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Environment, Communication and Democracy: Framing Alberta's Bitumen Extraction Onscreen

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Environment, Communication and Democracy:

Framing Alberta's Bitumen Extraction Onscreen

by

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Abstract

This study in environmental communication addresses links among land, natural resources and people in a world shaped increasingly by global economic forces and pervaded by the power of pictures. Hosting what has been called the world's largest industrial project, the bituminous ('tar'/'oil') sands, Alberta has become an epicentre of the clash between economic growth mandated by extractive capitalism and its unsustainable ecological costs. A high-stakes, international public-relations battle has emerged, with independent filmmakers producing documentary films challenging Albertans' environmental stewardship, and government and industry producing advocacy videos defending it. Situating this negotiation of Alberta's place-identity in a discourse beginning in 2004—the year the US deemed the extraction of the sands to be economically viable—this study is inspired theoretically by the Canadian critical tradition, notably extensions of Innis' ideas on communications into environmental studies, and methodologically by arts-based research (re)presenting diversities and complexities of voice, nuances of character and potential affect on audiences that would be diminished in conventional scholarly prose. Thus, this study proceeds in three phases: interviews with commissioning and creative principals of the films/videos; a critical visual framing analysis of that work, focusing on its creators' positioning of Alberta and broader cultural, political and economic forces at work; and a synthesis and (re)presentation of my findings in a script for a hybridized documentary film. Five conclusions emerging from this study are: (1) place in a globally-recognized, resource-based economy is positioned and contested largely in response to events and to representations of that place originating *beyond its borders;*

(2) in representing resource extraction and its effects, visual strategies focus on both the macro and the micro; (3) visual omissions or denials can be as significant in environmental discourse as explicit representations; (4) producers of films/videos use a wide spectrum of frames ranging from anthropocentric (e.g. *denial, progress, money)* to ecocentric *(e.g. eco-justice, present-minded, ecocide);* and (5) the significant costs, production time and distribution challenges of producing and exhibiting documentary films professionally favour presenting generalizations and drama over nuanced details in addressing complex issues like environmental concerns about resource extraction.

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If land is indeed the pivot of earth and world, then the manner in which it figures into art … will always be revealing: it will present our experience of the natural or built environment to us in novel and suggestive ways that bear instructively on how we are to manage our life on earth. In this sense all art … [is] environmental.

— Edward S. Casey (2004, 269)

Communication can be the very model of democracy, or the very method of its subversion.

— Gregory J. Shepherd and Eric W. Rothenbuhler (2001, x)

Chapter 1: The Problem

1.1 Situating the field of study

As both a subfield within the discipline of communications studies and a meta-field cutting across diverse disciplines, environmental communication aims to understand, explain and improve the relationship between nature and humans (Milstein 2009; Cox 2013). How we communicate about nature not only reveals some of our most profound values (Cronon 1995; Corbett 2006), but also shapes the natural world itself. In a society in which meaning is shared increasingly through images (Mirzoeff 2009; Banks 2007), more than merely communicating information, images of the environment involve the power to define our relationship with nature and our actions towards it (Hansen 2010). This becomes especially important in an age in which the progress narrative that has fuelled extractive capitalism (economic development founded on removing and exploiting the Earth's natural resources) clashes with concerns over its ecological costs, which are now seen as unsustainable (e.g. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007; Suzuki 2010; McKibben 2012a). This study in environmental communication focuses on contested visual representations of place in resource-based economies. My case study uses critical theory, narrative research, visual framing analysis and arts-based methods to present conflicting views of Alberta produced in documentary films and advocacy videos in the context of what has been called the world's largest industrial project (Leahy 2006), the bituminous sands in the boreal forest in northeastern Alberta.

1.2 Mapping this work

This dissertation can be divided into two parts. The first part presents the study's foundations, stating the problem (Chapter 1), reviewing three bodies of literature

supporting this study (Chapters 2–4), explaining my research methods (Chapter 5) and presenting the context for my data and analysis (Chapter 6). The second part provides discussion of my data and an initial analysis (Chapter 7), its synthesis in an arts-based format, a script (Chapter 8), and concluding reflections (Chapter 9).

Within the first part, this first chapter, titled "The Problem," outlines the context of my inquiry, situating the subject of the case study, Alberta, at the forefront of public-relations battles and contestations of place-identity amid rising tensions around economic development and environmental protection in a global, arguably ocularcentric society. Also, the chapter identifies my background for addressing the problem, the goals of my study, support for it in the literature, and the research questions to be answered here.

Chapter 2, "Critical Theory, Place and Identity," examines how a critical theoretical approach—specifically that of Harold Innis as extended by current scholars—helps us to understand place-identity in resource-based economies. Here 'place-identity' is defined as a constructed, "unique essence" of a place, comprising its social and symbolic capital, and capable of representing it in a "coherent, convincing and comprehensive rhetoric" (Campelo, Aitken and Gnoth 2011, 3)

Chapter 3, "Environmental Communication and Visual Representations of Place," examines how notions of place have been understood and applied visually in environmental communication.

Chapter 4, "Arts-Based Research and the Environment," examines the potential for arts-based research to engage the subfield of environmental communication. Here 'arts-based research' means "the systematic use of the artistic process… as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they

involve in their studies" (McNiff 2008, 29).

Chapter 5, "Research Methods," explains and justifies my methodological choices of narrative inquiry, visual framing analysis and arts-based research.

Chapter 6, "Context: Images and Frames of Alberta and the Sands," provides background for my case study, highlighting visuality generally and visual representations of Alberta and resource development in particular, along with an initial survey of frames through which that topic has been positioned in the public sphere.

The second part of this dissertation starts with Chapter 7, "Positioning and Contesting Alberta," presenting recent extensions of the visual discourse contextualized in Chapter 6, as gleaned from my interviews with its exponents (independent filmmakers as well as commissioners of videos in government and industry), and cross-referencing framing strategies apparent in the films/videos themselves.

Chapter 8, "Tarred and Feathered," presents findings from my interviews and my analysis and synthesis of the films/videos studied here as a creative work, a script for a hybridized documentary film, grounded in practices of arts-based research.

Chapter 9, "Reflections," comments on my results as well as on the processes precipitating them, along with notes on the work's limitations and potential contribution to the field of communication studies, followed by my suggestions for further research.

1.3 Context of inquiry

The study of place has become an interdisciplinary focus for research in recent decades (Cresswell 2004) because we understand place as "a primary basis for real human experience—a deeply metaphysical factor with practiced and expressive consequences" (McCready 2010, 44). The profound connection between place and identity has been

explored by philosophers—as in Casey's fixing place as the source of "identity, character, nuance, history" (1997, xiii) and land as "the inner frame for all outgoing and ongoing perception, a basis for personal as well as public identities," and also the foundation for creating art (2004, 269)—and by artists themselves, as in Carpenter's lyric, "But as you let your eyes adjust/ to the darkness deep within/ sifting through this ash and dust/ we are the places that we've been" (2012).

Representing *place-identity*—that is, constructing a unique sense or essence of a place comprising its social and symbolic capital and expressing it in "a coherent, convincing and comprehensive rhetoric" (Campelo, Aitken and Gnoth 2011, 3)—is relevant here for four reasons. First, rather than minimizing national, regional or local identities, globalization has arguably reemphasized the importance of defining and marketing place-identities, given the rising competition for human, physical and financial resources (Dittmer 2010). Second, because place-identity boosts citizens' confidence through a greater sense of belonging and a clear self-concept, it involves issues of power (van Ham 2010a)—the power to set norms and standards to determine what is socially acceptable and desirable; as such, representing place-identity can become an instrument of maintaining political and economic hegemony (van Ham 2010b). Third, place-identity may be the strongest link between a collective culture and a sense of individual and group agency that can help engage citizens politically on issues of public importance (Dahlgren 2009), such as environmental concerns. Finally, given the significant role of the natural landscape in producing place-identity (Vorkinn and Riese 2001), the latter can reflect citizens' relationship to their environment, thereby revealing some of their deepest values as a collectivity, expressed on spectra such as utilitarianism or ecocentricism (Corbett

2006), technological or moral imperatives (R.D. Francis 2009), liberal individualism/ ethno-nationalism or harmony with nature (König 2005b), and societal and media biases towards space or time (Innis 2008). These aspects of place-identity prioritize their importance in political discourse, and thus attract the protective interest of the state. This may explain why states defend their constructed place-identities from attack, alongside corporate actors with vested interests in maintaining those identities.

Questions of place-identity, power, public engagement and axiology converge with the escalating ecological costs of extractive capitalism. A growing ecological consciousness contesting the dominant, progress narrative has arisen over recent decades, exemplified in landmarks of popular culture such as *Silent Spring* (1962), Rachel Carson's seminal study of the dangers of using pesticide; the iconic *Earthrise*, the first colour photograph of the planet, taken by William Anders (1968) from lunar orbit aboard Apollo 8; the observance of Earth Day beginning on April 22, 1970 (Earth Day Network n.d.); the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Al Gore—the author of various books (e.g. [1992] 2006a, 2006b) and most famously, the subject of a documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim 2006)—for their work in raising public awareness of the impact of climate change and the need to counteract it (Nobel Prize 2007); and the emergence of Bill McKibben's "creative activist" group, 350.org, as a global phenomenon (350.org n.d.; Dutton 2012).

This consciousness has further politicized dealings among nations, regions and even within regions, as jurisdictions position themselves for ongoing political and economic gain while grappling with dystopian forecasts of the future of the Earth, and the life that it supports, should existing industrial and consumptive patterns continue

unabated. An exemplary case, and the subject of this study, is Alberta, site of the bituminous sands, the world's third-largest recoverable source of oil (Alberta 2012a) and according to some, the world's largest industrial project (Leahy 2006) and the largest such project in history (Davidson and Gismondi 2011). Even its terminology is contested: longstanding residents often use 'tar sands', as do prominent critics of the project (e.g. Greenpeace Canada 2012), while the Government of Alberta and the oil industry adopted the cleaner-sounding 'oil sands' after extraction began commercially in the 1960s (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2012a; Dembicki 2011), with proponents of development and/or the status quo following suit. The latter seems to be exemplified by the *Edmonton Journal'*s refusal to print one writer's op-ed pieces using 'tar sands' (Gibson 2011) and the *Calgary Herald's* branding that term "loaded and inaccurate" and "part of the propaganda lexicon for radical environmentalists" (*Calgary Herald* 2011, A10). Others, including "industry old-timers" (CBC Radio 2009) use both terms interchangeably, in lieu of the more scientifically accurate but colloquially bulky 'bituminous sands' (Clark and Blair 1927). For simplicity and scholarly neutrality, I will use the term 'sands' throughout this report to describe the resource and/or the related industrial project.

Reflecting these polarities, the sands has become a focal point in the ongoing debate over the costs and benefits of resource extraction (Holden 2013) as well as a site for contesting Alberta's identity (Gismondi and Davidson 2012) and even Canada's identity (Nikiforuk 2010). A public-relations or *place-branding* battle has erupted in Alberta. On one side are advocates of the dominant agenda that critics have come to call Neoliberalism, which gained international prominence under Ronald Reagan in the US

and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, and privileges market imperatives as the primary basis for organizing public affairs and particularly the economy; this agenda is epitomized by the Alberta government's no-holds-barred approach to exploiting the sands. On the other side of the battle are citizens at home and abroad with concerns about the devastating ecological impacts of the sands. A favoured weapon in this battle is images, evidenced in productions such as the province's rebranding campaign trumpeting its pristine scenery (Alberta 2009), documentary films critical of the sands project (e.g. Radford 2008; S. Walsh 2009a; Iwerks 2009) and critical online videos created abroad to build international resistance to it (Corporate Ethics International 2010; Dick 2012). In an economy shaped increasingly by global forces, Alberta's place-identity and representations of its citizens' core values are fiercely contested—a struggle exacerbated by an anti-democratic tradition manifested in the province changing governments only thrice since 1905 (Elections Alberta 2007, 2010; Election Almanac 2012) and consistently recording the lowest voter turnouts in Canada (Stewart and Carty 2006; CBC News 2008a; Elections Alberta 2010).

All of this raises multifaceted questions. How do creators of conflicting representations of a place engage people and assert the veracity of their claims? What perspectives can be identified in the use of visual representations of place by dominant and dissenting interests in a resource-based economy? What do these representations reveal about citizens' relationship to the natural landscape, and ultimately to each other as a society? And what cultural, political, economic and other forces underlie it all?

We can use this case to see how identity is produced through communication (Warren 1999), and to reveal and reflect those processes in a format aimed at, and

hopefully conducive to, engaging, resonating with and inspiring people to critical thought, engagement and action on ecological concerns around projects like the sands. To that end, and in an effort to transcend the bifurcated, polarizing and (for critics of Alberta's course of extraction) paralyzing status quo of the current discourse on the sands, I use an arts-based approach, which provides a humanistic and potentially affective and impactful complement to traditional social-science research. Arts-based research "sees the material outcomes of practice as all-important representations of research findings in their own right" (Haseman 2006, 106). Thus, the presentation of my results is fuelled by:

- an arts-based approach, offering tools for intervention, advocacy and change, aimed at boosting public engagement and offering emancipatory potential for interests underserved by the prevailing political agenda (Knowles and Cole 2008);
- the potential of humour, and specifically satire, to "serve as an antidote to alienation" and "set off a subversive chain reaction that unites an audience in collective protest against the stifling social and political forces of our times" (R. Jenkins 1994, 208); and
- beyond a desire to give voice to under-represented interests in the dialogue around Alberta's values and identity, an overarching commitment to engaging in, and inspiring, a debate that is *not* framed by a neoliberal agenda or a social movement.

