The spheres of the

cultural politics of oil are clearly significant, as the emergence of petroturfing attests: the

smoothing out of Canadian oil's political frictions, to use Mark Simpson's parlance (289),

establishes present and future conditions to appeal to the allegedly superior social and ecological

ethics of Canadian oil, in turn eroding the claims found throughout anti-oil sands campaigning

such as those in the "dirty oil" campaign while ultimately creating favourable cultural conditions

for the maintenance and reproduction of Canadian petro-capitalism in response to social and

environmental movements that continue to gain traction.

Enter Petroturfing: Counter-Counter Discourse and the PR Machine

The history of Ethical Oil, the ground-zero of petroturfing, is remarkably similar in structure to

the "dirty oil" campaign launched by Greenpeace and taken up by others. Its popularization as a

phrase and concept began with a book, Levant's *Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands*

(2010), that then spawned a blog (EthicalOil.org), and eventually on-the-ground events such as

(poorly attended) demonstrations against companies critical of the oil sands.[46] As this series of events illustrates, the emergence of ethical oil as a discourse and the birth of petroturfing as a phenomenon is structurally indistinguishable from the establishment of "dirty oil" discourses and other campaigns against the oil sands: a book, an online web-presence, and other supportive actions and demonstrations geared towards the production of or intervention in a media conversation. And so it is here that we can understand petroturfing as fundamentally reactionary, adopting the languages, strategies, and forms of ENGO and others' campaigns with fundamentally antithetical content. Indeed, if Harper's declaration (or, as some have labelled it, "sales pitch" [Way 2011]) of Canada as an energy superpower in the making is the discursive origin-point for the scaling up of oil sands extraction in the latter half of the first decade of the millennium and the "dirty oil" campaign is its counter-discourse, then petroturfing is a counter-counter discourse that strategically denies the hegemony of petroculture in an effort to reframe Canadian oil as the victim of bad publicity when it is, rather, a force for social and ecological good in Canada and throughout the world.

In the process of legitimation through circulation wherein form subsumes content, petroturfing reveals the limitations to the kinds of social media-based activisms that I discussed in the context of anti-oil sands politics above. Such a limit, attributable in large part to the dynamics and relations that Jodi Dean identifies in her work as communicative capitalism—a term that points towards the tendency for capitalist communication technologies, including social media, to reproduce capitalism—is a larger focal point for and contribution of *Liquid Ethics,*

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[46] In 2011, Ethical Oil staged a protest at a Safeway in Edmonton against Chiquita bananas, who made a public statement encouraging its transporters to avoid relying on oil sands oil in the future (as if this were even possible) (Campbell 2011). "The protest," Darren Campbell of *Alberta Oil Magazine* writes, "was a farce. Two college-aged kids – no doubt being paid $10 an hour so they can earn a little cash during Christmas break – wore sombreros and ponchos and handed out flyers calling on Safeway to join the boycott. (The store doesn't even sell Chiquita bananas, so the outlet was obviously out in front of the issue)" (2011).

Fluid Politics that I will continue to return to throughout this dissertation. Narrowing the focus from this broader conceptual and methodological recognition, the following section traces the origins and evolution of petroturfing while showing how it operates as a counter-counter discourse.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are several key features of petroturfing that are virtually universal and can in turn be used as a barometer to identify a petroturf campaign or group. These include post-political[47] obsessions with notions of balance and fairness (see Chapter 3), from which they assert the unfair treatment of the oil industry and, in some cases, its workers by environmentalist and other oppositional groups (such as many Indigenous groups and peoples) and in turn the broader public. Decrying these groups' biases, they carve out the discursive space for their intervention by suggesting that they are here to restore balance and save the Canadian oil industry and its workers. Symptomatic of a broader social and political moment wherein strong stances, regardless of the content of these stances, are seen as radical or fundamentalist in a pejorative sense, balance in turn becomes a way in which petroturf groups can circumvent their own biases and agendas. Characteristics such as these will become more clearly articulated throughout the rest of this dissertation, but these preliminary gestures towards a theory of petroturfing are a necessary frame for moving forward and for understanding petroturfing as a fundamentally neoliberal venture that, among other things, naturalizes free market dynamics, pushing them into social and ecological spheres beyond the purely economic, along with a naturalization of fossil fuel production and consumption (see the next section). These twin forces of hegemony—neoliberalism and petro-capital—profoundly shape the contemporary political economic moment; as Matt Huber argues throughout *Lifeblood: Oil,*

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[47] Writing of the post-political turn in the contemporary moment and its ideological implications, Slavoj Žižek argues in *Living in the End Times* that this shift relegates action and agency, traditionally understood as part of the sphere of politics, into the sphere of consumption.

Freedom, and the Forces of Capital, neoliberalism (as a stage of capitalism) and fossil fuels are

symbiotic, mutually reproducing each other as a dominant mode of production on the one hand

and a dominant form of energy on the other. In further reconciling these two on a cultural level,

petroturfing aims to maintain and reproduce the neoliberalization and *fossilization* of Canada's

political economy. With this directive in mind, then, it is worth turning back to Ethical Oil in an

effort to tease out the relationships that petroturfing has had to the established order of politics

and business in Canada.

Investigative journalistic work from Greenpeace has linked the production of the Ethical

Oil website to Go Newclear Productions (now Torch), a company owned by Hamish Marshall,

who has also made websites for Conservative Party of Canada figures such as Jason Kenney.

The enmeshed history of Ethical Oil's development is described in DeSmog's write-up in the

following way:

> Kathryn Marshall took over from Mr. Velshi as spokesperson for Ethical Oil in
>
> September 2011. Ms. Marshall also has Conservative Party connections and is
>
> married to Hamish Marshall, a former manager of strategic planning in Stephen
>
> Harper's PMO. Mr. Marshall's company, Go Newclear Productions, both created
>
> and hosted websites for both Ethical Oil and Conservative cabinet ministers Joe
>
> Oliver, Pierre Poilievre and Jason Kenney. There are indications that these web-
>
> sites were programmed by Travis Freeman, who was simultaneously a member of
>
> the Go Newclear team and an employee of the Conservative Caucus Research
>
> Bureau. ("Desmog Ethical Oil/via Greenpeace")

My aim in underscoring these relationships is not to map out a conspiracy in the paranoid sense,

but rather to draw attention to the ways in which many layers of Canadian politics converge in

relation to what are disingenuously framed as grassroots, citizen-initiated campaigns. Theorizing the relationship between the totalizing impulses of (late) capitalism and the rise of conspiracy theories that aim to provide a snapshot of that totality, Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle write in *Cartographies of the Absolute*: "One wonders how theory could be produced or research undertaken without one's work resembling conspiracy theory" (n.p., epub). What Toscano and Kinkle are ultimately pointing towards is the way in which the operations of contemporary capital are at once a conspiracy in ways that are unsurprising or obvious (recall the twin PR efforts of tobacco and oil companies spinning the social and ecological harms of the consumption of their products) and *not* a conspiracy due to lacking an identifiable scapegoat that so many conspiracy theories are constitutively premised upon, such as "Illuminati, the New World Order, reptilian humanoids, and the like" [Toscano and Kinkle]). This is precisely why I continue to frame petroturfing as a strategy that aims for legitimation through circulation, where form entirely supersedes content, while also emphasizing the relations it has with broader promotional discourses because, despite its repeated claims to the contrary, petroturfing is a promotional discourse in the first and last instance.

To push further on the angle of conspiracy, one also cannot separate petroturfing from the broader sphere of "public relations," an industry that manages and mediates relations between corporations and publics that emerged out of the advertising boom in the second half of the twentieth century. Public relations remains a somewhat understudied industry within scholarly literature, particularly from a *critical* perspective, yet its role in shaping the narratives that mediate the public and the corporations they represent, and thus a significant portion of everyday social relations in late capitalism, is hard to over-exaggerate. And while public relations as an industry is often framed by practitioners as ambivalent, given the aims of controlling narratives

implicit in its work, such ambivalence or neutrality seems an idealism in relation to its actually

existing forms. In his study of the origins of public relations, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, Stuart

Ewen makes clear the anti-Democratic power relations at work in public relations. Ewan relays

the arguments of Edwards Bernays, known for his pioneering work in public relations and

propaganda, that at the core of public relations is "the requirement, for those people in power, to

shape the attitudes of the general population" (11). Of the groups studied throughout this

dissertation, those that are not entirely petroturf organizations are not so primarily due to the fact

that they do not claim to be grassroots organizations, such as Canadian Association of Petroleum

Producers, whose ties to industry are made extremely clear.

While the notion of "Big Oil" as a homogenous being or actor may seem problematic, it

can be claimed with relative certainty that this abstract entity of "Big Oil" has a fundamental

aim—to maintain, expand, and reproduce the fossil economy as it sees fit. And, moreover, these

corporations and their associations use PR to achieve this end. A couple of examples will suffice

in illustrating the breadth and depth of these efforts. In the United States during the 1970s, Mobil

Oil pursued an aggressive public relations campaign in an effort to shape public discourse.

Vanessa Murphree and James Aucoin detail Mobil's multi-layered public relations efforts in

"The Energy Crisis and the Media: Mobil Oil Corporation's Debate with the Media 1973-1983,"

which they describe as a "response to the growing hostility toward the oil industry" (8-9). First,

"Mobil withdrew product advertisements and instead focused on an antagonistic and broad-

based public relations effort designed ultimately to take control of the public debate over oil" (9).

The campaign itself included purchasing of advertising spaces for advertorials that promoted

industry viewpoints: "the company designed several advertising series to establish its authority

on energy policy and the national economy" (18). "In one example," Murphree and Aucoin

write, "it bought fifteen advertisements to present what it called 'Infamous Energy Mysteries,' 'Riddles' about energy policy, and 'Prescriptions' to fix the U.S. economy, which was lagging because of high energy prices and other reasons" (18).

These cunning advertisements and advertorials, a kind of precursor to Petroturfing, find echoes in Ethical Oil's "Mythbusting" campaign. As DeSmog shows in its release of the leaks obtained by Greenpeace from the PR company Edelman's astroturfing campaign for TransCanada's Energy East pipeline, there are legitimate, well-funded, wide-scale efforts to promote Canadian oil sands infrastructures in ways that appear to stem from a grassroots level on the Internet (DeMelle). The document, entitled "Grassroots Advocacy Vision Document," discusses online campaign efforts from American petroturf groups that support the Keystone XL pipeline, pointing out industry support for these groups and putting forward a proposal for TransCanada to do the same. "Companies like ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, and Halliburton (and many more) have all made key investments in building permanent advocacy assets and programs to support their lobbying, outreach, and policy efforts" (6). It further outlines opposition techniques from ENGOs, who rely "on sophisticated technology … centralized databases, email marketing and list management, geotargeted outreach, and paid recruitment" (7). This leaked document functions as a call to petroturfing that makes clear the interrelations between "grassroots" and industry while revealing petroturfing to be a reaction, similar in structure, to those groups who oppose the expansion of oil sands developments.

The groups that have spawned out of Ethical Oil are numerous and seemingly ever-increasing, and while I have touched on these groups in Chapter I, it is worth spending some more time on them in terms of their function as counter-counter, reactionary discourses that aim

to maintain and reproduce Canadian petroculture at the level of superstructure. Rhetorically,

much of petroturfing is built upon

> high-school debate-club style dismissals of opponents' positions through the
>
> deployment of what are at times relatively crude forms of rhetoric (a reliance on
>
> the identification of contradiction, expressions of startled surprise at the discovery
>
> of supposed hypocrisies, and so on). (Szeman 158)

Such a critique can be scaled out to include *all* of petroturfing. In an email newsletter sent on

May 4, 2017, Epstein discusses a recent debate he participated in with Bill Ritter as part of the

Collision conference in New Orleans, a debate that left him disappointed due to the fact that he

was initially slotted to debate the CEO of the DiCaprio Foundation who ended up pulling out, the

turnout was less than promised, and "the promised format of uninterrupted back and forth time-

slots was completely violated" (Epstein "A debate"). While decrying the organization that hosted

the debate for not following the format he requested—and his debate partner for "rambl[ing] on

as much as he wanted"—he reveals that the only way he can debate effectively is through a

strategy that "involves framing the issues in a new and unfamiliar (but very effective) way"

(Epstein "A debate"). This format is necessary for Epstein because, according to him, "[he] can

only use it successfully in a debate if [he has] an opportunity to reframe what the other person

says" (Epstein "A debate"). Form, yet again, subsumes content as a means to destabilize

environmentalist counter-discourses.

More conceptually in terms of political sensibilities and commitments, petroturfing

subscribes to varying shades of the post-political in the sense that it frames itself as, in some way

or another, bi-partisan, committed to fetishized notions of balance, and ultimately *beyond* politics

as such. Politics, in this formulation, is for those groups and individuals who aim to challenge

petroculture's hegemony (environmentalists, the Indigenous groups and peoples who oppose oil sands developments, and so on), and thus the post-political position is one that rhetorically does away with politics as such. For instance, British Columbians for Prosperity describe themselves as "an independent, non-partisan group of concerned British Columbians" ("British Columbians for Prosperity"). Canada Action states that it "does not have an ideological or partisan agenda" ("About Us – Canada Action"). And Ethical Oil "are non-partisan and believe that the Canadian values reflected in Ethical Oil appeal to people from all walks of life and across the political spectrum" ("Ethical Oil.org | About EthicalOil.org").

All of these organizations exhibit the same features: an agenda wrapped in a non-agenda, wrapped in a dubiously grassroots organization. Indeed, the dynamics of the "post-political" come with their own sets of assumption and allegiances—dynamics that are an arguable by-product of neoliberal reason. Discussing the forms of ethical consumerism that the post-political moment brings into being and, in turn, naturalizes, Žižek cites examples of ethical consumerist companies such as TOMS shoes—buy a pair of shoes and one is donated to a needy community—as those which illustrate the climax of ethical consumerism. "The process thus reaches its climax[,]" he writes, "the very act of participating in consumerist activity is simultaneously presented as a participation in the struggle against the evils ultimately caused by capitalist consumerism" (*Living* 356). In this way, petroturfing capitalizes on and reproduces narratives of ethical capitalism as it enters the conversations surrounding the broader public's relation to oil on the level of the consumer, a constitutive characteristic of neoliberalism that I will return to throughout this dissertation. Focusing solely on the public as consumers is precisely how oil becomes, as Mark Simpson puts, "smooth oil" (289)—a kind of oil that has

been discursively manicured in contrast to conflict oil and promoted in terms of ethical consumption.[48]

As a form of "narrowcasting" (Licklider 1967), petroturfing aims to reach an audience that it can interpellate as "Energy Citizens" (CAPP), "full-blown fossil fuel champions" (Epstein *Millenial* 3), or whatever other equally troubling identifier these groups can conjure up. For communications scholar Manuel Castells, narrowcasting is *individualized* mass communication that has risen as opposed to the traditional media form of broadcasting (323). Castells clearly identifies environmental organizations as groups who pioneer narrowcasting through social media. "There has been a shift in the tactics of environmental organizations from broadcasting to narrowcasting to communicate their message," he observes, and these "[a]pproaches to narrowcasting include: creating web sites, setting up channels on YouTube, establishing pages on social networking sites, and using mobile phones to send SMSs" (323). Through petroturfing, narrowcasting has been appropriated as a means to disseminate already-dominant ideas surrounding fossil fuels. And social media provides the conditions to oscillate between broad and specific audiences in an effort to gain circulation—by recruiting a public of users to perform the immaterial labour of reproducing petro-capital at a cultural level, exploiting the close ideological relationship between "democracy" and the Internet that Jodi Dean and others have shown is far from the realities of its functioning.

One of the most recent and prominent petroturf media efforts is the figure of Bernard the Roughneck, a character played by Neal Bernard Hancock, who began appearing in Canadian news outlets after the 2015 oil crash and as a reaction to a perceived neglect of Alberta by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal party. As touched on above, Bernard is a caricature of an

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[48] This argument stems from my earlier work on the Ethical Oil campaign in my MA thesis, "Sustainable Appropriation: Advertising, Consumption, and the (Anti-)Politics of Post-Environmentalism" (2014).

"average" oil sands labourer—a 20 to 30-something man dressed in soiled coveralls who speaks plainly and unpretentiously—who BBC describes as Canada's "Joe the Plumber" in reference to the everyman figure that John McCain and Sarah Palin invoked in their unsuccessful 2008 campaign against Barack Obama. Bernard's rhetorical strength hinges upon appeals to and performances of an authentic, working class identity built explicitly in opposition to "suits" and to the elite spheres of federal politics, tapping into legitimate fears of unemployment as well as a long history of Alberta's perception of marginalization from Ottawa, the centre of Canadian political process. While delivering a "pro-oil petition" on Parliament Hill in September of 2016, Bernard described himself in this way: "I'm not a guy from Calgary in a suit," he says. "I'm not a guy who's knowledgeable about public policy or processes that go on in buildings like this. I'm a roughneck. I'm a guy who has a job in Alberta whose livelihood has been threatened" (CBC News). Featured in several YouTube videos with titles such as "Bernard the Roughneck goes to Ottawa!" and "Oil rig worker, Bernard Hancock, delivers pro-oil petition to Ottawa" that were uploaded by Rebel Media and CBC News respectively, Bernard the Roughneck arguably represents the most media-savvy and successful petroturfing campaign to date in terms of going "viral" and penetrating the mainstream, as his petition stunt sparked commentary in a number of outlets. Whereas Greenpeace et al. has dead ducks, petroturfing has Bernard the Roughneck.

The degree to which Bernard the Roughneck is understood, acknowledged, or recognized as a fictional character both by himself and by the general public is unclear: Bernard *is* actually an oil sands worker, but he also holds a BA from Bishop's University in Media and Communications Studies (Climenhaga 2016). And this has led many to speculate that his newsmedia appearances are little more than a clever public relations stunt and, to some degree, Bernard does not entirely deny the fact that his appearances have been a media effort to promote

the continued development of the oil sands.[49] When asked by interviewer David J. Climenhaga

for *Rabble.ca* how Bernard came to the attention of the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling

Contractors (CAODC):

> I didn't come to their attention. They came to my attention because I really loved the
>
> non-partisan, fact-based approach that Mark Scholz[50] and John Bayko (communications
>
> director) were advocating. I walked into their fancy office tower in my jean jacket and
>
> dirty jeans. … I just touched base, and we continued to do our own thing … but we
>
> envision the same outcome, which is responsible energy policy that meets the concerns of
>
> all Canadians, not just pundits, professors, politicians or eco radicals. … Right after that
>
> came out, first my derrick-hand told me to come back rigging because my rig was going
>
> out, and then, right after, John Bayko called me and invited me out to Ottawa to present
>
> this petition … I don't understand why people find it so unbelievable that lots of
>
> roughnecks are articulate and well spoken; and that I do this for free because I care so
>
> much about how guys and gals in the oil patch need support from the government at the
>
> federal and provincial level. (2016)

Given the ways in which petroturfing shapes itself and carefully manicures a perceived

authenticity vis-à-vis the social and cultural capital of being a grassroots movement in an effort

to reframe discussions and debates surrounding the oil sands, it is not hard to side with those who

perceive Bernard as another strategy to maintain and reproduce the interests of petro-capitalism

in Canada. Silliness notwithstanding, Bernard's weird media events tap in to serious anxieties

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[49] A *BBC News* article quotes Bernard as saying "In a way it's a bit of a stunt, but this is who I am, and this is what I look like at work" (Levinson King 2016).

[50] Mark Scholz is president of the CAODC and mastermind behind the "Oil Respect" campaign who "was a founding member of the Alberta Alliance Party, which later became the modern Wildrose Party and is now the United Conservative Party, when he was just 17 years old" (Alberta Oil Staff 2016). Scholz's campaign is premised on many of the hallmarks of petroturfing discourse; its three goals are to "address the misinformation spread by opponents of oil and gas"; "Give regular people who support the industry a voice"; and "Remind Canadians we have the highest living standards in the world because of oil and gas" ("Oil Respect").

and grievances surrounding the future of those who make a living labouring in extractive professions that many environmentalist campaigns such as those discussed above do not speak to in any sustained manner until recently; it is from within this space that the success of the campaign emerges. The crash of 2015 made clear that the boom and bust cycle of oil extraction most dramatically affects the workers on the ground. By capitalizing on this legitimate concern of oil sands workers (and workers across Canada and elsewhere), Bernard the Roughneck is one more strategy in the emergent archive of petroturfing that aims to maintain and reproduce oil sands extraction.

The discourse of oil as ethical and socio-economically benevolent is now a privileged discourse not only in Canada's oil and gas industry, but also in its government. Ezra Levant's presence in parliament suggests as much and his offer to share free copies of his book shows how he sees his efforts as a kind of cultural work that politicians can take up and use in relation to policy (Alex Epstein uses the "free book" tactic as well). On December 7, 2010, during Stephen Harper's reign as Prime Minister, Levant was invited to parliament to discuss energy security in Canada, where he outlined the arguments of his book, concluding that "for those who love Canada, expanding the oil sands is the right thing for our country and for those who think globally and act locally, because every barrel of oil sands oil we can sell to Asia or the United States is one less barrel sold by the world's terrorists and dictators" (stated at the Natural Resources Committee on Dec. 7th, 2010). In this way, the ethical oil argument supported Harper's aim in establishing Canada as an energy superpower by ascribing unique characteristics the nation's energy supplies.

As of 2018, there is no doubt that under Justin Trudeau the *material* interests of petroculture are well-maintained, and pipeline project approvals remain business as usual. In this

sense, the ideological work of petroturfing has been effective in extending the reach of industry narratives beyond conventional lobbying. In insisting on the exceptionalism of Canadian oil, political figures who campaign on comparatively strong ecological platforms such as Rachel Notley and Justin Trudeau can justify their business as usual approaches to pipeline politics, for instance, that sustain Canada's energy transition impasse by relying on already accepted tropes linked to the social and ecological positivity of Canadian oil. Trudeau made this commitment to petro-capitalism clear in a town hall-style speech in January of 2017. "Not only am I approving them," he said, "but I'm standing up, here in Alberta, and in downtown Vancouver, and saying: 'I'm approving these pipelines because it matters.' And I'm *making the case for the oil sands*" (qtd. in Tait, emphasis added). Here, Trudeau echoes the subtitle of Ezra Levant's book. And in a 2017 speech by Trudeau that justifies his government's decision to move forward with Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain, which his government would later purchase, and Enbridge's Line 3 pipelines, the discourse is virtually indistinguishable from petroturfing mantras. Yet, petroturfing in general communicates vis-à-vis an underdog position, fighting valiantly against the highly influential environmentalists to preserve the fossil economy at the behest of working Canadians. This is precisely why I choose to label petroturfing as a *counter*-counter discourse, one that comes out of (and indeed is necessitated by) campaigns such as Greenpeace's "dirty oil" that attempt to expose the social and ecological consequences of the oil sands as a means of instigating change. Without dirty oil, there would be no ethical oil.

Communicating Neoliberalism: Petroturfing as Neoliberal Media Strategy
The structural characteristics of petroturfing—especially the dynamic of legitimation through circulation that petroturfing rests upon—are not isolated, nor are they exclusive to petroturfing

and the Canadian oil industry. If we understand petroturfing as a fundamentally neoliberal

discursive and rhetorical strategy, then the connections and relationships petroturfing has with

other producers of neoliberal cultural production, such as reports by think tanks and other NGOs,

are important to approach. Media from petroturfing as well as from neoliberal think tanks can be

seen as a twenty-first century response to Friedrich Hayek's diagnoses of a lack of non-

progressivist (read: non-socialist) intellectuals and intellectual cultural production.[51] His answer

to this lack was to build a kind of neoliberal intellectual counter-insurgency that produced

content with neoliberal ideas that would circulate among a larger public. As many critics of

neoliberalism cite, Hayek's aim was to make neoliberal ideas palatable for "second hand idea

dealers" to disseminate. Petroturfing is thus embedded in the continued unfolding of

neoliberalism in ways that are both conceptual and historical. This is evidenced in the deep

relationship between petroturfing's key figures such as Ezra Levant and think tanks such as the

Fraser Institute, which has ties to the University of Calgary's Political Science department and

the School of Public Policy, a group of scholars that would come to be known as the Calgary

School in reference to the Chicago School. Situating petroturfing within this larger neoliberal

impetus helps us to understand petroturfing's larger aims and purposes in more detail.

Ethical Oil in particular and petroturfing in general has an intimate, historical connection

with the Calgary School beyond shared ideologies of neoliberalism. Surprisingly, there is little

scholarly work on the Calgary School, aside from Frédéric Boily's *Stephen Harper: de l'École*

de Calgary au Parti conservateur: les nouveaux visages du conservatisme canadien (2007) and

other French-language journal articles. Despite being a more popular (rather than scholarly)

account of the relationship between Stephen Harper's rise to power and the Calgary School as a

semi-coherent group of influential intellectuals committed to neoliberalism and the spreading of

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[51] My arguments here are indebted to conversations with Richard Kover.

neoliberal policies, Donald Gutstein's *Harperism: How Stephen Harper and his think thank colleagues have transformed Canada* remains indispensible.[52] Gutstein details the processes by which Harper's Conservatives deepened neoliberalism in Canada with chapters that articulate systematic strategies ranging from "Convince Canadians of the Importance of Economic Freedom" and "Liberate Dead Capital on First Nation Reserves" to "Counter the Environmental Threat to the Market" and "Undermine Scientific Knowledge." As the book details, the Calgary School and particularly the Fraser Institute think tank were instrumental in developing the types of policies that became identifiable as *Harperism* during 9 years of Harper-led rule in Canada. Harperism names the particular ideological configuration of Stephen Harper's deepening of the neoliberalization of Canada, a process linked with the maintenance, reproduction, and expansion of Canada's fossil economy. Under the chapter header "Counter the Environmental Threat to the Market," Gutstein details the relationship between the Fraser Institute and Stephen Harper while underscoring the role that Ezra Levant played in this process. As Gutstein argues, the notion of ethical oil was brought into being by Levant's book of the same title, and four months after its release, "ethical oil was Harper government policy, or at least an official government talking point" (142). It is perhaps unsurprising to add that Levant, a University of Calgary alumnus, was a former student of Tom Flanagan's, who Marci McDonald called "The Man behind Stephen Harper" (2004).

Gutstein's work further makes clear the broader historical and ideological links from key figures of the Austrian School of economics (such as Hayek) and the Chicago School (such as Milton Friedman) to the Calgary School (such as Tom Flanagan) that are important to understanding petroturfing. Ideological commitments to the tenets of neoliberalism, many of which will be discussed in the next chapter, run deep in all manners of petroturfing. Alex

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[52] I thank Adam Carlson for drawing my attention to the book.

Epstein's explicit subscription to a Randian fetishization of the free market, for instance, underscores the ways in which petroturfing is an extension of what Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe call the "neoliberal thought collective." Although Epstein explicitly identifies as a libertarian, a political identification whose fundamental divergence with neoliberalism revolves around the question of the role of the state (libertarians are anti-state and neoliberals understand the role of the state to be in opening up and maintaining markets), the distance between neoliberalism and libertarianism is not necessarily a large one. In summarizing Philip Mirowski's arguments, Gutstein states "that many self-identifying libertarians are actually neo-liberals" (27).

The introduction to *The Road From Mont Pèlerin*, Plehwe exhaustively details the emergence of neoliberalism as an intentional political-economic project stemming out of post-World War Two Europe, tracing its origins to the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), a society started by Friedrich A. Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and others. Plehwe's analysis further explores the vast networks of economists who have participated in this organization while also tracing its lineage (i.e., from the Austrian School to the Chicago School) and emphasizing the role that cultural production plays in the spread of neoliberalism's tenets. "The architects of the neoliberal thought collective," Plehwe writes, "have carefully connected and combined key spheres and institutions for the contest over hegemony—academia, the media, politics, and business" (22). In the early stages of the MPS, a "statement of aims," or the Neoliberal "ten commandments," was drafted, the contents of which emphasize the necessity of individual freedom in terms of competitive markets, decentralization through private property, consumer choice, limited government activity, and more (22-24). The naturalization of neoliberalism's "ten commandments" has been achieved in part due to concerted efforts from think tanks, including

the Fraser Institute, whose annual "Economic Freedom of the World" report represents a quantified, purportedly objective condensation of neoliberal abstraction that measures and ranks countries according to their upholding of "economic freedom," the "cornerstones" of which are defined as "personal choice, voluntary exchange, freedom to enter markets and compete, and security of the person and privately owned property" (Gwartney v). By supporting the conditions for a naturalization of neoliberal tenets in the public imaginary, the Fraser Institute is to Canadian neoliberalism and petro-capitalism as Greenpeace is to environmentalism. It comes as no surprise, then, that an early post that Ethical Oil made on its blog was a reference to a Fraser Institute report arguing that the United States should consume more Canadian oil, which aided in inaugurating "ethical oil" into Canadian political discourse (Alykhan 2011). But think tanks are not the only front on which this ideological war is waged, as evidenced by petroturf and other astroturfing groups.