Uniting these models is a critical approach, which emphasizes unfair practices of dominant interests in society and seeks to change them. I accept Couldry's (2010)

assertion that Neoliberalism—particularly as practised by the economic and political rulers of Alberta today—is anti-democratic in its underlying sacrifice of critical thought on the altar of market supremacy in all social, economic and cultural matters. Thus, I believe that allowing different, public voices to emerge is fundamental not only in a democracy, but especially when the well-being of all life on the planet may be at stake.

To promote the emergence of these voices, this study will examine how place-identity is contested and produced in Alberta in the context of extracting the sands, from diverse viewpoints and interests. I will probe the outlooks, motivations, communications strategies and environmental values of key participants in documentary films and advocacy videos about the province through personal interviews; analyze a purposive sample of those productions and the frames through which their creators position Alberta; and analyze, synthesize, create and present the results in an arts-based format embracing elements of a script for a documentary film or TV program, a stage play, creative non-fiction and comedy. Documentary film is pivotal to this inquiry, in terms of both my data and its presentation. It straddles the ideals of the social sciences and the aesthetics of art and entertainment, raising questions about the political or ideological nature of the form as research, the extent of its criticality of society's power relations and dominant institutions, discourses and embedded cultural assumptions; as a way of creating knowledge, the documentary is grounded firmly in the qualitative research tradition, drawing on interviews (popular in social research), narrated explanations and transitions (mirroring the context, analysis, argument and sequencing in scholarly articles) and archival footage (deployed by anthropologists, historians and others) (Wayne 2008).

1.4 Prior foundations

This study builds on my longstanding fascination with my home province (Takach 1992) and my professional work over the years as a speechwriter for the public, private and volunteer sectors, and as a performing comedian. This fascination was escalated to inspiration by the work of van Herk (2001), resulting in my further explorations of Alberta's identity and its representations, expressed in articles (e.g. Takach 2009a, 2009c, 2012a, 2013a), a one-hour documentary film for television (2009b), two short 'festival' films (2008a, 2008b), a university-press book (2010), a live performance (2011), a stage play in progress (2012b) and a short documentary film for an art-gallery exhibition (2013b). I see Alberta as a fascinating, frustrating, hyperbolic Janus: "aggravating, awful, awkward, awesome" (van Herk 2001, 1), a place of dazzling initiative and innovation on the one hand, and of disturbing, systemic neglect of underprivileged citizens, democracy and nature on the other.

Hosting what may be history's largest single-site industrial project, centred as it is on feeding our society's spiralling addiction to fossil fuels—and the escalating and potentially disastrous ecological consequences—has two key communicative effects. It makes Alberta not only a proverbial canary in the bitumen mine for the future of the Earth, but also a leading, international symbol of how human activities, and particularly the untrammelled extraction and consumption of the planet's resources, affect the precious natural systems that enable all life. This view of the tensions at work around the world in general and in Alberta in particular has underscored both my scholarship and my work in recent years. However, it comes with a significant caution. Being drawn to dualistic, either/or perspectives, on which much of the irony and satire in my work turn,

and which underscored my first career as a practising lawyer, I am reminded of my duty as a scholar to challenge that binary mindset, and to be reflexive both theoretically and methodologically. Thus, I approach this study on the understanding that place-identity is expressed by diverse interests and forces in a continuing, complex and polyphonic communicative struggle for voice and social power.

1.5 Research goals

In striving for a scholarly approach to a highly polarized, emotionally-charged public issue, this study aims:

- to explore and express how producers of documentary films and advocacy videos use visual media to propagate and contest representations of place-identity in a resource-based economy;
- to provide a critical case study in place branding, centred on a global flashpoint among the growing tensions of seeking to accommodate economic, ecological and other goals; and
- to develop an arts-based model of public engagement in environmental issues which includes the use of humour, among other techniques.

As for tangible outcomes, this work seeks to provide insight, critique and analysis that might invite reflection (and perhaps even action) on responsive and responsible environmental policy in Alberta and beyond. Ultimately, this study seeks to advance knowledge, dialogue and action on lessons that sites of resource-based economies offer to the rest of the country and the world.

1.6 Research questions

Thus, my primary research question is: *how is Alberta positioned and contested in film and video that negotiate environmental issues concerning resource extraction?*

In this question:

- "film and video" means documentary films and advocacy video vignettes about Alberta, produced and/or screened professionally by documentary filmmakers and professional communicators in the context of exploiting the province's bituminous sands, and placed in the public forum through theatrical release, film-festival screening, television or digital media since 2004;
- "environmental issues" means concerns over the health of the Earth's air, water, land, natural ecosystems and living organisms, and the consequences to nature and human society of negotiating those issues.

My secondary research questions are:

- How do producers of conflicting representations of a place frame that place through visual strategies to advance their claims?
- Who do such representations serve and with what aims?
- Who has resisted them and why?
- What social, political, economic or other forces shape the visual discourse of identity in a resource-based economy?

- What do representations of a jurisdiction's place-identity reveal about its citizens' relationship to the natural landscape, and ultimately to each other as a society and to the wider world?

Chapter 2: Critical Theory, Place and Identity

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation of my study by addressing how a critical theoretical approach—building on the work of Harold Innis as extended by current scholars—helps us to understand place-identity in resource-based economies.

2.1 Critical theory

Rooted in the rhetorical tradition and Marxist critique, 'critical theory' commonly refers to a tradition established by scholars at the Frankfurt School in the 1920s in opposition to the modernist, objectivist thought predominant in the Western world (Stamps 1995) and more specifically to the 'administrative' school of predominantly quantitative, 'scientific' research in communication, funded by institutions to measure and improve the reach and impact of media, exemplified in the work of the American sociologist, Paul Lazarsfeld (Hamilton 2010). Although the Frankfurt School never consolidated an approach to criticizing culture or capitalism, critical scholars out of the 1960s "came to view their disciplines as manifestations of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical context that produced them," in seeking to propagate "a more egalitarian and democratic social order" in which people can gain more freedom and agency in their lives (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011, 287–288).

As Kincheloe and McLaren observe, critical theory is never unified, always in a flux, resistant to definitive pronouncements of socio-political and epistemological outlooks, and a matter of subjective interpretation. They suggest an approach to a critical social theory that accepts that societies always privilege some groups over others, and then focuses on the ensuing power struggles, identifying how they operate and who are

privileged and marginalized as a result; this approach transcends Marxist economic determinism to embrace multiple forms of power (e.g. based on race, gender, sexual orientation or geography) and incorporates Gramsci's (1992) notion of dominant interests getting their way not merely by physical force, but also by gaining public consent through cultural institutions such as popular media.

Thus, the critical tradition sees communication as "discursive reflection […] on assumptions that may be distorted by unexamined habits, ideological beliefs and relations of power" (Craig and Muller 2007, 425). In exploring how to develop a more democratic public sphere in late capitalist societies, Nancy Fraser (1990) calls on critical theory to expose how public decision-making is compromised by social inequality; how such inequality affects division, empowerment and dealings among publics; how deeming some issues and interests 'private' reduces public debate; and how weak public spheres neuter the notion of public opinion. From a communications standpoint, weak public spheres find apt illustration in industrial society, where the master narrative of progress privileges instrumental or technological rationality to the point that ideas not adjudged to be efficient are seen as irrational and impractical (Ellul 1964), or even contrary to one's national identity, epitomized in the failed American vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, declaring that refusing to "drill, baby, drill" is "un-American" (BBC News, 2010).

Critical theory considers concepts like identity, democracy and participation as it "exposes hidden social mechanisms that distort human communication and supports political efforts to resist the power of those mechanisms" (Craig and Muller 2005, 425). Critical theory's goals include curing the split between "the naïve realism of positivism and the tendency toward relativism characteristic of the qualitative paradigm generally

and the methodologies of the 'linguistic turn' specifically" (Wayne 2008, 94). Thus, critical research "takes on the 'big issues'" such as "Who controls the media? How can media be used by a greater diversity of people? How do we negotiate our roles within and between social groups through practices of communication?" (Hamilton 2010, 12). As Slack and Allor (1983) point out, in critical communications research, "The effectivity of communication is traced in the interactions of systems of representations and the negotiations over social meaning embedded in the practice of everyday life" (216).

In distinguishing critical research from the more dominant tradition of administrative research, Lazarsfeld states that the former "seems to imply ideas of basic human values according to which all actual or desired effects should be appraised" ([1941] 2004, 169). Prominent among such values are social justice and freedoms of thought, communication and participation in a democratic, pluralistic society (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011). Yet scholars warn against distilling complex epistemological and political differences to oversimplified binaries like 'administrative' versus 'critical:' for example, critical theory embraces diverse approaches, such as political economy, ethnography, Marxist sociology, semiotics and cultural studies (Slack and Allor 1983).

Proponents and critics of critical theory agree that critical communication research is hardly objective, being shaped by the researcher's values in, for example, choosing and approaching research questions; however, critical researchers make the same argument for administrative research, which is also based on values (e.g. truth, objectivity, science, utility), but does not acknowledge them (Hamilton 2010). Critical research understands its political function and seeks to produce social critique aimed at improving the world rather than 'objective' knowledge aimed at knowing it better

(Hamilton 2010). Rather than "cling to the guardrail of neutrality," critical researchers "frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world" (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011, 300). In advancing that approach, Lincoln and Denzin (2011) cite a broader turn to social justice that they see as profoundly changing qualitative research itself. That turn, while challenged by advocates for a more traditional, non-activist role for the academy (e.g. Fish 2008), is echoed, for example, in the call for more critical research in visual studies (Bal 2003; Pink 2003; Dikovitskaya 2005; Rose 2012).

Foundations of critical theory are deeply embedded in the tradition of communications studies in this country. As Canada lies on the margins of the American juggernaut—be it politically, economically, culturally or academically—our communications scholarship has been seen as working from a critical base, in opposition to the dominant, so-called 'administrative' tradition in the US. As Babe ([2000c] 2011) observes, five "foundational" Canadian theorists whom he ranks as our country's foremost scholars in the humanities and social sciences in the 20th century—Harold Innis, George Grant, Marshall McLuhan, C.B. Macpherson and Northrup Frye—"are virtually univocal in their condemnation of the market as the chief means of organizing human activity, and by implication, of subordinating communication systems to commercial concerns" because "[t]he price system and the ensuing concerns for economic power and efficiency […] tend to wipe out the ethic of community" (212).

Coupling this notion of community, characteristic of Innis' communication thesis (e.g. [1950] 2007, 2008), with McLuhan's ([1962] 2011) call to examine the "cultural ecology"—defined by Babe as the communicational environment—Babe notes the commoditization of communication and reads at least an implicit call from those five

foundational theorists to become more "critically aware" so that we may "interpret matters differently" and then bring "greater balance not only to our interpretations but also to our actions" ([2000c] 2011, 212). He urges us to "free ourselves from the power of professional communicators who do not necessarily use the media to promote the common good," observing that such resistance will make us freer (Babe 2000a, 11).

Yet Hamilton reminds scholars not to accept critical inquiry *uncritically*, that is, not to assume our own criticality, but to reflect on the premises of critical theory rather than "dated and problematic distinctions between critical and administrative research" (2010, 23), and appreciate prior scholarship, but always while imagining a better world and pursuing new scholarly paths to its realization. That the merits of critical theory continue to be debated hotly speaks to its ongoing relevance (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011), particularly in an age in which prevailing neoliberal discourses naturalize globalized, capitalism and the primacy of the market, while denying not merely dissenting voices, but also voice as both a value and a process (Couldry 2010).

2.2 Innis and extensions

Acknowledged as the first and foremost of the communications theorists (Carey 1975; Blondheim 2004), the forerunner of the new school of Canadian political economy (Watkins 2006) and "Canada's first internationally recognized postcolonial intellectual" (Watson 2006, 3), Harold Innis (1894–1952) was not a *critical* theorist per se. Rather, he was a historian whose work embraces primarily political economy and then communications, and in transcending any single discipline, transgresses traditional academic paths in his era (Melody 1981). Yet his and McLuhan's variation of the 'negative dialectics' advanced by the Frankfurt School are said to have created a

singularly Canadian, media-based version of critical theory (Stamps 1995), although the extent to which it has inspired a unique body of scholarship has been seen as more difficult to discern (Robinson 2000).

Certainly Innis' antipathy to interests whose dominance created societal imbalances, exploitation and wars seem congruent with the aims of critical theory. Such a reading is bolstered by Innis' valorizing balance in the state of political and economic affairs (e.g. in observing that "civilizations can survive only through a concern with their limitations" ([1950] 2007, 22) and in placing "fundamental importance to the future of civilization that universities take the lead in adopting a neutral position" (1981, 47)); by his ability to envision the world from the periphery of power (e.g. in concluding that Western Canada paid the price for Canada's nationhood ([1923] 1971)); and even by the title of his seminal biography by Watson (2006), *Marginal Man*. Indeed, this self-described "dirt economist" (Innis 1936)—possibly in reference to his focus on material, social and political in addition to economic issues (Babe 2004, 2008), another hallmark of critical theory—warned against "American imperialism in all its attractive guises" (Innis 1952, 20); travelled to Russia and saw communism as a useful counterweight against the rampant commercialism of Western capitalism (Innis 1981); and believed that power impedes intellectual progress and destroys free thinking (Innis 1946).

Innis' earlier work, exemplified in his expression of the staples thesis of Canadian economic development, positions the control and exploitation of the hinterland by the metropolitan centre, as in Canada's subservience to Britain (Innis [1930] 1999, [1940] 1978), that of Western Canada to Central Canada (Innis [1923] 1971), or that of Canada to the US (Innis 1952, 1956). This creates a dependency (Neill 1981) in that the resource-

producing periphery is caught in what historians extending Innis' work call the "staple trap" (Paquette 2001, 628) of systems that are, first, geared to exporting rather than adding value to those resources or diversifying economically, and second, financed and controlled by foreign-owned multinational conglomerates (Barnes, Hayter and Hay 2001). In resource-based jurisdictions in which governments depend heavily on revenues from resource rents— for example, revenue from non-renewable resource royalties is forecast to constitute 19% of the provincial budget in Alberta in 2012–2013, down from an initial estimate of 28% (Alberta 2013a)—declining energy-commodity prices significantly affect government's ability to provide essential public services.

Thus, Innis' staples thesis both presages postcolonialism and echoes in contemporary studies of resource-based economies. As Barnes, Hayter and Hay (2001, 2030) point out, capitalism's insatiable demand for raw materials leads "global-cyclonic winds" to touch down at single-industry sites—in that case, a forestry town in British Columbia, but applicable writ large to the sands in Northern Alberta—creating a "maelstrom" of infrastructure to extract the resource and support its extraction, with implications far beyond the economic, as massive as the latter may be. Invoking Innis, Barnes, Hayter and Hay observe that "indelibly stamping the character of each town is the peculiar nature of the specific staple itself, which shapes the form of production, the dominant social relations, the prevailing technology, and the relationship to the environment" (2030). In a neoliberal order, natural assets like water, timber and oil are overwhelmingly seen as not only there for the taking by interests best positioned to exploit and profit from them (Singer 2010), but sometimes even as an incident of the identity of the citizens living in the jurisdiction (Whitelaw 2007). For example, Alberta's

well-known identification with oil is trumpeted in teaching resources celebrating the role of the oil and gas industries in "creating the Alberta identity" (Glenbow Museum 2006), at a 'cultural' exhibition at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC (Gauthier 2008) and in a branding campaign by the oil industry, "Alberta Is Energy" (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2010b).

Innis' incomplete later work, epitomized in his communication thesis (Innis [1950] 2007, 2008, [2004] 1952), distinguishes between media biased in terms of time or space as a means of theorizing not only how empires rise and fall, but as an expression of their dominant societal priorities and values, or "cultural traits" (2008, 33). Innis' dialectic of space-biased and time-biased societies and media can be seen as an oscillation between, respectively, an impersonal, militaristic model in its conquest of space, and a more humanistic, religious model in its conquest of time; the former privilege the technical and scientific, the secular and the exigencies of the present, while the latter favour tradition, community, morality and the sacred. For Innis, a strength of a time-biased society is that it cannot be monopolized, because it emphasizes dialogue—personal interaction—rather than more widespread communication that permits monopolies of knowledge leading to the spread of political authority and imbalances in power and wealth. He declares his own bias towards the oral tradition (exemplified in ancient Greek civilization) rather than its mechanized successor, and also "the necessity of recapturing something of its spirit" in the face of the rising space-biased ways of Western society (2008, 190). Thus, he finds that "the balance between time and space has been seriously disturbed with disastrous consequences to Western civilization" (76),

cautions that empires begin to fall when that balance is lost, and calls for a corrective revival of the oral tradition by way of scholarly dialogue.

Although Innis' scholarship is commonly bifurcated into his staples and communication theses—even if Babe (2000b) carves out an earlier phase marked by Innis' history of the Canadian Pacific Railway—the two theses have been linked. Heyer (2003) points to commonalities in their subject matter (e.g. pulp and paper as staples become newspapers and books as media of communication, both empowering those who control them) and more deeply, a nexus in viewing staples as communication media which are either time-binding or space-binding. Natural resources "become media of communication by creating environments for services and disservices that transform their users" and thus "shape the history of empires" (Nevitt 1982, 100). McLuhan (1960) agrees, positioning staples or natural resources as communication media due to their informational power to affect human thought and behaviour. And Innis' definition of media extends to organizations, technologies and institutions (re)creating knowledge, power and wealth (Comor 1994), which would certainly encompass the apparatus surrounding the exploitation of staples like the sands. Finally, Babe (2004) links the two theses in equating control over staples in Innis' earlier writings to monopolies of knowledge in his later work, and also in viewing changes in staples as precipitating changes in political economic control in diverse empires.

Thus, Innis' oeuvre can be read as a career-long anatomy of power (R.D. Francis 2000) focusing on the use of technology, broadly defined (R.D. Francis 2009); as a critique of modernity and imperialism (Stamps 1995); and as a study of the power structures and the organization of relations between the population core and the periphery

of a place, along the axes of space and time (Acland 1999). His concerns remain pertinent, given the perilous impact of untrammelled resource extraction on the economy, accelerating the staple trap and thus a jurisdiction's dependency on non-renewable resources, external capital, global markets and commodity prices for the livelihood of its citizens. But even more ominously, the swath of neoliberal policies of extractive capitalism threatens to wreak further havoc, if not devastation, on our social fabric (Harrison 2005*;* Gibson 2012; Taft, McMillan and Jahangir 2012), democracy (Taft 1997; Friedman 2006; Nikiforuk 2010), freedoms (Heinberg 2005; Greer 2009; Nikiforuk 2012a) and ecological future (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007; Hatch and Price 2008). In addressing how Innis' work can help us understand place-identity, we must situate the latter in the broader body of scholarship on place itself.

2.3 Place and place-identity

Just as history, a key disciplinary resource for Innis, was the intellectual foundation of the 19th century, so might our era be seen to embrace a spatial turn, as "[p]lace is understood as a primary basis for real human experience. […] It is how people know the world about them, and it frames their understandings of how best to engage that world" (McCready 2010, 44). For example, cultural studies has shifted from studying representation in texts towards analyzing communication "as a technological and spatial process with its own meanings in specific locations" (Berland 2009, 65). Berland finds Innis' key contribution to cultural history to be his positioning communication and transportation technologies—shaped by commercial and geopolitical contexts—as essential to forming spatial configurations and hierarchies of political and economic power, through the ongoing production of centres and margins. As such, "place is not just a thing in the world, but a

way of understanding the world" (Cresswell 2004, 11), both an ideological construct and a site for power struggles (Cresswell 1996).

Thus a pronounced social constructionist view prevails in many writings on place, and the rapidly multiplying literature on sense of place often combines aspects of the physical environment, human behaviours and social and/or psychological processes; however, empirical research has insufficiently addressed the role of the physical environment, not as a determinant of, but as a contributor to, human behaviour (Stedman 2003). In the field of cultural geography, Massey's (1994) conception of place as the essential integration of space and time lets us consider how a place might enable the creation of identities specific to it, given that place plays a critical role in shaping identities (Walker 2007). Walker suggests that an awareness of the role of place in the social construction of identity can increase our understanding of "mechanisms of positive social change, such as redefining the way that agency is created" (13).

All of this tells us that the existential transformation of space into place produces a relationship between people and their spatial environments. Human geographers summarize this as a sense of place, consisting of place-attachment (a positive emotional bond between individuals and their environment), place-dependence (the extent to which a setting allows people to achieve goals) and place-identity (aspects of the self, involving and reflected in people's environment and its personal and social meanings) (Hunziker, Buchecker and Hartig 2007, 51). However, in environmental psychology, for example, place-attachment is seen as an *aspect* of place-identity (Vorkinn and Riese 2001). In any case, a postmodernist perspective suggests that place-identities should not be

essentialized as singular, coherent and fixed, but rather "as nodes within ongoing processes of cultural relations" (J. Anderson 2004, 46).

Yet even as the identity of a place changes, entrenched, stereotypical perceptions can persist, especially among people without recent contact with that place (Skinner and Kubacki 2007). Critics suggest that mass tourism and the globalization of information channels beget an increasingly shallow understanding of local place-identities, leading to localities becoming "caricatures or mutant reflections of their past" (Nijman 1999, 162). However, as Campelo, Aitken and Gnoth (2011, 10) observe, "Even in a postmodern world where realities compete and are constructed through a variety of perceptions, experiences and interpretations, there is a common ground of each culture, each people and each place." Found in the shared context of spaces, groups, beliefs and behaviours forming part of the identity common to specific people living in a specific place, that common ground might be understood as what Campelo, Aitken and Gnoth call "the ethos of place: an original essence that shapes […] characterizes, and creates the uniqueness of a place…" and is based mainly on "the meanings of their social capital, that is, the way that relationships (between people and the environment) are established that shape the habitus and nurture the characteristics of that social capital" (2011, 10). As Spyce notes, "Places can become symbols of cultural identity that reflect experiential, sociopolitical, historical and cultural meanings, and link people together in a common bond with their land, their place in the world" (2009, 67–68); such symbolic links can be familial, social, economic and political; mythological, ideological, religious and moral; or defined by external influences like government authorities and community groups.

Seen from a critical perspective, such representations of community and place can seal social fissures under the glue of a singular culture, and the resulting dominant vision of the state shapes the production and dissemination of images and meanings associated with that identity (Wayne 2002). These images and meanings become a complex, evolving public discourse, and as such, an object of appropriation in the struggle for political and economic power in the state (Foucault [1977] 1998), as well as in the global marketplace (Anholt 2010). Such a discourse includes place branding, representing a favourable, shorthand image of what a place is and for what it wants to be known (Finucan 2002). This follows a long tradition of reputation management and propaganda, and belongs to a broader discourse involving public relations (van Ham 2010a).

Because the media are central in constructing and circulating representations of place through place branding (van Ham 2010a), the mediated depiction of an organization (or place) becomes the critical influence on the (de)construction of its identity, and so "practices of mediated communication do not simply disseminate a pre-existing identity, but rather, produce this identity in the course of mediation" (Chouliaraki and Morsing 2010, 3). Thus, place branding "implies a shift in political paradigms, a shift from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence," where place-identity is formed by strategic positioning rather than "romantic notions of a nation's exceptionalism and essentialism" (van Ham 2002, 252, 265).

This is a complex and political process. As Mayes (2008, 133–134) observes, place branding is "fundamentally contradictory […] riddled by the tensions between utopian claims—to each of us a place in the sun—and the pressing need for competitive differentiation as determined by 'the threat' of highly mobile capital, and the power

relations enacted in/by global capitalism and reproduced in place branding." A critical view reminds us that the idea of a place having one true identity is an essentialist construct, based on an "imagined community" (B. Anderson 2006, 6) or "imagined geography" (Shields 1991). Representing place-identity through place branding engages the critical theorist's focus on power in two ways: first, in boosting citizens' confidence through a greater sense of belonging and a clear self-concept (van Ham 2010a), and second, in setting norms and standards to determine what is socially acceptable and desirable; in either case, representing place-identity can become an instrument of maintaining political and economic hegemony (van Ham 2010b), obscuring lines of power coming from intra, inter and transnational sources (Blue 2008).

Such an approach accords with Lefébvre's argument in his influential text, *The Production of Space* ([1974] 1991): while also seeing space as a complex social construction—his focus on social space resembling the concept of place in human geography—Lefébvre views it as a site of contestation and struggle, controlled by a hegemonic capitalist class to maintain its dominance. But conversely, place-identity may also be the strongest link between a collective culture and a sense of individual and group agency that can help engage citizens politically on issues of public importance and perhaps even challenge hegemonies (Dahlgren 2009). In that vein, an 'ethics of place' has been invoked to frame environmental concerns as moral issues in radical ecological theory (Smith 2001). Finally, given the significant role of geography in producing place-identity (Vorkinn and Riese 2001), the latter can reflect citizens' relationship to their natural landscape, thereby revealing clues to some of their most profound, collective values, expressed on spectra such as technological or moral imperatives (R.D. Francis

2009), utilitarianism or ecocentricism (Corbett 2006), and, as Innis puts it, societal and media biases towards either space or time ([1950] 2007, 2008, [1952] 2004).

2.4 Conclusion: critical theory, Innis and place-identity

With its focus on studying the exercise of power and its view to improving social justice and individual freedom, critical theory provides a suitable framework to address the positioning and contesting of place in a resource-based economy. Jurisdictions that depend heavily on resource extraction for public revenue and employment for their citizens epitomize the substantial and pressing social, political, economic, cultural and environmental threats manifested under contemporary neoliberal structures. Holding a foundational rank within the critical tradition of Canadian communication studies, Innis' work in the areas of staples and communication has been extended to offer initial insights into issues such as postmodernity (Wernick 1999), globalization (Acland 1999), the rising tension between natural-resource extraction and environmentalism (Babe 2008), the shifting balance between centres and margins of power (Shields 1991; Berland 2009), and the communicative power of the Internet (Frost 2003).