Similar in structure to petroturf groups, Friends of Science (FoS) uses social and traditional media to undermine scientific research on the impacts and severity of anthropogenic climate change. FoS is a Calgary-based "non-profit organization run by dedicated volunteers comprised mainly of active and retired earth and atmospheric scientists, engineers, and other professionals" ("Friends"). The group's aim is "[t]o educate the public about climate science and through [the public] bring pressure to bear on governments to engage in public debates on the scientific merits of the hypothesis of human induced global warming and the various policies that intend to address the issue" and its base argument is "that the Sun is the main direct and indirect driver of climate change" ("Friends"). Using social media such as YouTube and billboards on Canadian highways (see Climatewise101 2015), FoS spreads this view, which is largely situated within the broader climate skeptic and denial movement in Canada. In his 2013 Master's thesis

"Climate Change Denial in Canada: An Evaluation of the Fraser Institute and Friends of Science Positions," Aldous Sperl justifies his choice of focusing solely on the Fraser Institute and Friends of Science in order to map climate change denial within Canada. "The two organizations," he writes, "were chosen as representational of the denial discourse because of their prominent role in the Canadian context" (5). What Sperl draws attention to is not only the concentrated efforts of certain organizations to fan the flames of climate denial, but their interconnectedness: "climate denial in Canada is part of a wider philosophical struggle linked to the modern conservative movement defending the Dominant Social Paradigm" (ii). Along with these connections to the Fraser Institute, significantly, YouTube links Rebel Media to FoS as a related channel, algorithmically establishing a relationship between the content that both groups produce.

Rebel Media is Ezra Levant's own newsmedia conglomerate, which produces YouTube videos, blog posts and other editorials that promote larger ideological views found in petroturfing, such as a valorization and naturalization of the free market, free speech, and so on. Starting in 2015, *The Rebel* has become associated with far right-wing discourses of Islamophobia, anti-globalism, and others that seem to be increasing in popularity.[53] It is a kind of Canadian *Breitbart*, the right-wing, conspiracy-theory laden news source infamously associated with Steve Bannon, US President Donald Trump's former White House Chief Strategist. Boasting 1, 231, 563 subscribers and a cumulative 444,541,599 video views as of July 2019 (in comparison to Ethical Oil's YouTube channel at 103 subscribers and a cumulative 153,400 video views), Rebel Media's YouTube channel overshadows the meager following of Ethical Oil and other petroturfing groups (@Rebel Media; @EthicalOildotorg). This success is perhaps why Ethical Oil remains relatively inactive since 2014, with sparse Twitter posts and virtually no

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[53] For more on this, see Jason Markusoff's essay in *Maclean's*, "Canada's Rebel is joining the global class of paranoid, far-right media" (2017).

updates to its website. But if we understand the neoliberal media ecosystem as one of interrelationships, Rebel Media continues to do the work that CAPP, industry representatives, Ethical Oil, and petorturfing more broadly set out to do.

All of these efforts represent a contemporary counter-effort against the perceived influence on the public or cultural sphere that intellectuals who favour a broadly understood progressivism have had historically, a trajectory that the godfather of neoliberalism, Friedrich A. Hayek, identified in 1949. In "Intellectuals and Socialism," Hayek examines the contemporary intellectual and concludes that this figure is largely a socialist one who influences broader socio-cultural spheres and, in turn, public opinion through the circulation of their ideas. Further, he argues that the widespread influence of these figures has been underestimated by conservatives who "tend to regard the socialist intellectuals as nothing more than a pernicious bunch of highbrow radicals without appreciating their influence" (376). Hayek concludes this short piece by noting the ways in which liberals (more accurately neoliberals in contemporary discourse) can learn from these figures:

> The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and therefore an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote … But if we can regain that belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost. (384)

Hayek recognized the important role that ideas play in shaping policy. Stedman Jones outlines how Hayek put his vision into motion by intentionally forming MPS (30-31), a society that would plant the seeds for the neoliberal schools of thought mentioned above—the Chicago School, the Calgary School, and others. Stedman Jones summarizes Hayek's view: "the way to

ensure that free markets triumphed was to focus on changing the minds of the 'second-hand dealers in ideas,' the intellectuals" (4). "The strategy was clear," he writes: "neoliberal thinkers needed to target the wider intelligentsia, journalists, experts, politicians, and policy makers" (4). This aim was to be achieved "through a transatlantic network of sympathetic business funders and ideological entrepreneurs who ran think tanks, and through the popularization of neoliberal ideas by journalists and politicians" (4).

Given the relationship between neoliberalism and Canada's petro-economy embodied in figures such as Stephen Harper, it would be a mistake, I argue, to view petroturfing as outside of this history of neoliberalism's successful dissemination of a socio-political, as well as socio-economic, set of beliefs and axioms that aim to naturalize the market and its relations. Indeed, petroturfing and the larger projects of the Calgary School—Friends of Science, the Fraser Institute, and so on—answer Hayek's call to disseminate neoliberalism as a new "common sense," a phrase used by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval in *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* to describe the spread of neoliberal modes of governance based on key principles such as competition (239). Petroturfing achieves this feat of naturalizing the fossil economy and its relations by using the *structures*, *strategies*, and *tactics* of the very groups and individuals whom they view as opposition. One need only to swap out "intellectual" for "environmentalist" in Hayek's piece to obtain a sophisticated and accurate reading of petroturfing and other misinformation campaigns spearheaded by various offshoots of the Calgary School.

This is not to say that Ethical Oil—or petroturfing in general—is an *intellectual* project in the way that "intellectual" is commonly understood to mean today. While it might not communicate sophisticated ideas about the role of oil in our everyday lives (in fact, it might

better be understood as an *anti*-intellectual project, given that one of its key claims is that the elite bias of Canada's Eastern Provinces comes at the expense of the everyday, working class West), it is nevertheless an intellectual project in the most general sense, performing the neoliberal cultural work that Hayek calls for in influential texts such as "Intellectuals and Socialism." The Calgary School, Barry Cooper, Tom Flanagan, Stephen Harper, Ezra Levant, Ethical Oil, Friends of Science, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, the Canadian Business Council, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Mining Association, the Government of Alberta, and the other groups and individuals I examine in this dissertation are participating in precisely the kind of efforts that Hayek calls for here—to shape public discourse, flooding the mediascape with neoliberal petro-narratives that are easily circulated, reproduced, and, in turn, internalized within the public imaginary. Social media provide one particularly effective way to circulate such content as it is built upon the impetus for users to share and reproduce content—a form that suits Hayek's vision from 1949. If we follow Matt Huber's key argument in *Lifeblood* that oil provides the fuel for neoliberalism's reproduction in a dialectical fashion, then broader efforts to maintain and reproduce neoliberalism whether on a cultural (as we have seen throughout this chapter) or material level also function to maintain and reproduce petroculture, even in cases where this relationship is less explicit.

Conclusion

2006	2008	2009	2010	2014	2016	2017
Harper's declaration of Canada to be an "energy superpower"	Nikiforuk-*Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*	Nikiforuk's Greenpeace report. Launch of dirtyoilsands.org	Levant-*Ethical Oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands*	Launch of British Columbians for Prosperity (bcprosperity.ca)	Bernard the Roughneck delivers petition to Ottawa for support of oil sands	Trudeau approves Enbridge's Line 3 and Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain Expansion, rejecting Enbridge's Northern Gateway

Table 2: Key Dates in Petroturfing, a Timeline[54]

Harper's call for Canada to become an energy superpower in 2006 has clearly been answered, at least in part: in Q1 of 2017, energy products were Canada's most significant export, with crude oil and crude bitumen making up 60% of that category (Government of Canada). However, this transformation has also been, in many ways, a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the maintenance and reproduction of petroculture was a key priority during Stephen Harper's nine-year tenure as Prime Minister. And, as this chapter has made clear, the continued expansion of the Athabasca oil sands in this period was not a clean and uncontested process—it was and continues to be met with cultural and material resistance from the Idle No More movement and numerous Indigenous communities, as well as environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace Keepers of the Athabasca, and the Sierra Club, and others such as Iron and Earth, a group of oil sands workers demanding training in clean energy jobs in anticipation of the forthcoming energy transition. One of the first major campaigns against the oil sands sought to signify oil sands oil as "dirty oil," and this has been extremely successful in its reach and influence. Although the success of these campaigns is hard to measure—especially given the fact that production has nearly doubled since 2008 when Nikiforuk's seminal *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* was published—their

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[54] Adapted from and inspired by *MediaToil*'s timeline that begins with the opening of an Alberta office inside the Canadian embassy in Washington in 2004 and ending with the delivery of Bernard's petition to Ottawa in 2016 ("MediaToil").

influence in shaping the global imaginary's conception of the Athabasca oil sands is hard to overemphasize.

The timeline above (Table 2) identifies key moments and events in the development of discourse around the oil sands that create the superstructural conditions of possibility first for the scaling up of production in the oil sands in the Canadian imaginary (beginning with Harper's inauguration of Canada's status as an energy superpower); second, for the counter-discourses that challenge and resist the expansion and intensification of extractive practices in the oil sands vis-à-vis new pipelines, increased production, and other related infrastructural projects (in this category or phase we can group the larger "dirty oil" campaign as well as other larger and lesser known campaigns); and finally, for petroturfing—the counter-counter-discourses that bring themselves into being from a rhetorically submissive power position in relation to the counter-discourses from the likes of Greenpeace et al. by, among other things, calling for a renewed "balance" in discussions and debates over the oil sands while exhibiting underdog characteristics as victims of unfair criticisms in the public sphere. These counter-counter discourses mark the focus of *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*.

Whereas the previous chapter laid out the theoretical and material context from which to begin to situate petroturfing in relation to petroculture and network society, this chapter has explored the discursive conditions for petroturfing's emergence and its placement and function within larger neoliberal lobbying efforts in Canada and elsewhere. As a counter-counter discourse, petroturfing reproduces already dominant relations of petroculture while it sits uneasily within the conventional categories of promotional material as such—like explicitly-identified promotional material (for instance, a particular advertisement or larger campaign from a lobbying group with clearly expressed industry ties such as CAPP or Enbridge's "This is Janet"

campaign, both of which I discuss in the next chapter). Unlike these explicit promotional campaigns, however, petroturf groups frame themselves as grassroots organizations without corporate or governmental financial support and, in turn, their promotion of the oil sands and expansion of its infrastructures are authenticated in the public imaginary.

Every group has its own version of declaring that it is both grassroots and non-partisan, supported solely by the donations of concerned citizens. Investigative journalists have uncovered some dubious paper trails with only a few of these groups that, unlike CAPP, veil their relationship to the oil and gas industry by identifying as being entirely donor-funded, and so it is difficult to make blanket statements of petroturfing in this way. For this reason, the *Mediatoil* project places these media efforts in the stakeholder category of "citizens." At the core of this struggle is—as McCurdy has quite rightly identified with regard to CAPP's "Energy Citizens" campaign, but could be scaled out to petroturfing *in toto*—an enactment of a Gramscian war of position over what the oil sands *are* at the level of superstructure. It is certainly no coincidence that Richard Berman, chief executive of the well-known PR company Berman & Company, provided advice to oil industry executives in these terms: "Think of this as an endless war…. And you have to budget for it" (qtd. in DeMelle 2014), as Brendan DeMelle reports in his discussion of Greenpeace's leaks of the Edelmen PR company's astroturfing plan for TransCanada.

Another way of framing petroturfing that underscores this Gramscian dynamic of a war of position is through Greg Elmer, Ganaele Langlois, and Fenwick McKelvey's deployment of the concept of a "permanent campaign" in relation to the functioning of social media as a dominant media form in the twenty-first century. The concept of a permanent campaign, as the authors make clear, is not a new one; it was introduced by an advisor to then U.S. President-elect

Jimmy Carter in 1976, who told Carter that "it is [his] thesis governing with public approval requires a *continuing political campaign*" (qtd. in McKelvey, Langlois, and Elmer 1). The rise of permanent campaigning is due in part "to the exponential rise in political advertising and fund-raising," as well as networked news cycles (3). But with the ubiquitous rise of social media and other Internet-based communications technologies, a permanent campaign in the twenty-first century has become normalized and, indeed, a necessity in today's political climate. Elmer et al.'s observations show us that "Web 2.0's networked platforms (e.g., blogs, microblogs, online videos, and social networking … have challenged centralized and hierarchical forms of political governance and campaign management" (4), which can help to contextualize the mediascape that petroturfing is a part of while also identifying how it extends the perceived characteristics of Web 2.0, especially its participatory apparatus figured through notions of democracy, to signify its project and in turn to signify Canadian oil. Petroturfing, it follows, is the permanent campaign of Canadian oil, and these are unconventional communications strategies for an unconventional oil, but such strategies may become the norm for all corporate promotion in the very near future.

Following this, we can begin to see how petroturfing underscores the limits of social and political activism in the social media age. Social media has revealed itself as a form that is fundamentally ambivalent, or, if we follow Jodi Dean, one that re-inscribes the relations of capitalism and the market by exploiting the perceived ideological impulses of the web towards democracy, openness, and participation. The three chapters that follow and which comprise the second part of *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* will push this analysis further by examining more closely the narratives that petroturfing constructs and circulates. It does so by extending the discussion of the role of neoliberalism in petroturfing through a focus on the appeals of petroturfing to economy and nation in Chapter III; in Chapter IV, it examines petroturfing in the

context of the Canadian petro-state, asking how race and gender are figured into petroturfing narratives while interrogating the limits of the politics of recognition on which this figuring depends; and in Chapter V, it looks to the ways in which the environment enters into petroturfing, with an emphasis on the promotion of oil sands reclamation projects. Together, these chapters take stock of three key spheres on which petroturfing hinges its efforts to lay claim over Canadian oil's social and cultural life: the spheres of the economic, the social, and the ecological.

PART II

PROMISE/ECONOMY | RECOGNITION/RACE + GENDER | RECLAMATION/ENVIRONMENT

Chapter III

Promising Prosperity, Promising Progress: Nation, Economy, and the Subject(s) of

Petroturfing

> The term 'progress,' referring to a general state, has become rare; even twentieth-century modernization has begun to feel archaic. But their categories and assumptions of improvement are with us everywhere.
>   -Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*

Introduction

Environment and economy, in particular the historical tensions between and separation of the

two, form the basis of a key site of ideological struggle for oil sands advocacy in general and

petroturfing in particular. Versions of the pervasive claim that environmentalists are, by any

means, attempting to destroy or stifle the employment of everyday Canadians by blocking

industrial development have become essential utterances for advocates of fossil fuel production

in Canada. Recall this frequently cited 2012 statement regarding the accelerated expansion of

Canada's energy market from Joe Oliver, Canada's former Minister of Natural Resources and

later Minister of Finance under Stephen Harper's Conservatives: "Unfortunately, there are

environmental and other radical groups that would seek to block this opportunity to diversify our

trade" (n.p.). "Their goal," he writes, "is to stop any major project no matter what the cost to

Canadian families in lost jobs and economic growth. No forestry. No mining. No oil. No gas.

No more hydro-electric dams" (n.p.). Such rhetoric is a transparent effort to maintain and

reproduce rifts between the allegedly *idealist*, inconsiderate environmentalists and the *realist*,

family-oriented working public—the "average Canadian citizen" that this discourse brings into

being, a discourse premised on concepts such as nationalism, nationhood, and progress.

Environmentalists and environmentalism, the story goes, are categorically antagonistic and

antithetical to the interests of Canada as a nation and its citizens as inhabitants of the nation.

Further, those who oppose (or even question) the actions and developments of such industries as forestry, mining, or oil and gas, this logic follows, are constructed as outsiders of the nation—they are no longer "Canadian," and they are no longer reasonable. This relationship between environment, economy, and nation on the one hand and claims of oil sands advocates to the domains of realism contra idealism on the other is where this chapter's intervention is located.

A dominant narrative that continues to surround global oil extraction is its ability to both produce *and* distribute wealth not only for oil companies, their CEOs and shareholders, but for industry employees, broader communities, and the larger regions or nations in which those companies operate. This seductive characteristic of the fossil economy litters oil sands promotion. Canada, and Alberta in particular, the narrative suggests, is not only a petroculture—a culture in which everyday patterns of life are primarily centred on and made possible by the consumption of fossil fuels—but a petro-*economy* as well, one in which the sustained employment of its citizens, the continued operation of its schools and hospitals, and so on, fundamentally relies on and is made possible by oil extraction.[55] This narrative is a strategic one; implicitly embedded within it is the oft-cited neoliberal axiom that there is no alternative—to either petroculture as a dominant mode of social organization or to capitalism as a dominant mode of production. *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* names the logic of this axiom as "*petro*-capitalist realism." Like the late Mark Fisher's notion of "capitalist realism," it is a logic and process of material and imaginative *enclosure* characteristic of and pervasive to our neoliberal

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[55] Fall-out in Alberta from the significant decrease in oil prices in 2015 shows how deeply tied Alberta's economy is tied to oil. Falling from $105 USD/bbl in June of 2014 to $47 USD/bbl in January of 2015 ("Oil Price"), the crash in part led to a rise in unemployment rates from 4.9% in June, 2014 to 8.8% in January, 2016 ("Oil Price"), a fall in housing markets, and more. While I was on a research trip to the oil sands and Fort McMurray in late 2015, the fallout from the crash was evident, but an optimism for recovery was also palpable. This optimism in the face of uncertainty highlights, in my view, both the material and the ideological centrality of oil in the Albertan economy and its imaginary.

moment in which capitalism and the petroculture it is bound to are framed and understood as the only viable economic and energetic systems and relations.

The promises of jobs, employment, and a vibrant economy are crucial pieces to the most convincing reasoning for public support of and consensus for the expansion of oil sands developments in Canada, including in particular such approved and proposed pipeline projects as Enbridge's Northern Gateway, Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain expansion, TransCanada's Energy East, and TransCanada's Keystone XL. Open virtually any mainstream Canadian newspaper's past and recent discussion of Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline, or Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline, or read any of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statements on oil sands developments from the past decade in which Canada's "energy superpower" status is emphasized.[56] Such promises shaped and continue to shape the discourse regarding the public economic benefits of these projects. This is precisely where their discursive value resides, rhetorically operating as a sort of logical fallacy in the form of an "appeal to the economy." Broader economic health of the nation here is construed as a synecdoche of the social and economic health of individual members of society, and such health is a fundamental promise of petroculture and of petro-capital. Pausing on the concept of promise proves instructive here. The OED defines the act: "To make a promise of (something), to give verbal assurance of; to undertake or commit oneself to do or refrain from (a specified thing or act) or to give or bestow (a specified thing)" ("promise, *v*"). Assurance, commitment, and *giving*: this is the vocabulary of fossil fuels in Canada, a vocabulary which claims and determines future relations.

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[56] See, for example, Stephen Harper's pre-G8 speech to members of the Canada-UK Chamber of Commerce in 2006 where he labels Canada "a new energy superpower" that will be built into a "global energy powerhouse" "based on competitive market principles" (qtd. in Taber). The state naming Canada an energy superpower while emphasizing neoliberal principles functions here as a sort of pre-condition for petroturfing.

This chapter examines notions of progress and prosperity as invoked and deployed in petroturfing by interrogating the relationship between economy and nation that underpins petroturfing. Both nations and economies as we understand them today, as *things* or *practices*, are recent constructs, traceable to the eighteenth and nineteenth century (nations) and in the early twentieth century (economies). In historicizing nation and economy, this chapter aims to unpack the historical assemblage that petroturfing emerges out of and to complicate the ease in which it appeals to both in the construction of its audience of petro-subjects. It argues that the appeals to economy vis-à-vis the invocation of notions of progress and prosperity through a reproduction of the opposition of environment and economy found in petroturfing exhibit what I call "petro-capitalist realism." As a kind of petrocultural "common sense," petro-capitalist realism creates a condition in which both material and discursive resistance and dissent are at once impossible and unimaginable, resulting in the types of dismissal and enclosure that Chiara Bottici outlines in *Imaginal Politics* where she argues that "[t]hose who argue 'another world is possible'—to quote a slogan of the new global movements—are easily labeled unrealistic, if not fanatical, and thus are excluded from the spectrum of viable political options" (14). This enclosure of imagination and of possibility, I argue, parallels the material impossibility of challenging the ubiquity of petroculture on an infrastructural level—to "shut it down," as it were, remains daunting if not entirely unimaginable. In other words, such a discursive enclosure operates on the level of superstructure whereas the material enclosure operates on base of the (petro-)capitalist economy.

To examine how this enclosure operates, I first look to the ways in which the nation and the economy crystallize as objects, figures, or "things" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively to historicize discourses of progress and prosperity as they later appear in petroturfing while also examining nation and economy in relation to Alberta's oil sands and to

the neoliberal moment in which we currently find ourselves. Then, I turn to the Canadian

Association of Petroleum Producers' (CAPP) Energy Citizens Campaign to explore the ways in

which petroturfing navigates and represents relationships between nation and economy in a

neoliberal context to construct subjects, users, or audiences within the subject-category of late

capitalism, the "citizen-consumer" (Johnston 231). Finally, I outline and interrogate the promises

of petroculture in terms of promotion of the Canadian oil industry by examining petroturfing

efforts from British Columbians for Prosperity that take these the subjects of petroturfing which

CAPP constructs as "energy citizens," for granted. Moreover, these efforts hinge upon

articulations through discourses of facts as another layer of petro-capitalist realist "common

sense." In these instances of petroturfing, nation figured as progress and economy figured as

prosperity are engaged with and deployed to further efforts to reproduce petroculture at a

superstructural level.

On Progress: The Neoliberal Nationalisms of Petroturfing

There is no doubt that we inhabit an era of accelerated and accelerating globalization, enabled in

no small part by the pervasiveness of neoliberal social and economic policies, with many

claiming that we now live in a "post-nation" world, that is, a world *beyond* nation.[57]

Neoliberalism, moreover, is often understood to be against or in conflict with nationalism, and

especially economic nationalism—economic policies defined negatively as those that challenge

an economic globalism. However, as Andreas Pickel observes in the introduction to *Economic*

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[57] Such perspectives are often framed around the erosion of national boundaries through trade, global telecommunications, and so on, but the nation persists. In *After Globalization*, Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman describe the state of the nation in a globalized and continuously globalizing world: "Globalization was supposed to mark the withering away of the nation; instead, in the twenty-first century we witness nations asserting their identities and fighting over the last scraps of the earth's resources" (6). "In what was imagined to be the post-national era," they elaborate, "the nation is stronger than ever" (7).

Nationalism in a Globalizing World (2005), neoliberalism and economic nationalism are not necessarily the enemies they were once thought to be (1-2). But regardless of the compatibility of neoliberalism and economic nationalism, as I show below, petroturfing is ultimately an attempt to deploy rhetorics of economic nationalism in ideological service of the *global* petro-economy. Emerging out of this strange mix of neoliberalism and nationalism, petroturfing relies in the first instance on an invocation, and thus a form of internal logic, of the nation as such—used primarily as a means to imbue Canadian oil with the positive characteristics associated with Canada in the popular national and international imaginaries, including its commitments to multiculturalism, to ecological conservation, to peacekeeping, and so on.[58] Indeed, *the* key premise in Ezra Levant's *Ethical Oil* is that it is these features of Canada that make it one of the few producers of what he and others now call "ethical oil." Canada's status as a well-regarded parliamentary democracy that respects human and ecological rights, provides much of the bases for repackaging Alberta's oil sands as socially, culturally, and ecologically appealing. In other words, its status as a liberal democratic nation is precisely what differentiates Canadian oil from the oil produced in so-called "conflict" regions and is why its production should increase. As a kind of moral-economic imperative, petroturfing frames increases in the production and consumption of Canadian oil as both ethically necessary and morally imperative to saturate the global oil market with Canadian oil, inhibiting the trade of socially and ecologically destructive "conflict oil" in a mission not unlike the vision of British nationalism we will encounter later in this chapter.

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[58] It would, of course, take another dissertation to address what these narratives leave out or overlook in terms of Canada's own conflict, not the least of which is its settler colonial history and present. For an account of the contradictions between Canada's global image vis-à-vis multiculturalism and its internal colonial violences, see the 2011 collection *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada* edited by May Chazan et al.

Such framing is, among other things, unapologetically anthropocentric, premised on a viewpoint that understands dimensions of ethics in an exclusively human sense. The way petroturfing navigates and negotiates the relationship between the human and nonhuman regarding the production and consumption of fossil fuels will become especially important in chapter 5, which examines the ecologies of oil extraction in Canada through promotional efforts surrounding oil sands reclamation. For now, it is sufficient to emphasize a very simple point: that as the production and consumption of fossil fuels increases, so too do GHG emissions. This fact forms the premise upon which McKenzie Wark names the historical and contemporary agents and actors who have been long committed to the production and consumption of fossil fuels the "Carbon Liberation Front" (CLF). The CLF is comprised of an array of agents whose key drive is to "liberate" carbon from the ground, releasing it into the atmosphere through consumption and in doing so accelerating climate change (xiv-xv). This "liberation" of carbon, which results in ever-increasing intensification of anthropogenic climate change, is not contingent upon the perceived ethics of the nation or region in which the oil or other fossil fuel was produced. And these ethics that groups such as Ethical Oil claim Canadian oil embodies ultimately do not lessen the social and ecological impact of the fossil economy. The planetary ecological flows do not care if the fossil fuels originated in a liberal, parliamentarian democratic nation that allegedly respects human rights or a nation founded on authoritarian or kleptocratic forms of governance.

Given the central reliance on concepts of nation and mobilization of national*ism* in petroturfing, it is worth briefly reflecting on nation and exploring its origins in relation to other keywords of (petro-)modernity, especially democracy and economy. For Benedict Anderson, theorist of nations and nationalism *par excellence*, nations are what he calls "imagined communities," socially constructed entities, constituted and maintained especially through

communicative venues like print media,[59] rather than the natural or fixed entities based on past traditions as nationalisms are often framed. The characteristics of the "imagined community" that binds Canada together as a unified nation are and have always been, as communications scholar Darin Barney argues, deeply material ones, founded upon a number of infrastructural developments that do quite literally bind Canada together, in turn shaping while being shaped by the national imaginary.

Trading routes, railways, and now pipelines stand in as the material *and* symbolic, or indeed mythical, entities of so-called nation-building development, the materials (and networks) on which Canada's imagined community rests. Barney explains: "It might be more accurate to say that Canada was not so much imagined as fabricated, produced materially by means of infrastructures onto which an imaginary nation was subsequently (and repeatedly) projected" (79). "Making railways and highways would be what 'made us Canadian'" (79). Barney invokes this history to underscore the ways in which Canadian nationalism has always been tethered to a technological nationalism, a nationalism whose bases are premised on ever-increasing technological innovation, rooted in the development of infrastructures that deepen legacies of settler colonialism and the domination of nature (79). Although there was and remains a strong tension between regionalism and nationalism in Canada, with critics like Harold Innis arguing that Canada is regionalist,[60] such infrastructural projects—trade routes, railways, pipelines—in

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[59] Anderson's analysis ties the rise of the nation as such to the emergence of print capitalism in Britain. As he writes, "it is obvious that while today almost all modern self-conceived nations - and also nation-states - have 'national print-languages', many of them have these languages in common, and in others only a tiny fraction of the population 'uses' the national language in conversation or on paper" (46). The parallels with social media, I think, reveal the ways in which media in general continue as a means to construct and disseminate nationhood.

[60] Innis argues throughout his work that Canada has become increasingly regionalist as provinces gained economic strength due in no small part to the exploitation of natural resources for the United States. "The extension of the American empire, the decline of its natural resources, and the emergence of metropolitan areas supported capitalist expansion in Canada and reinforced the trend of regionalism." He continues: "The pull to the north and south has tended to become stronger in contrast with the pull east and west" (164).

many ways strategically override these tensions by framing these infrastructural projects as nation-building ones.

Questions of nation are historically tied to those of economics, which, in the Western imagination, further hinge upon broader abstract notions of progress that have been a fundamental ideological apparatus of modernity as such. Both nation and economy as we understand them today are arguably by-products of the internalized ideals of Enlightenment, rooted in teleological perceptions of history as perpetual improvement that laid the cultural and ideological foundations for the Industrial Revolution. Historically speaking, the emergence of the nation is a recent one, and this is worth dwelling upon given the ways in which petroturfing so easily overlooks this history as it is premised upon a kind of timeless, naturalized conceptualization of both nation and economy, as Eric Hobsbawm reminds us when he points out that "We may thus, without entering further into the matter, accept that in its modern and basically political sense the concept *nation* is historically very young" (17-18). Canada's own perceptions of nation are embedded within this very young history, inherited from the legacies of nationhood found in British histories wedded to a colonialist, white supremacist vision of civilization and the spreading of it. Literary historian Maurice J. Quinlan defines the aims and impulses of British nationalism in similar terms: "Nationalism [was] based upon a belief in the moral [and cultural] superiority of the English over the lesser breed of men" (qtd. in Bélanger 22).

The imperialist spreading of British morality and culture was tied to notions of progress, and this notion or "myth" of progress holds a unique status in Western intellectual history. Scholars such as Robert Nisbet have traced the idea of progress as a kernel found throughout the Western intellectual tradition. In tracing the idea of progress in the "Classical World" up to what

he calls its triumph (from 1750-1900), Nisbet shows in *History of the Idea of Progress* how progress has functioned as a consistent and increasingly dominant concept in the Western historical imaginary. Writing in the early 1980s before the fall of the Soviet Union, the triumph of liberal democracy, and the ushering in of the much-mythologized "End of History," Nisbet diagnosed a *decline* in the kinds of faith in progress found in the ideological narratives of earlier periods in the West and especially the nineteenth century. But in the twenty-first century there is arguably a broader social, cultural, and economic revival of progress, particularly through rapid technological development, the rise of what Nick Dyer-Witheford called "high-tech capitalism" in the late 1990s, and the techno-utopian impulses that lurk in the shadows of these developments end up establishing the context for the emergence of petroturfing, which mobilizes this faith in progress for the benefit of the fossil economy.

Understanding and invoking the economy as a *thing*, like the nation, is a recent phenomenon, and one that has become both ubiquitous and internalized. This internalization is, for instance, evident in the opening statements of this chapter, which place the environment and economy as tangible objects of equal material grounding. Such statements have only recently been made possible in a moment when "Second Nature," or the social and economic structures that modernity has been built upon, has fully subsumed "First Nature," or the broader environment as such.[61] In "Economentality: How the Future Entered Government," Timothy Mitchell traces the emergence of the economy as an object, arguing that such conceptualizations enable a mode of *economentality* (*pace* Foucault's governmentality), which functions as "a way to bring the future into government" (484). "Around 1948," Mitchell explains,

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[61] For recent accounts of the relationship between first and second nature, see Anna Tsing's 2015 book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* and McKenzie Wark's 2015 book *Molecular Red*.

it became common in American political debate to talk about the economy. References

to this object in government and newspapers were starting to appear in a routine,

repetitive way that made the economy appear for the first time as a matter of fact. It was

no longer always necessary to explain what the term meant or to qualify it in some way.

(481)

This internalization made possible through economentality gave way to a number of effects,

including, most prominently, a conflation of interest between nation and economy on a micro

and macro scale, resulting in a kind of collective consciousness that understands in the first

instance that what is good for the economy is good for the nation. "The economy," Mitchell

writes, "would embed people's political lives in the future by bringing them to calculate

according to its representation. It would locate them in relation to a future formed in a particular

way, as a balance, or trade-off, between forces now inscribed as equivalents in the structure of

national accounts, with wage earners/consumers on one side and business and banking on the

other" (492). In this way, economentality as Mitchell understands it makes possible the types of

rhetorics and concepts like Gross Domestic Product (GDP), by which "progress" measured.

These measures of progress shape the promises of petroculture I discuss throughout this chapter,

wherein the interests of the Canadian petro-economy parallel the interests of the nation and its

citizens. These promises rely on a link of government or nation and economy found within

neoliberalism that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, make claims to (and thus attempts to

create) a specific vision of the future shaped by speculations of the benefits of the production

and consumption of (Canadian) oil, and so by the impulses of petro-capitalist realism.

Briefly tracing the historical emergence of the nation and economy and understanding

them as interrelated, symbiotic objects also establishes an important historical link with fossil

fuels that is worth highlighting. Whereas nation and economy conceptually link to broader notions of progress that underpin capitalist modernity, fossil fuels are the *materials* that power these imaginaries. Indeed, it is no coincidence that both nation and economy as we understand them today emerged in the late nineteenth century out of a series of material circumstances and conditions that are at least partially responsible for establishing the basis of the forms of capitalism we know today. And it is no coincidence that fossil fuels continue to carry the symbolic baggage of progress, in the case of oil embodying what Fredrick Buell has called the "marriage of catastrophe and exuberance" (69).

While classical political economists arguably underplayed or overlooked the role of energy in shaping social and economic relations,[62] narratives that emphasize the decisive roles of fossil fuelled *technologies* in rapid industrialization were (and are) plenty, especially what many view as the protagonist of Britain's Industrial Revolution: the steam engine.[63] But honing in on the technologies and what capacities they enabled, rather than the energy sources that fuelled them, obscures the complexities of the history of industrialization, especially in terms of social and ecological relations. The increasingly widespread burning of fossil fuels is what ushered in a particular separation of humans from the confines of their environment both in terms of temporality (e.g., travel) and materiality (e.g., industrial production), a form of alienation that remains central to Marxist criticism. The steam engine and its applications are effects of this alienation rather than its primary source. And, to add, the widespread burning of fossil fuels is a key culprit in the ushering in of the epoch many call the Anthropocene.

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[62] In *Energy and the Rise and Fall of Political Economy* (1999), Bernard C. Beaudreau argues that overlooking the role of energy led to the fall of political economy as a discipline.

[63] There is no shortage of books and statements that reproduce this narrative that mystifies and fetishizes the steam engine. See, for example, William Rosen's 2010 book *The Most Powerful Idea in the World: A Story of Steam, Industry, and Invention*.

Questions of nation have shaped Canadian petro-politics from its early days. Initial

development of the oil sands in the late 1960s and early 1970s was largely influenced by

American oil companies, especially in terms of proprietary technological research and

development to make the oil sands extractable. In this way, the "Canadianness" of the Athabasca

oil sands has been, and arguably continues to be, under question. Larry Pratt's political economic

masterpiece, 1976's *The Tar Sands: Syncrude and the Politics of Oil*, reveals among other

things—including the rise of the new bourgeoisie in Alberta—the ways in which American and

multi-national interests shaped the emergence of the oil sands as an economically viable source

of extraction that used public funds to finance its early stages. "It is the handful of multinational

companies, holding almost exclusive leasing privileges in the tar sands, that are dictating the

conditions for their development," he writes (17). What Pratt's book exposes is perhaps

unsurprising to many of us; after all, in Harold Innis' account of Canada as a staples economy—

an economy sustained by the gathering or extraction and export of raw or "staple" materials—the

way Canada has historically developed its resources has never been with an eye for its own

consumption, or even its own manufacture.[64] "Contrary to that comfortable myth [that American

corporations are not directly involved in Canada's politics]," Pratt argues, "scrutiny of the

politics of Syncrude reveals that the multinational companies which own so much of our

economic wealth are also highly purposeful, ruthless institutions engaged in what can only be

called a struggle for power in Canada" (18). Despite the interests of American and multinational

oil corporations significantly dictating how, when, and with whose investment the oil sands

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[64] Innis provides an account of Canada's status as a staples economy that has and continues to supply Britain and the United States with staples: "[Canada] has continued, however, chiefly as a producer of staples for the industrial centres of the United states even more than of Great Britain making [Canada's] own contribution to the Industrial Revolution of North America and Europe and being in turn tremendously influenced thereby" ("Staple Products" 6).

would be developed, nationalism continues to be a key rhetorical device from which to promote

"nation building" through projects such as pipelines.

True nationalization of Canada's oil industry was once a point of serious discussion.[65]

But from today's vantage-point of an oil sands dominated by global stakes and interests—and

when, for instance, a royalty review completed in 2016 by the then newly-appointed NDP

confirms that the rates are acceptable and not in need of updating—a serious discussion

regarding nationalization seems implausible. Elsewhere, however, state oil companies are the

norm, dominating the global oil market, controlling more than 75% of crude oil production

(Bremmer).

Regardless of whether or not oil production is done at the hands of private corporations

or a state, this production has been historically tethered to what is known as the resource curse—

a tendency for regions rich in resources to have widespread structural inequality, political

corruption, and so on. While the empirical validity of the resource curse has recently come under

fire,[66] evidence remains that many petro-economies suffer major income inequalities, political

turmoil, erosions of democracy (in democratic petro-states), and so on, with few exceptions. In

their 2012 article "Do Oil and Democracy Only Clash in the Global South?: Petro Politics in

Alberta, Canada," Meenal Shrivastava and Lorna Stefanick use Alberta's petro-economy as a

case study to show how "the impact of oil on democratic development is not confined to the

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[65] Serious discussion occurred in the early to mid-1970s from actors like Grant Notley, the then provincial leader of Alberta's NDP. "The leader of the provincial New Democratic Party, Grant Notley, criticized the government for taking such a small share of Syncrude and wondered why the oil sands should not be developed by Canada through a crown corporation," Pratt writes (21).

[66] See, for example, Romain Wacziarg's "The First Law of Petropolitics" where he empirically challenges his titular law which asserts that high oil prices prop up autocratic regimes. "None of these empirical tests led to any evidence of an inverse relationship between political freedom and oil prices, in particular for oil-producing nations post-1961, where a relationship, if any, would be most expected to exist," he argues (654).

Global South" (2).[67] And Laurie E. Adkin's 2016 anthology *First World Petro-Politics: The Political Ecology and Governance of Alberta* expands the territory covered in the work of Shrivastava and Stefanick by approaching Canada as a "first world petro-state" (Adkin 4-5). Such erosions to democracy, among other things, are the end-result of what Larry Pratt observed in the 70s—an unflinching influence from American and multinational companies on the funding and regulatory apparatuses of Alberta's petro-economy.

A brief glance at a rent map shows that the oil sands, rather than being a Canadian venture as petroturfing's rhetorics suggest, are instead a fundamentally globalized and globalizing one. The names of multinational oil companies proliferate, superimposed over a cartographic grid of trans-national extractivism although it is worth mentioning that this has shifted since the 2015 decline. Oil extraction in Canada is and has always been decidedly post- or trans-national. And Canadian-based companies such as Suncor or Syncrude are private ones, serving in the first and last instance their shareholders.[68] Pratt's analysis in *Tar Sands*, as discussed above, presciently shows how this map was historically made possible—through collusion with American companies such as ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell.

The ease in which nation is invoked in petroturfing—analogous in form to how the Canadian imagined community is defined through promotion of private commodities in campaigns such as Molson's long-running "I am Canadian" campaign or, for example, the brand materials for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics that construed the Olympics as a national and nation

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[67] Their investigation led to a 2015 anthology provocatively titled *Alberta Oil and the Decline of Democracy in Canada*.

[68] Those in support of industry, however, often frame oil sands production as a benefit. For example, Kelly Gordon argues in *The Oil Sands: Canada's Path to Clean Energy?* that because mineral rights are provincial in Alberta and Saskatchewan, they belong to the citizens. "The mineral rights under Alberta and Saskatchewan belong to the province unless otherwise granted to other landowners," he writes. "As a result, 81% of the mineral rights in Alberta belong to the province and *indirectly, to the citizens*" (18, emphasis added).

building project[69]—is what I hope to trouble and complicate here. This nationalism that

petroturfing exhibits is part of a broader promotional impulse that seeks to capitalize on the

concept of the nation as a unifying gesture, drawing on the history of citizens in a nation to

create a demographic of *consumers*. In petroturfing's flagship manifesto, *Ethical Oil*, the

Canadian nation is figured in contrast to most other oil producing nations. By invoking

nationalism in a neoliberal setting, petroturf groups attach aspects of Canadian national identity

to its fossil fuels while individualizing relations to fossil fuels through a mobilization of lifestyle-

ist discourses that, in the first *and* last instance, promote the production and consumption of a

private commodity and aim for consensus in that process. Due to the *ease* in which the nation is

invoked, these slippages are sly ones, suggesting both "the nation is dead"—in terms of

securities, welfare, and so on—and "long live the petro-nation" as a vague organizing principle

for the pursuit of extraction and profit. When nation building and pipeline building are one and

the same, to challenge these projects on virtually any ground—social, economic, ecological, and

so on—places one against and outside the nation.

Confronting petroturfing as I have above—historicizing and contextualizing its rhetorical

foundations while demystifying its invocations *of* and appeals *to* both economy and nation and to

economy as nation—is not merely an effort to point out the falseness that these appeals exhibit.

Accuracy and validity of the claims made in petroturfing are not exactly my concerns here (nor,

evidently, are they Levant's or other petroturfing figureheads). Instead, I am concerned with

what these narratives *do*, what they *signify*, and how they *circulate* while reproducing

petroculture on a cultural level in tandem with its material reproduction. In a time replete with

so-called "fake news" vying for circulation in what some have called the attention economy,

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[69] The latter example is perhaps unsurprising as nation and nationalism permeate sporting events like the Olympics, but the controversies and protests that surrounded hosting the Olympics on unceded land illustrate the lack of consensus in support.

validity or accuracy is not necessarily what legitimates discourses (if it ever has)—existence and circulation in broader popular culture do. This almost painfully clear lack of legitimacy is precisely why much of the content produced by petroturf groups seems silly or inconsequential to critical readers, and why a study of them might be perceived as equally inconsequential. When one steps back, however, and concerns oneself with how these discourses and rhetorics develop, are circulated, and are given meaning and legitimation through circulation in primarily social media-based venues, the significance of petroturfing becomes clearer. The petro-capitalist realism that animates petroturfing relies on ubiquity while generating consensus and neoliberal "common sense." Petroturfing is not an isolated discourse or effort, but an embedded and pervasive one; its constitutive feature is the way it garners participation from a broader public, mobilizing web 2.0 discourses to insidiously distribute its narratives of petroleum-fuelled progress throughout the contemporary mediascape. My claim throughout this dissertation, put simply, is that petroturf groups capitalize on the perceived democratic sensibilities and impulses of the internet to further the complementary, codetermining ideologies of petro-capitalism and neoliberalism to the benefit of the oil and gas industry.

Individualizing Petroculture: Neoliberalism and CAPP's Energy Citizens Campaign
Above I have traced the ways in which economy and nation have emerged as objects of modernity and how these notions operate in the Canadian petro-economy. Extending this conversation to the specific cultural products of petroturfing—campaigns and the texts produced for those campaigns, cultural products that aim to reproduce petroculture's hegemony—helps to illustrate just how nation and economy are strategically utilized in petroturfing. The ways in which neoliberal versions of the nation are rhetorically invoked in petroturfing are perhaps best

exemplified through CAPP's Energy Citizens campaign, a campaign which asks users to "Show your interest and support for Canada's oil and natural gas resources" by signing an online declaration of energy citizenship and "spread[ing] the word" ("Canada's Energy Citizens"). Although not a petroturf group in the proper sense—CAPP's relationship to the oil industry is clearly articulated and the organization does not claim grassroots status—the campaign itself uses "bottom up" grassroots discourses, bolsters over half a million supports, and thus provides a useful starting point for tracing how a neoliberal version of nationalism operates in petroturfing and for beginning to extrapolate the consequences of this rhetoric. The rhetoric CAPP deploys operates on two levels. In the first instance, it disseminates a nationalist rhetoric suggesting that we as Canadians are all united by our relation to energy whether as consumers or workers,[70] but, in the second instance, it mobilizes a neoliberal individualization that simultaneously implies *unique* relations to Canadian energy, a two-pronged process that establishes an audience of "citizen-consumers," that is, a subject based on the idea that "a social practice that can satisfy competing ideologies of consumerism (an ideal rooted in individual self-interest) and citizenship (an ideal rooted in collective responsibility to a social and ecological commons)" (Johnston 232).

Quite rightly, Canadian communications scholar Patrick McCurdy suggests that the campaign is built on a kind of corporate *petro*-nationalism wherein support for the Canadian oil industry is made analogous to the support of the nation (McCurdy 2016). Support for the oil sands and its developments, CAPP's narrative suggests, is a project of building the Canadian national consciousness, the key site that threads together the Canadian imagined community. Energy extraction is thus ideologically bound to national identity on both micro and macro,

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[70] This statement is made despite, of course, the reality that in Canada there continues to be significant divergence in access to energy and other fundamental resources such as water, especially on reserves. A report from the David Suzuki Foundation and the Council of Canadians on boil water advisories for First Nations in Ontario observes that "as of November 2016, Ontario has 81 DWAs in 44 First Nations, with 68 of those classified as long-term" (7).

individual and social scales that express a duty to defend oil and gas interests. CAPP's campaign

is undoubtedly linked to an explicit form of petro-nationalism, but it is important to recognize

that the kind of nationalism invoked here is one mutated from its earlier forms, reliant on

understanding its audiences as consumers rather than citizens, despite the naming of CAPP's

campaign. Indeed, the campaign as a whole asks its audience to "[raise] their hands in support of

Canada's energy sector" ("Canada's Energy Citizens")—a sector that is privatized. This

neoliberal version of consumer-nationalism that enables appeals to nation and appeals to

economy as one and the same is consistent among virtually all instances of petroturfing,

including in campaigns from its for-profit American counterpart, the Center for Industrial

Progress, and CAPP's American equivalent, the American Petroleum Institute (API). CAPP's

Energy Citizens campaign is representative of the other forms of petroturfing as well as industry

advertising. Enbridge's regional promotional campaign for the Northern Gateway pipeline, for

example, stressed the local personhood and ecological citizenship of the late Janet Holder,

Enbridge's former Executive Vice President. Communicating the multiple stakes that employees

like Holder embody, both in terms of their personal identity and their corporate identity, the

campaign suggests that because of their *personal* relationship as British Columbians to the

landscape Enbridge's pipeline would run through, ecological concern is at the forefront of the

pipeline project, "the safest pipeline Canada has ever seen" ("Enbridge").[71] Enbridge's campaign

also underscores the tensions between regionalism and nationalism that pervade petroturfing in

its emphasis on the Province of British Columbia, which ultimately pits provinces against one

another using nationalism. Indeed, while the distinctions between nationalism and regionalism

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[71] At the 2015 MLA Convention in Vancouver, British Columbia, Cameron Butt (2015) performed a rhetorical-semiotic analysis of Enbridge's campaign, showing how it relies visually and discursively on logically unsound syllogisms to create associations with ecological preservation and Enbridge employees.

are in tension in Canada, they are also slippery distinctions, and discourses surrounding energy seem to move in-between them rather easily and, ultimately, uncritically.

The Energy Citizens initiative is a push back against resistance to the oil and gas industry from environmentalists and others that is motivated by CAPP's strategic appeal that "We need a more balanced discussion about energy, the economy, and the environment" (2015). "Together," they say, "let's change the conversation" (2015). Here we return to a common thematic that I highlight in the introduction to this chapter—an invocation of the tension between economy and environment. Moreover, implicit in these statements is the perception that public discourse around energy's economics and ecologics is unbalanced, purportedly favouring an anti-oil (and anti-oil sands) narrative slant, operating as a kind of counter-counter narrative. Regardless of the validity of accusations surrounding the alleged public bias *against* the oil sands and its developments, in branding groups and individuals who oppose particular developments, especially pipelines, as unreasonable or as unfairly biased, CAPP further feeds into the realistic/unrealistic binarism constitutive of petro-capitalist realism. This fetishization of balance is a pervasive one that I explore in more detail later in this chapter, but it is important to flag the ways in which it forms a key rhetorical frame of petroturfing while it implicitly suggests that oppositional parties are more powerful (in the broadest sense of the word) than oil and energy companies. By exploiting liberal preoccupations with "balance," petroturf groups create the conditions of possibility for the Canadian oil industry's self-construed "underdog" position, as absurd as such a classification may sound to anyone with a basic understanding of the power that the industry holds in relation to government, media, and broader public consciousness.

Considering the ways in which the contemporary neoliberal subject is understood—as entrepreneur, as market-microcosm—the use of "citizens" and "citizenship" in CAPP's

campaign is worth commenting on. Citizenship invokes a kind of traditional conceptualization of nation like those discussed in the previous section. It also invokes notions of democracy through a democratic apparatus that neoliberalism as a dominant rationality has categorically undermined and continues to aggressively dismantle. In a number of works, including *Liquid Modernity* and *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that in liquid modernity (akin to but distinct from postmodernity), members of society are no longer primarily understood as citizens, but as *consumers*. But the widespread use of social media for sharing commercial content indistinguishable from non-commercial content in networked society suggests we need to update Bauman's observations: we are simultaneously consumers *and* advertisers called upon to perform the digital labour of reproducing petroculture on an *ideological* (read: superstructural) level. This is precisely the social and political moment that the Energy Citizens campaign is entering and attempting to mobilize. We do our part (some of us no doubt reluctantly) to reproduce petroculture when we fill up our vehicles or take our planes to conferences, but Energy Citizenship aims to explicitly *acculturate* oil by invoking what Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval call the "empty shell of liberal democracy" (307). Energy Citizenship is perhaps more accurately refigured as a kind of extractivist, promotional self-entrepreneurship that fills the empty shell of liberal democracy with high-test petroleum whose mantra would read: "We are all neoliberals. We are all petro-subjects. We are all advertisers." In this way, CAPP appeals to a kind of ethical consumerist lifestyle-ism in an attempt to entice users to perform the immaterial labour of reproducing petroculture at an ideological level by individualizing a citizen-consumer's relationship to the production (and in turn consumption) of Canadian oil. However diverse we may be in terms of our beliefs and belief systems, we are all, whether we like it or not, Energy Citizens.

Crystallizing this focus on individual Energy Citizens and their individual energy selves, CAPP's campaign website features profiles of a number of users who have answered the call to take the Energy Citizens pledge. As a kind of self-styled, self-contained petro-social network, a grid of portraits on the website, styled using social media profile picture conventions, invites users to "Meet Citizens Like You" with an interface that creates the conditions for the audience or user to imagine their own portrait in the grid. Each of these portraits links to a profile that underscores the individual citizen's reasoning for taking the pledge to become an Energy Citizen. András Vaski, an economics and political science student at McGill University, did so because he "knows that the importance of oil to the Canadian economy cannot be understated" ("András Vaski"). Hyeji (Jessica) Yoon, a student and blogger, "believes that Canada is a leader when it comes to creating jobs while having the highest standards in caring about the environment" ("Hyeji [Jessica]] Yoon"). A survey of the remaining 22 profiles reveals that the majority of reasoning for "joining the campaign" is related to the perceived economic benefits that oil and gas developments bestow upon Canadians, whether to British Columbians ("Lilia Hansen"), First Nations ("Josh Giesbrecht"), rural communities ("Maryann Chichak"), tradespeople ("Nick Warus"), or young women ("Katie Smith"). Another motive for taking the pledge—one that falls out of the purely economic dimensions—emphasizes Canada's socially and environmentally responsible way of developing the oil and gas industry. This is consistently referred to as "the Canadian way" (see, for example, "Danielle Gillanders" and "Kelly Perioris"). In effect, the portraits perform a small-scale version of Mitchell's economentality, demonstrating the kinds of normative social and political positions "average" Canadians have (or should have) towards nation, energy, and economy.

Many of these portraits are derivative in form and content of the sponsored-content series "Energize Canada" developed for the *Financial Post* by Postmedia Works on behalf of CAPP, underscoring the ways in which petroturfing penetrates the traditional mediascape as well ("Energize Canada"). CAPP's campaign, then, is both a concentrated media effort akin to what Manuel Castells views as a form of web-based "narrowcasting," or targeted communication enabled especially through digital social media (322-327), *as well as* a traditional broadcasting effort. These efforts seek to disperse petroturfing to further legitimate the rhetorics that it deploys by creating content that holds the appearance of a legitimate news article. And in its individualization of reasoning for taking the Energy Citizens pledge, CAPP establishes a context of free choice wherein an individual's personality is reflected in the available range of choices, a process consistent with neoliberal lifestyle-ism that is so pervasive today. Whether liberal or conservative, environmentalist or economist, there is a pro-oil narrative available for every personal niche, which in turn erases the conflict among these positions in a way that benefits petro-capital. Here in CAPP's Energy Citizens campaign, the ultimate desire of petroturfing is quite clearly expressed—not only to establish a nation entirely of petro-subjects, but to create a nation of petro-subjects who are *proud* to be petro-subjects and to perform the work of convincing others to be such as well. In constructing and disseminating profiles of a diverse cast of Energy Citizens—"Citizens Like You"—CAPP aims to recruit everyday Canadians through messaging that implies that we as Canadians should not be ashamed of our collective reliance on fossil fuels and on the fossil economy, but instead should revel in it in a manner consistent with the declarations that form the basis of Barney's arguments regarding Canada as a pipeline nation discussed above. In many ways, this effort, and petroturfing in general, can be seen as a somewhat pre-emptive reaction to the growing recognition that fossil fuels are an inherently

socially and ecologically destructive energy source—what I have elsewhere characterized as inherently tending towards destruction.[72]

The *tendency* or *disposition* of fossil fuels is a fundamentally anti-*democratic* one. Despite claims from thinkers like Levant or Alex Epstein who imbue oil with morality (based on dubious arguments that fossil fuels have enabled a better life for human beings) and democratic principles (due to oil's potential to enable a better life for *all* human beings), as I have written elsewhere, oil and its infrastructures are especially anti-democratic in their tendencies in part because of their unevenly distributed social and ecological costs and benefits (Kinder 23). So, for those of us who do recognize both the necessity and urgency from which we must transition into a world beyond oil, campaigns such as CAPP's Energy Citizens aim to *disrupt* the possibilities of imagining alternative relationships to energy and more equitable energy futures by suggesting that we already have this equity thanks to fossil fuels. In signifying Canadian oil as a force for social and ecological good, they seek to keep alive the fossil economy and to disrupt efforts to halt and undo the hegemony of the twin forces of oil and neoliberalism. These attempts to imbue Canadian oil—and in some ways fossil fuels in general—as not just an economically positive but a *socially* positive force underscores just how deeply entrenched fossil fuels are in not only the material aspects of everyday life but its social and cultural aspects as well. And doing so largely involves promises packaged in (self-described) fact-based articulations of the perceived benefits that the petro-economy offers everyday Canadians, the citizen-consumers of petroturfing.

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[72] See my article "The Coming Transition: Fossil Capital and Our Energy Future" in *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2016, pp. 8-27.

Petroculture's Promise: The Benefits and Facts of Petro-Capitalist Realism

The promises of petroculture more broadly are related to the capacities and affordances that the production and consumption of fossil fuels provide. In terms of consumption, fossil fuels allow those who can access them an increased mobility through automobiles and airplanes, convenient storage of food in petrochemical-based plastics, and so on. Forms of convenience that function as a bedrock of modernity as we generally understand it are premised fundamentally on a kind of immediacy and disposability enabled by plastic, and in turn by oil. As Amanda Boetzkes and Andrew Pendakis write in "Visions of Eternity: Plastic and the Ontology of Oil," "[p]lastic weaves itself into every facet of our contemporary reality" (1). The economic benefits that form the bases of the promises of petroculture more broadly, however, relate largely to the *production* of fossil fuels. These promises manifest primarily in the form of facts embodied in projected numbers—such as increased jobs, increased royalties and taxes, and broader economic stimulus due in part to the increase in jobs. As CAPP's Energy Citizens campaign puts it, "Canada's energy industry benefits every province and territory" ("Canada's Energy Citizens"). Found in the pages of feasibility reports, government statements, and so on, the benefits promised by petro-developments function as a further claim to realism through the consistent invocation of "facts."