In its totality, this literature can help point us to a better understanding of the evolving expression of certain collective values in a specific geographical location, a process that we can call negotiating place-identity. Innis' critical positioning of staple-based economies as dependent on and subject to external economic forces (Innis [1923] 1971), and of space-biased societies as individualistic, materialistic and present-minded (Innis 2008), seem to find an energetic exemplar in the subject of this case study. In Alberta, what may well be the world's largest industrial project continues to accelerate its stewards' mission to service the insatiable global (and especially American) addiction to

oil, despite dire warnings of the plentiful and profound dangers. Thus, analyzing film and video that position and contest Alberta in this context, as well as interviews with their creators, through a critical lens will yield insights into not only issues and forces helping to drive the creation of that work, but also into the values, motivations and passions of its creators.

Critical theory and extensions of Innis' thought also resonate with the scholarship on both environmental communication and arts-based research, as discussed below in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

Chapter 3: Environmental Communication and Visual Representations of Place

This chapter addresses how notions of place-identity can be understood and applied visually in environmental communication. Building on the critical perspective set out in Chapter 2 above, this review sequentially highlights salient, fundamental aspects of constructing the environment, media representations of environment and place, and visual representations of place in the context of environmental communication.

3.1 Constructing the environment

On the premise that our experience and emotional connection with the environment are largely a product of discourse (Cantrill and Oravec 1996; Dobrin and Morey 2009), the literature recognizes that "the way we communicate with one another about the environment powerfully affects how we perceive both it and ourselves" (Cox 2013, 2), as well as how we treat the environment itself (Hendry 2010). So we can view environmental communication as an expression of some of our most fundamental values (Cantrill and Oravec 1996). This central connection between communication and environmentalism has fuelled a foundational social and political issue since the 1960s and is "reflected in the increasing prominence and consolidation enjoyed by 'environmental communication' studies as a distinctive strand within media and communication studies generally" (Hansen 2011, 9). Hansen says studies have shifted "from traditional, narrow concerns with mainstream news coverage of environmental issues—often perceived in simple journalistic terms of balance and bias—and its influence on public opinion, towards drawing on a much richer body of theories and approaches to help understand and elucidate the broader social, political and cultural roles of environmental communication."

Most cultural critics start with the premise that how we represent nature "usually reveals as much, if not more, about our inner fears and desires than about the environment" and that nature and our inner psyche "can be regarded as coterminous, since our inner fears and desires often reflect or at least constitute in large part the 'external' environment" (Brereton 2005, 16–17). As L.M. Johnson observes, "Our response to our environment shapes our culture, determines our lifestyle, defines our identity, and sets the tone for our relationships and economies" (2009, 1); this seems especially pertinent in resource-based economies, where "understandings of 'land' also underlie the complicated dance of resource development, even the concept of 'resource,' as they are negotiated between local populations and larger socio-political and economic forces" (217). Carbaugh and Cerulli (2013) posit strong, affective links among place, identity and environmental communication. While being careful to avoid environmental determinism due to the complex array of factors involved in construing the environment, I embrace the view that our communication around the environment stems from our individual experience, geography, history and culture (Corbett 2006), but that the latter are rooted in our social relationships, reflecting human inter-subjectivity rather than so-called objective reality (Gergen 2009). For example, in Western Canada, viewed by early European visitors as vast, empty, wilderness and the world's last "Great Lone Land" (Butler 1872, v), the idea of nature as pristine and sublime became part of the region's literature and its popular consciousness. This idea was manifested in the wilderness-protection movement emerging in the 19th century. Formatively expressed in the creation of Canada's first national park in Banff in 1885, the movement endures to this day, as discussed further in Chapter 6 below.

More than merely communicating information, our messages about the environment also involve power in society, namely the ability to define our relationship with nature and what we do to it (Hansen 2010). Thus, diverse constructions and representations of the environment ideologically validate and advance perspectives on "everything from public debate about science, health and the environment to advertising and marketing of products, locations/tourist destinations, politics and business/corporate images" (Hansen 2011). A key implication of nature as a human construct is that the former is not "a pristine sanctuary" devoid of "the contaminating taint of civilization," but "a product of that civilization" (Cronon 1995, 69). While sympathetic to ecological concerns, Cronon's influential critique of the longstanding separation of people from nature has been accused of providing an argument *against* environmentalism, as that segregation grounded Romantic preservationist ideas even if, as Cronon argues, those ideas further disengage us from taking responsibility for nature (Saltmarsh 1995).

Macnaghtan and Urry (1998) remind us that nature is not a singular concept, but subject to a variety of constitutions and contestations, reflecting different values "fundamentally intertwined with dominant ideas of society"; once we accept this, they advise, "we need to address what ideas of society and of its ordering become reproduced, legitimated, excluded, validated and so on, through appeals to nature or the natural" (15). Corbett (2006) hypothesizes a broad spectrum on which we can situate, isolate and analyze values around the environment, ranging from more anthropocentric, *utilitarian* views of nature as a resource for human conquest and exploitation, through a progressively more ecocentric continuum of notions of nature as meriting *conservation* (to maximize its benefits to humans over the longest possible term, a feature of neoliberal

environmental rhetoric today (Singer 2010)), *preservation* (transcending utilitarian concerns to include scientific, ecological, aesthetic and religious uses of nature) and ultimately, a radical *transformation* of our relationships with the natural world and each other (ascribing intrinsic worth to nature and its non-human inhabitants irrespective of their benefits or costs to people (Smith 2001)).

A significant consequence of the tension among advocates of economic development and/or environmental protection is its polarizing effect. Advocates at the extreme of either position frame the conflict as a winner-take-all game with no chance for compromise, thereby alienating people situated between those poles (Boime 2008). Thus, this study will consider the panoply of perspectives along the spectrum, and the advice of Foucault (1972) not to focus on notions of accepted and excluded discourses, but to consider multiple discursive elements that can be taken up in different strategies. In this way, we may seek ways to begin to depolarize the discourses by finding common ground among them. This depolarization is central to allowing different public voices to emerge. Also, we can work to dislodge extremes by reframing that apparent conflict to get at what the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007) and others (e.g. Flannery 2010; Suzuki 2010; McKibben 2012a) identify as the *real* issue: not taking sides in a battle of black vs. white, but developing the Earth's resources in a way and at a rate that its ecosystems can physically sustain. Crucial to the ongoing debate is the concept of salvation, namely preserving the environment from destruction or preserving economic growth and people's quality of life, i.e. saving the economy from shutting down due to ecological concerns. Polarity and its extremism create this 'saviour' mentality by crediting the opposing side of the debate with the demonic power to destroy,

when in fact neither side may be all-powerful or all-destructive.

Seen through a critical lens, environmental concerns profoundly challenge the legitimacy of industrial society. As Ulrich Beck (1995) notes, where our health and security are increasingly threatened and "this 'security pact' is violated wholesale and systematically, the consensus on progress itself is consequently up for grabs" (22). On the anthropocentric end of Corbett's spectrum, the forces of globalized capitalism have excelled at commandeering environmentalist discourse to serve the dominant culture (Brereton 2005), and at asserting claims of innocent intent, especially prevalent in resource-dependent economies (Hirt 1999; Gailus 2012). On the ecocentric end of the spectrum, appeals to fear may actually alienate audiences by suggesting that an ecological problem is simply too large to bother addressing by taking individual steps (de Vries, Ruiter and Ruiter 2002), although this is debated (Brulle 2010), and care is required in either case when it comes to communicating fear or threats (Moser and Dilling 2007). Scholars have cited a particular need for ethical practice in ecological disaster areas (Cammaer 2009), and have stressed scholars' ethical responsibilities as environmental advocates (Cox 2007), beyond calling for ethical communication practices among journalists, scientists and PR professionals (Valenti 1998).

Because environmental communication is rooted in existing definitions of what the environment means, the challenge for communicators working towards a more ecocentric approach in society is to create not merely "a frame with a new language, but a comprehensive cultural framework for how we see our daily lives on the Earth" (Corbett 2006, 309; Smith 2001; Crompton 2012). Framing has proven to be a productive scaffold for analyzing environmental communication (Hansen 2010), even if it is "neither a full-

fledged theoretical paradigm, nor a coherent methodological approach" to analyzing discourse (König 2005a). Framing has been called a class of media effects, an approach, an analytical technique, a theory, a paradigm and a multi-paradigmatic research program (D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010, 2). Scholars have distinguished between Goffman's (1974) 'frame in thought' or 'individual frame', referring to an individual's cognitive comprehension of a situation, and a 'media frame' or 'frame in communication', referring to words, images and presentation styles used by a communicator (Chong and Druckman 2007a). In an oft-cited article exemplifying the latter approach, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) observe that an environmental issue will gain profile in the public sphere if it is cast in terms which accord with widely-held notions. Lakoff (2010) argues that utilitarian interests are advantaged in environmental debates because their diction—namely their framing of the issues—resonates with how people think: conservatives can rely on simple, visceral notions like development providing more jobs and nature being separate from people—notions easier to process than, say, the science of global warming. Noting that the necessary solution, political involvement, falls outside the 'environmental frame,' Lakoff suggests a simple, direct call to action for progressive counterpublics, like, "The natural world is being destroyed and it is a moral imperative to preserve and reconstitute as much of it as possible as soon as possible" (2010, 80). Also citing the moral frame, Nisbet (2010) additionally calls on scientists and journalists to recast climate change from unclear science, economic burden or apocalypse to a cultural reference point already valued and understood by people, like clean energy, green-collar jobs or public health.

However, Brulle (2010) counters that such campaigns, informed by cognitive science, rhetoric and psychology and conducted by professional communicators, may

help in the short term, but cannot precipitate the large-scale mobilization and transformation of industrial society required to address global warming because they actually reinforce existing relationships of power. Instead, Brulle calls for a new, broader-based collective social vision that engages citizens based on their enlightened self-interest as well as the long-term needs of the community. Crompton (2012) adds that 'green marketing' campaigns appealing to values of "self-enhancement" may work well on a piecemeal basis in response to specific issues, but appeals to more universalist ethics focusing on "self-transcendence values and intrinsic goals in society" (208) are needed to bring about the profound shift required for effective action on substantial and pressing environmental issues like climate change. Bortree et al (2012) advise environmental advocates to focus more on motivating individuals, and by using frames that balance the avoidance of ecological loss with the need for conservation. Beyond the anthropocentric-ecocentric polarities, these strategies advance the inclusion of different voices denied under neoliberal regimes currently holding sway in Western society (Couldry 2010).

In contrast to the foregoing discussion of the role of framing in producing specific discursive positions, the use of framing as an analytical tool aimed at generating data is addressed in Chapter 5 below.

3.2 Media representations of environment and place

The media are a public forum for competing environmental claims and also an active influence on whether and how those claims are publicly presented (Hansen 2010). Although ecological messages communicated in any single medium or format are unlikely to affect public beliefs or behaviours in a linear, direct way, Hansen argues, the media as a whole "provide an important cultural context" for the public to make sense of

the environment and related claims; so this "dynamic interaction of media, publics, politics, claims, claimants and social institutions is where we must turn to understand the processes by which […] and why some environmental claims succeed in the public sphere while others wither or fall by the wayside" (182).

Media representations of environmental issues can be seen as the outcome of a battle among different sources of news (A. Anderson 2002). Media representations of climate change are not random collages, but socially constructed "manifestations of dynamic and contested relationships between scientists, policy actors and the public" (Boykoff and Smith 2010, 216). Factors in play in media constructions of environmental issues include scientific authority; a scientific figure to package the issue in media-friendly terms; framing the issue as novel and important; visible economic inducements to act on the issue; a transnational champion to keep the issue in the public eye; and dramatization in highly visual and symbolic terms (Hannigan 2006), along with cultural resonances, public opinion and media norms (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). These and other complexities of environmental issues and media practices suggest a need for "more textured and expansive narratives" that break complex issues down to their interacting parts, and a wider range of voices to ensure more geographically and culturally diverse views and opinions, aimed at potentially "recasting the relationships between and within the realms of science, policy and civil society" (Boycoff and Smith, 2010, 216).

In that spirit, practitioners of environmental communication could consider telling stories and creating messages that, first, causally link actual actions of their specific target audience to local issues as well as to broader concerns of environmental justice which affect others, and second, give their audience clear goals, simple instructions, the

opportunity to respond and a sense of agency (Moser and Dilling 2007). Thus, "the main product of environmental and risk communication is not informed understanding as such, but the quality of the social relationship it supports, becoming a tool for communicating values and identities as much as being about the awareness, attitudes and behaviors related to the risk itself" (Heath et al 2007, 46).

Representations of the environment offer avenues into the process of forming place-identity. For example, wilderness has been essential to the Canadian imagination, "relentlessly repackaged and remarketed for domestic and foreign consumption" (E. Gilbert 2008, 65). Exemplified by Gilbert partly via the visual art of the Group of Seven, the wilderness and the North became "crucial tropes for understanding Canadian national identity when that identity was in a particularly fragile state vis-à-vis US domination" (65). For its part, Canadian cinema has positioned pristine nature and unpopulated spaces as "'Canadian' in opposition to Europe's urban historicity or America's tumultuous cityscapes" in what Melnyk (2007) calls "a synthesis of two movements—the earlier rejection/glorification of land in an oppositional binary created by the settler society in search of national identity and the resolution of that binary with a postmodern embracing of rurality and wilderness as a mythic construct rather than a pure naturalist reality" (26).