Examples of rhetorical reliance on perceived benefits of oil sands developments—the promises of petroculture—can be found in virtually every piece of promotional material for oil sands developments, whether from companies, governments, or petroturf groups. It is, in other words, a fundamental and constitutive piece of rhetoric for the widespread internalization of the logics of petro-capitalist realism. To explore how the nexus of facts-benefits-realism is deployed, British Columbia's recent oil sands history provides a worthwhile focal point,

especially in relation to two major proposed pipelines—Enbridge's Northern Gateway, which would travel roughly 1180 kilometres from Alberta to British Columbia's coast with an eastward line carrying natural gas,[73] and the Trans Mountain expansion, purchased by the Government of Canada from Texas-based Kinder Morgan in 2018, which travels 1147 kilometres from Edmonton to Burnaby and under the expansion would twin the existing line, increasing capacity from 300,000 barrels per day to 890,000.[74] Both pipelines have faced considerable opposition through protests from a number of groups and, for instance, opposition through cultural production such as *The Enpipe Line: 70,000 km of poetry written in resistance to the Northern Gateway pipeline proposal*, published by Creekstone Press. Arguably, these proposed pipelines are among the most controversial infrastructure projects in recent Canadian history. Again, the refrain of environment versus economy returns in the form of promised jobs and economic enrichment.

A series of short YouTube videos released in 2014 by British Columbians for Prosperity, a self-described "apolitical, non-partisan organization" ("Confusion"), demonstrate how discourses of fact are leveraged for legitimacy. Many of the short videos contain the *dramatis personae* of naive environmentalists and realist rationalists, and conclude by urging viewers to "check the facts before you decide." In one video, a couple, two self-described environmentalists, have a conversation in which the naïve environmentalist is progressively mocked for his lack of awareness of oil's ubiquity. The gendered assignment of the defender of oil as a woman and the naïve environmentalist as a man is significant here in that it inverts conventional imaginaries that associate "reason" with masculinity and "irrationality" with

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[73] As of 2017, "The Government of Canada has directed the National Energy Board (NEB) to dismiss the Northern Gateway Pipelines project application" due to the fact that The Government has determined that the project is not in the public interest because it would result in crude oil tankers transiting through the sensitive ecosystem of the Douglas Channel, which is part of the Great Bear Rainforest" ("Northern Gateway Pipelines Project").

[74] As of 2017, the Canadian Government has approved this expansion ("Trans Mountain Expansion Project").

femininity. The video opens with establishing Vancouver shoreline shots as a young man

expresses his interest in becoming an activist to his partner. Degradation and sarcasm ensue as, at

her request, the young man imagines ways of being mobile without oil at her request. She

contradicts each of his musings. Finally, she asks: "By the way, how do you think those out of

town protesters travel to the rally?" ("The Conversation"). He laughs in response: "I get your

point." This short video playfully degrades environmentalist politics from a kind of fatalistic

"can't-beat-'em-join-'em" perspective as she consistently stifles his political imagination with

rebuttals that cite the promises and realisms of petro-capital. In this scenario, life is not *realistic*

without oil. Far from providing a clean conclusion that we need more oil, however, this short

video starkly foregrounds Huber's arguments that oil "is valuable precisely because it is the

antecedent of a multiplicity of use values" (226). In other words, her answer to the framing

question of the short video, whether or not we can "just stop" using oil, is one that anticipates a

tautological answer rooted in petro-capitalist realism—we cannot stop using oil because we use

too much oil, so we should continue to produce and consume oil at increasing rates.

In another short, this assimilation into realist, economic reasoning is even more evident.

The short begins with a man watching footage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill as prompted by his

friend who knew he was undecided about pipelines; they start video-chatting about the oil sands

and pipelines. The friend, surrounded by acoustic guitars in what looks like a stripped-down

basement suite, is the archetypal naïve environmentalist hippie who *de facto* opposes

"development," and the young professional in the modern kitchen is the realist rationalist. The

hippie's arguments against development are emotional, while the yuppie cites his sources. He

draws attention to a UBC study which vaguely concludes that "even in the worst-case scenario,

the economic benefits outweigh the risks…" ("Check"). The environmentalist says he's coming

over to settle it and the yuppie gets researching. After a montage of intense Googling, the yuppie

provides his friend with an impromptu defense of pipelines and the Alberta oil sands; he even

shows his friend a BCIP video. These two videos illustrate an acculturation process in which

petro-capitalist realism is the only *reasonable* position, operating as a kind of how-to manual for

viewers in educating your idiotic, unrealistic environmentalist friends while further suggesting

facts exclusively support industry's claims. Facts, it follows, are for industry, while

misinformation is for environmentalists.

Other short videos from BCP forego the informal, conversational *mis-en-scene*, opting

instead for an educational, public service announcement, infographic-*esque* arrangement. Using

bright colours and cute animations, these videos aim to *explicitly* educate the audience rather

than passively educate them through dramatizing debates or personal conflicts in relation to the

expansion of Canada's pipeline developments as in the videos discussed above. "If you're

unemployed, nothing feels better than landing a job," a voiceover states in the opening of a short

video entitled "Can B.C. afford to say 'no' to 8000 new jobs?" ("Can B.C."). The rest of the

video emphasizes the number of jobs that will be created, pointing out that "local businesses will

benefit from the sale of goods and services to workers" while closing with the tagline "pipelines

benefit people" ("Can B.C.").

In a longer video, "What are the real benefits of proposed B.C. pipeline projects?," a

teenager walking down a high school hallway addresses the audience, saying that he "thinks it's

cool that people want to balance protecting the environment and economic development," but

that he's "tired of all the hot air" and he wants "to know the facts" ("Real Benefits"). Opening up

a tablet to British Columbians for Prosperity, the video zooms into the screen and cuts to an

infographic-styled text and auditory-based relaying of the alleged facts surrounding the benefits

of pipeline projects in British Columbia. Asking what "the proposed B.C. pipeline projects mean

for British Columbians," the voiceover states that they have "examined the facts" ("Real

Benefits"). Listing a number of figures in relation to job creation, the video, whether

intentionally or not, reveals the significant divergence between projected jobs in the short and

long-term. BCP claims that Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline will generate 3,000 jobs

during the construction period (temporary) and 560 long-term jobs, whereas Kinder Morgan's

Trans Mountain expansion will generate 4,500 jobs during the construction period (temporary)

and 50 permanent jobs. Pipelines and their construction, the video also maintains, are a means

for economic stimulus and increased tax revenue, which ultimately result in, according to BCP,

in more money for healthcare and education.

Both of these videos expose a number of significant, constitutive features of petroturfing

in relation to the promises of petroculture—a preoccupation with expressing the projected job-

creating abilities of pipeline construction and maintenance, despite a major divergence in

temporary and permanent jobs, an emphasis on the broader increased economic stimulus and tax

revenue that pipelines will bestow onto the province, and so on, all bracketed with a fetishization

of facts. Facts are a discursive medium through which to communicate, in the first instance, an

irrefutable authority. All the videos produced by BCP demonstrate this by urging their readers to

"check the facts"—facts that BCP as an organization has curated in a self-affirming manner.

And, it must be said, framing projected employment or other figures such as revenues as facts is

a troubling and misleading gesture. The numbers relied on in both videos are an extension of

petro-capitalist realist impulses, a form of laying claim to the future in a manner that makes these

perceived facts rhetorically unchallengeable. This is precisely why an emphasis on facts plays

such a central role in petroturfing: facts are essentially mobilized as claims to the realm of the

real with the aim of maintaining and reproducing the hegemony of petroculture. While enclosing the possibilities of imagining a future of world beyond oil (let alone building it!) and making certain a petrol-based future despite the fundamental uncertainty of futurity, the appeals to facts at work here also either implicitly or explicitly construct dissenting voices as unreasonable, lacking in facts while circulating mistruths, as if any serious criticism of pipeline development is always-already *unfactual* on the one hand and slanderous or unfair on the other.

Like CAPP's Energy Citizens campaign, and as Chapter II shows of petroturfing *in toto*, the motivations for BCP is to provide a counter-counter-discourse to the kinds of environmentalist campaigns that have, rather successfully, branded the oil sands industry as one that produces "dirty oil." The kinds of gestures towards facts seen above and throughout petroturfing are impulses centred on a singular concept of balance. Due to the alleged "deep pockets" of environmentalist groups like Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, petroturfing asserts that balance has been skewed to favour environmentalists. In this way, balance has emerged as a meme within petroturfing. In discussing its core beliefs, BCP states: "We believe that *balancing* responsible environmental stewardship with accountable, measured development means paying careful attention to *facts rather than rhetoric*, and taking account of technological improvements and regulatory changes that have altered how development impacts the environment" ("Core Beliefs," emphasis added). Petroturfing claims the oil industry and Canadian oil as *victims* of unfair, foreign-influenced environmentalist ideological sabotage that has tipped the scales in public discourse, despite the realities of the industry's enormous social and political influence. This illustrates why petroturf groups such as Ethical Oil emphasize that Canadian environmental groups accept foreign funding, attempting to expose a vested interest in destabilizing the Canadian economy and, in turn, a disloyalty to the nation. "Those of us who support Canadian

jobs — and Canadian values — should tell Greenpeace and its rich foreign patrons to stay out of our business," Ethical Oil claims (2012). Such a notion of balance—explicit and implicit in the examples above—is tied to the kinds of liberal preoccupation with centres or middles that have become hegemonic and wherein alleged one-sidedness becomes the ultimate form of slander.

In his dissertation "The Dialectic of Middleness," Andrew Pendakis provides an account of the ways in which centrism emerged as hegemonic in late capitalism. Centrism dismisses critique and, Pendakis writes, "becomes identifiable at the moment the gesture of critique is renounced as 'bias' or mocked as the very picture of childishness" (6), and such gestures of centrism mark every instance of petroturfing. As a rhetorical device, balance is a symptom of hegemonic centrism, and in the context of debates over the continued development of the oil sands, especially in the form of pipelines, balance is achieved through the use of facts as an authoritative discourse. Jon Gordon shows the competing discourses of facts at work in the struggle over the signification of Alberta's oil sands in his 2015 book *Unsustainable Oil: Facts, Counterfacts, and Fictions*. Troubling the rhetorical appeals to facts so prevalent in pro-oil sands discourses, Gordon traces the strategies at work in such appeals while offering up literature as a space to challenge these discourses. Facts are invoked in an effort to bring balance to a debate, yet the history of the emergence of facts *as such* shows how appeals to facts in petroturfing is a politically-charged endeavour, furthering the kinds of economistic absolutism at the heart of the neoliberal project.

Facts are not a universal, objective, or apolitical language, as the competing facts and counterfacts of oil sands discourses that Gordon examines through *Unsustainable Oil* illustrate. Mary Poovey's work on the genealogy of what she identifies as the "modern fact" shows us the economically and politically charged history of the emergence of the contemporary

understanding of facts and their immanent authority. Facts as we understand them today are bound to a particular late-nineteenth century epistemological history that understood numbers as a wholly accurate mode of representation, a kind of hard realism. "[N]umbers have come to epitomize the modern fact," Poovey writes in *A History of the Modern Fact*, " because they have come to seem preinterpretive or even somehow noninterpretive at the same time that they have become the bedrock of systematic knowledge" (xii). In this way, facts *qua* numbers become a privileged, *irrefutable* discursive form. After all, the OED defines a fact as "[a] thing that has really occurred or is actually the case; a thing certainly known to be a real occurrence or to represent the truth. Hence: a particular truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony, as opposed to an inference, a conjecture, or a fiction" (OED 8.a.).

The statistics, projections, and figures that BCP mobilizes as facts in discussing the benefits of Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline largely come from a University of British Columbia study assessing the risk and impact of tanker spills from increased traffic due to the proposed pipeline, cited and engaged with to imbue BCP's claims with the cultural and intellectual capital UBC carries. One conclusion the BCP consistently, or perhaps persistently, draws from this report is that the overall economic benefits of the project outweigh the risks, a conclusion that quantifies ecological disaster in economic terms. The project is slated to generate $628 million while a catastrophic spill or "worst case scenario" would cost between $87 and $308 million to address. What is important to underscore here, however, is that facts in this context are ultimately *projected outcomes*, predicted numbers that lay claim to the future by attempting to restrict its possibility—a process operating in tandem with how petro-capitalist realism encloses possibility by claiming exclusive access to the domains of reason and reality that liberal ontologies hold dear.

My aim here is not to suggest that the numbers in the UBC Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries' report are not methodologically sound ones. Instead, I hope to trouble the certainty established in framing such predictions as facts. A report authored by Ian Goodman and Brigid Rowan in collaboration with SFU's Centre for Public Policy Research in 2014, for instance, calls into question many of the numbers projected by the then owner of the Trans Mountain pipeline, Kinder Morgan, suggesting that the projected figures (jobs created, economic benefits, and so on) are roughly half to a third of what Kinder Morgan projects (19-20). Placing this report next to Kinder Morgan's projected benefits—also referred to as facts in numerous contexts—reveals the ways in which facts themselves are a site of contention. The numbers that form the rhetorical bases for BCP's pro-pipeline media are not facts, but rather *promises*—promises that attempt to claim prescience over an uncertain future, thereby enclosing possibility.

These promises, strategically packaged as facts, are tenuous ones limited to the realm of the economic, the privileged relation of neoliberalism. In "Stapled to the Front Door: Neoliberal Extractivism In Canada," Travis Fast explores the effects of the promises of neoliberal extractivism and its economentality:

> The promise of neoliberal extractivism in Canada of course was never popularly premised on the destruction of the environment, increased tensions with many Aboriginal communities, or the compensation of capital with super profits. Rather, it has always been promoted on the grounds of job creation and general economic well-being. In the context of an overreliance on raw and semi-raw resources representing a failed attempt to balance Canada's current account (exports), matched with an absence of incentives for high value-added processing of those resources—which, by and large, are prohibited in a slew of multilateral and bilateral trade agreements—little job creation will occur. (53-4)

Fast underscores who and what is excluded in the economistic metrics of facts *qua* promises that underpin so much of petroturfing, showing that even what *is* promised, primarily a widespread availability of jobs and an increased economic well-being, cannot be done so in good faith. But as with petroturfing's process of legitimation through circulation, the reality of these claims is not what produces the desired outcome of Petroturfing. Rather, what produces the desired outcome is the initial *claim* to reality and balance that counterposes itself against oppositional *ir*rationality and imbalance. In petroturfing, then, the *promises* of petroculture are more important than the delivery of those promises, which of course can only be evaluated in the future after the construction of the infrastructures aiming to gain approval in part due to these promises.

Conclusion

Progress, prosperity, and promise—these keywords permeate the media of petroturfing and form the foundations of the petrocultural imaginary more broadly. As Anna Tsing reminds us in the epigraph to this chapter, while notions of progress carry a certain antiquatedness, they continue to pervade the underbelly of modernity. Prompted by these keywords, this chapter has argued that the foundational discourses of petroturfing are rooted in appeals to nation and economy that establish the promises of petroculture in the form of economic benefits on the one hand and both explicit and implicit demonstrations of a form of petro-capitalist realism on the other. In an effort to historicize the ways in which these appeals are made possible, I have shown how nations and economies emerged as objects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in tandem with the emergence of fossil fuels as a dominant energy source, paving the way for the "economization of everything" under capitalism. When Randy Martin points out in "After Economy? Social Logics

of the Derivative" that "[c]apital has claimed economy as the name of its social relations" (86),

he draws attention to the ways in which "economy" emerges as a space for capital to permeate

the social in late capitalism, making possible the kinds of campaigns from CAPP and BCP that I

discuss above. This economization, or economentality as Mitchell understands it, is precisely

what petroturfing is tapping into with its incessant references to benefits, to jobs, and so on. And

it is with this economizing impulse that Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism as a form of

reason "is converting the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy's

constituent elements into *economic* ones" (17).

A key premise of this dissertation is that, following Matthew Huber's arguments in

Lifeblood, neoliberalism as a dominant ideology (or, as Brown prefers to view it, a political

rationality) and oil as a dominant energy form are symbiotic, mutually reinforcing

configurations. In pushing Huber's argument further, my view is that neoliberalism and oil are

bound in mutually-constituting symbiosis; that is, oil fuels neoliberalism and neoliberalism

reproduces the social and economic relations—*pace* Althusser's schema of the superstructural

reproduction of capitalism through ISAs and RSAs. Neoliberalism's economization of

everything—of the economy as a (privileged) social relation (Martin) and the flattening of the

socio-political and the economic on micro and macro levels (Brown)—is also the *petro-fication*

of everything. And both of these processes, are processes of material and discursive or

imaginative enclosure wherein other relations and energy futures are perceived as unrealistic or

impossible. Such enclosure is material in the sense that we are collectively compelled to

consume oil in a petroculture, and discursive in the sense that our energy imaginaries are tethered

to that petroculture and the impossibility of moving beyond it. This is precisely the goal of petro-

capitalist realism, to foreclose our collective energy future, and petroturfing serves as one particularly explicit instance of such enclosure.

This neoliberal process of the bracketing off of the social and political with the economic is achieved through petroturfing's garnering of public participation in the circulation of its narratives. These bring into being or *interpellates* a Canadian petro-subject, or as CAPP names this subject, an "Energy Citizen." The Energy Citizen is a normalized subject and petroturfing is a normalizing process. Both CAPP's Energy Citizens campaign and BCP's YouTube video series imply a similar audience. Through this normalizing discourse, petroturfing flattens our complex, uneven energic relations to promote Canadian oil by implying, for instance, that an Executive Vice President of a major energy company and a British Columbian café worker are united in their relationship to energy and environment. In doing so, petroturfing, and the promotion of Canadian oil and its developments more generally, strategically excludes—or at least does not properly account for—those who are and have been subjugated by the Canadian petro-economy, both human and nonhuman. The chapters that follow ask: who and what is left out in the promises of petroculture discussed in this chapter, and how does petroturfing account for these voices? And what does this account—or lack thereof—suggest about the kinds of relations to energy that petroturfing, and indeed the fossil economy more generally, desires its audience to have? In answering these broader questions, the following chapters look to the ways in which petroturfing speaks (or does not speak) to social and ecological relations while exploring the implications of how, in a bout of historical amnesia, petroturfing conveniently overlooks Canada's colonial past and present, and the racial, gendered, and ecological forms of petro-violence that this history and present reproduce in attempting to reframe Canadian oil as an egalitarian and equalizing force.

Chapter IV

Social Extraction: The Limits of Petroturfing's Politics of Recognition

Introduction

After a brief, roughly one year hiatus from the production of online content aside from regular

Twitter posts, Ethical Oil released a YouTube video entitled "Social Oil" in 2014. Panning into a

shot of a computer screen actively searching "Alberta Oil Sands" on Google, showing the result

of a Google Maps search for Fort McMurray, scanning Wikipedia's entry on the Athabasca oil

sands, and more, the first half of the video expresses the freedom that the internet provides in

accessing knowledge and information, especially as it relates to job opportunities. But "Social

Oil" takes a dark turn as it subsequently focuses on the state of the internet in Saudi Arabia,

drawing attention to the state's egregious online censorship by superimposing headlines onto

blocked websites, like the following 2012 *National Post* one: "Death for 140 characters? Saudi

blogger could be executed for 'heretical' tweets."   Concluding with a young girl's voice-over

narration stating that "Ethical Oil is Social Oil" and "conflict oil is socially unjust" while asking

viewers what choice they will make, this video makes three key rhetorical moves. First, it

equates the ability to search the internet for jobs and other information on Alberta's oil sands

with a particular kind of social and political freedom valued in Western discourses of democracy.

Further, it highlights the restrictive, repressive regime of Saudi Arabia as it relates to censorship

of social media and the internet. Finally, it implies that the individual consumption of Saudi

Arabian (and other) "conflict oil" directly supports these kinds of restrictive and repressive

media regimes by asking the audience what choice they will make, as if such a choice between

Canadian oil and Saudi Arabian were even possible given the ways that oil is produced and exchanged on a world market.[75]

In a dissonant way, "Social Oil" traverses some of the key themes and relationships that are central to the critique of petroturfing that I develop in *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*. It names energy, or at least in this case "ethical" energy, as social and, among other things, it draws out and identifies a relationship between social media and oil production. But "Social Oil," like most petroturfing efforts, is a superficial engagement with these dynamics. The video does not clearly articulate oil and energy as a social relation in the ways that this dissertation understands it, and its simplistic equation of the freedom to blog or search the internet with broader social and political freedom uncritically reproduces narratives from the kinds of techno-utopian accounts of the internet critiqued in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. In turn, it is worth asking what the promotional video's understanding of the social even is in the first place.

Invoking the social in this way demonstrates a narrow understanding of what constitutes the social. When Ethical Oil makes the claim that Canadian oil is "social" and, it follows, oil from conflict regions as *anti*-social, it understands the social in terms of a "social good," framing Canadian oil as a force that contributes positively to Canadian society in social and economic terms. And it does so by gesturing towards a relationship between "conflict oil" petro-states such as Saudi Arabia and (as we will see) the particularly gendered violence that the regime perpetuates. Both in book and campaign, Ethical Oil has previously built its arguments on the relation between conflict oil and gendered violence, positioning Canadian oil as a kind of

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[75] In 2007, a gas station opened in Omaha, Nebraska bearing the name "Terror-Free Oil." While framing promotion of the station with rhetorics suggesting that the station does not purchase gas from the Middle East, they also "acknowledge there is no way to track the origin of all the oil from the ground to the pump" (Byron 2007). Matt Huber argues that this attempt "exhibits the paradoxical relations between oil, consumption, and neoliberal notions of freedom" in the manner that it gestures towards the neoliberal "mantra that all individuals are, as Milton Freidman famously put it, *free to choose*" (*Lifeblood* 156).

(Western, liberal) antidote to the global ills of violence perpetrated in conflict oil regions. But what does it mean to claim an ethics in relation to the production and consumption of oil in this way? And what does it mean to so in the context of Canada, a settler colonial society? How are women and Indigenous peoples accounted for in petroturfing, and what are the social and political consequences of these accounts?

At the core of petroturfing and the ethical discourse surrounding Canadian oil is a basic claim that the production and consumption of Canadian oil are at once beneficial to *all* Canadians as well as global society in general. Embedded within this argument is a set of significant assumptions about the Canadian state (both past and present), about the characteristics of resource extraction in a settler colonial society, and about the relationship between ethics and the production and consumption of commodities. This chapter takes aim at these assumptions while interrogating the ways in which petroturfing engages the social in terms of gender and race. I take aim in this way not in an effort to prove petroturfing "wrong"—a simplistic and fruitless endeavor—but instead to illustrate the ways in which petroturfing leverages an ambivalent and ambiguous politics of recognition, both gendered and racialized, in the service of construing Canadian oil as an ethical, benevolent force. In leveraging recognition and ethics in this way, this chapter argues, petroturfing *extracts* a kind of social value from women and Indigenous peoples. And, in doing so, petroturfing exposes the limits of discourses of ethics built on the politics of recognition in late capitalism. These limits manifest in terms of the failure of a politics of recognition in supporting material change in the conditions of those most greatly affected by extractivism and what can be broadly understood as petro-violence, a contested term that names the forms of violence—gendered, racialized, ecologized—that are

largely endemic to oil producing countries, historically most associated with Nigeria (see Turcotte 2011; Watts 2001).

By politics of recognition, I mean a relational politics that hinges upon demands of a dominant group for *recognition* of another. Charles Taylor classically defines it in terms of demands from "minority or 'subaltern' groups, in some forms of feminism and in what is today called the politics of 'multiculturalism'" (25). "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves," Taylor explains (25). While the origins of this political project— demanding recognition as praxis—are relatively recent, its structural impetus has a deeper philosophical origin in Hegelian dialectics embodied most famously in the Master-Slave dialectic, a relation that has received extensive criticism from anti- and decolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon.[76] More recently, Dene theorist Glen Coulthard, whose 2014 book *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* shows how the Canadian state engages Indigenous peoples through the vector of a politics of recognition, in turn establishing the conditions for Indigenous identities as always-already being defined in a bounded relation to the Canadian state, not as autonomous and sovereign from it, takes to task the limitations of such a politics of recognition while arguing for a material politics built instead on the sovereignty of Indigenous nationhood.

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[76] In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1961), Fanon systematically critiques Hegel's master-slave dialectic, which sees the master and slave as defining each other in reciprocation, through the experience of blackness and "Otherness" by illustrating the ways in which, contra Hegel, the master defines the slave and not the other way around. Fanon's most famous anecdote that articulates this dynamic is the story in which a child points at him and shouts "Look, a Negro!" (84). This episode demonstrates how the Other's identity is always already defined in relation to the dominant group, and this relationship is founded on asymmetrical power relations. This critique has been widely influential in contemporary decolonial thought, including most recently in George Ciccariello-Maher's *Decolonizing Dialectics* (2017) and Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014).

This chapter builds on Coulthard's critique by focusing on the ways in which recognition operates in both petroturfing and broader industry discourse in relation to gender and race (especially women and Indigenous peoples) in Canada as a means to further signify Canadian oil as ethical. Although this tradition of recognition politics that Taylor describes centres primarily on multiculturalism, gendered relations have historically operated in similar ways, as Taylor's mention of feminism's politics of recognition suggests. To develop my arguments that demonstrate the ways in which petroturfing exploits the ambivalent nature of recognition politics in relation to both women and Indigenous peoples in Canada, I first explore the historical and contemporary relationship between colonization and resource extraction in Canada with a focus on the ways in which Canada's Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) maintain and reproduce petroculture. Examining the role of RSAs in maintaining and reproducing petroculture in this way contextualizes and problematizes the ease in which the politics of recognition are leveraged for the promotion of Canadian oil. Then, I turn to the ways that women figure as subjects of and for petroturfing by examining promotional oil sands media alongside media from British Columbians for Prosperity and a Calgary-based organization and network that encourages women to enter largely professionalized, executive positions in the energy industry, Young Women in Energy. Finally, I move from this critique of the gendered dynamics of petroturfing to examine how Indigenous peoples are engaged with and represented in petroturfing and other industry campaigns and initiatives. I have isolated the gendered and racialized politics of petroturfing in this chapter not to underemphasize other dynamics of petroturfing, including the kinds of economic-nationalist or class-based discourses that the previous chapter explores in more detail; nor am I isolating them to suggest that they somehow operate outside of the economic and ecological registers that the next chapter examines more closely. Instead, this

chapter demonstrates that the gendered and racialized aspects of petroturfing (vis-à-vis the Canadian settler colonial apparatus) deserve particular scrutiny given their important place in and relationship to the Canadian petro-political imaginary, a relationship central to Canadian petro-politics.

Enclosing the Sands: RSAs and Petro-Violence in the Canadian Petro-State

Before examining petroturfing's politics of recognition, I work through the historical relationship between gender, race, and extraction in Canada to understand the deeply embedded tensions that petroturfing strategically overlooks. Canada's history of resource extraction and its colonial pasts and presents are inseparable histories. The tar-like bitumen that shores up on the edges of the Athabasca River in Northern Alberta had historically been used by First Nations to waterproof canoes long before the emergence of the fossil economy as we understand it today (Poveda and Lipsett 97). The first settler to view these bitumen deposits in person was Peter Pond of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1776. As Frances J. Hein writes in a 2000 report published by Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (now the Alberta Energy Regulator) and Alberta Geological Survey, "the first European to see oil sands was Henry Kelsey, Manager of York Factory on Hudson's Bay, who received in 1719 a sample of oil saturated, bituminous sand, that was delivered to York Fort by a Cree guide, named Wa-Pa-Su" (1). Hein describes the later visit to the sands by Peter Pond: "In 1776 Peter Pond, a fur trader and one of the founding members of the Northwest Trading Company (later amalgamated with the Hudson's Bay Company), became the first European to enter the Athabasca region upon crossing the confluence of the Clearwater and Athabasca rivers" (1). And in 1803, as Ed Gould recounts in *The History of Canada's Oil &*

Gas Industry, "David Thompson, the noted mapmaker, surveyed the Athabasca River between the Clearwater and Athabaska Lake" (113).

With aid initially from local Indigenous peoples as guides, settlers were made aware of the oil sands early on in Canada's extractive record. The fact that Indigenous peoples made use of the bituminous sands in a pre-extractive setting is used by proponents as an ideological exercise in naturalizing the production and consumption, establishing a relationship, however tenuous, between the use of bitumen as a raw material in its natural state and the extraction and refining processes used to produce crude oil from the deposits in an effort to blur the distinction of these two uses that finds its most exaggerated form in the claim that oil sands extraction projects are simply cleaning up nature's largest oil spill.[77] For example, Ezra Levant draws attention to these uses of bitumen in *Ethical Oil*, pointing out that "Alberta's Aboriginals would scoop it up near riverbanks and apply it as waterproofing to their canoes" (107). In her dissertation "Animal Capital," Nicole Shukin highlights the ways in which these uses of bitumen are rhetorically deployed in an effort to naturalize its extraction (145-146), an observation that underscores the relationship between bitumen and settler colonialism in Canada. Canada is built upon a seemingly endless impulse of extractivism—from the fur trade of the past to the intensive logging practices and liquid natural gas (LNG) extraction in British Columbia, the mining of uranium in the Northwest Territories and elsewhere, to the extraction of bitumen in Alberta today.

Pierre Bélanger's exhibition *EXTRACTION*, shown at the Canadian Pavilion in the 2016 Venice Biennale, then in 2017 throughout Canada, synthesizes these long and intertwined histories of Canada's colonial and extractive state apparatuses. "If extraction is the process and

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[77] I first heard a version of this argument in 2015 during a tour of the Suncor Community Leisure Centre in Fort McMurray, a 450,000 square foot recreation centre ("Suncor Community Leisure Centre").

practice that defines Canada at home," the catalog to the exhibition reads, "then it is also the policy and dynasty that shapes its image abroad" (9). In its topography of Canada's extractivist past, present, and future, the project builds an extractivist archive of materials that, when placed together, map out the historically interrelated apparatuses of extraction and colonization that persist in similar guises today.

Once a British colony subsumed by Imperial forces, *EXTRACTION* firmly asserts that and demonstrates how Canada is now, through the scale of its transnational mining developments scattered across the planet, an Imperial force all on its own that remains bound to the Crown. This scale is truly a massive one; as the catalog points out, "[o]f the nearly 20,000 mining projects [in the world] … more than half are Canadian-operated" (9). Beginning with King John of England's *Magna Carta* (1215), one of *EXTRACTION*'s most illuminating pieces is a timeline that highlights key primary and secondary documents and texts in Canada's, and the globe's, colonial-extractive history, including the *Hudson Bay Charter* (1670), King George III's Royal Proclamation (1763), Harold Innis' *Settlement and the Mining Frontier* (1936), and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) ("Archive"). Through this timeline, the project visually and genealogically underscores the ways in which Canada's material and cultural development—its identity *as such*—is tethered to mining and the extraction of value primarily through natural resources while also demonstrating that extraction is a multi-disciplinary but concentrated venture, embedded in the colonial histories of crown corporations and the practices of geologic surveys and other partnerships between scientific practice and the Crown. The inside cover of the print exhibition catalogue for *EXTRACTION*, which wraps around the small book, contains a manifesto—"Undermining Empire: A Landscape Manifesto for the Next Century." "Undermining Empire" gathers seventeen theses whose focus ranges from displacement to

sovereignty. "Property in Canada is built on the back of land stolen from First Nations," the manifesto argues. "Land has been subdivided by a colonial bureaucracy leading to territorial agreements and retroactive treaties—from the Charter of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670 to the Confederation of 1867, to the 11 Post-Confederation Treaties between 1871 and 1921," concluding that "[f]uture legal revisions to colonial laws and imperial maps lie in the medium, media, and means in which they were originally drafted" (Bélanger n.p.). These documents, as *EXTRACTION* draws our attention to throughout its multimedia archive, have enabled the colonialist, extractivist impetus of the Canadian state then and now.

This is all to say that extraction defines Canada, that it is deeply woven into the past, present, and future of Canada's material and ideological fabrics, and that this extraction is further premised upon particular kinds of settler-colonial violence that persist today. And while the violence that follows in extraction's wake is unevenly distributed around the globe and not necessarily universal in its particular effects, there is certainly no doubt that with extraction both locally and globally—whether the mining of rare minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo or bitumen in Northern Alberta—comes violence both social and ecological in form. Extraction, it has become increasingly clear, is both a constitutive impulse and primary condition of a capitalist modernity, and whether in the form of sub- and superterranean resource extraction or the extraction of surplus value from labourers across the planet, extraction is a fundamentally violent process and precondition to what Marx terms primitive accumulation, a process of violent separation of peoples from their land necessary for the transition from other modes of production to capitalism.

Marx's observations regarding primitive accumulation as an *early stage* of capitalism that it eventually moves beyond in its maturation and sophistication are, it follows, put in question.

Indeed, such accumulation has remained a persistent feature of capitalism throughout its expansion, as Coulthard argues throughout *Red Skin, White Masks* by building on theorists who have explored the role of dispossession in the legacy of capital accumulation, including figures such as David Harvey, Silvia Federici, Taiaiake Alfred, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Andrea Smith (9). Jason W. Moore also develops this argument from an eco-Marxist perspective in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* where he, among other things, examines "capitalism-in-nature," arguing that "[c]apitalism is not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is *a way of organizing nature*" (2). For Moore, capitalism is a world ecological system *in the web of life*. The relationship between capitalist accumulation and Moore's thesis of capitalism as world ecology is thus laid bare, exposing the ways in which capital relies on extraction—of labour power, of energy, of forestry, of agriculture, and of mining (120-121). Considering the question of social and ecological violence in this way, petro- and other extractivist violences are *fundamentally* capitalist violences at their core.

Petro-violence is a specific form of capitalist violence that is deeply embedded in larger practices of both colonial and gendered violence found in oil producing regions. First used by Michael Watts and Nancy Peluso, the concept has since become standard in the petro-critical lexicon. Watts describes petro-violence in the seminal collection of essays *Violent Environments* as a concept that does not express a "commodity determinism," but a "commodity-focus[ed]" "way of thinking about the intersection of environment and violence" that "consider[s] both *ecological* violence perpetrated upon the biophysical world and *social* violence—criminality and degeneracy associated with the genesis of petro-wealth" (189). In her seminal 2011 essay "Contextualizing Petro-Sexual Politics," Heather M. Turcotte pushes the concept of petro-violence further by articulating a framework of "petro-sexual politics" to understand the

gendered dynamics of petro-violence as it occurs in the Niger Delta, which clearly re-frames the question of petroleum production and its social and ecological consequences as a feminist issue. Petro-sexual politics, Turcotte argues, "offers a methodological and theoretical juxtaposition of two seemingly separate sites—petro-violence and sexual–gender violence—and allows us to examine how the conditions of petro-violence are embedded within larger structures of gender violence and international oppressions" (201). Turcotte further argues that the ways in which women are represented in media and elsewhere as victims of a terroristic petro-violence in socially and politically unstable regions such as the Niger Delta distances the role that corporate, non-state oil production (i.e., US/multi-transnational) plays in this very same petro-violence by representing such gendered violence only when it occurs via terrorism. But, as Turcotte quite rightly observes, "[p]etroleum production is filtered through colonial frameworks of extraction and imperial nation building" (205), and corporate actors participate in this process as well. "In other words," she elaborates, "gender and petroleum must be considered systemic threads of petro-violence" (208). Turcotte's influential and original notion of petro-sexual politics is important to engage with here and throughout this chapter because of the ways that it draws attention to the overlapping colonialist and gendered violences endemic to petroleum production, regardless of region.

The framework of petro-sexual politics aids in further unpacking petroturfing given that many of the serious problems that Turcotte identifies regarding the ways in which petro-violence is represented in Western discourses are reproduced within petroturfing's constitutive distinctions between conflict and ethical oil whose relation is symbolically distilled into the figure of the "free" Western woman on the one hand, juxtaposed with that of the oppressed, veiled Muslim woman on the other. While the forms of petro-violence found in Canada are

indeed different than those found in the communities of the Niger Delta upon which Turcotte's

analysis is based, important parallels can be drawn to articulate the gendered and colonialist

dynamics of petro-violence in Canada. In her essay "Gendering Oil: Tracing Western Petro-

Sexual Relations," Sheena Wilson engages and extends Turcotte's analysis in relation to

Canadian petro-capitalism, drawing attention to, among other media, the Ethical Oil campaign's

treatment of race and gender in several of its billboards. After analyzing many of these

billboards, Wilson argues in conclusion that "the Ethical Oil campaign reveals the gendered and

racialized messages that have been naturalized as part of Canadian, and even Western,

petrocultural narratives" (254). "Read together," she continues,

> the various billboard images situate in bas-relief the identity-based fantasies of the
>
> entire Ethical Oil campaign, whereby foreign women of color are figured as
>
> victims of horrific violence, Canadian [Indigenous] women are recuperated as
>
> symbols of Western gender and ethnic equality and representatives of the
>
> progressive employment practices of the oil industry, and white Canadian women
>
> are celebrated as civic leaders and symbols of democracy. (254)

Wilson's analysis underscores the tensions and problematics in the ways in which Ethical Oil

circulates the images of racialized women. In its superficial use of racialized women for the

ideological ends of making ethical Canadian oil, Ethical Oil takes part in reproducing what

Turcotte calls the "racist scripts" (213) of petro-violence by symbolically colonizing the images

of women for the purposes of promoting Canadian oil. Whereas, in Turcotte's analysis,

American media leverages racialized and gendered petro-violence as a means to identify the

native male populations' terrorism while placing attention away from the multinational oil

corporations that *also* actively and enthusiastically take part in this violence, petroturfing, as

Wilson makes clear, colonizes the images of both women and Indigenous peoples, strategically ignoring the long history of Indigenous women who oppose the colonial forces of the oil and gas industry and the Canadian petro-state.

Both Canada and the province of Alberta in which the Athabasca oil sands are situated are petro-states that both commit and facilitate varying degrees of petro-violence from both state and non-state actors. The ways that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which includes in its original conception the Church, the school, the media, and so on, and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), which includes the Law and the Police, apparatuses "that [make] direct or indirect use of physical violence" (78), reproduce petrocultural relations is important to underscore here. Law repressively condemns violence against subjects or citizens, the state, and property, including infrastructure and means of production, while legitimate violence remains held exclusively by the domain of the state. As Max Weber reminds us, *legitimate* violence falls exclusively on the state, pointing out that "[t]he [modern] state is regarded as the sole source of the 'right' to use violence" (33). As such, physical threats to the oil infrastructure and petro-capitalism—via blockades, targeted bombings, or other forms of sabotage, for example—and to a certain degree the ideologies that oppose oil-related developments function as illegitimate and are subsumed under the banner of "criminal" in the Repressive State Apparatus' imaginary.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) explicitly identifies a perceived threat on oil infrastructure and is developing measures to combat these threats, concretely actualizing the relation between RSAs and oil that I am exploring here. An RCMP report leaked by Greenpeace in 2015 entitled "Criminal Threats to the Canadian Petroleum Industry," part of a "Critical Infrastructure Assessment," quite clearly illustrates this relationship between RSA and so-called *critical* infrastructure. In the report, the RCMP identifies populations that are at-risk of

becoming radicalized and potentially taking part in sabotaging what they term as critical infrastructure. The population that the report seems most concerned with are First Nations and in particular the Elsipogtog First Nation. With questionable evidence, the report finds that "[t]here is a growing, *highly organized* and *well-financed*, anti-Canadian petroleum movement, that consists of peaceful activists, militants and violent extremists, who are opposed to society's reliance on fossil fuels" (1, emphasis added). The rhetoric is hyperbolic, aimed primarily at establishing a threat in an effort to justify and legitimate increased police presence and resources, but Canada does indeed have a history of infrastructural sabotage[78] or what some scholars, such as Dwight Hamilton and Kostas Rimsa, understand as domestic, "homebred" terrorism.[79] It is around this history that the domestic threat, homebred terrorism rhetoric is constructed and mobilized. The position of the RCMP is thus made explicit, consistent with other RSAs' impulse in supporting the ideology that this dissertation calls petro-capitalist realism: support for oil is what is deemed realistic within the confines of business-as-usual and the RCMP as arms of the settler petro-state, paired alongside oil companies, operate to repressively reproduce petro-capitalism. And in a nation of smooth(ed) oil, less than smooth measures are taken to ensure the reproduction of the fossil economy.

Canada's oil and gas industry operates as a neo-colonial force, enabled and supported by the RSAs of Canada, particularly on the levels of Law and the Police. The alliance between ISAs

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[78] Examples of this form of sabotage, or "domestic terrorism," focused on energy infrastructure include the Squamish Five's bombing of the Cheekey-Dunsmuir Hydro Power Station in the 1980s. For a personal perspective on the Squamish Five, see Ann Hansen's memoir *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerrilla* (2002). In Alberta, Wiebo Ludwig's sabotaging of pipelines and other oil and gas infrastructure is a prominent example of this kind of action. For more on Ludwig, see the 2011 documentary *Wiebo's War*

[79] Hamilton and Rimsa's ideological allegiances are revealed in their development of what constitutes domestic terrorism in Canada. Under this uncritical banner of terrorism in Canada, they lump such diverse groups as al-Qaeda and Direct Action/Squamish Five together (16-23). As Steve Vanderheiden argues in his discussion of the Earth Liberation Front and their categorization by the FBI as a terrorist organization, "[d]escribing someone as a 'terrorist' serves an explicitly rhetorical purpose in contemporary discourse, though the very language and imagery the term conjures obscure its rational analysis: it implies a moral claim for their aggressive pursuit and prosecution unconstrained by the conventional limits set upon military or law enforcement action" (425).

and RSAs in the maintenance and reproduction of petroculture in Canada seems to be an unwavering one. While Justin Trudeau's Liberals successfully campaigned during the 2015 Canadian Federal election on a platform that included, among other things, a promise to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples along with promises to grant veto power on development projects, they have since emphasized that they are willing to continue Canada's legacy of deploying militarized police forces both to protect existing infrastructures and developments along with quelling resistance against new and proposed ones. This legacy is perhaps most emblematically associated with the Oka Crisis of 1990, which finds its fossilized counterparts in efforts from those such as the Unis'to'ten Camp in British Columbia.

Much of this dissertation has focused on how petroculture is reproduced on an ideological level within Canada through media and broader discursive settings, but as emphasized above, petroculture is also reproduced through coercive means via Repressive State Apparatuses. These apparatuses, primarily those related to the platforms of Law and the Police, *enclose* possibilities for halting the expansion and reproduction of fossil fuel infrastructures. In other words, they block meaningful action through *physical repression* (the Police) and legal repression (the Law) while communicating to a broader public the consequences of such action, thereby establishing a socio-political climate of fear amongst activists, especially would-be ones. Canada's fossil economy, the state continues to underscore, will take prisoners. Further, as the leaked RCMP report illustrates, the Canadian petro-state's disciplinary apparatuses bracket off First Nations activists as a potential terrorist threat against oil infrastructures—a demonstration of the racialized imaginary located within the Canadian RSAs' petro-impetuses. And given the strong, well-documented presence of Indigenous women in leadership roles throughout key

movements and campaigns that confront and challenge the hegemony of petroculture in Canada, such as Chief Theresa Spence and the Idle No More movement as well as Freda Huson of the Unist'ot'en Clan and occupation camp of the same name, it is clear that the politics of gender enter these dynamics as well.

Without essentializing these relations, it is important to underscore the gendered aspects of the kinds of extractivist (neo-)colonial violence that affects communities and disrupts their means of social reproduction, a largely gendered sphere. Women are often on the front lines of experiencing and resisting the encroachment and consequences of extractivism. The historically underexamined and undertheorized role of gendered divisions of labour—especially domestic labour—in the reproduction of capitalism has been a key focal point for Marxist feminists such as Silvia Federici and Nancy Fraser, both of whom find that social reproduction under capitalism is a form of labour neglected by capital as well as Marxist political economy.[80] Considering, then, that one of the fundamental threats to Indigenous peoples in Canada (and elsewhere) from extractivism is the destruction of the means of their livelihood—i.e., traditional ways of social and cultural reproduction—it follows that Indigenous women are the most affected by extractivist practices.[81] In turn, the maintenance and expansion of petro-capitalism is at once, through its persistent modes of primitive accumulation, a colonial—read: racialized—issue and, given, for instance, these impacts on social and cultural reproduction, a gendered issue as well. As Nishnaabeg theorist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson puts it in her 2017 book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, "dispossession is gendered" and "settler colonialism is gendered" (51). Kahnawake Mohawk theorist Audra Simpson echoes

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[80] See, for instance, Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004) and Fraser's "Contradictions of Capital and Care" (2016).
[81] As Jen Preston point out, "These racial and colonial relations are also heteropatriarchal and necessarily intersect with the regulation of sex, gender, sexuality and kinship" (372).

Simpson when she frankly declares in "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders, and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty" that in its continued process of settler colonization, the Canadian state "is killing Native women in order to [continue settling] and has historically done this to do so" (n.p.).

It is from this context that I turn to petroturfing's engagement with both gender and race. Focusing on the gendered and racialized ways that petroculture is reproduced through ideological and repressive apparatuses in the ways I have outlined above challenges, in the first instance, the ease in which petroturfing claims an ethics vis-à-vis politics of recognition for women and for Indigenous communities and peoples. And, as I will show below, the ways in which gender and race enter the petrocultural imaginary unreflexively continue to reproduce an extractivist legacy at the level of culture as such. Petroturfing's leverage of both women and Indigenous peoples as icons that signify the ethical and "social" aspects of Canadian oil is fundamentally extractive: it extracts their contextual symbolic value in the liberal imaginary while leaving the residues of petro-violence unexamined and, ultimately, fails to account for the agency of both groups.

Post-Feminist Petro-Politics: On The Petro-Sexual Politics of Petroturfing
The politics of gender and sexuality in relation to petroculture are present throughout the whole of petroturfing, though they operate largely in the background and in an unassuming manner, especially outside of the Ethical Oil campaign, whose engagement with gender and petro-violence is explicit. Recall, for instance, Bernard the Roughneck from Chapter 2, whose affective performance attempts to distil the quintessential characteristics of the Albertan oil labourer into a single entity: the white, masculine, rough-around-the-edges, plain spoken, 20- to 30-something rig worker. Images from the Oil Respect campaign, which aims to stand up for Canadian "oil and

gas families," moreover, are predictably heteronormative, suggesting through its promotional materials that those families it stands up for are exclusively heterosexual, nuclear ones. Indeed, the stories of struggling families that it features on its website involve, where it can be discerned, entirely heterosexual relationships ("Stories"). Gender and sexuality in petroturfing demonstrate a strange and mix of progressivism and traditionalism as it, on the one hand, celebrates and uses formal equality to promote a stronger representation of women in oil sands work while, on the other hand, reaffirming the traditionalist hetero-patriarchal nuclear family.

It is telling that EthicalOil.org's first television advertisement, which focuses primarily on Saudi Arabia's gender politics, premiered exclusively on the Canadian Oprah Winfrey Network in 2011 ("TV ad"). "The 30-second public information ad," EthicalOil.org writes, "highlights Canada's oilsands as an Ethical Oil alternative to Conflict Oil from regimes like Saudi Arabia that mistreat women" ("TV ad"). While EthicalOil.org makes clear through a disclaimer that the paid advertisement "does not reflect the corporate views of the Oprah Winfrey Network" ("TV ad"), the cultural and material contexts of this promotional effort reveal the relation between Ethical Oil and the kinds of neoliberal feminisms I discuss in more detail below—a neoliberal feminism of which Oprah Winfrey, a figure whom Janice Peck calls in the subtitle of her 2008 book *The Age of Oprah* a "cultural icon for the neoliberal era," is strongly emblematic. Neoliberal feminism refers to a kind of feminism that adopts key neoliberal principles—individualism, valorization of free markets—as feminist gestures and is bound to what Angela McRobbie identified in 2004 as "post-feminism," understood as "an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" (255). Ethical Oil's efforts here attempt to reconcile the production and consumption of Canadian oil at a cultural level through a (neo-)liberal feminist imaginary.

As Sheena Wilson's reading of the gendered politics of Ethical Oil makes clear, Ethical Oil strategically leverages the legal status of women in the West—that is, the status of formal equality—against what it suggests women's universal experiences in Middle Eastern oil producing regions are, particularly Saudi Arabia. This is done in an effort to associate the production and consumption of Canadian oil with the kinds of liberal, equality-based gender politics of the West. Canadian oil, the broader narrative suggests, is oil that supports and enables such equality, whereas conflict oil supports and enables gendered violence and repression. Through emphasizing the ways in which women are legally equal with men in ability to participate in society and politics while glossing over the gendered issues and inequities that persist in liberal democracies such as Canada, Ethical Oil extracts the supposed virtue of gender equality by deploying a politics of recognition in an effort to promote Canadian oil. Canadian oil, it follows, is discursively imbued with these characteristics—Canadian oil becomes, in the words of Ethical Oil, a form of "social oil." More significantly, perhaps, is that the easy reproduction of such comfortable and comforting binarisms strategically glosses over a long history of struggle for equality in the West that persists today in privatized, pervasive forms of patriarchy that remain as barriers for many feminists in the West. Wilson's essay repeatedly points this out by drawing attention to, for instance, the ways in which Indigenous women are instrumentalized to further a narrative that circumvents the actually existing relations between many Indigenous women and Canada's fossil economy. And in engaging with gender politics solely on a plane of recognition, Ethical Oil attempts to construct an ethics that in the first and last instance operates as an unproductive, ambivalent politics that simply reproduces already dominant relations of patriarchy, capital, and petroculture. In other words, women are utilized as promotional objects to further the agenda of Ethical Oil.[82]

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[82] This is especially apparent in relation to former Fort McMurray Mayor Melissa Blake's appearance in Levant's

In more conventional promotional material from industry and its explicitly allied

lobbying organizations such as CAPP, this performance of recognition in relation to gender and

employment access is further emphasized. A 2013 campaign from Shell Canada, Shell's former

Canadian subsidiary, for instance, circulated, in print and digital media, profiles of women who

work for the company under the headline "Developing the Oil Sands Responsibly: Women

Behind the Operation."[83] Shell Canada describes the initiative in these words:

> From avid environmentalists, to scuba-diving grandmothers, these women are not only
>
> experts in their fields but balance vibrant lives outside of work with their hobbies,
>
> families and community involvement. Find out more about the passions that drive their
>
> careers and sucesses [sic] as they work to sustainably unlock and develop one of the
>
> world's most challenging resources. ("Developing")

The write-up reproduces several sexist, patriarchal narratives, including a naturalized concern for

environment signified particularly through the vector of motherhood. Profiles include Stephanie

Sterling, VP Business and Joint Venture Management, whose tagline reads, "Fashionista? Farm

Girl? Vice President? Stephanie Sterling is all three" ("Developing"); Nicole Stanley, Oil Sands

Environment Coordinator, whose tagline asks if "someone working in the oil sands" can "be an

environmentalist" ("Developing"); and Lorraine Mitchelmore, Shell Canada President and EVP

of Heavy Oil, whose write-up asks: "Running a company and a family of four - How does she do

it?" ("Developing"). Wilson's critique of the gendered impulses found in dominant petro-

narratives aids in drawing out some important points here. Like Ethical Oil's invocation and

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Ethical Oil and in the Ethical Oil billboard campaign that Wilson discusses. Contrasting the status of women in
Saudi Arabia and Canada, Levant writes: "If Blake even stepped into the streets in Saudi Arabia without a burka on,
and without the supervision of a man who was her relative, she'd be beaten by the mutaween—Saudi's violent
religious police" (76). Notably, she was not asked for consent to use her likeness in the billboard campaign (see
Andrew Leach's blog post "Fort McMurray Mayor Melissa Blake on Ethical Oil").
[83] My attention was drawn to this campaign from research published online from Deborah Sogelola, a then
undergraduate student at the University of Ottawa working with Patrick McCurdy, entitled "Fashionistas, feminist
and oil sands advertising: A qualitative analysis of women in oil sand's advertising."

recognition of gendered legal equality in Canada, measured by Ethical Oil through such vectors as employment access, Shell Canada draws attention to its female employees' personal lives in an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which the oil sands are being developed responsibly because of the presence of women in influential positions in the company. But in framing its campaign around the responsible development of the oil sands, Shell Canada reproduces an essentialist narrative surrounding women's inherent closeness to the natural world that eco-feminists such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva have been challenging since the 1980s.[84]

As a media-event, Shell Canada's campaign was disseminated through print advertisements, online social media, and conventional newsmedia. In a 2012 *Alberta Venture* article entitled "Why women could save the oil sands," reporter Alix Kemp suggests that, because of the differences between the ways that men and women approach business, more women holding professional, executive positions in oil companies could aid in reinvigorating oil sands production. Beginning with a quotation from University of Alberta professor Karen Hughes in an effort to legitimate these essentializing claims surrounding the differences in the ways in which men and women think, the article then focuses largely on Shell and the initiative discussed above. Official traces of this campaign have since been purged from the internet, likely due to Royal Dutch Shell's divestment in the oil sands in 2017 ("Shell divests") with incomplete archives remaining through the Internet Archive's Way Back Machine. Traces and remnants of the campaign include an archived research presentation poster from Deborah Sogelola, a former undergraduate student at the University of Ottawa. What is significant here is that in this campaign, women become objects onto which to cast stereotypical, essentializing characteristics,

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[84] Summarizing the work of Leiselotte Steinbrugge, Maria Meis writes in "White Man's Dilemma" that Enlightenment philosophers in the eighteenth century generated discourses "on the 'nature of woman'" that outlined characteristics such as "the embodiment of emotionality, human caring, motherliness, a closeness to nature" (147). These characteristics that became associated with women resulted in exclusion "from the realm of politics and conomics, from the public arena, governed by (male) reason" (147).

including the centering of key commentary on the balancing of their careers and their domestic duties as wives and mothers (Sogelola).

Shell, however, is not alone in reproducing these petro-sexual narratives. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) also mobilizes a politics of recognition in discussing its commitments to gender equality vis-à-vis employment, citing partnerships with Women Building Futures, an initiative that provides resources and training for women to enter industrial construction labour jobs. My aim is not to suggest that these initiatives are not valuable ones, nor is it to suggest that they do not legitimately help women gain employment in traditionally male-dominated industries such as construction; instead, my critique takes aim at the ways in which these initiatives ultimately reproduce existing relations simply with increased gender parity while doing little to challenge the systems and structures that have historically produced the inequities these initiatives are claiming to address in the first place.

Initiatives such as Women Building Futures are focused largely on the labouring, blue-collar positions within the oil and gas industry, but organizations that support the employment of women in executive oil sands positions have emerged as well. An organization formed in 2014, Young Women in Energy, hits many of the markers of petroturfing since it frames itself as an energy initiative even though most of its sponsors are oil and gas companies (Chevron, Energplus, Repsol, and Willbros for instance), and it maintains a safe distance from particular companies. The organization offers support and mentoring for young women to enter executive positions in energy companies. Based out of Calgary—the city headquarters of Enbridge, Husky Energy, TransCanada, and more—Young Women in Energy "was founded to champion the interests of young women working in energy" with "aims to address the recognized need to increase female presence, development and leadership in the energy industry" ("Young Women

in Energy"). Deploying aesthetics that emulate popular social media sites such as Instagram or Pinterest—a minimalist web interface with clean lines, a pastel blue and white colour palette, and circled profile pictures aesthetically similar to the Energy Citizens campaign discussed in Chapter III—the organization's website serves as a hub for networking, including members only access to the membership directory, which is used for establishing mentoring relationships. Moreover, implicit throughout its media is an echo of the refrain encountered above—an article YWE cites as a source in a discussion of the gendered employment demographics of Alberta's oil and gas industry—that more women in (especially executive) positions in Alberta's oil and gas industry would fundamentally improve its extractivist practices, as if the fossil economy would run less exploitatively if it were overseen by women. Such a line of argumentation hinges upon a kind of individualistic, neoliberal feminism; with Young Women in Energy, neoliberal feminism meets the Canadian petro-economy.

Nancy Fraser argues that it is feminism's turn from a politics based on equality—that is, a politics based on *material* demands—to a politics of identity and recognition that established the basis for what we can best understand today as neoliberal feminism. "Turning 'from redistribution to recognition,'" Fraser writes, "the movement shifted its attention to cultural politics just as a rising neoliberalism was declaring war on social equality" (4). Catherine Rottenberg finds neoliberal feminism, embodied in figures of "high-powered women … unabashedly espousing feminism," articulated most clearly in two texts—Sherryl Sandberg's *Lean In* and Anne-Marie Slaughter's article in *the Atlantic*, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All" (418). The feminist subjects that these discourses construct is "Individuated in the extreme[,]" yet remains "feminist in the sense that she is distinctly aware of current inequalities between men and women" (420). "This same subject is, however," Rottenberg argues,

"simultaneously neoliberal, not only because she disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus" (420).