Such associations with the environment, shown in studies of ads in North America, Europe and Asia (Hansen 2010), trade on longstanding, positive pictures of nature as innocent, good and unsullied by humanity (R. Williams 1983)—views embodying the Romantic ideal of nature as sublime and venerable, in contrast to the earlier, Enlightenment view of nature as hostile and in need of taming and exploitation by people (Corbett 2006). For Hansen (2010), this "semiotic linking of a [romanticized]

view of nature with a rural past with national identity has undoubtedly been one of the most potent ideological uses in the modern age" (137).

3.3 Visuality and environmental communication

That the visual plays a key role in the social, political and cultural construction of the environment is well entrenched in the literature (Dobrin and Morey 2009), although the phenomenon itself remains relatively understudied (Lester 2010). We equate how we *see* the environment to how we understand it, make meaning from it and value it—a cultural assumption since the Enlightenment (Doyle 2009). Although the modernist connection between seeing and knowing is fractured in postmodernity, visuality remains central to postmodern thought, which views our society as ocularcentric "not simply because visual images are more and more common, nor because knowledges about the world are increasingly articulated visually, but because we interact increasingly with completely constructed visual experiences" (Rose 2012, 4 citing Mirzoeff 1998). This constitutes a sort of hyper-reality which Baudrillard (1994) calls simulacra, suggesting that we may not understand what it is that we are really seeing.

Images are hardly objective (Tagg 1993; Jamieson 2007; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), as they are mediated by their creators in their selection and composition,[1] and by viewers in their subjective perceptions. Dobrin and Morey (2009) suggest that we never see the entire picture and that in looking at images, our perceptions stem from desire, namely what we seek to consume as image. Also, images have social effects (Berger 1972; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Tagg 2009) and are significant sites to address

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[1] From an image-maker's perspective, Potter (2012) observes, "As a filmmaker, I'm always a doubter; I'm always looking for the truth behind the image. I'm quite aware of how people can be manipulated by image and how we frame our stories like magicians. I'm aware that the image is a construction."

power struggles in public discourse (Mirzoeff 2009). The effect of the media's use of images and symbols on essential public debates and decision-making on environmental issues remains inadequately understood (Lester 2010). Noting that "the environment is visualized through the use of increasingly symbolic and iconic images rather than those which are recognizable because of their geographic/historical/political or socially specific identity," Hansen and Machin suggest that the repeated use of those images replaces and masks representations, "particularly those that locate and connect such issues in actual concrete processes such as global capitalism and consumerism" (2008, 779). With globalization, power flows from sources within, between and beyond nations, and is "often obscured by appeals to collective identity and imagined communities" (Blue 2008, 81–82). Thus, Hansen and Machin (2013) argue that broader cultural and historical contexts are important to interpreting environmental imagery, and call for studies into how these repeated representations connect to greater political and economic forces. Addressing the need to unmask, locate and connect such representations to specific political, economic and cultural forces and interests is part of the inspiration for, and intended outcomes of, this project.

This invites the critical approach advocated by visual-studies scholars like Pink (2003), Bal (2003), Dikovitskaya (2005) and Rose (2012) to challenge naturalized master narratives. As Dikovitskaya (2005, 4) notes, "Visual Culture needs to position itself as a critical study of the genealogy and condition of the global culture of visuality." Thus, visualization becomes "a specific technique of colonial and imperial practice, operating both at home and abroad, by which power visualizes History to itself," and so the image "demonstrates authority, which produces consent" (Mirzoeff 2013, xxx). This invites us

to look beyond the image to ask whether a visual work has "exceeded its essence as the documentation of memory and acquired other values as a symbolic resource for imagination" in constructing a sense of one's heritage (Rusted 2010a, 5) or identity.

This is notably the case in environmental communication, which has focused overwhelmingly on verbal rather than visual rhetoric and discourse, despite the communicative power of the image (Dobrin and Morey 2009). Visuals remain understudied compared with text regarding their ability to frame media messages; this may be due to the academy's latent privileging of words over images, beyond the difficulties in coding visuals, but in any case, examinations of both visual and verbal framing of the same material in one study are said to be rare (Coleman 2010). These calls for more critical work are in keeping with what Lincoln and Denzin see as a "turn to social justice" and "a turn in interpretative work to critical stances" that is profoundly changing qualitative research as a whole (2011, 715).

Images are a powerful expression of place and identity. Beyond its strategic objectives, the visual rhetoric of place branding may be seen as adding to the ethos or ontology of a place, representing its core, commonly held values, encompassing social and symbolic capital in helping to build enduring beliefs and meanings (Campelo, Aitken and Gnoth 2011). However, as we define place-identities through historical, cultural and political discourse, ideological tensions and political struggles can hijack the process of place branding (Govers and Go 2009). Porter (2013) suggests that in representing landscapes, place branding oversimplifies and naturalizes them through a system of market-friendly 'calculated aesthetics' that perpetuates stereotypes of nature. Through the lens of critical theory, the construction of place through imagery in contemporary society

can be seen as "a political process that encodes and reinforces the dominant ideology of tourism culture, essentially a global process that manifests locally," based on Western capitalism and feeding a rising global culture of consumption (Ateljevic and Doorne 2002, 648). Yet visuality not only enables the construction of a place's identity as an apparently coherent whole—a dominant vision—but also opens that constructed wholeness to disruption by counterpublics (Glynn 2009).

In the critical approach to visual environmental communication which Dobrin and Morey (2009) dub 'ecosee,' the issue is neither whose competing images prevail nor whose images are more compelling, but what the images leave unseen (Killingsworth and Palmer 2009). For example, pristine images (e.g. of a resource-based jurisdiction in a place-branding campaign, as in the Alberta government's video, *An Open Door* (Alberta 2009)) may suggest reverence for nature and thus a preservationist view (Ivakhiv 2008), but they 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 (Clark, Halloran and Woodford 1996). On a more anthropocentric reading, these apparently opposite gazes—Romantic and 'extractive'—are both consumptive and so two sides of the same coin (Hodgins and Thompson 2011; Takach 2013a). Although popular culture often shows nature's beauty, the latter is more typically shown as a commodity for human consumption, subordinate to (ideological) images of the good life in the foreground (Meister and Japp 2002). This is where "commodification […] ironically transcends and unites the nature-culture dichotomy" (Rehling 2002, 27). This dichotomy becomes more pronounced in images of industrializing nature: for example, the historical photographic record of developing the

sands in northern Alberta can be read either as "a narrative about nature's stubborn resistance, matched by an equally stubborn and ultimately prevailing human ingenuity" that is "celebrated as Alberta's heritage and culture," or alternatively as "the normalization of mass destruction" (Davidson and Gismondi 2011, 61, 62).

Studies relating place and identity tend to involve scenic, touristic settings rather than industrial locations containing environmental hazards (Broto et al 2010). Allied to this is a case for more critical perspectives in marketing discourse (Skålén et al 2008) and in the PR industry (e.g. Nelson 1989; Wernick 1991), into which place branding can be grouped (van Ham 2010a). Mayes (2008, 134) calls for a critical understanding of place branding measured not merely in marketing success, "but in terms of its costs and impacts on the broader social field […] particularly so given the prevalence of place branding as empowered discourse and tool for identity construction." For Mayes, "Recognising the role of place branding in constituting identities is the key" (134). The need for critical perspectives on PR and place-branding practices is brought home in a recent book, *Little Black Lies* (Gailus 2012), which raises serious environmental and ethical concerns over the oil industry's "propaganda" around the sands, while also noting instances in which environmentalists' communications practices could be corrected. In addition, the fiercely contested and polarized context of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic positioning studied in this work stands to ground a response to the largely neglected examination of studies of *competitive* framing observed by Chong and Druckman (2007a).

3.4 Conclusion: environment, place and visuality

Linking foundations, aspects and manifestations of environmental communication, a critical approach to place-identity and notions of visuality situates potent forces at work in discourses involving the environment in industrial society. That the anthropocentric view of nature as something to be mined, packaged and sold—or even conserved—for purely human use prevails is suggested by communicative practices in such ubiquitous areas of daily social life as journalism (Dispensa and Brulle 2003), advertising (Hansen 2010), tourism (Todd 2010), politics (Gailus 2012), entertainment and specifically films (Ingram 2000). Neoliberalism works to naturalize consumption and, as Opel (2002) notes, to eliminate the suggestion of contradiction or conflict in presenting nature and (audaciously) even environmental causes in furtherance of consumer lifestyles and the industrial economies that feed them. These anthropocentric assumptions, values and expectations underlying a consumer society "become an uncritical and unconscious dimension of our cultural identity" (Japp and Japp 2002, 93).

In investigating the negotiation of place-identity in resource-based economies through documentary films and advocacy videos, a critical approach demands looking beyond the images themselves. Here we can look further to scholars of environmental communication, who, in critiquing and raising awareness of discourses affecting nature and our relationship with it, study not only representations that directly concern the environment, but also those that may not relate to it, yet still affect it (Milstein 2009). Thus, viewed critically, the discourse of place-identity furthered in a tourism or place-branding video, for example, can be seen as embodying the prevailing, neoliberal premise of the primacy of the market economy in human organization, while masking the "greater

truth" of the need to preserve the natural environment and its biodiversity, a collective, "public good" (Babe 2011, 324). Yet much of the more ecocentric positioning over the last two decades may be open to critique as well, for example, for its unwaveringly rationalist precept that masses of people will change their behaviour if only they can be made to comprehend the scientific severity of human harm to the Earth (Gailus 2012). A potential, scholarly bridge to bipolar views and communications around environment and economy lies in arts-based research, the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Arts-Based Research and the Environment

This chapter explores the potential for arts-based research to engage the subfield of environmental communication. It highlights rationales, aims and best practices for the creation of arts-based research, along with ethical, practical and methodological issues pertinent to arts-based research in environmental communication.

4.1 Foundations of arts-based research

Premised on the idea that "many of the greatest contributions to human understanding have been generated by the arts" (McNiff 2008, 38), arts-based research is defined by McNiff as "the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies" (29). This hybrid methodology transcends art and science (Finley 2003; Eisner 2006; Leavy 2009), arising over the last few decades because traditional academic vocabulary "fell short in its ability to capture and communicate the complexity of human experience in all its diversity" and because "even challenging conventions of positivism and following qualitative research methodologies resulted in research representations wrung dry of life," making little impact on participants or their communities (Knowles and Cole 2008, 57).

The literature uses terms such as "arts-based research" (Leavy 2009), "art-based research" (McNiff 2008), "arts-informed research" (Knowles and Cole 2008), "practice-led research" (Gray 1996) and "performative research" (Haserman 2006). Transcending positivistic statements and numbers, arts-based research seeks to make scholarship more

accessible, engaging and relevant to more people (Barone and Eisner 2012). It brings the languages, processes and forms of literary, visual and performing arts to scholarly inquiry, creating "a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness and the ethical dimensions of enquiry" (Knowles and Cole 2008, 59).

As one of its pioneers, Eisner (1997), explains, arts-based research is motivated both epistemologically and politically: epistemologically because it raises questions going to the foundations of research—our study of the world and the creation of ways to share our learning—and politically because of its agenda to supplement traditional means of conducting and sharing scholarly research within the academy and beyond. The latter is particularly significant from a methodological perspective: "starkly political is the effort to claim that art is equal to—indeed, sometimes even profoundly more appropriate than—science as a way of understanding" (Finley 2005, 685–686). Arts-based research echoes the phenomenological researcher's desire to evoke more emotional rather than solely cognitive understandings and responses to human experience (van Manen 1997; Mienczakowski 2009). More broadly, it may also be seen as an effort to redress a rhetorical imbalance, given the privilege accorded to the appeals of logos (logic) and ethos (credibility) over pathos (emotion) in scholarly writing (G. Williams 2012).

Adopting the constructionist view that knowledge is created rather than merely discovered and that there are many ways to come to know the world (Gergen 2009), arts-based research aims to increase the range of methods in which we depict, construe and assess the world, while recognizing that our choice of forum through which we represent the world can affect not just what people can say, but also what they are likely to

experience (Eisner 1998). As Barone and Eisner note, “for highly nuanced and expressive renderings of human affairs, the arts are of primary importance” (2012, 8).

The researcher’s experience is seen as part of the inquiry (Sullivan 2010), and acknowledging authorial subjectivities and practising reflexivity become important in this methodology (Knowles and Cole 2008; Denzin 2011). In advising doctoral students and their advisers, Knowles and Promislow (2008) indicate that arts-based research may be appropriate when researchers appreciate that “knowing through the arts is more than mere knowledge about the arts”; when it is congruent with the focus and substance of the research and the researcher’s artistic skills; and when it offers potential to gain special insights and to reach audiences not typically available to scholars (518).

On the latter point, Denzin (2001) suggests that the fundamental aim of arts-based research is to provoke action for social change, beyond simply reporting findings. Barone and Eisner (2012) describe this aim more broadly as potentially persuading oneself and others to cast fresh eyes on orthodox perspectives. This supports the aims of this dissertation, to cultivate the potential for democratic social change by transcending the paralyzing polarities around resource extraction by opening a space in between them for more public voices to emerge.

Citing the narrative turn in the social sciences, Denzin observes that “we write culture, and that writing is not an innocent practice. We know the world only through our representations of it (2001, 23).” Indeed, researchers have presented their findings in genres such as ethnodrama (Mienczakowski, 1995; Saldaña 2005), ‘playbuilding’ (Norris 2009), readers’ theatre (Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer 1995), educational script and DVD (Sandelowski et al 2006), dance (J. Fraser 2008), poetry (Leggo 2008), visual art

(McNiff 2008), comics (Carpenter and Tavin 2010), film (Woo 2008), art therapy (Huss and Kwikel 2005), videogames (Shyba 2008), 'a/r/tographic' cartography (Irwin et al 2009), novels (Gosse 2008) and combinations of forms, such as memoir, poetry and photography (Rusted 2010b).