It is this shift from equality to recognition (Fraser) and from collective to individual (Rottenberg) that creates the conditions of possibility for neoliberal feminism to flourish in the twenty-first century—the very kind of feminism under whose banner Young Women in Energy operates with enthusiasm. As YWE describes itself in its tagline: YWE is "changing the face of energy." In the wake of YWE, then, the battle for more representation of women in the boardrooms of oil companies is seen to be equivalent—for the advancement of feminism in the twenty-first century—to the feminist battle to keep fossil fuels in the ground.

Elsewhere in petroturfing, the figure of the mother returns in a series of videos produced by British Columbians for Prosperity. Opening with a shot of a middle-aged woman carrying a bag of groceries to the trunk of her SUV, the three 30-second videos centre on a mother who articulates concern about her personal consumption of oil for a variety of reasons all prefaced with "I worry my oil and gas consumption is causing environmental damage in Alberta," a slight pause, and "but then I hear the oil sands are making big strides with new technology" ("Oil Sands: What is Being Done"). In the first, she is concerned with the question of "what is being done to protect the land." In the second, she is concerned with the impact of tailings ponds. And finally, in the third, she is concerned with the levels of water usage in the process of mining and refining bitumen. Each video concludes with figures, urging viewers to "consider the facts, then decide what's right for British Columbia" ("Oil Sands: What is Being Done"). Echoes of Shell Canada's reproduction of the essentialist relation between womanhood and ecological concern

discussed above reverberate here alongside a reassertion of the sphere of consumption as a primary (or even exclusive) space for meaningful political action—that is, a reassertion of the faiths in ethical consumption that underpin Ethical Oil's discursive power. While other BCP videos explore the ecological impacts of the production and transportation of Canadian oil while always privileging the economic benefits—the googling yuppie versus the irrational hippie that we encountered in the previous chapter in particular come to mind—this series of videos directly comments on individual consumption of oil rather than larger scale, industry dynamics. Such framing ultimately reproduces what Wilson identifies above: notions of consumer responsibility and ethical consumption leveraged for the sake of individualizing political action.

All of these treatments of gender, particularly in relation to women, reveal the internal limits to a politics of recognition as they play out in the context of late capitalism or neoliberalism. A politics built solely on recognition does nothing to seriously challenge the fossil economy, and this is precisely why petroturfing and other promotional discourses invoke it in support of the maintenance and reproduction of the Canadian fossil economy, achieved in no small part due to an *appearance* of progressivism in concern over the treatment of women that reproduce business-as-usual both materially and ideologically. Such an unholy alliance between neoliberal feminism and extraction, embodied in petroturfing's politics of recognition, shares structural similarities with the ways in which Indigenous peoples are engaged with—which, in my view, reveals petroturfing to be a socially and culturally extractive enterprise that mirrors the material practices it supports.

Green Grass, Flowing Oil: Exploiting Recognition Politics as an Extractive Practice

During the early stages of the Kearl Oil Sands Development in 2014, Imperial Oil partnered with

the Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay communities of Alberta to produce a children's book,

written by well-known Tlicho Dene author Richard Van Camp, with illustrations inspired by

Plains-Cree artist George Littlechild. The book, *Our Stories Help the Northern Lights Dance*,

tells a story of the Northern Lights and its relationship to the communities, alongside vibrant

illustrations from the children who participated in its production. *Our Stories Help the Northern*

Lights Dance was designed and ultimately produced by National Public Relations, Canada's

largest public relations consultancy firm, which is affiliated at an international level with Burson-

Marsteller,[85] a PR company that played a key role in managing the Union Carbide Corporation's

public image from what is known as the Bhopal disaster in India, "one of the worst chemical

disasters in History" that continues to affect children born today (Broughton). The dedication in

the preface of the book describes the role that Imperial Oil played in the development and

publication of the book: "Imperial Oil supported the creation of this book to give thanks to the

residents of Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay who have shared not only their stories with us, but

also their deep understanding and respect for the land" (4). "We are grateful to them for

contributing their time and traditional ecological knowledge to help us shape our plans for our

Kearl Oil Sands development and its reclamation" (4). The blurb concludes: "As a good

neighbour, we look forward to building a strong relationship with local communities for

generations to come" (4). With Esso and Imperial Oil logos stamped on both the fourth and the

final pages of the book, it is clear that this book is as much Imperial Oil's as it is the authors'

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[85] See the Government of Canada's Federal Corporation Information website for more information on BURSON-MARSTELLER LIMITED/LIMITEE,
https://www.ic.gc.ca/app/scr/cc/CorporationsCanada/fdrlCrpDtls.html?corpId=0151653

(including the children who participated in its production). The book would provide Imperial Oil with a nomination for the CAPP "2014 Responsible Canadian Energy Nominees for Social Performance."

My aim here is not to reproduce easy criticisms against the individuals, particularly its authors, or the communities who participated in creation of the book—a tactic that, for instance, finds its petroturfing counterpart in the ways that Ezra Levant and Ethical Oil leverage critiques against vocal oil sands opponents such as David Suzuki and Neil Young with cries of hypocrisy. Nor is it my aim to undermine the value of the book itself as a record of culturally and historically important stories that serves, ultimately, as a pedagogical device for the community. Rather, I begin this section with *Our Stories Help the Northern Lights Dance* because it represents one of the ways in which Canadian oil supports certain kinds of socio-cultural work as a means to acculturate oil as an ethically positive force, highlighting one particular result of the nexus of public-facing initiatives that hinge upon the kinds of politics of recognition this chapter takes as its target. Located in this venture is an uncomfortable dissonance embedded in the ways that Imperial Oil articulates its commitments to a community whose surrounding environments it ultimately aims to disrupt through extraction—what it calls "building on a strong relationship with local communities for generations to come" (4). Such a "responsible" extraction, this dissertation argues, is impossible—there is no reconciling traditional ecological knowledge and fossil fuel extraction, even in the stages of reclamation (see Chapter 5). The corporate social responsibility efforts from companies such as Imperial Oil are, ultimately, an effort that seeks to extract social capital as it extracts fossil capital to ideologically absolve itself from the short and long-term social and ecological petro-violence inherent in the process of extraction, in turn

objectifying and commodifying the very peoples and communities whom it suggests it is working with as equals.

The neighbourly language from Imperial Oil that frames *Our Stories* further recalls Coulthard's critique of the ways in which the Canadian state nominally *recognizes* Indigenous sovereignty, but fails to *act* in a manner that demonstrates the validity of this nation-to-nation relation. Continued criticisms of the actually existing implementation of practices outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)—pledged to, but not adopted by Trudeau's Liberals—is just one indicator of the dissonance between commitments and actions on the part of Canada's Federal Government, despite the widespread and consistent emphasis on reconciliation, in part the product of findings and recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report (2015).[86] The dissonance that I identify here between commitments and action was demonstrated when emails from Indigenous Affairs deputy minister Helene Laurendeau discussing UNDRIP were received through an Access to Information by NDP Member of Parliament Romeo Saganash's office, as an article from the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network reports. "Two months after Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett declared to the world that Canada was fully embracing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," the article states, "the most senior official in her department told underlings the international document would not be guiding planned consultations with First Nations, Inuit and Metis, according to an internal email" (Barrera).

Industry has also rather enthusiastically adopted this *discourse* of reconciliation. Suncor, for instance, writes on its corporate website:

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[86] Canada's historical relationship to UNDRIP has been a tumultuous one. Initially when the declaration was adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, Canada voted against it, only signing on in 2010 ("United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples").

Through our partnership with Reconciliation Canada, Suncor is learning what

reconciliation means in Canada and for our organization. As outlined in our social goal,

Suncor has committed to changing the way we think and act in regards to our relationship

with Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Reconciliation is the process of understanding and

coming to terms with our shared history in order to have a vibrant community where all

peoples, including Indigenous youth, achieve their full potential and have an opportunity

to share in their prosperity. (Suncor)

A politics of recognition as a primary means of negotiating the relationship between the

Canadian state, the extractive industries, and Indigenous groups and peoples creates the

conditions for governments and companies such as Suncor to claim commitment to

reconciliation and equality *in spirit* while continuing the very same practices in the very same

way that made the impetus for superficial regimes of recognition and of corporate social

responsibility to be a worthwhile endeavour in the first place. Fraught with ambivalence and a

lack of *material* commitments that reflect in any capacity the degree to which extraction

damages both landscapes and communities, these efforts extract the socio-culture value of

appearing to consult and negotiate with Indigenous communities in good faith and as equals (or,

in Imperial Oil's terminology, neighbours). This is, in many ways, unsurprising—the most

meaningful act of reconciliation by oil sands companies along with the Provincial and Federal

governments that continue to support the maintenance and reproduction of petro-capitalism

would be to properly respect Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Indigenous peoples appear sparingly yet strategically throughout the petroturfing

mediascape. Unlike traditional industry public relations media, including *Our Stories Help the*

Northern Lights Dance or the corporate websites that detail corporate social responsibility efforts

and initiatives related to reconciliation, where community and employment-related initiatives are promoted in sub-sections of corporate websites almost universally, petroturfing is selective in its engagement with First Nations. In terms of corporate discourse, virtually all of the major oil sands companies, including Canadian Natural Resources Ltd, Cenovus, ConocoPhillips, Suncor, Syncrude (a joint venture of five oil and gas companies), and others, have sections of their respective websites dedicated to describing their principles with regard to relations with Indigenous peoples and traditional territories.[87] Citing its partnership with CAPP, for example, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd (CNRL) directly references UNDRIP: "Canadian Natural supports the federal government's decision to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation in Canada, and the implementation of its principles in a manner that is consistent with the Canadian Constitution and law" ("Canadian Natural Resources – Indigenous Relations"). Suncor frames its "Aboriginal Relations" around four key areas: "respect," "communication," "benefits," and "environment" ("Aboriginal Relations"). Both of these examples serve to illustrate the ways in which a politics of recognition undermines the possibilities for meaningful enactment of UNDRIP principles, since the impetus of the Canadian state and companies such as Suncor is to extract. And as part of each broader corporate social responsibility, it is difficult to see these efforts as anything but a kind of promotional effort in the first and last instance. Even at the level of government, the implementation of UNDRIP is seen by some Indigenous groups as an expansion of colonialist principles, given that its implementation was done without proper discussion and negotiation and, moreover, that this implementation uses its own principles as the basis of its framework. As the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians puts it, "The Recognition and Implementation of

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[87] The top companies here are from a list put together by the Rain Forest Action Network with data from Rystad Energy AS, courtesy of Oil Change International ("List of Tar Sands Companies").

Indigenous Rights Framework (the Rights Framework) is a continuation of Canada's colonial legacy" ("Stop the Framework"). Gestures to the smooth implementation of these already troubled initiatives and frameworks establishes conditions that allow Indigenous peoples to be framed as beneficiaries of the fossil economy in a manner that reproduces the same economistic rhetorical strategies explored in the previous chapter.

Petroturfing reproduces this thread of corporate discourse in an effort to further circulate the narrative that, far from damaging landscapes and communities, extraction benefits them, and that it is in their best interest to support these developments. In highlighting the support for oil and gas developments from certain Indigenous groups in British Columbia and Alberta, petroturfing aims to create the conditions for an appearance of division among First Nations groups in relation to development while further suggesting that development is in their best interest and, in turn, that dissent and resistance betray their communities. For instance, in an early 2011 blog post, which was one of its first, Ethical Oil writes: "We can choose to support an industry that finally, after decades of injustices and patronizing control over First Nations, gives Canada's aboriginals a way to provide for themselves and prosper" (Alykhan "First Nations"). Implied in Ethical Oil's diatribe here is a proposal that suggests that the solution to the persistent inequities faced and experienced by First Nations is to support the expansion of Canada's fossil economy. As the first section of this chapter makes clear, however, these developments are neo-colonial ventures supported by both industry and government, neo-colonial ventures that, through persistent ecological destruction, break treaties and disrupt ways of life for many communities. Such a framing further denies agency from Indigenous peoples and communities by explicitly reasserting what is in the best interest of a given nation from the perspective of external observers, repeating arguments that can be found in the pages of such

reports from the Fraser Institute as *Opportunities for First Nation Prosperity Through Oil and Gas Development* (Bains 2013) or *Why First Nations Succeed* (Flanagan 2016). At its core, then, petroturfing's engagement with Indigenous peoples in manners such as these reproduce colonial dynamics by circulating narratives that suggest the oil and gas industry is a means through which Indigenous individuals and communities can escape generations of structural inequities by welcoming development with open arms, a narrative that, in the first instance, establishes the conditions for further dispossession, the very condition of colonization that is at the core of most Indigenous struggles today.

Other petroturf groups use social media as a means to circulate similar narratives. On May 23, 2017, BCP tweeted a *Financial Post* article "First Nations chiefs plan to challenge Liberal oil tanker ban for British Columbia" (BCProsperity). The article points out that "Aboriginal chiefs backing a pipeline through northern British Columbia plan to challenge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's 'ill-conceived' moratorium on oil tanker traffic off the northern section of Canada's West Coast" (Morgan). Virtually every tweet by BCP that mention First Nations functions similarly. On January 23, 2017, for instance, BCP tweeted an article from the *Times Colonist* with the headline that "Oil-spill response upgrades mean jobs for First Nations communities" (BCProsperity). This leads to the building of a kind of imaginary consensus wherein a handful of Indigenous communities stand in for the whole of Indigenous peoples, another form of legitimation through circulation that extracts social and cultural value in the name of Canadian oil, petroturfing's *modus operandi*. In an undated post entitled "Building Strong Relationships with First Nations," BCP echoes the kinds of nation-to-nation discourse of recognition that Trudeau campaigned on in the 2015 election and continues to invoke in relation to UNDRIP. The tone of the post reads as educational, describing treaty rights and their

relationship to development. "As indigenous people were the original occupants of the land," it states, "they have certain legal rights that other British Columbians do not have. This shapes the provincial government's relationship with indigenous people – it is a government-to-government relationship where First Nations are rights-holders not stakeholders." "It's important that we as British Columbians recognize the importance of furthering strong relationships with First Nations groups and that our government continues to foster a more inclusive approach," it continues. "This will ensure a stable investment environment that allows business to *tap B.C.'s full potential*. British Columbians must continue to work to encourage progressive practices and values with aboriginal groups so that our province can continue down a path that builds strong communities and prosperity for all" ("Building"). Oil Sands Action, a subsidiary of Canada Action, echoes these sentiments in a tweet from early 2017: "If @Janefonda and @MikeHudema actually cared about Indigenous rights they would also support those that support oil and gas development" (OilSandsAction 09-01-2017 19:05). Both BCP's and Canada Action's posts advocate a kind of neo-Frontierism, echoing the sort of narratives encountered in the work of Tom Flanagan and the Fraser Institute, who aggressively support the imposition of private property regimes on Indigenous territories.[88]

The writing and circulation of newsmedia reports that emphasize Indigenous support for oil and gas developments such as pipelines serve to provide another layer to the claims. Many petroturfing groups retweet and share articles from conventional news sources, including Flanagan's 2016 opinion piece "Not all First Nations oppose oil and gas development," published by the *Globe and Mail*. And like CAPP's promotional pieces published in *The Financial Post*, discussed in the previous chapter, Canada Action founder Cody Battershill's opinion piece "First Nations actually want resource development— if paid activists would just

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[88] See chapter 4 of Donald Gutstein's *Harperism*, "Liberate Dead Capital on First Nation Reserves."

get out of their way" serves as another example of the ways in which petroturfing enters traditional newsmedia. The article cites Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde and Fort McKay Chief Jim Boucher who both suggest there is overwhelming openness to oil and gas developments among First Nations. "If the paid staffers of activist groups like Greenpeace truly cared about First Nations communities in Canada," Battershill writes, "those staffers would listen to the wishes of the many Indigenous leaders who support current pipeline proposals like Trans Mountain. The fact those paid staffers continue to ignore the hopes and aspirations of so many in the First Nations communities is not just disingenuous—it's outrageous" (2017). Articles circulated in conventional media such as these establish a broader mediascape for petroturfing that contain positive feedback loops that situate environmentalist activists and their interests through an economistic vector. But First Nations communities, like all communities, are not homogenous entities. Moreover, many First Nations have different relationships with government due to the complexity of treaties and land claims. To scale out the fact that some Indigenous groups support development projects into a claim that "First Nations actually want resource development" is problematic on a number of levels. Several groups are used to represent the whole in a manner that flattens the complex differences between Indigenous groups as communities and individuals. These sentiments that underscore Indigenous support for development perform the process of legitimation through circulation, demonstrating a petro-capitalist realist impulse that provides the foundation for the Facebook petroturfing page Oil Sands Strong to claim that "The Oil Sands are the Economic Reconciliation for the First Nations" (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Image Posted by @OilSandsStrong, Facebook, 4 December 2017

Like the neoliberal undercurrents of the kinds of feminism found in organizations such as

YWE, such claims as those of British Columbians for Prosperity, Canada Action, or Oil Sands

Strong surrounding First Nations support of oil sands developments are made possible and

legitimized through the neoliberalization of Indigenous interests and cultures in Canada. This

neoliberalization occurs through a number of material and cultural registers, especially related to

regimes of private property and the politics of Indigenous land relations. In "Racial Extractivism

and White Settler Colonialism: An Examination of the Canadian Tar Sands Mega-Projects," Jen

Preston argues that "The Athabasca, Cold Lake and Peace River tar sands mega-projects and

associated discourses of 'natural resource' extraction reveal how the character of contemporary

white settler colonialism has changed in relation to the nation-state's neoliberalization" (354),

part of which is a process of what she terms "racial extractivism" (356). "Racial extractivism,"

she writes, "positions race and colonialism as central to extractivist projects under neoliberalism

and underpins how these epistemologies are written into the economic structure and social

relations of production and consumption" (356). Such racial extractivist impulses are replicated

in petroturfing's insistence from outside that Indigenous peoples support oil sands developments such as pipelines and that extraction is ultimately beneficial for these communities.

Conclusion

The material processes of extraction that underpin the production of fossil fuels in particular and global capitalism in general are mirrored in petroturfing's effort to decontextualize the relationship between women, Indigenous peoples, and extraction in Canada, a relationship that ultimately deepens inequality. Whereas extractivism and the violences that follow in its wake mark the landscapes and peoples affected by these processes, the cultural work of petroturfing aims to reconcile these contradictions at a discursive level by offering up Canadian oil as an emancipatory extractive practice. At the core of these attempts is a politics of recognition. While perhaps an important starting point in demanding the kinds of sovereignty that implementing UNDRIP requires, recognition cannot be the end of a project to realize meaningful sovereignty. In a provocative 2012 article entitled "Decolonization is not a metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang challenge how decolonization has been easily adopted by mainstream educational and pedagogical discourses. At the core of their argument is the suggestion that the process of decolonization is a deeply *material* process. "Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun)[,]" they write, "cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks" (3) because decolonization requires generating new sets of relations and ways of being. I turn to Tuck and Yang here in an effort to expose the ways in which discourses of recognition, which are today so easily gestured towards by the state and in corporate social responsibility discourse, do not serve as ends in effecting meaningful change. Petroturfing extends this gesture towards recognition

discourse in its extraction of the social and cultural capital of women and Indigenous peoples that is then leveraged to frame Canadian oil as a socially benevolent commodity. In doing so, petroturfing confirms the limits to a politics of recognition that Tuck and Yang are criticizing.

The social extraction at work in petroturfing is itself a form of petro-violence. In "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity," Michael Watts asserts that "[t]he manner in which the mythic, magical, and biophysical properties of oil enter into these violent struggles—how oil is talked about, framed, and given meaning—is ultimately an empirical question: which is to say, one needs to examine carefully the historical and cultural local context of oil" (212). As one agent in this struggle over the mythic properties of Canadian oil, petroturfing attempts to actively construe these properties by attaching positive economic, social, and ecological signifiers to Canadian oil. In doing so, it commits a form of cultural petro-violence that denies the agencies of women and Indigenous peoples by using them as objects for the promotion of Canadian oil. Like the extraction of social and cultural currencies that this chapter explores, petroturfing replicates this same process with regard to the environment, framing the production of Canadian oil as ecologically sound while deploying a neoliberal, post-environmentalist imaginary that values nature only in relation to humanity and capital.

Chapter V

Sustaining Petrocultures: The Politics and Aesthetics of Petroturfing's Post-

Environmentalist Imaginary

"We will ensure the land disturbed by our operation is returned to a stable, safe condition that is capable of supporting biologically self-sustaining communities of plants and animals"
- Syncrude Canada

"Many of the human-altered landscapes of the present appear to be landscapes beyond resurrection"
- Alberto Toscano, "The World Is Already without Us"

Introduction

A man in a hardhat, high-visibility safety vest, and sunglasses strolls through a lush landscape in a short 2011 promotional video from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP). Uplifting piano music plays in the background. He opens his hands, gesturing toward the landscape that surrounds him. "This is an active mining operation in the Canadian oil sands," he says. "It's not a pretty site when you open up the earth in order to extract the oil, but after this operation is finished, it will be reclaimed" (2011). "Where there was once an oil sands mining operation, you now have a beautiful biodiverse landscape again," the narration concludes, "where you'd never know there'd been a mine there in the first place" (2011). A white screen with black text fades in, declaring: "New ideas are making a difference" (2011). The landscape featured in this video is a reclamation project in Alberta's oil sands, a greenspace nested within a wider landscape of active mines, seemingly endless deforestation, and general destruction. A "pretty sight" amidst the not so pretty one. In this feature is Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace and self-described *sensible* environmentalist,[89] whose endorsement of the project strategically deploys his environmentalist cultural capital to imbue reclamation, and bitumen

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[89] Moore's memoir, *Confessions of a Greenpeace Drop-Out: The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist* (2010), traces his increasing disillusionment with the alleged radicalization of Greenpeace's mission in the 1970s, his eventual removal from the organization, and his development into a "sensible" environmentalist.

extraction in general, with "green," renewable characteristics. As is well known,[90] however, the

reclamation process, like the process of mining and refining bitumen that necessitates such

reclamation in the first place, is incredibly resource intensive and, again like mining and refining

bitumen, has been historically developed in a touch-and-go fashion only to be discursively

repackaged retroactively as "innovation"—as "new thinking."[91] Such a description of

reclamation—as innovation, as new thinking—strategically avoids the realities of reclamation's

intensities and uncertainties. When considered this way, the whole project of oil sands

reclamation works to superimpose the limitless logic of capital onto the limits of the nonhuman

world, and it is within this disjuncture in possibilities for reclamation that I focus the present

intervention in relation to petroturfing's environmental imaginary.

All land leased by oil companies in Alberta, per contract, must be reclaimed at some end

point of a given development project, and that reclamation clause specifies that the land is

returned "to an equivalent land capability." "If an area meets stringent requirements for

reclamation," the Government of Alberta states, "regulators will issue final certification and the

land is returned to the Crown as public land. To date, one area called Gateway Hill is certified

reclaimed" ("Alberta's Oil Sands Reclamation"). Gateway Hill spans 104 hectares, nestled in

89,592 hectares of total land affected by oil sands mining ("Alberta's Oil Sands Reclamation").

Distinctions between types of landscapes and their current possibility for reclamation are

worth pointing out here, especially in terms of the distinction between agricultural landscapes,

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[90] See Kevin P. Timoney's *Impaired Wetlands in a Damaged Landscape: The Legacy of Bitumen Exploitation in Canada* (2015). In it, Timoney develops a comprehensive critique of the viability of reclamation based on existing data, which he points out is extremely limited—so limited that conclusions in the affirmative or negative are hard (read: scientifically invalid) to draw and shed serious doubt on official narratives that confirm reclamation's viability.

[91] The semi-official narrative of how the oil sands came into being confirms this. On a research trip to Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada in 2014 at the Oil Sands Discover Centre, I encountered at an interactive oil sands museum, a screening of a short film on the history of the development of the oil sands that emphasized the role of American entrepreneurialism in the shaping of bitumen extraction today. Larry Pratt's 1976 *The Tar Sands: Syncrude and the Politics of Oil* confirms this narrative.

which of course have been "human-altered" for generations, and what are considered wild or natural landscapes. There is little evidence that wild or natural landscapes can be reclaimed, even according to the vague metric of "equivalent land capability," despite the legal requirement for companies operating in the oil sands to commit to this process. As Natural Resources Canada puts it, "100 percent of land must be reclaimed" ("Oil Sands: Land Use and Reclamation"). The temporalities at work in these processes—official wording suggests that the lifespan of a given oil sands project is between 40 and 80 years—means that the possibilities for reclamation cannot be evaluated in good faith well into the twenty-first century, further underscoring the ways in which industry controls the terms and conditions of reclamation in what can still be considered, some 50 years after the establishment of the first oil sands production sites, the early stages of reclamation's development.

I begin this chapter on petroturfing's ecological imaginary with reclamation because oil sands reclamation is a concentrated site through which broader characteristics of petroturfing's ecological imaginary are expressed. Alongside persistent gestures to Canada's strict environmental regulations, which I discuss near the end of this chapter, reclamation efforts, successful or otherwise, serve as a key promotional vector through which the oil sands' ecologies are positively figured, particularly in terms of the lasting ecological impacts of oil sands extraction. And like more generalized promotional material from oil companies or lobbying groups with overt connections to industry such as CAPP, petroturfing echoes these sentiments, using its process of legitimation through circulation feedback loop as a means to further disseminate the oil sands eco-narrative.

If tailings ponds are material and symbolic sites around which environmentalist action against oil sands extraction is organized, reclamation and other techno-scientific projects that

mitigate the ecological impacts of extraction should be understood as petroturfing's equivalent. As Ethical Oil explains, reclamation projects "are just one of the things that make Canadian oil sands ethical" ("Greenpeace co-founder"). Both petroturfing and reclamation are a means to *sustain* petroculture in Canada, that is, to maintain and reproduce petroculture at the levels of culture and of ideology. This chapter primarily focuses on reclamation as it appears in the petroturfing mediascape, showing how reclamation and other environmental efforts are mobilized as another promotional-ideological layer through which to figure Canadian oil as a socially and ecologically benevolent force. It does so in the same way petroturfing exploits a politics of recognition in relation to women and Indigenous peoples (see Chapter IV) as a means to reframe and refine Canadian oil as, in the words of Canada Action's Founder Cody Battershill, "fair trade" ("Passion")—a post-political gesture to liberal regimes of ethical capitalism that aim to maintain capitalism as a dominant mode of production while addressing its social and ecological shortcomings through ethical consumption.[92] In the case of reclamation and other environmental technologies and contexts in relation to petroturfing, environments and ecosystems themselves become decontextualized signifiers of the "good" deeds of Canadian extraction.

In this chapter, I make several key moves in mapping and interrogating petroturfing's ecological imaginary and, in turn, the ecological imaginary of oil sands production in general. In order to contextualize reclamation and other oil sands environmental technologies and draw out their relationship with petroturfing in general, this chapter is anchored by a theoretical account of the politics and aesthetics of reclamation articulated through three theses that examine reclamation as a capital and resource intensive, techno-scientific process that ultimately

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[92] For analyses of the contradictions of ethical capitalism particularly in relation to ecology and environmentalism, see especially Slavoj Žižek's *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009) and *Living in the End Times* (2010).

maintains and reproduces the fossil economy. Here I argue that rather than restore ecosystems to

"equivalent land capability" as a primary aim, reclamation is instead a materialization of what

Timothy Morton has called, in the context of literary representation, "weak" eco-mimesis—a

largely Romantic literary aesthetic that mimicking the natural world, often reproduces the very

same view of nature it aims to disrupt. In this way, reclamation embodies the partnering of

science and petro-capital made material, but in a manner that, among other things, privileges

human experiences of the aesthetic over a nature for itself, in turn *continuing* the extractive

legacies that produce the conditions necessary for reclamation in the first place rather than

moving beyond these legacies vis-à-vis scientific technologies. Intertwined with this theoretical

account is an examination of the role of bison and landscape in reclamation that also serves to

interrogate petroturfing's treatment of reclamation as a means to signify the socio-ecologically

positive aspects of Canadian oil. Reclamation thus serves as a foundational process that I use as a

starting point to build a criticism of more general engagements of the environment within

petroturfing and in the broader oil sands promotional mediascape. I argue that petroturfing

reproduces the technological-instrumental views of nature that both extraction and reclamation

and other oil sands ecologies rely upon.

Together, the theses that comprise this chapter illustrate the ways in which environmental

technologies *and* petroturfing work together to maintain and reproduce petroculture by

attempting to reconcile the ecological and social contradictions of petroculture materially and

culturally. What may seem as categorically incongruous with the development of the oil sands

(i.e., conservation and stewardship) is, rather, wholly compatible with neoliberal extractivism in

superficial ways. Petroturfing serves as a vehicle through which to sustain the petrocultural

environmental imaginary by employing a constructivist vision of nature that suggests human

beings can (re-)construct nature or return it to its previous state (e.g., through oil spill clean up). Nature and environment as such figure into the oil sands environmental imaginary only *after* the landscape's exhaustion of value as raw material. On offer here is a fundamentally *post-* environmentalist position that superficially reconciles ecological damage with an environmentalist outlook through a constructivist and neoliberal environmental perspective that suggests all human impact can be mitigated through technological development. By post-environmentalism, I mean an environmentalism that has been fundamentally depoliticized through strategically adopting small-scale tenets of environmentalism that on the surface reconcile extraction and environmentalism. This strategy seeks to legitimate (while in turn creating the conditions of possibility for) the claim that Canadian oil is no longer "dirty," as now-conventional wisdom tells us, but "green."[93]

Thesis One: Reclamation is Motivated by Anthro- and Capitalocentric Productivism

At the core of reclamation's claims about the possibility of returning a damaged landscape to "equivalent land capability" are questions of use-value and exchange-value, on the one hand, and nature and production on the other. For Marx, the concept of nature is deeply rooted in his understanding of production and the creation of value (use-value in particular), which can be summarized in the following formula: labour plus nature equals production. A tempting impulse emerges here to critique Marx's calculus as a perpetuation and reproduction of a kind of binaristic, Enlightenment view of the oppositional relationship between the human and nonhuman, and society and nature. But, for Marx, this is not so straightforward. As Alfred Schmidt, one of the earliest theorists of Marx's ecological thought, notes, "Marx considered

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[93] See, for instance, Peter Silverstone's 2010 book *World's Greenest Oil: Turning the Oil Sands from Black to Green*.

nature to be 'the primary source of all instruments and objects of labour', i.e. he saw nature from the beginning in relation to human activity" (15). Schmidt summarizes: "Nature was for Marx both an element of human practice and the totality of everything that exists" (27). Use and instrumentalization, a notion tied to a productivist imaginary,[94] are complicated here in the way that Marx views nature as an aspect of "human practice," as well as a totality under which everyone and everything exists. Less an attempt to perceive and characterize nature as a space for extraction, i.e., for purely *human* use, Marx's view of nature arguably opens up several ways of accounting for the complex relationship between humans and nonhuman nature.

This dynamic is embodied in Marx's development of the notion of the "metabolic rift," a concept that eco-socialists such as Paul Burkett and John Bellamy Foster revive in relation to contemporary ecological relations under capitalism.[95] The metabolic rift names the deepening rift between humans and nature under capitalism, or what John Bellamy Foster calls Marx's "mature analysis of the alienation of nature"—"a systemic critique of capitalist 'exploitation' (in the sense of robbery, that is, failing to maintain the means of reproduction) of the soil" (ix, 155). In *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (2015), McKenzie Wark describes the metabolic rift in terms of exchanges and flows: "Labor pounds and wheedles rocks and soil, plants and animals, extracting the molecular flows out of which our shared life is made and remade. But those molecular flows do not return from whence they came" (xiv). As crystallized in the concept of the metabolic rift, Marx's understandings of nature and its relation to production is an important starting point when theorizing reclamation and interrogating its terms and conditions.

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[94] "Productivism" is a key term in the degrowth movement—whose origins are in the 1970s—that identifies historical tenets of both capitalism's and socialism's respective projects of modernity; the notion of a "productivist imaginary" has been developed by Diego Andreucci and Terrence McDonough in their reading of degrowth theorist Serge Latouche to name the worldview that sustains productivism ("Capitalism," in *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, eds. Giorgos Kallis, Frederico Demaria, Giacomo D'Alisa. New York: Routledge, 2014. 62).

[95] For an extended account of the metabolic rift and its relation to contemporary capitalism and climate change, see especially Brett Clark, John Bellamy Foster, and Richard York's *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (2010) and McKenzie Wark's *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (2015).

The epistemological basis of reclamation relies in the first instance on a scientistic *disavowal* of the thesis behind metabolic rifts, promoting instead the perception that we as a species can carry on large-scale extractive processes without any serious, irreparable, or long-term damage to landscapes and ecosystems.

Embedded within reclamation's terms and conditions, including its gesture towards a vague concept of equivalent capabilities, is an anthropocentric—and indeed *capitalo*centric—productivism that overrides the ecological complexities of pre-extraction landscapes. Jon Gordon elaborates on the implications of this anthropo/capitalocentric productivism:

> This discourse of productivity asserts that the land will be more humanly useful, more profitable, because its productivity will be oriented to marketable ends … The amount of profit land can generate determines its value rather the diversity of life it supports, even if the latter must be sacrificed for the former. (xli)

Oil sands reclamation, then, understands ecology primarily as a relation to capital and in this sense is consistent with its own logic when invoking "equivalent land capability," a framework we can understand as an extension a specific iteration of neoliberal environmentalisms this chapter engages. But such a narrow view of ecology—one that hinges entirely upon a landscape's profitability—reaches its limit when one begins to consider the material complexities of natural landscapes and ecosystems that reclamation, at least in spirit, hopes to mimic. This is precisely why it is essential to expand how we understand Marxist notions of labour, production and use-values to include nonhuman animals. And while such a framing may read as a naïve or superficial attempt to erode the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, it is instead a fundamentally materialist gesture that begins to develop a politics through recognition of the role that nonhumans have played throughout history. Expanding

notions of production to include nonhumans—although certainly not an uncontroversial move,

particularly from within Marxist criticism[96]—is arguably a necessity when attempting to

conceive of ecologically just relations in the twenty-first century. In other words, viewing

nonhuman animals as producing for themselves expands and establishes grounds for a politics

that moves beyond the anthropocentric confines of the Anthropocene.[97]

Anthropocentrism as it manifests in a privileging of the human, including the primacy of

exchange-value over use-value in capitalist modes of economic organization, is a key factor in

this epochal shift. Consistent with the types of post-humanist thought of theorists such as Donna

Haraway, this inclusion of nonhuman animals in understandings of labour is arguably not a

betrayal of the spirit of Marx's understandings of production, nature, or labour.[98] In "'Animals

Are Part of the Working Class': A Challenge to Labour History," Jason Hribal complicates the

anthropocentric assumptions behind conventional labour history, arguing that animals are, and

historically have been, agents of production. "The basic fact," he writes, "is that horses, cows, or

chickens have labored, and continue to labor, under the same capitalist system as humans" (436).

Nicole Shukin (2009) pushes these observations regarding the role of animals in capitalism even

further in her concept of "animal capital," as she traces the manner in which animals (through

their labour and their commodification in processes of rendering) have been central and crucial

to the rise of capitalism. If, following Hribal and Shukin, we begin to view animals both as

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[96] In his 2018 book *The Progress of this Storm*, for instance, Andreas Malm criticizes those, such as Haraway, who view animals as labouring creatures since they do not transform the world around them at a scale remotely similar to humans.

[97] The role of the "anthro" in the Anthropocene is a hotly debated one. See especially Jason W. Moore's *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, where he argues against the notion of an Anthropocene and for the notion a Capitalocene, a term originally coined by Andreas Malm that aims to properly account for the role of capital and *capitalists* in generating the epochal shift (169-192).

[98] Haraway explains her reasoning in understanding non-humans as productive beings:

> The actors are not all 'us.' If the world exists for us as 'nature,' this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological. In its scientific embodiments as well as in other forms, nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans. (66)

labouring and productive beings in their own right, the concept of "equivalent land capabilities"

becomes an even more dubious and unstable signifier, as the anthropocentric bases that form the

foundations of the metrics of reclamation become ever more apparent. In other words, folding

nonhuman animals, on their own terms, into the equation reveals that the metrics of "equivalent

land capabilities" are anthropocentric by design.

Thesis Two: Reclamation is Materialized (Weak) Eco-Mimesis

If part of reclamation's problematic lies in its material artificiality as a landscape stripped of its

use-value and rebuilt in the image of an idealized form, another part of its problematic lies in the

aesthetic. Timothy Morton's work on environmental aesthetics helps in developing this point

further. In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton establishes a conceptual apparatus (what he

calls a "device") from which to critique dominant Romantic notions of nature as they work in the

genre of nature writing and artistic cultural production in general. He does so by developing the

notion of "ecomimesis." Ecomimesis, Morton explains, is an environmental literary aesthetic that

seeks to privilege, reflect and embody nature—including nature's ambience and atmosphere—in

its poetics. In its weak form, ecomemesis often reproduces the very same troublesome power

relations between humans and the natural world that it hopes to erode or erase.

But what does a largely literary aesthetic have to do with reclamation and its emphasis on

innovation and progress? To view reclamation, and indeed the contemporary energyscape more

broadly, as somehow outside the realm of aesthetics is to misread its core imperative, especially

in relation to the purpose of reclaiming natural, post-extractive landscapes, which is in the first

instance to re-construct an environment on the basis of a pernicious mixture of aesthetic and

anthropocentric productivity measured by exchange value. Despite the fact that there are a

number of potential or imagined end-uses, including as recreation sites (see Gordon 54), that

have guided the reclamation process since its inception, there currently remains a primary

emphasis on the aesthetic characteristics of post-extractive landscapes. Such an emphasis is

arguably due to the ease with which an aesthetically pleasing landscape can be recreated and

maintained with current reclamation technologies when compared to a "productive" and self-

sustaining landscape. "Equivalent land capability" in a self-sustaining and auto-productive

manner (i.e., as an autonomous environment) has yet to be properly achieved, if it is at all

possible in the first place. This is precisely why Moore's evaluation of reclamation's success

centres primarily on "pretty *sights*," an anthropocentric way of experiencing nature that

underscores reclamation's key drive *in the first instance* to aesthetically mimic that which has

been internalized as "nature" in the cultural imaginary. In their privileging of the idyllic

aesthetics of nature that can be traced to the types of Romantic conceptions of nature that Morton

elaborates upon and critiques, reclamation projects re-inscribe the problematic dynamics of

nature versus culture that privilege the latter over the former. Whereas Morton's antidote is to

call for an ecology without nature—an ecology that is not built upon the same problematic

concept of nature that marginalizes it in the first place—reclamation projects invert this

relationship in their mimicry of nature, producing a (capital N) Nature *without* an ecology of any

dynamism or vitality, fundamentally lacking in what Morton has elsewhere called "dark

ecology"—the unseemly, "monstrous," and often brutal aspects of the natural world overlooked

in Romantic idealizations of nature (*The Ecological Thought* 59-68).

The nexus of ecology, Romantic aesthetics, and scientism crystallized in reclamation

reveals its roots as an artificial landscape embedded in a colonial epistemological framework. In

a dialectical fashion, Geo Takach argues in his reading of the Albertan imaginary of nature—as

expressed through, for instance, tourism promotion of the Rocky Mountains—that the gazes

underpinning Romantic views of nature, such as those that likewise shape approaches to reclamation projects, are wedded to the extractive views they initially seem to oppose because both are based on consumption. Visions such as these "may be more a part of a tradition dating back to Romantic landscape painting that views nature as unspoiled, separate from humanity and, as rhetoricians argue, thus open for human conquest" (25). Takach accordingly concludes that Romantic and "extractive" gazes "are both consumptive and so two sides of the same coin" (25). It serves us better critically, then, to view landscapes like Gateway Hill as always already human-altered. Such viewing immediately destabilizes the Western idealized landscape and the politics of colonization in reclamation.

Richard Grove's work is instructive in illustrating the colonial roots of conservation science, especially *Green Imperialism* (1995) and *Ecology, Climate and Empire* (1997). In both works, he traces the complex historical relationship between environmental conservation, environmentalism, ecology, and colonialism. My aim in underscoring this history here is not to dismiss the important work of the ecological sciences, including those sciences that underpin reclamation projects, but to historicize their Western epistemological origins in order to trouble assumptions that remain within ecology as science. Most importantly, we can read ecology in positive and negative registers by drawing distinctions between the ways in which ecology serves capital, or, in the case of Grove's focus, the colonial apparatus *en masse*, instead of the peoples and broader environments that can be broadly understood as a kind of common. Such framing demonstrates the ways in which reclamation is materially and culturally—that is, aesthetically—wedded to the same dynamics that make reclamation necessary in the first place.

One of the most prominent signifiers of the material, cultural, and, ultimately, scientific possibilities for successful oil sands reclamation is the figure of the wood bison. In Syncrude's

"successful," certified reclamation project that I discuss above, wood bison, and particularly their continued survival on the reclaimed landscape, have played an instrumental role in demonstrating the ecological viability of reclamation, of (re)building a landscape to its former capabilities. Imported from Elk Island Provincial Park in the 1990s and studied over several years in partnership with the Fort McKay First Nation, the continued survival of bison serves as a testament to the success of reclamation techniques (Pauls 92). Images of them "roaming" can be found in news articles, promotional material, corporate websites, and petroturfing (see, for example, Figs 1 and 2 below). Like reclamation in general, however, moving past the promotional curtain reveals bison to be a reminder of the fundamentally *constructed* nature of these landscapes and, indeed, their inhabitants. In attempts to establish "equivalent land capability"—a notably *human* metric—through a recreation of wilderness vis-à-vis scientific knowledges and technologies, efforts to reclaim damaged landscapes require significant, continuous human inputs while carrying on the extractive legacy of enclosure into its post-extractive state. Writing for the *CIM Bulletin* in 1999 in the wake of the five year study on the viability of bison survival in Syncrude's reclamation project, R.W. Pauls underscores the ways in which the bison are managed as *captive* animals. "Because the project area is in the heart of a large industrial operation and within range of diseased bison straying from Wood Buffalo National Park," he writes "the herd has been managed as a captive, ranched herd" (92). Like the managed flora in recreated landscapes that culminate in "pretty sights," the fauna sustain themselves only through human intervention and management.

It is within this context that Shukin theorizes the role of wood bison "as Syncrude's unofficial corporate mascot" (142). Through this "mascotry," Shukin argues, Syncrude enables itself "to naturalize the denatured nature and racialized labour of neo-colonial capitalism" (142).

I would, however, like to push Shukin's observations here further and suggest that while Syncrude's corporate iconography is deeply attached to both the bison and reclamation in general, as the image circulated on Facebook by the petroturfing group Oil Sands Strong demonstrates (see Figs 1 and 2), restricting the discursive power of the image of the wood bison to Syncrude alone overlooks the ways in which reclamation projects serve the aim of positively framing the oil sands in *general*. Indeed, in the wake of Stephen Harper's national agenda to establish Canada as an energy superpower (discussed in detail in Chapter 3), it is clear that the oil sands operate as an ideological totality beyond the sum of its individual corporate parts. Petroturfing, which sees no allegiance to a particular energy company but instead to the oil sands as a project in the collective national interest, is evidence of this understanding.

Figure 3: Image shared on the OilSands Strong Facebook page.
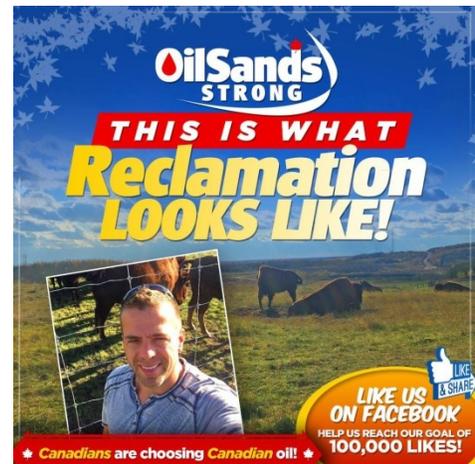
Figure 4: Image shared on OilSands Strong Facebook page.

Tours of the oil sands, a promotional venture in themselves, reinforce the significant role that the wood bison play in the reclamation imaginary as testaments to its success. In this space the Romantic tourist gaze collides with its extractive mirror-image. Describing her experiences during a tour of this reclamation site, Shannon Walsh quotes a Newfoundlander guide in the opening pages of her article "The Smell of Money: Alberta's Tar Sands": "As long as the buffalo

can live here, anything can live here" (Walsh 117). Shukin confirms the role of the bison when discussing her own tour, pointing out that "the promise of environmental reclamation will be mediated at both the first and last stop on the tour by a charged animal sign: endangered wood bison" (151-152). If wood bison serve as a synecdoche of reclamation's success as a living barometer through which to gauge the health of a given reclamation ecosystem, the prognosis remains an uncertain one. A 2015 article by the Canadian Press for *Global News* reports the death of several bison after an anthrax outbreak. "Three bison from Syncrude's herd in the oilsands have tested positive for anthrax" (n.p.). While anthrax is a naturally occurring disease in free-roaming North American bison and is a threat to their conservation (see New et al.), it is worth repeating that the bison at Gateway Hill are not free-roaming, they are captive.

Despite the issues related to anthrax, the population of bison has grown since their introduction. A 2018 *CBC News* article written on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Syncrude's introduction of the wood bison celebrates, among other things, the boom in wood bison population from 30 in 1993 to 300 in 2018. Chief Jim Boucher is quoted in the article, stating that "[t]he herd's growth represents the success of Syncrude's oilsands reclamation" (Thurton), but his overall observations are notably less than celebratory in relation to reclamation efforts in general. "The numbers are very disappointing to look at currently," Boucher said. "I think we need to do a lot more reclamation to demonstrate to the world that we have the ability to reclaim the land" (qtd. in Thurton). A header title of the article is telling—"Bison an example for future oilsand reclamation" (Thurton). Rhetorically embedded in much reclamation discourse are gestures to a future where reclamation is a smooth process. Present rent contracts that allow the continued expansion of the oil sands, which require companies to sign off on the clause of returning the land to "equivalent land capability," continue to treat reclamation as if it was an

already well-established process. As Natural Resources Canada confidently reminds us, "[o]nce

mining is complete in these areas, all of the land will be reclaimed" (NRC). Yet the fact that in

2018 only 1.04 square kilometres of the total 895 square kilometres disturbed since mining

began in 1967 (Government of Alberta "Facts")[99] has been certified reclaimed reveals the hard

limits of reclamation technologies today, which are further compounded by the vast temporalities

in which oil sands projects operate in the first place. These vast temporalities aid in the

obfuscation of possibilities for reclamation that work in favour of industry, since projects are

estimated to have a duration range beyond the years that the oil sands have been operational.

　　Reclamation is a complex process in both a material and cultural sense, which is in part

why I have chosen to spend so many pages theorizing it and engaging its promotion in a chapter

not solely dedicated to reclamation and in a dissertation that primarily hones in on one particular

kind of promotional oil sands discourse. As an extractive discursive practice, petroturfing

decontextualizes reclamation from these broader political, economic, cultural and material

processes that shape reclamation and the environmental imaginary of the oil sands in general in

an effort to champion industry efforts that have been by most accounts extremely

underwhelming. More recent petroturfing efforts uncritically gesture to the process of

reclamation in a way that suggests reclamation technologies are at an adequate stage to reclaim

all disturbed land. Indeed, the celebratory images above from Oil Sands Strong reveal as much.

But this emphasis on reclamation has always been a fundamental mobilizing point for

petroturfing since the launch of the Ethical Oil campaign. In *Ethical Oil*, Ezra Levant reassures

readers that land disturbed from mining "will be reclaimed once the oil is pumped out" since

"it's the law in Alberta" (4). An EthicalOil.org blog post makes a similar gesture as it cites and

celebrates how much Syncrude has invested in reclamation. "Syncrude, for instance," the blog

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[99] These statistics are based on numbers from 2013. As of 2018, no new sites have been certified.

post reads, "has spent billions of dollars 'reclaiming' over 1,000 hectares of mined land since 2005" (Alykhan "Mythbusting"), which equates dollars spent to land restored. It is arguably unsurprising that industry and petroturf groups celebrate the process of reclamation technologies as rent lease contracts themselves figure reclamation as an already possible venture throughout the entirety of disturbed areas, yet the limits to current and future technologies haunt these celebratory impulses.

Enclosure and containment serve as key words for the entire process of oil sands production in present and future, including its post-extractive state as reclaimed land. The three theses on reclamation that make up this chapter tell us as much in a larger sense, but so too does the promotional material produced and circulated (largely online) by industry and petroturf groups. Referencing the final stop on her tour of the oil sands, Nicole Shukin discusses the vision of the future that Syncrude offers through its reclamation projects. In this prospective future, Shukin sees the maintenance of capitalist forms and processes that shape extractive landscapes in post-extractive landscapes as well. "Real estate and recreational tourism are the two prospects Syncrude envisions for its reclaimed mine sites, prospects which pledge the land to renewed 'health' within affluent white cultures of capital," she writes ("Animal" 167). And within this dynamic the (econo-)metrics of equivalent land capability become all the more clear:

> Global capital's fatal treatments of leased Aboriginal lands arguably forecloses the possibility of any return to use-value (trapping, hunting) … Ruined for anything but re-capitalization as recreational destination or 'lakefront property,' what oil sands capital promises to return to Aboriginal people in the region is the death of nature as use-value and the future of nature as exchange-value. ("Animal" 167)

Use-values are forever depleted, while exchange-values are forever valorized and extraction as both an abstract and material process persists—this is the future on offer, founded on the same relations of the present.

David Harvey's theorization of what he calls the "new imperialism" re-theorizes Marx's concept of primitive accumulation by extending it beyond Marx's understanding of primitive accumulation as an originary pre-capitalist stage; this new imperialism functions through a process of what he calls "accumulation by dispossession," which provides further theoretical elaboration alongside Shukin's observations here as Indigenous peoples' ways of life are *forever* enclosed in the initial stages of enclosure and extraction. These processes are, in my view, irreversible, and the persistent result of, in Shukin's words, re-capitalization is in part a testament to this fact. Understanding reclamation sites as a continuation of extractivist logics and processes rather than a reversal is important. And the ways in which reclamation is signified through petroturfing and other promotional means provide a framework from which to approach other oil sands environmental technologies since they serve the same symbolic and material purpose: to mitigate, however minutely, ecologically deleterious effects of extraction at the site of extraction and in doing so reframe bitumen—technologically and ecologically—as a source of energy for the *future* and in doing so foreclose or delay possibilities for transition.

Thesis Three: Reclamation is The Symbiosis of Science and Petro-Capital(ism)

Drawing attention to the aims of particular modes of ecology raises a crucial question: who, and what, does reclamation *serve*? In *In Catastrophic Times*, Isabelle Stengers names those who serve capital and, simultaneously, the destruction of the planet by deploying their knowledge— including financiers, scientists, politicians, and so on—as our "guardians" (29-34). There is a productive overlap between Stengers' idea of guardians and Marx's notion of general intellect, a

term from the *Grundrisse* that describes the ways in which knowledge is deployed as a force to reproduce capital, operating as a kind of immaterial productive force. Through general intellect, Marx predicted the hegemonic role of knowledge as a productive force in the maintenance and reproduction of capitalism that serves the advanced stages of postindustrial capitalism, a stage of capitalism fuelled by the types of energy intensification that fossil fuels arguably make possible.[100] In the case of reclamation projects, the knowledge deployed by "our guardians" as a kind of general intellect establishes the *perceived* possibility for a reconciliation of the contradictions of petro-capitalism. In other words, we can sustain our current fossil-fuelled energy culture by leveraging science as general intellect to superficially eradicate the metabolic rift. We need no longer worry, as the story goes, about the destruction of landscapes, about anthropogenic climate change, and so on, when our petrocultural guardians can mitigate these mere symptoms with "new ideas."

The role of science in oil sands reclamation and in the maintenance, expansion, and reproduction of petrocultures reveals the ways in which these dominant modes—science and (petro-)capitalism—often function symbiotically. Stengers's guardians name this pervasive and problematic relationship between benefactors of capitalism and its supporters (including some scientists) by collapsing seemingly heterogeneous factions of capital into a homogenous group based on a single, shared, and constitutive effect: the self-justified furthering of the interests of capital, of extractivism, and of ecological destruction well into the twenty-first century and beyond.

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[100] This historical process of energy intensification is termed by political economists of energy as "energy deepening" (see Beaudreau 1999). In "Energyscapes, Architecture, and the Expanded Field of Postindustrial Philosophy," Jeff Diamanti explores the relationship between energy deepening and the shift to postindustrial modes of economic organization, claiming that energy deepening is "a crucial component of what [Rosalind] Krauss called the 'root cause' of postmodernism" (2016).

Consider the Land Reclamation program, offered as a major of Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Conservation Sciences through the University of Alberta's Faculty of Agricultural, Life, and Environmental Sciences. The University of Alberta, located in Edmonton, has a close historical relationship with the emergence of the oil sands as a viable site of (profitable) extraction, having pioneered many of the technologies currently in use in the oil sands. According to the University of Alberta's, a potential career for graduates of the Land Reclamation major is "reclamation specialist" ("Bachelor"). ECO Canada, a professional resource whose aim and tagline is to "build the world's leading environmental workforce" ("About Us | ECO Canada") describes the career of a reclamation specialist, featuring a profile of a "role model" who points out that "a reclamation specialist's role is 'to create a win-win-win scenario, where industry, the environment, and landowners all win'" ("Reclamation Specialist"). But, as I have argued above, such a scenario remains extremely uncertain, especially in the case of natural landscapes returned to "crown land" after successful reclamation. Such a process forms the dialectic of bitumen extraction: exhausting a landscape's resources on one end while superficially reconstructing them on the other, providing the appearance of a reconciliation of the metabolic rift. It is an error, then, to view reclamation projects like Gateway Hill as a kind of post-extractive procedure that absolves us of ecological responsibility; instead, it is more accurate to view such reclamation projects as akin to other infrastructures necessitated by energy deepening, such as Onkalo, a nuclear waste storage site featured in Michael Madsen's 2010 documentary *Into Eternity: A Film for the Future*, which is 5 kilometres long and 500 metres deep, and must remain undisturbed for 100,000 years. Oil sands reclamation and long-term nuclear waste storage, it follows, are two ends of a spectrum that ties energy to issues of representation. While reclamation hopes to represent the possibilities for the real-time absorption

of the externalities of petro-capital, Madsen's film makes clear the full extent of the problem

through the hyperbolic temporal scale necessitated by nuclear waste storage. Both face the same

conceptual and temporal limits at differing scales. Such projects are a prominent yet under-

theorized aspect of our collective energy unconscious as they bury the unseemly and indeed

dangerous by-products of increasingly intensified energy deepening and of the demands of our

collective energy cultures.

Reclamation is only one aspect of petroturfing's environmental imaginary, but the

rhetorics that underpin petroturfing's engagement with it serve as a concentrated site from which

to glean the larger environmental imaginaries at work in the oil sands during and after the

extraction process, particularly in terms of environmental technologies framed as panacea for the

ecological contradictions of petroculture. As Chapter IV demonstrates, the environment more

generally figures into petroturfing and other oil sands promotional discourses, especially from

politicians, in relation to the economy. The two are often invoked together in this way to gesture

towards the tensions and rifts between economy and environment that, as the narrative claims,

environmentalists underscore and take as an organizing principle. Ethical Oil's 2014 tweet

sharing a *Huffington Post* blog post written by Janet Holder, the former project lead of

Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline, summarizes a common gesture in its title: "Northern

Gateway Will Create Jobs While Protecting the Environment" (@Ethical_Oil). Justin Trudeau

reproduced this talking point when he pointed out in a town hall while announcing the approval

of the Line 3 pipeline expansion that environment and economy can work together hand in hand

(Harrison 2017). There is, however, a pervading sense that while it may be unfair to suggest that

environment (or, indeed, nature) is not considered at all in oil sands production, it remains an

afterthought—something to be considered *after* economy if it cannot be folded into the economic

apparatus entirely. Much of the promotional material surrounding reclamation confirms this, as discourses of innovation are mobilized as a means to reconcile material environmental contradictions and tensions of oil sands production. These discourses of innovation are often also mobilized through a strong nationalist rhetoric that manifests in gestures to Canada's strict environmental regulations. As Ethical Oil puts it, Canada "maintains world class environmental standards and regulations" (Ellerton 2012) and is a place where "peace and democracy are promoted and environmental standards and regulations are strictly enforced" (2011).