Drawing on a richer palette of "creative intelligence and communications" lets arts-based methods "generate important information that often feels more accurate, original and intelligent than more conventional descriptions" (McNiff 2008, 30). Eisner (1997) suggests five advantages of arts-based inquiry to scholars and artists. First, it offers an alternate form of presentation to shape experience and expand understanding. Second, it brings a deeper sense of detail, beyond the capacity of abstract propositions. Third, it offers "productive ambiguity" (8), as the material presented is more evocative than denotative, and thereby invites insight and attention to complexity. Fourth, it increases the variety of questions that we can ask and explore. Fifth, it exploits individual aptitudes beyond the literal or quantitative. To these, Brandt (2006) adds that arts-based research can inspire people's creativity, recover repressed histories, build community and strengthen social movements, while serving in itself as a holistic form of action.

Yet arts-based research also comes with challenges. A hazard of its being at the leading edge of social-science methodologies is that theory has not always kept pace with practice (Leavy 2009). Thus, under the umbrella of critical research—which itself is said to subordinate methodology to theory (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011)—Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011) invoke the bricoleur, the handy(wo)man who brings all available tools to the task. They define a methodological bricolage as a multidisciplinary approach combining diverse "research knowledges such as ethnography, textual analysis,

semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, historiography, discourse analysis combined with philosophical analysis, literary analysis, aesthetic criticism, and theatrical and dramatic ways of observing and making meaning" (168). This bricolage comes with two key caveats. First, as Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg note, "Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the critical researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge." Second, as Lincoln and Denzin remind us in expressing their concern about the current state of mixed-methods research, "epistemology does matter" because, along with embodied and sociocultural standpoints, it "give[s] meaning and inflection to both the research question and the findings of any inquiry" (2011, 716). Thus, reflexivity, as well as epistemological, ontological and axiological congruence within the bricolage, is important in arts-based research.

Another concern lies with presenting results. While storytelling, for example, can lull us into believing that our research is "pluralistic, multi-vocal, non-discriminatory and non-privileging," we must accept that "stories are not real life; they are reconstructed representations of an actor's experience" and "always subject to further and different undocumented reconstructions by the storyteller and deconstruction by whoever reads or hears them" (Collins 2010, 144). Stuart Hall (2005) calls this 'coding' and 'decoding.'

Eisner (1997) raises three other key challenges to arts-enabled methodology. The first is a lack of referential precision, as subjective meanings derived from data make consensus impossible, suggesting a trade-off between advancing knowledge and fixing its

meaning precisely. We can account for this at least partly by expressing different voices through the first person, acknowledging subjectivities and practising authorial reflexivity to help frame and identify that (Denzin 2011), and by asking, as does Eisner, questions such as how much precision we need, when precision becomes constraining and how we can test the validity of data presented in an arts-based format.

Another challenge stems from the constraints imposed by existing systems of publication on material that transcends printed form. "Where, for example, will the video segments so central to a presentation appear?" (9) asks Eisner in 1997. Although intervening years have seen the spectacular expansion of the Internet and the pervasive tentacles of electronic and virtual culture continue to proliferate, it is likely that this challenge will diminish over time with further advances in communication technologies. For example, one editor of a scholarly journal laments the pending demise of that form (and its artful sequencing of articles) in the age of instantly searchable digitized material (Hartley 2009). For scholars, especially emerging ones, the number of online hits of their work may yet surpass the number of times cited as a benchmark of scholarly success.

Eisner also raises a potential backlash by the research establishment against what it might view as "bizarre" representations of data (1997, 9), seen through the old, positivistic model of representing the world in measurable statements and numbers. Despite increasing literature on the contributions of arts-enabled work in the area of education research, for example, Woo (2008) notes debate in wider arenas over whether art can be called research or a representation of data. Conversely, she points out that "just as arts-based research is being criticized for not being 'scientific' enough, there are also worries that the work may not be sufficiently 'artistic,' in that arts practitioners have

questioned the extent to which arts-based research products qualify or should aim to qualify as bona fide aesthetic or literary texts" (321). This concern can be reduced by researchers properly grounding themselves in their chosen art form (Blumenfeld-Jones 2008) or at least pursuing critical comment on their efforts (Saldaña 2008), being careful to avoid what Finley (2011b) suggests is the trap of conservative pedagogy working to reinforce a status quo by demanding compliance with existing conventions.

In a broader sense, arts-based methods are hardly radical, as all research is constructed narratives (Richardson 1990). As a newer form of scholarly inquiry, arts-based research is still developing guidelines around the level of expertise required, the appropriateness of methods used in its creation, and criteria to evaluate its contributions (Lafrenière and Cox 2013). Scholars have considered these issues, for example, in the form of reflexive questions (Woo 2008), defining elements, formal requirements and qualities (Knowles and Cole 2008) and more generally, a catalogue of values that make research more 'authentic' (Four Arrows 2008). Two different approaches to evaluating arts-based research are highlighted here as guidelines to inform productive work.

Combining a focus rooted in traditional, empirical methods of data collection in health research with a constructionist perspective, Lafrenière and Cox (2013) propose a "meta-framework" comprising three sets of criteria to assess the quality of arts-based research. The first set is *normative,* listing methodological and ethical criteria to ensure data is genuinely conveyed; this includes the appropriateness of the project for arts-based inquiry, clarity in describing the methods used, and reliability, rigour and ethical research practices in data collection and analysis. The second set is *substantive,* using artistic criteria generally—such as creativity, originality and thematic unity—and technical

criteria specific to the discipline being practised, such as the need for conversation rather than didacticism in a play script (Martini 2006). The last set is *performative,* relating to the work's receptivity, namely the effect on the emotions, understanding, response and motivation to change of its audiences.

Sharing a constructionist view but working from less scientistic traditions of pedagogical research, Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest six general criteria: *incisiveness* to cut to the core of a social issue; *concision* to stay focused on a controlling insight; *coherence* to assemble the work's elements and interactions in a complete way; *generativity* to let audiences connect the work to their own lives and experiences; *social significance* to occupy them with issues that matter significantly to their lives; and *evocation and illumination* to engage their intellect and emotions with a view to inspiring reflection and potentially even behavioural change as a result.

Barone and Eisner take care to offer their criteria as a starting point only, a compromise between binding rules and standards specific to each work; they call on researchers to develop further guidelines that may arise from their own engagement with arts-based work. Similarly, Lafrenière and Cox position their suggestions as "landmarks that could inform" as to the artistic merit of a work, rather than as a prescription for grading it (2013, 333). Finley (2011a) adds that ultimately the value of *critical* arts-based inquiry is its utility to the community in which the research is based. Thus, at this point, evaluative criteria for arts-based research are nascent and general, but I find the foregoing suggestions sufficiently concrete, thorough and resonant to guide my effort here.

4.2 Arts-based research and environmental communication

With its focus on human relationships to nature and other spaces, environmental communication has studied constructions of the environment in diverse artistic efforts such as painting (Clark, Halloran and Woodford 1996; Hodgins and Thompson 2011), photography (Cammaer 2009; Wolfe and Novak 2012), music (Pedelty 2012), literature (Wall 1994; Guignard and Murphy 2009), 'eco-comedy' (Fisher 2010; DeLaure 2011) and film and TV, be it dramatic (Ingram 2000; Brereton 2005; Bahk 2011), documentary (Murray and Heumann 2009; Rostek 2009; Ott 2011; Szeman 2012) or animated (Todd 2002; Starosielski 2011; Stewart 2011). These links are bolstered by critical approaches common in both arts-based research—which is counter-hegemonic to positivistic, scientific research, as well as socially activist (O'Donoghue 2009; Finley 2011b, 2012)—and in environmental communication research—which challenges anthropocentric assumptions frequently underlying dominant, popular representations of the environment (U. Beck 1995; Corbett 2006; Crompton 2012). Art and environmental issues are linked further to education and activism. Reflecting its roots in educational research (Eisner 1997), arts-based research has been connected to environmental education (Barrett 2007; Inwood 2010; Carpenter and Tavin 2010), and 'green art' has been viewed as an expression of eco-justice in a pedagogical context (Finley 2011b, 2012). Green art connects people to abstract environmental concerns like climate change by making its effects "tangible, visceral and specific to local places, neighbors and selves" (D. Hall et al 2009, 74). This is exemplified in the critical, activist approach of EcoART, a collaborative artistic practice rooted in the 1960s, grounded in "place and community"

(Carruthers 2006a, 25) and tasked "to Restore, Protect and Preserve the world for its own sake, and to mediate human/world relations to this end" (Carruthers 2006b, 3).

Integrating artistic practice into education and advocacy on ecological issues addresses McKibben's (2005) call for artistic expressions of climate change—which we can extend to environmental issues generally—to boost understanding and feeling and thereby create the kind of political change that art helped to inspire in the case of AIDS over the last two decades. He urges us to bring environmental issues to the public on a broader, more emotional level, to "register in our gut" and become "part of our culture." This includes communicating ecological issues visually, as in the "Step It Up" campaigns to share images of protests and actions on climate change worldwide, one of which produced a video capturing aerial views of 16 massive group performances called *Climate Change Art Visible from Space* (350.org 2010). As McKibben (2012b) points out, "Without films… and images… people would have little conception of what's happening with things like the tar sands and what needs to be done about them."

Further insights can be gleaned from the practice of green art. In a study of how artists address climate change and social activism, D. Hall et al (2009) offer several practical considerations for green art—and more broadly for this purpose, arts-based research in environmental communication. They suggest that it should be community-based and fit local settings and audiences. It should provide a recognizable focal point, identified by Mitchell (1996) as creating a visual 'face' for the problem. It should suggest possible alternatives to "status-quo understandings of political and scientific complexities" (D. Hall et al 72), recognizing that change is incremental and must begin now rather than later. It should be open to aesthetic as well as political criticism, to

separate art from didactic discourse. It should be sincere, non-threatening and open-ended in a way that "invites multiple interpretations and defies standardization," while also "encouraging interpretations consistent with […] advocacy goals" (73).

More guidance comes from the literature on humour and in the nascent subfield of eco-comedy scholarship. Environmental communication suffers from both the human penchant to deny information that is uncomfortable and from relativism that can position environmental harm as part of a valid value system, each of which suppresses communication and moral action (Boehnert 2012). Humour can address this by weakening our defences and drawing us into communication (Meyer 2000). Beyond serving as a safety valve to release social tensions (M. Hart 2007) and as a corrective to didacticism, enabling social criticism (Burke 1984), humour has a long history of use in social protest, from medieval carnivals (Bakhtin 1968) to resistance movements by traditional cultures in places like Bali, Lithuania and South Africa (R. Jenkins 1994), and even by a coterie of Western separatists in oil-rich Alberta in opposition to the federal National Energy Program a generation ago (Hiller 1983). As Hiller reminds us, humour in social protest can be used hostilely to divide as well as more benignly to unite. At its most humane, the comic frame brings us together by emphasizing humility (accepting human imperfection) over humiliation (demeaning others) (Ott and Aoki 2002). This is rooted in "the global persistence of laughter as an adaptive response to human hardship" which "makes one suspect that at its most visceral level comedy is linked to our species' instinct to survive" (R. Jenkins 1994, 208).

The link between environmentalism and human survival makes comedy and ecological advocacy natural allies. Fisher (2010) defines eco-comedy as "an

environmentalist intervention to the rhetorical appeals to guilt and sacrifice" and a performative attack on both anthropocentric, extractive capitalism and mainstream environmentalism (163). As she observes, comedy's trading on juxtaposing contradictions enables advocacy for change through challenging common fallacies such as the doublespeak of 'clean coal.' An example of eco-comedy from popular culture is the satirical documentary film, *The Yes Men Fix the World* (Bichlbaum and Bonanno 2010), which mocks Dow Chemical's refusal to redress the devastation of the oil spill in Bhopal, India as well as Canadian energy policies promoting the carbon-intensive development of the sands, among other targets for major ecological improvement.

The aims of green art and eco-comedy are allied to those of green scholarship. Moser and Dilling (2007) push critical scholarship towards activism in calling for communications scholars to help engender a collective will to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, not only by reframing the way that media take up the discourse of climate change (Boykoff 2007), but also by showing ways to structure communications that promote agency, and thus inspire widespread public action towards ecologically sustainable policies and practices (Foust and Murphy 2009). Finley (2011b, 2012) advocates what she calls an 'ecoaesthetic', which draws on artistic practices to open more spaces for public dialogue, debate and action on ecological concerns. This resonates with my reading of the literature on environmental communication, which, reflecting its ties to science, has tended to adopt traditional quantitative—and to a lesser extent, qualitative—research methods rather than arts-based forms of inquiry.