In this way, the nation and a form of nationalism as a rhetorical mode are also crucial and constitutive vectors through which petroturfing's environmental imaginary is expressed. Canada's image as an environmentally friendly nation—part of its global social and cultural capital—is mobilized as a means to promote Canadian oil. Canada Action, for instance, explicitly equates an increase in production of energy from Canada with a positive, global ecological impact in a 2017 Facebook post. "Oil, natural gas, uranium and hydro-electricity that's made in Canada," the post reads, "is a tremendous opportunity for our families while also being a positive for the global environment" (2017). Attached to a photograph of a lake and the Rocky Mountains with a woman in the foreground wearing an "I Love Oil Sands" sweatshirt (see Chapter III)—visually suggesting that one can both appreciate nature and also support Canadian oil (Takach's romantic/extractive gaze re-appears)—the captioned text calls on users with a patriotic bravado to "be proud" and to be "be vocal." Petroturfing and other promotional oil sands media view the negative environmental impacts of the production and consumption not as material consequences inherent to the fossil economy (the kinds of petro-violence discussed in Chapter IV) but primarily as a problem of *discursive framing*.

In a *CBC News* opinion piece entitled "Branding Canadian oil green would be good for industry and for climate change," Don Pittis makes a blunt case for the greenwashing of Canadian oil as a means to increase its international appeal and, in turn, increase its capacity. Echoing the ethical capitalist discourses of fair trade leveraged by petroturf figureheads such as Ezra Levant (Ethical Oil) and Cody Battershill (Canada Action), Pittis writes that *branding* Canadian oil as green "could also mean that environmentally minded consumers around the world might be willing to buy more Canadian oil — a *prestige product* at a premium price — increasing sales overall while displacing less environmentally produced crude from the marketplace" (2017, emphasis added). Pittis' article is telling: fossil capital is so entrenched in the political economy of Canada that the distinction between *branding*, naming Canadian oil as green, and *doing* becomes increasingly muddled. Pittis recognizes the potentials of contradiction by directly invoking greenwashing while speaking to the limits of branding rather than acting: "branding alone — like BP's attempt at greenwashing — is not enough" (2017). Yet, in speculating on strategies to "green" Canadian oil—including increasing transparency on behalf of industry for independent investigations akin to fisheries supervised by the Marine Stewardship Council—Pittis suggests that market-based interventions, such as Alberta's carbon tax, indicate that Canada is well on its way to establishing the pre-conditions for greening its oil. These interventions take place within the narrow confines of the market, reproducing neoliberal tenets and, like the neoliberal environmentalism at the roots of reclamation, Pittis' proposals are *mitigation* and *remediation* primarily for petro-capital, not environment.

Petroturfing's ecological imaginary arguably mirrors the oil industry's ecological imaginary writ large, as instrumentalized understandings of nature form the basis through which environment is figured and, in turn, technologies that (minimally) mitigate the vast negative

ecological impacts of the production and consumption of oil are valorized, celebrated and promoted as viable solutions to the ongoing, intensifying climate crisis. In November of 2013, Ethical Oil tweeted a *Financial Post* article examining the formation of Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance (COSIA), which the article's author Claudia Cattaneo identifies as "the biggest effort of environmental self-improvement on the planet" (Ethical_Oil 2013), which *directly* mirror's Berman's description of the oil sands as "the single largest and most destructive industrial project on earth" (n.p.). As its title, "COSIA: Some progress made in environmental innovation, but breakthroughs will come later," suggests, the article contains a critical edge, pointing out that its "aspirations are lofty" (2013). COSIA aims

> to produce oil with lower greenhouse gas emissions than other oil sources, to transform
>
> tailings from waste into a resource that speeds land and water reclamation, to produce
>
> energy with no adverse impact on water, and to restore land disturbed by development
>
> and preserve biodiversity of plants and animals. (2013)

Cattaneo points out that, at the time of writing this article some two years after COSIA began operations, "anyone expecting major breakthroughs — or even hard targets — will have to wait a little longer" (2013). A 2014 tweet from Ethical Oil links to a more favourable assessment, a *Wall Street Journal* article by Chester Dawson that describes COSIA as a "technology-sharing partnership" between research and development departments of 14 energy producers brought together "in an effort to reduce the environmental impact of oil sands production" (2014). The article's subtitle makes clear the extent of the level of innovation being celebrated: "Cosia Commits to Reducing Fresh-Water Use at *Some* Operations" (Ethical_Oil 2014-10-27 22:59:45, emphasis added).

While Dawson does celebrate initiatives, he is careful to include some criticisms. In writing that, for instance, "Cosia's toughest issue by far is dealing with highly controversial wastes known as tailings, a byproduct of surface mining when bitumen, or heavy oil, is separated from clay, sand and silt," Dawson does not entirely overlook the scale and severity of the oil sands' damaged landscapes (2014). "Toxic waste ponds have become a magnet for critics," he elaborates, "who say they are an eyesore and dangerous to migratory wildlife" (Dawson 2014). Tailings ponds once again enter as a foil to the celebrated environmental mitigation technologies being developed—and for good reason since as of this writing no tailings pond has been certified reclaimed or looks to be in the near (or, indeed, far off) future—but Dawson's rhetoric ultimately serves to undermine the scale, severity, and uncertainty surrounding the persistent and ever growing problem of tailings ponds. By suggesting that the aesthetics of tailings ponds are the *primary* concern of critics and casting doubt towards critics by underscoring that they merely "say" tailings pond are a risk in the ways they factually are, the article casts aside scientific consensus.

More work is needed to understand the full impacts of tailings ponds (see Chapter IV), but many of their impacts are well-known and well documented. Jodi McNeill, a policy analyst with the Pembina Institute, points out that, among other things, there is evidence of the possibility of leakage and the ponds also emit air pollutants, including "volatile organic compounds (VOCs), greenhouse gases, hydrogen sulphide and nitrous oxides" ("Oilsands Tailings"). The aesthetic question, one that pervades reclamation discourse, does not adequately capture the degree of environmental problems that tailings ponds pose and celebration of COSIA's early-stage developments (served up as fodder for petroturfing's environmental imaginary) remains premature.

CAPP's "Energy Tomorrow" campaign pushes this techno-scientific mitigation logic to its limits as a means to sustain further extraction while deflecting criticisms by suggesting that environmentally friendly oil is within the industry's reach. Like the "Energy Citizens" campaign (see Chapter III), Energy Tomorrow's website is structured with profiles of scientists and others who are "changing the future of Canadian energy," such as Jessica, who is "building forests and wetlands to reclaim mined lands;" Anne, who "is capturing and storing carbon to keep it out of our atmosphere;" or Neal, who "is using light oil and steam to reduce greenhouse gases" ("Energy Tomorrow"). Images of each "Innovator" sitting on a couch next to their spouse or parent are laid out on the front page, linking to an interview hosted on YouTube that begins with spouses or parents being asked to describe what the Innovator does for a living. Alongside these videos are detailed descriptions each of the Innovator's particular technology that emphasize how these technologies are addressing ecological issues faced during and after extraction. Jessica's profile, for instance, discusses the ongoing Sandhill Fen reclamation project, a fen wetland built on top of reclaimed tailings. Anne's profile describes efforts to perfect carbon capture and storage technologies wherein carbon dioxide is injected and stored two kilometers underground. The write-up naturalizes the process by equating it with geological processes, stating that "[t]he carbon dioxide is trapped in a porous layer beneath multiple layers of rock and salt, just like oil, gas and CO2 have been naturally trapped in geological formations for millions of years" ("Jessica"). Neal's profile describes Solvent-Assisted Steam-Assisted Gravity Drainage (SA-SAGD), an extraction process that adds a solvent containing light oil to the conventional Steam-Assisted Gravity Drainage process developed in the 1970s for accessing deposits too far underground to reach through mining. SA-SAGD "can help make oil extraction more energy efficient, use less water and reduce greenhouse gas emissions" ("Neal").

These profiles and the technologies they describe serve two key purposes that form the foundational aims of the Energy Tomorrow campaign. First, the profile format *humanizes* the technologies and, in turn, companies, by establishing an explicit primary connection between the technologies in development and the human "Innovators" involved in their development. Users are compelled to associate an individual (and their spouse or parent) with what, in some cases, may seem like dispassionate, sterile scientific work. Second, the profiles emphasize the necessity of developing these technologies by reminding users of the central role that oil plays now and, pointing out that "fossil fuels [are] expected to supply the majority of the world's energy needs in the coming decades" ("Anne"), in the projected future. What ultimately emerges from the campaign is another variant of petro-capitalist realism premised on a particular vision of our energy future that encloses possibility, persistently reminding us of how we will remain reliant on fossil fuels now and in the future. While there is a breadth of technologies in development highlighted in the campaign, virtually every initiative assumes an increase in fossil fuel consumption. Energy Tomorrow, then, is indistinguishable from energy today, save for monitoring and mitigation technologies working behind the scenes during the life and afterlife of extraction. A *cynical* vision of the future is on offer here—one still fueled by the burning of fossil fuels where the most radical interventions on offer are those that simply mitigate its ecological impacts and are unquestionably bound to the maintenance and reproduction of petro-capitalism.

While these technologies serve as material means through which to sustain and reproduce petroculture in a time when the deleterious effects of the production and consumption of fossil fuels are increasingly clear, the promotional efforts from petroturf groups and other entities such as CAPP serve as symbolic means to do the same. Alongside citations of Canada's strict

environmental laws, discourses of innovation are used to reframe Canadian oil as technologically advanced on the one hand and environmentally friendly on the other. In framing Canadian oil this techno-utopian way, petroturfing refines bitumen from its origins as an ugly, heavy, tar-like substance into a fuel suitable for the future. The environment thus serves as a site through which to reconfigure Canadian oil not as the dirty oil it was once considered to be but rather the *green* oil that Pittis and others suggest Canadian oil can be.

Conclusion

In reclamation, nature is simultaneously recast in terms of a material and aesthetic exchange value where "pretty sights" and potential forestry and logging capacities operate as metrics from which to judge its success. The OED has a number of definitions for reclamation, including: "a reassertion of a relationship or connection with something; a re-evaluation of a term, concept, etc., in a more positive or suitable way" (OED). Indeed, reclamation is a reassertion of a particular relationship between the human and nonhuman, one which asserts a techno-scientific mastery masqueraded as stewardship. Global anthropogenic climate change encapsulated in the concept of the Anthropocene is premised on a recognition of the ways in which *all* landscapes are now human-altered ones. Reclamation projects like Gateway Hill can thus be rendered as manufactured and artificial, as human-constructed and perhaps no different than an office building in any given metropolis. After all, both sustain and reproduce a form of capital that in turn sustains the social life that bitumen extraction enables.

I have previously tended to view reclamation projects like Gateway Hill in terms of Freud's uncanny and Baudrillard's simulacra (Kinder 2013). These frameworks, however, have limits based on how they describe the effect and phenomenological experience of reclamation

rather than explain what reclamation *does* on an economic, ecological, and indeed social level. Mobilizing the myth of our technological ability to rebuild damaged landscapes to "equivalent land capability," reclamation is a re-inscription of settler-colonialist behaviours that see land as something to be managed, another form of primitive accumulation that Glen Coulthard, building on Harvey, argues has been fundamental to historical and ongoing processes of colonization (12). As "new ideas" inoculate discourses of ecological destruction—geo-engineering is now "climate remediation," fossil fuel companies are now "energy" companies, pipelines are now "energy projects"[101]—questions about the possibilities of a post-carbon energy future are made visible at the level of language, discourse, and culture more broadly. The three theses on the material, aesthetic, and technological dimensions of reclamation in this chapter show that rather than function as climate or ecological "remediation," the techno-utopian processes embodied in reclamation are instead a kind of (petro)capital remediation—attempts to mitigate the ever-intensifying contradictions of petroculture and petro-capital by continuing the extractive legacy into the allegedly post-extractive context. The tripartite line of argumentation I take here provides the theoretical context from which to demonstrate petroturfing's treatment of reclamation and the broader oil sands environmental imaginary as furthering this same goal of remediating petro-capital under a veneer of post-extractive environmental progressivism.

If nature, as petroturfing and indeed the Canadian petroscape more generally understands it, is equal parts economistic, technocratic, and Romantic, which is all filtered through a constructivist lens that sees humans as the prime agent in shaping (or not shaping) nature as such, this vision is wholly consistent with the neoliberal perspectives of the economic and social found in the previous two chapters. This is not a novel argument and it finds its echoes in the

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[101] In the time that I have been working on this dissertation, the Government of Alberta's website url for information on the oil sands has switched from "oilsands.alberta.ca" to "energy.alberta.ca".

work of Gordon, Takach, and others. The privileging of the human in this way is ideologically bound to contemporary neoliberal theories of how humans function in the world as rational actors. Privileging nonhumans, after all, is precisely what Alex Epstein claims is fundamental to environmentalist thought, and environmentalist critiques of fossil fuels are in turn *anti-human* understandings of energy. In summarizing what he views as the problem with the ways that energy is typically conceived, Epstein writes that a "more subtle popular framing of our energy thinking is that it is largely *anti-human*" (4). If we aim to "maximiz[e] human flourishing instead of minimiz[e] human impact, and if we look at the whole picture of our energy choices instead of being biased, then there is an overwhelming moral case *for* fossil fuels," Epstein argues (5). Of course, the leaps in logic that must occur as a precondition to these kinds of arguments are numerous, not the least of which is a convenient lack of attention to the ways in which increased production and consumption of fossil fuels affect the climate and impede the "flourishing" of the planet. Nevertheless, Epstein's musings demonstrate the tension between the anthropocentrism of economic logics of extraction and the flourishing of the nonhuman environment.

Although certified reclaimed land, of which Gateway Hill is our only example to date, is officially returned to the state as crown land as the final and constitutive part of that certification process, its continued maintenance does not rest entirely on the state. This makes immediate logistical sense considering that reclaimed land now and in the future will be embedded in landscapes alongside active oil sands operations, but the consequences of this arrangement are worth briefly exploring here. The power relations at work in the management of the landscape and the bison that live on it rely on the very same kinds of paternalisms found in discourse surrounding industry relations with Indigenous peoples in general (see Chapter IV) wherein extractivist projects are made legitimate through superficial acts of inclusion. Shukin describes

the semiotic dynamics at work when using the bison as a master signifier of the ecological dimensions of the oil sands. "Communicating with the public via an endangered animal sign popularly perceived as synonymous with Aboriginal life," she writes, "Syncrude can avoid racist discourse *per se*—and on the contrary cast itself as a postcolonial corporation attuned to the need to preserve Indigenous culture and to encourage First Nations self-determination—while simultaneously insinuating an essentialist discourse of Aboriginality with a fixed, subordinate relation to white cultures of capital" (153-154). These semiotic processes develop at the material level as academic commentary, news discourse, and promotional material gestures towards the fact that the wood bison at Gateway Hill are maintained by the Fort McKay First Nation.

Petroturfing is an extractive practice at a cultural level that mirrors the material process of extraction that it promotes, and its post-environmentalist underpinnings discussed in this chapter only further this point. Taken together, the ways in which the environment is understood and engaged as resource from its extractive to post-extractive states creates conditions wherein oil sands ecologies remains in control of industry and its proponents, including petroturf groups. The tension between economy and environment, where the former is privileged in the latter, finds its self-parody in testimony from the Northern Gateway Joint Review Panel, where the audience was told that "[s]ome businesses in northern B.C. could benefit from an oil spill" (James). Such an understanding of energy not only reveals the limits of purely technological solutions to the ever-intensifying climate crisis, but also lays bare the necessary foundations for building a post-carbon energy future based on just social and ecological relations. These just social and ecological relations certainly cannot be achieved without science, but not a science that is implicitly and explicitly subservient to capital. Instead, such a transition will be achieved

with a science that is in service *to* species-beings and ecologies rather than markets, and *for* a

commons rather than enclosures.

Conclusion

Whither Petroturfing?

Writing in the wake of the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the United States of America and

his decision to, among other things, appoint Rex Tillerson, a former CEO of ExxonMobil and

all-around fossil fuel champion, as a Secretary of State, Andreas Malm argues that the continued,

intensifying consumption and production of fossil fuels well into the twenty-first century is all

but a certainty. "Through the election of Donald Trump," he writes, "this particular fraction of

the capitalist class—call it primitive fossil capital—has gained direct control of the most

powerful state in world history" (93). "Whether the Trump saga ends with a bang or a whimper,

it has already demonstrated one thing conclusively: in the second decade of the twenty-first

century, primitive fossil capital is *nowhere near becoming a marginalised force*" (93-94,

emphasis original). But heads of state who show unwavering support for the continued expansion

of the fossil economy need not demonstrate their allegiance to the fossil economy in such a base

manner so as to elicit the label of "primitive." In early 2018, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

declared of Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain expansion: "That pipeline is going to get built"

(qtd. in Hall and Renouf 2018). About a day before Trudeau's statements, a barge sunk in Howe

Sound, near Vancouver and in Squamish Nation territory, spilling diesel "where orca whales

were seen in recent days" (Hatch 2018). Not long after these events, Alberta Premier Rachel

Notley announced a province-wide ban on the importation of British Columbian wine due to

B.C. Premier John Horgan's stance on Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain expansion. The ban

lasted little over two weeks—a spectacle that makes equivalent the trade of wine and the trade of

oil. Call this *slick* fossil capital, and "alongside" its primitive counterpart, it runs deep in the

twenty-first century. Yet, as I have shown throughout *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*, despite fossil capital running deep in our material and cultural present, petroturfing takes as its constitutive organizing principle a position of marginalization, constructing a space through which to leverage the cultural capital of being the "underdog" in support of an already dominant position, namely, neoliberal extractivism. To create the appearance of the conditions of marginalization, petroturfing situates itself on the far end of the tripartite discursive power spectrum of discourse (petro-capitalism), counter-discourse (oppositional viewpoints), counter-counter-discourse (petroturfing).

Petroturfing, however, has not necessarily been effective in its aims depending on what we take those aims to be. It arguably has not captured the cultural dimensions of Canada's energy imaginary in the same way that the "dirty oil" campaign has or to the degree that the economic and infrastructural base has and continues to be captured by petro-capital and the production and consumption of fossil fuels in general. As discussed at several points throughout the dissertation, many of the groups have followers on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in numbers in the thousands at most and many have not produced content in several years or have, as in the case of British Columbians for Prosperity, which has gone completely dark, actively pulling all of their content off the web. Regardless of the success of petroturfing in these ways—one can view the increase in production of oil sands oil as a form of success—this first era of petroturfing (2010-2015) demonstrates a particular way that Canadian oil is intentionally acculturated in a world that is clearly and increasingly facing the consequences of the past 150 years or so of burning fossil fuels, experiencing what Malm has termed as "the heat of this ongoing past" (*Progress* 5). Perhaps most importantly, there has been measurable success in the broader adoption of the petroturfing lexicon in significant policy-

making spaces, such as in Canadian Parliamentary debates. Ethical oil and its subsidiary lines of argumentation may very well have become "common sense" in the same way that petro-capitalist realism uncritically underpins the Western imaginary. In Chapter II, I drew attention to Ethical Oil patriarch Ezra Levant's 2010 visit to Parliament and the relative ease in which the ethical oil arguments have come to find their way into political discourse. These are not isolated episodes relegated to the golden era of petroturfing, but continue to rise to the surface from seeming dormancy.

In late March of 2017, Cody Battershill, Founder and Spokesperson of the petroturf group Canada Action and its subsidiary Oil Sands Action, gave an impassioned speech in defense of Canadian oil. In it, he emphasized the importance of acculturating Canadian oil through promotional means:

> We need a zero-tolerance policy from the government, and from all levels of government and all of our elected officials, against misinformation and inaccurate reporting that undermine the good work we're doing on the environment, on technology, and on research and development. It doesn't matter what *we do if we don't tell the story properly*.
> ("Natural Resources Committee on March," emphasis added)

Battershill's speech is a kind of condensed utterance of petroturfing's fundamental tenets. He demonstrates, for instance, an allegiance to a particular kind of fact that he implicitly suggests, through the use of "we," the state and industry have sole access to (being "against misinformation and inaccurate reporting"). More importantly, he highlights the necessity of disseminating dominant Canadian petronarratives ("tell[ing] the story properly") while implicitly suggesting this framing is *equally if not more important* than doing that "good work … on the environment, on technology, and on research and development" ("Natural Resources Committee

on March"). This brief statement is a kind of brief petroturfing manifesto—it does not matter what actually occurs "on the ground," the logic suggests, but instead how it is framed and circulated.

The "good work" Battershill gestures towards here anticipates the trajectory of *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics*, which structures itself primarily on the benefits and promises on offer from Canadian petro-capital according to its proponents at the levels of economy, society, and environment. But the *content* of petroturfing is markedly less important than its *form*—this observation is a central tenet to the account and critique of petroturfing on offer in this dissertation. The *form* of petroturfing is one of a process of legitimation through circulation that structurally mimics environmental organizations such as Greenpeace by claiming grassroots origins and disseminating narratives and calls to action through venues such as social media, conventional news media, and staged demonstrations. The claim to grassroots status is fundamental here as it creates an appearance of distance from industry and government that is necessary when claiming the kinds of democratic and "bottom-up" qualities that are leveraged in petroturfing's over-emphasis on the citizen as a political force and, indeed, its claims to representing the viewpoints of those citizens. These discursive acts end up legitimating petroturfing's form as grassroots. This is what separates petroturfing from, for instance, conventional lobbying groups such as CAPP (although I understand some of their campaigning, particularly the Energy Citizens campaign, to be a form of petroturfing), allowing the very same dominant petro-narratives to be disseminated in a different media environment, through a different subject-position, and in a different context.

In this way, petroturfing has, to a degree, served its purpose and fulfilled its aims through the process of legitimation through circulation, a process that will become increasingly important

in other contexts in an age premised upon an "attention economy" (e.g., Davenport and Beck

2001) in a "post-Truth world" (e.g., McIntyre 2018) that operates through "regimes of posttruth"

(Harsin 2). Along with being provided a platform in parliament that creates the conditions for

normalization of petroturfing narratives, Cody Battershill was also lauded for his promotion of

the oil sands by Conservative MP Kelly McCauley during the Statements by Members period on

May 2nd of 2017. McCauley used his allotted minute to "recognize Cody Battershill, a dedicated

supporter of Alberta's job-creating oil sands and founder of Canada Action, which runs

grassroots campaigns in support of Canada's energy and resource sectors" ("Debates"). "Cody,"

McCauley continues, "has spent over $100,000 of his own money to fight misinformation on

Alberta's oil sands and to educate people about the importance of our natural resource industry"

("Debates"). And "[u]nlike the Prime Minister, who wants to phase out the oil sands," McCauley

declares his "love" for the oil sands and that he "stand[s] with Cody" ("Debates"). Whether these

ideas penetrate mainstream public consciousness in Canada arguably remains to be seen, but

episodes such as these from within Parliament show that petroturfing has had a very real impact

on shaping conventional political discourse. Due to the self-styling of petroturf groups as

grassroots organizations, politicians who gesture towards these groups in turn claim

representation of *citizens* (rather than industry), despite fundamental overlaps in rhetorical modes

and narrative content.

      Petroturfing, this dissertation has argued, is an extractive practice. Like the material

process of extraction it supports and aims to reproduce, petroturfing is a form of *enclosure*.

Whereas oil sands extraction encloses land and environments, transforming the land into a value-

producing commodity, petroturfing aims to foreclose the possibilities of imagining and desiring a

transition to a world beyond fossil fuels. It does so by imbuing Canadian oil with positive

characteristics and disseminating petro-capitalist realism. Citing, for instance, Canada's status as a liberal, parliamentary democracy, its formal equality of genders, or the stringency of its environmental regulations, petroturfing equates the production and consumption of Canadian oil with these political, socio-legal, and environmental-legal characteristics and calls on users to participate in celebrating Canadian oil through these vectors.

The chapters that comprise this dissertation do three things to map the cultural politics of petroturfing in particular and Canadian oil in the twenty-first century more generally. First, I provided an account of the cultural and material politics of energy and communication today. Examining the relation between energy and communication establishes an historical and material context from which to approach the conditions that make petroturfing possible—extractive conditions. After developing this account, I turned to the ideological-historical conditions that make petroturfing possible by developing a genealogy of petroturfing to reveal it as a reactionary counter-counter discourse. In the final three chapters I closely examined *how* petroturfing performs this position by leveraging the perceived economic, social, and environmental benefits of oil extraction in Canada through the contemporary mediascape. In doing this, I ultimately show that petroturfing serves as an important site from which to examine the ways in which oil is consciously and unconsciously given meaning in the twenty-first century at a time when our collective relation to oil needs to be urgently and consistently put under question and scrutiny.

The waning of content production and circulation from once-prominent groups such as Ethical Oil or the full closure and removal of content from those such as British Columbians for Prosperity signal a shift in possibilities for the future of petroturfing, but not its disappearance. Whither petroturfing? Alex Epstein, who I have referred to as Ezra Levant's American counterpart, seems to have successfully repackaged petroturfing into a sharp communicative tool

through which to invite broader publics into industry-fueled narratives by arguing that fossil fuels make life better for humans and that is all we should be concerned with as humans. Appearing in a host of social media-savvy venues to promote this viewpoint, the "moral" case for fossil fuels seems to be gaining traction. Epstein has appeared in talks for Google, TEDx, and given a host of keynote addresses at various forums. He offers his services to deliver talks to industry and has hinted in his email newsletters that his book, *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels*, will be sold throughout the country in a chain of gas stations. The work that a subset of those on the Corporate Mapping Project, who are looking into the use of Facebook groups to promote oil sands developments, suggests a shift in petroturfing from aiming to influence politicians and convince broader populations of the benefits of pipelines and other oil sands developments to aggressively campaigning among an already convinced public who share a worldview that is equal parts neoliberal economism, alt-right politics, and racism.

The Facebook pages Oil Sands Strong (@OilSandsStrong), Rally 4 Resources – The Movement (@rallyforresources), and the Committee for Proud Alberta Fair Trade Oil (@albertafairtradeoil) are a few examples of these efforts, producing content such as memes for circulation or organizing real-world demonstrations in support of the Trans Mountain expansion project (Mertz 2018). In Grande Prairie, on December 16th of 2018, the groups Oilfield Dads and Rally 4 Resources organized a 1,500 person strong demonstration in support of oil and gas development. The demonstration involved "a convoy of more than 600 vehicles" "to tell Canadians and their political leaders that the oil and gas industry needs their support" (CBC News 2018). The Energy Citizens twitter page tweeted the event: "CONVOY!!! Grande Prairie in support of oil and gas!!!" (2018). The convergence of old and new forms of petroturfing reveal a coalition of pro-oil activists attempting to enclose the possibilities of a future beyond oil.

So, while Ethical Oil's homepage is stagnant to the point of being hacked by a group offering essay writing services, an increasingly sophisticated and effective pro-oil movement in Canada seems to be on the horizon, a movement made possible by the kinds of efforts that this dissertation examines.

Moreover, this shift is indicative of the state of the politics of social media as I write this, a time when, for instance, anxieties over foreign influence over elections through social media dominate the North American liberal imaginary.[102] The social mediascape of today is fundamentally different than it was in the early days of petroturfing, and jumping from well-produced YouTube videos featuring characters undecided on the question surrounding oil sands developments to aggressive, divisive, and minimalistic content reflects this shift. If petroturfing is a means to intentionally delay energy transition by using existing media structures and contexts to further embed petro-capitalist realism within the Canadian imaginary, from "below" rather than "above," then it simultaneously illustrates the limits of social media as a space for supporting political movements that challenge business as usual. As another instance of "communicative capitalism," petroturfing further deepens the stronghold of the fossil economy by assuming an underdog position and associating extractivism with ethics, which points to, among other things I argue in this dissertation, the fundamental poverty of discourses of ethics in late capitalism. Yet, the dynamics of the current mediascape suggest if these reactionary conditions are possible, so too is another Internet, another energy system, and, indeed, another world. To begin building towards such a future we must account for these limits, as *Liquid Ethics, Fluid Politics* does, in order to move beyond them.

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[102] See, for instance, the *New York Times* coverage of "Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election" as a "news event" ("Russian Hacking").

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