4.3 Conclusion: arts-based research and the environment

From its roots in pedagogical studies, arts-based research works from a critical approach to impact positively on environmental concerns late in the Age of Oil. Building on established associations between art and the environment, Finley posits a critical approach to arts-based research that she terms 'ecoaesthetics' in calling for researchers to engage with communities and to move participants, readers and viewers to positive action on ecological responsibility and on social and ecological justice. She cautions against lapsing into "the colonialist role of imposing paradigms of knowledge on indigenous people or other community residents" (2012, 216).[2]

Notwithstanding well-established connections between arts-based research and environmental concerns, methodological accounts of arts-based inquiry in environmental communication are scarce in my review of the scholarly literature; in my inquiry as to responses as yet to Finley's (2011b, 2012) appeal for 'ecoaesthetics' (Finley 2013); and in my inquiries through listservs hosted by the International Environmental Communication Association; the Association for Literature, the Environment and Culture in Canada; and the Arts-Based Research Studio at the University of Alberta. Certainly, work addressing issues around ecological stewardship and the positioning and constructing of place-identity in that context could meet cited criteria for 'good' or 'quality' arts-based research such as "communication of socio-political and cultural

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[2] To this one might add a caution against drifting into a sort of reverse-colonialism which isolates and reduces one perceived perspective in blanket fashion. One could arguably read that approach in Denzin's (2011) segregating Indigenous and White visual artists' representations of the Battle of Greasy Grass and Custer's Last Stand, respectively, and perhaps diminishing the latter in their totality, although Denzin takes great care to express postmodern perspectives that acknowledge the elusiveness of objective truth and transcend simple binaries of black versus white. Short (2005) cautions against delineating too sharply between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art in one Australian example, citing "major" White influences in shaping, marketing and selling Aboriginal art in that particular case.

concerns" (Lafrenière and Cox 2013, 325), "social significance" (Barone and Eisner 2012, 152), "passion for a political cause" (Finley 2011b, 447) and "transformative potential" that is ultimately "for the public good" (Knowles and Cole 2008, 67, 65).

Thus, this dissertation will be informed methodologically by, and build on, goals, strategies and criteria for productive arts-based work, gleaned from fields such as pedagogical and health research, which, like environmental communication and humour, also seek to improve the human condition and democratic practice. My project's aims find congruence with the critical approach and the focus on social justice grounding the work of scholars like Lincoln and Denzin, Finley and Kincheloe, in the ethos of green art and ecological advocates like Suzuki and McKibben, and in the small, nascent body of scholarship in eco-comedy. At the same time, this work must attend to the significant challenges facing the arts-based form as it navigates at the vanguard of social-science research methodologies. Particulars of my arts-based methods are described in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Research Methods

This chapter presents my choice of methods to investigate the positioning and contesting of Alberta in film and video that negotiate environmental issues concerning resource extraction. As this negotiation constitutes a discourse—definable as a specific way of discussing and understanding an aspect of the world (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002)—my research methods will approach, and ultimately situate, my findings as an ongoing and overlapping public dialogue in Chapters 7 and 8. Discourse constructs social identity (or for this purpose, place-identity) by defining groups, their interests and their position in society and in relation to other groups; thus, social identity acts as an interpretive frame for social action by indicating what people should think about a particular issue or group, and thereby functions as a mechanism through which collective group interests play out in the social practices of individuals (Van Dijk 2001). Because this inquiry includes interrogating the universality of dominant representations of Alberta—a discourse in which polling research (Harris/Decima 2009), provincial-government place branding (Takach 2013a) and popular culture (Chapter 6 below) all suggest that economic interests tend to supersede environmental concerns—my analysis takes a critical approach to these forms of communication. Reflecting the methodological bricolage called for in critical research (Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg 2011), my approach unfolds through identifying films/videos to study, interviewing their principal creators, conducting a critical, visual framing analysis, and integrating and re-presenting my findings, analysis and synthesis in an arts-based format. Each of these steps is discussed below.

5.1 Identification of films/videos and participants

My data collection (and recruiting for participants) began by researching documentary-style films and vignettes from TV news segments, DVDs, film festivals and the Internet, produced and/or exhibited professionally in the context of the province's resource-based economy in general, and with express or implied reference to the sands in particular. I chose professional work because of the presumption of creative and technical skill involved, and the potentially wide public recognition, distribution and impact that may be associated with film and video work produced and/or distributed professionally for public viewing. Such work tends to be more readily situated in the public discourse explored in this research than, for example, isolated works of opinion, activism, scholarship or juvenilia posted on the Web by non-professionals—work equally worthy of study. I searched for films and videos in public and university library catalogues, online and in media reports, and via personal and professional contacts for leads.

The work that I found was produced by and/or on behalf of independent filmmakers, ecological concerns, the Alberta government and the Canadian oil industry, reflecting a broad sample of the spectrum of interests operating in a resource-based economy. This work is listed in chronological order in Appendix E. From this list, I identified parties who created or commissioned that material and categorized them in five groups: independent filmmakers, activist groups, public servants, PR agencies, and industry spokespeople. My access to the first two groups was smoothed by my own experience as a documentary filmmaker (e.g. Thomas 2004; Takach 2009b), which provides contacts and a common language in which to converse with their members. In the case of the last three groups, which produce corporate videos, I accessed the directors

of those projects; that access was boosted by my prior work as a writer and communications consultant to the public, private and volunteer sectors in Alberta.

On meeting this first wave of participants from the five groups, I invited suggestions for further interviewees. This provided a crosscheck of my initial investigations and comments on work produced by other filmmakers, which may have influenced participants' own efforts at storytelling around Alberta and the sands. Further, I contacted two organizations for filmmakers in the province, the Film and Video Arts Society-Alberta, an artist-driven cooperative serving primarily independent auteurs, and the Alberta Media Production Industries Association (formerly the Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association), serving industry professionals with an emphasis on producers.[3] These groups kindly ran my ad soliciting participants for this study on their websites and in their online newsletters. The texts of my letter of invitation to participate, recruitment ad and consent form are attached as Appendices A–C.

5.2 Interviews

"We know the world only through our representations of it," declares Denzin (2001, 23). "We have become an interview society, a cinematic society, a society which knows itself through the reflective gaze of the cinematic apparatus." Rooted in the social sciences and humanities, the interview, or narrative inquiry, aims to study people's experiences as expressed in their stories, and then make meaning from them (Creswell 2013) in an interpretation that is not necessarily the only one possible, but is viable in light of the available data (Polkinghorne 2007). Narrative research is useful in critical inquiry because it tends to "critique cultural discourses, institutions, organizations and

[3] URLs for these organizations are, in order of mention here: www.fava.ca and ampia.org (both accessed May 7, 2013).

interactions that produce social inequalities," while aiming to inspire "dialogue about complex moral matters and about the need for social change," which includes focusing on participants' "collusive or resistance strategies" within their narrative environments (Chase 2011, 429).

As a research method, the interview boasts the advantages of spontaneous (albeit edited) orality and visuality; potentially new revelations transcending the earlier record; a chance to capture essential emotional responses that might not otherwise be recorded; and the inclusion of the participant's form of speech, insight into the evolution of a project, which is "often missing in critical discourse on completed works of art"; pitfalls include potentially unhelpful participants and the ephemerality of a snapshot conversation that can make standardizing the form difficult and not worthwhile (Melnyk 2008, vii).

In approaching my interviews, I noted concerns raised by Collins (2010) as to knowing whom to interview; what questions to ask; how open-ended the responses should be; how they would be recorded and analyzed; how my conclusions would flow from that analysis; and reasons for my choices. These aspects are outlined here.

My interviews aimed for insights into the political and other conditions under which participants' films were produced and their sense of the visual discourse itself, that is, which films and videos on Alberta in the context of environmental issues concerning resource extraction triggered, informed or otherwise affected their own work. I sought to access their motivations for producing the films, their communication goals and their storytelling and framing strategies. While appreciating that exploring and analyzing commonalities and contrasts among these participants, their practices and their dissemination strategies could ground productive research in fields such as ethnography

and media studies, I confined my approach to a journalistic inquiry to answer my research question within the practical limits of my study and its overarching focus on the discourse itself.

I conducted the interviews in person, by online videoconference or by telephone. In doing so, I understood the potentially conflicting needs of, first, seeking replies to specific, scripted questions that help get at the subject of my inquiry with minimal imposition on participants' time, and second, leaving them free to provide ancillary details or to move into areas or themes unanticipated by the questions. Thus, my interviews were semi-structured, based on questions designed as prompts and an understanding the potential need to improvise questions following up on fruitful replies that transcend my scripted prompts. Where time prevented me from raising all of my questions, I asked questions or explored areas in which I felt that an interviewee would offer the most productive insights. To permit the greatest latitude in responses, all of my questions were open-ended.

My questions can be grouped into five broad avenues of inquiry:

1. participants' prior acquaintance with, and sense of, films depicting Alberta and resource extraction (to access their perceptions of the visual discourse on Alberta, and of their intended response to it);
2. their sense of Albertans character, both generally and relating to resource extraction, and the extent of their experience in Alberta (to access their perceptions of Alberta and values at work around resource extraction, and to situate their biases in positioning and contesting Alberta's place-identity);

3. the circumstances leading to their involvement in film work depicting Alberta in the context of the sands and their role in that work (to access their motivations in joining the visual discourse on Alberta and resource extraction);
4. aspects of their work, such as goals, target audiences, editorial guidelines, chosen imagery of Alberta, themes and specific filmic techniques to support them (to access how they position and contest the province in light of resource extraction); and
5. dissemination and reception of their work, whether it met its goals and how they would approach making a film on Alberta and the sands today (to access their reflections on their practices, the success of their efforts and lessons that they learned in positioning Alberta around resource extraction).

My final scripted question invited participants to add anything else that they believe would benefit this research. My list of 25 questions is attached as Appendix D.

I recorded interviewees' responses by taking notes, using shorthand tactics developed in my years as a student, writer (notably for this purpose in journalistic endeavours) and researcher. Where granted permission on the consent form, I also recorded our conversation on a digital audio recorder to back up my stenography. In transcribing my notes, I grouped each answer under the corresponding question (copied from my document template) from my list of 25, and grouped answers to unscripted questions springing from a particular question as a related sub-numbered question. I checked all uncertainties in my transcription against the recording and contacted

participants for clarification as required.

To help compile, internalize and begin to analyze, my interview data, I reviewed my transcripts (highlighting and annotating the most revealing passages) and checked each recording. I created a log listing the interviewees with the names of their films; their professional affiliation (government, independent producer, or the oil, PR or tourism industries); the settings in which their work is offered for public viewing (commercial, film-festival, community or conference screenings, television, DVD and/or online); and a summary of overarching frames, themes and specific insights emerging from each interview. This let me consider, compare and contrast participants' influences (including references to other films under study here), goals, approaches and strategies regarding their work and ecological, economic and other concerns relating to Alberta and the sands.

Such an analysis also allowed me to assess each work's response to prior positioning and contestation of Alberta in film and video in the context of environmental issues around resource extraction, and the place of that work in that discourse. In considering how each film or video informs, and is informed by, other work in this conversation, I attended to the specific media involved and noted participants' perceptions of the effect of the form of public dissemination on the reception and impact of their film/video. This was gleaned from their accounts of experiences at screenings, and in both their perceived responses to their work over time, and in actual commentary, from reviewers and others through traditional and digital media channels. All of this fuelled my next step, the visual framing analysis described below.

5.3 Visual framing analysis

After hearing from the originators of the subject films and videos, I supplemented their insights by (re-)viewing and considering the works themselves. Following my critical theoretical approach, I identified dominant visual themes and strategies in the positioning and contesting of Alberta, which I then situated in specific political, economic, social and historical contexts, expressed as perspectives called *frames.*

In scholarly inquiry, 'framing' grew from the study of psychology and psychiatry into the social sciences (Plec and Pettenger 2012) with Goffman's (1974) ethnographic exploration of "schemata of interpretation" through which we make meaning of a specific activity, that is, "locate, perceive, identify and label" it (21). We do this by connecting an activity to the body of our individual or social experience (which Goffman calls 'primary framework'), aided by indexical cues to meaning ('keys' or further layers of meaning such as the tone of a message and actions accompanying it) and different slants on, or reversals of, the message's meaning ('design' or 'fabrication' such as irony and deception).

Goffman's work, while highly influential, has been critiqued as obscure, spawning "conceptual proliferation [that] precludes the development of a single methodological paradigm" (König 2006, 62)—which Borah's (2011) longitudinal review of framing research concludes is inevitable given its multidisciplinary roots, and its dual function in psychology and sociology/communications. Goffman's work has been extended, at least in the social sciences, into what has been grouped into three scholarly fields: management/organizational studies, focusing on behavioural effects of framing; social-movement studies, relating frames to cultural phenomena and mobilizing people;

and media studies, typically concentrating on analyzing journalistic content (König 2005a). Straddling the latter two fields, environmental communication research in the area of framing has thus tended to focus on analyzing messages in the interests of mobilizing action on ecological concerns (e.g. Nisbet 2009; Lakoff 2010) or situating media coverage (e.g. Weaver 2007; Hansen 2010). Such research often cites Entman's (1993) effort to construct a concrete theory on how framing works within communications studies from insights scattered across various disciplines—an effort which Borah (2011) finds intrinsically impracticable. Entman defines framing as emphasizing the salience of selected aspects of a problem by promoting a particular definition, suggested cause, moral evaluation and/or recommended treatment for that problem—that is, "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable for audiences" (53) while "simultaneously direct[ing] attention away from other aspects" (54). So framing in a news (or other) text "is really the imprint of power—it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (55).

Environmental-communication scholars commonly adopt Entman's definition of framing—building on Goffman's (1974) seminal work—as emphasizing selected aspects of a perceived reality as to "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation," and his notion of framing occurring at the sites of the communicator, the text, the audience and the broader culture (1993, 52). My study centres on how the visual forms are used to advance specific storytelling goals and visual strategies in service of positioning and contesting Alberta in the context of environmental concerns around the sands. This requires providing a sense of how the visuals support the *framing* of the work, reflecting the stories and themes featured there.

In conducting a framing analysis from the perspective of communicators situated in a competitive and polarized discourse, I followed extensions of Goffman (1974) into environmental communication, borrowing from a media-studies approach—used in several studies of environmental communication (Plec and Pettenger 2012)—which focuses on 'media frames' or 'frames in communication' referring to words, images and presentation styles used by a communicator, rather than on Goffman's 'frames in thought' or 'individual frames' referring to an individual's cognitive comprehension of a situation (Chong and Druckman 2007a), as outlined above. In reviewing the literature on frames in communication, Chong and Druckman (2007b) describe three goals of that research as tracking frames to identify how issues are defined, how different media outlets cover issues and how their coverage varies. My study is most obviously concerned with that first goal—defining issues—but the remaining two are also analogously applicable if we read them broadly to consider the creators of documentary films and advocacy videos as 'media outlets' providing 'coverage' of Alberta and the sands. In any case, Chong and Druckman (2007b) find a tendency in their reading of the best research to take four steps: (a) identify an issue, event or political actor; (b) isolate a specific attitude towards that issue; (c) inductively identify an initial set of frames to provide the set of "'culturally available frames' in elite discourse"; and then (d) analyze the selected data set, checking for the presence or absence of the predefined frames (107).

Although my study adopts neither the focus on the effects of frames on individuals nor the quantitative basis for measuring those effects which appear in Chong and Druckman's (2007a, 2007b) research, their four steps provide a solid foundation for this part of my inquiry, subject to some key adaptations geared towards a more

qualitative approach that Kuypers (2010) grounds in rhetorical criticism. Rooted in the humanities more than in the social-scientific paradigm typifying many studies in environmental communication, this latter approach "explores those qualities that make us human, and does so in a manner that involves self-expression" (290) and subjective choices of the researcher manifested in the critical nature, interpretations and language of the research, rather than through the mantle of objective detachment characterizing 'scientific' analysis; yet, as Kuypers suggests, critical researchers should still approach their studies with a fair, open mind and a sense of curiosity. He sees framing as an element of rhetoric, as it strategically creates communication—including discourse—aimed at achieving specifiable goals. However, I see framing as *transcending* rhetoric, deepening the study of persuasion by importing worldviews or value judgements that provide context for the case being made, beyond solely its content. This is important in critical research, which interrogates the assumptions and flows of power underlying communications—a concern of framing, which "registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (Entman 1993, 55)—and highly pertinent to this study of representations of a place and the priorities of its citizens.

Thus, I worked through, and built on, a modified and expanded version of Chong and Druckman's (2007b) steps in Part 6.3 below in preparation for discussing my data, and in the ensuing discussion in Chapter 7. However, I provide details of, and a rationale for building on, that four-part sequence here.

Chong and Druckman's (2007b) first step is identifying an issue, event or political actor—a step that finds equal applicability in qualitative as well as quantitative methods. Here, the issue can be derived from the primary research question in this study: how is

Alberta positioned and contested in film and video that negotiate environmental issues concerning resource extraction? As this question is itself one of framing, the question *for the purpose of this part of the framing analysis* must explore the underlying issue—attitudes and frames involving Alberta and the sands—rather than attitudes and frames involving the act of *framing* of Alberta and the sands. Thus we must address the underlying issue rather than its actual framing here, namely: how is Alberta negotiating environmental issues concerning resource extraction—and particularly the sands?

The second step requires isolating specific attitudes towards that issue—*if* the goal is to understand how frames in communication affect public opinion. As this study centres on how Alberta is positioned and contested rather than on how that activity moves the populace, a strict reading seems to take this step outside of Chong and Druckman's (2007b) second step. However, as identifying attitudes can help to identify frames used to position and contest Alberta, and also to understand motivations that may lead to that framing, I followed that step briefly, adding examples expressing those attitudes. Those examples are gleaned from my tracking, and compiling an extensive electronic inventory of, media reports and other publications on the sands since starting my doctoral studies in 2009, although the content of the inventory—supplemented by my review of scholarly and popular literature, accessed through university and public libraries—dates back to the first reported European contact with the sands. The media coverage includes popular print media (national via the *Globe and Mail* newspaper and *Maclean's* magazine, and Alberta-based via the two largest metropolitan daily newspapers, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal),* supplemented by specialty periodicals like *Alberta Views* magazine and by online reports from conventional broadcasters (CBC television and

radio, and the CTV and Global television networks). In addition, I monitored and compiled statements and reports and other representations related to Alberta and the sands from prominent, interested parties ranging from Greenpeace, the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Pembina Institute to the Fraser Institute, the Government of Alberta, the Government of Canada, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) and other sources.[4] Kuypers (2010) takes a similar tack within his critical rhetorical approach in searching for 'themes' before determining how they are framed.

The third step in Chong and Druckman's (2007b) account of best practices requires inductively identifying an initial set of frames from the literature, media and other sources noted above, to provide the set of "'culturally available frames' in elite discourse" (107) embodied in my research question. Kuypers (2010) extends this beyond what one might call an *agenda-setting* mindset—premised on the notion that the media cannot tell us how to think, but can influence what we think about (McCombs and Shaw 1972)—to a view of second-level agenda-setting or *agenda-extension*, which holds that the media can shape our understanding and assessment of issues and events in a specific direction. Entman's seminal article views framing as heavily influencing our responses to communications, as "on most matters of social or political interest, people are not generally so well-informed and cognitively active" (1993, 56). Accepting the communicative potential of framing without needing to assess its actual effects on audiences in this study, my analysis addresses not only *what* attributes are given more

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[4] URLs for these media sources and interested parties are, in order of mention here: www.theglobeandmail.com, www.macleans.ca, www.calgaryherald.com, www.edmontonjournal.com, www.albertaviews.ab.ca, www.cbc.ca, www.ctvnews.ca, globalnews.ca, www.greenpeace.org/canada/en, www.ienearth.org, www.pembina.org, www.fraserinstitute.org, alberta.ca, www.canada.gc.ca and www.capp.ca (all accessed May 7, 2013).

emphasis, but *how* that is done, i.e. how the film/video creators seek to have their work interpreted, and *why;* the latter also involves questions of *who* is doing the framing, which has been significantly understudied in framing research (Borah 2011).

To that end, I added to Chong and Druckman's suggested third step in two ways. To gain a deeper understanding of what is being framed in the discourse of Alberta and the sands and by whom, I noted prominent exponents of the frames and offered possible reasons for their use, drawing on attitudes as noted above and on a brief critical analysis thereof. To determine better how the framing occurs and the relationships among the various frames, I added a further, taxonomical step for two reasons: (a) given the likelihood of common attitudes underlying some of my initially identified frames, and also of some similarities among them, some consolidation may be desirable for ease of analysis; and (b) the polarization, and Alberta's positioning around, the sands suggests the utility of placing the frames on a spectrum, such as Innis' ([1950] 2007, 2008, [1952] 2004) model of space- and time-biased societies, or R.D. Francis' (2009) notion of technological versus moral imperatives. I read these spectra as productively reflecting competing ends of exigency (e.g. speed, distance, quantity) and permanence. However, this study's focus on environmental communication impelled situating my found frames on the analogous but more ecologically-specific spectrum posited by Corbett (2006).

Corbett's taxonomy ranges from more anthropocentric, utilitarian views of nature as a resource for human conquest and exploitation, through a progressively more ecocentric continuum of notions of nature as meriting conservation (for the greatest human use), preservation (for beyond instrumental use), ethical duties (to some nonhuman entities) and ultimately, transformed relationships (based on equal regard for

nature and all living things, as in ecofeminism, 'deep' ecology, some Eastern religious traditions, etc.). Recognizing the arbitrariness of such an exercise, Corbett's model is based on "a subjective best guess" (28) at ideologies discernible in contemporary American society, and also on three premises: (a) that the dominant American-European—and by my extension, Albertan—environmental paradigm remains resolutely anthropocentric; (b) that as humans, we may necessarily be bound by anthropocentric perspectives; and (c) pure ecocentricism may be impossible given the trajectory of technology and culture today. That model is diagrammed as follows:

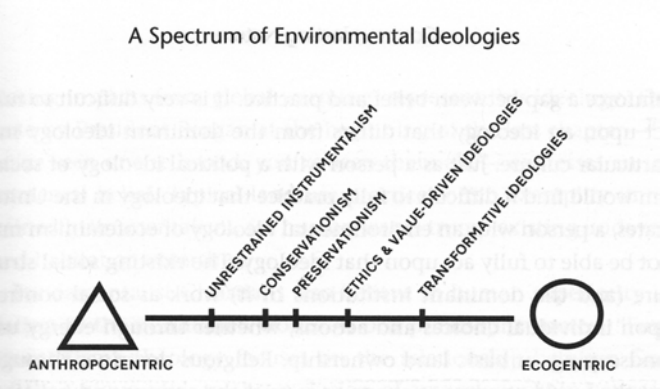

Figure 1. A spectrum of environmental ideologies (Corbett 2006, 29)

Thus, I subjectively located my initial frames on this spectrum, modifying the labels as required, to range from anthropocentric to ecocentric ideologies.

The fourth and final part of Chong and Druckman's (2007b) sequence entails checking for the presence or absence of the listed frames in each item in the 'data set'—a social-science term, which, as Kuypers (2010) explains from a critical rhetorical perspective, addresses content, but not context: a 'theme' as it is understood in quantitative content analysis is not necessarily evidence of a particular frame. I accounted for this in my study—incorporating the contextual questions of *how, why* and *who* in

addition to the *what* addressed in the agenda-setting paradigm—by mining: (a) my interview transcripts (one question explicitly asks what key messages the filmmaker wants to share about Alberta, but several other questions help more implicitly and piecemeal with this); (b) the visual and verbal content of films themselves (through repeated viewings); and (c) my notes on both. I situated my overarching analysis as a discourse, which I took up in 2005, the year after the US recognized the economic feasibility of extracting the sands (Humphries 2008) and also Alberta's provincial centennial year, which prompted visual celebrations of its place-identity (e.g. Tingley and McInnis 2005; Van Horn and Wagner 2005). My study of films and videos closes at the end of 2012. I considered each film/video in chronological order and drew on Entman's (1993) four sites of framing—communicator, text, audience and the broader culture in which they operate—recognizing that multiple factors and actors can influence the production of frames (Entman 2004). The process of checking each site is set out here.

First, I checked my interviews for revelations at each framing site. I noted my interviewees' background and work, their sense of the prior visual discourse, their reasons and goals for making their film/video, and their attitudes and intentions regarding framing Alberta and the sands, including any relevant editorial considerations. I looked for their accounts of visual strategies chosen to achieve those ends. I identified any references to cultural influences on their work, cited or implied—including films/videos preceding their work in the discourse. Also, I investigated their sense of their work's influence by way of reaction from audiences, critics and the media, although only insofar as it supports my analysis of the framing.

Second, I examined the films/videos themselves for visual and aural indications of framing Alberta and the sands. In particular, I investigated the chosen imagery, highlighting key visual motifs and specific filmic techniques deployed to support that framing. Here I touched on the subfield of 'eco-cinecriticism', which blends critical methods of visual analysis from film studies with environmental history and politics to reveal formal, textual, semiotic and other choices in films that touch on environmental subjects or reflect ecological attitudes (e.g. Ingram 2000; Murray and Heumann 2009; Rust, Monani and Cubitt 2013). This allowed me to consider the work, for example, in terms of the identification of power relationships and values underlying our relationship to our natural environment; practices such as greenwashing, deployed to downplay humanity's ecological footprint (Ingram 2000; Brereton 2005); and a spectrum of anthropocentric to ecocentric interests (Corbett 2006). An eco-critical reading would view more ecocentrically positioned representations as counter-frames challenging the dominant, anthropocentric discourse (Plec and Pettenger 2012).

Third, I checked for clues to the influence of the films/videos by touching on audience reaction, media coverage and interviewees' assessments of whether their work met its goals.

Finally, a critical analysis requires attending to broader, cultural or contextual factors to determine interests and flows of power at work in constructing communications; similarly, critical discourse analysis recognizes the intertextuality of discursive practice (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). Consequently, I included sections referring to significant events, covered in the popular media and supplemented by my

review of the literature, that provide context and may affect perceptions—and thus representations in response—of Alberta and the sands in the public sphere.

Any one of the four sites of framing classified by Entman (1993) could generate an entire chapter in this study. However, each site complements the others in collectively grounding an analysis of the overarching discourse. Balancing the micro insights offered by each site with the macro perspective offered by using all four as a group illustrates the positioning of Alberta in the context of environmental concerns around resource extraction in an age of climate change.

5.4 Arts-based research

As argued in Chapter 4 above, a study in environmental communication lends itself to arts-based research, which aims "to enhance the understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible" (Knowles and Cole 2008, 59). Arts-based research is methodologically relevant to my study for four reasons.

First, my findings lend themselves to presentation through complexities of voice and nuances of character and emotion that could well be diminished in conventional scholarly prose. The complex cacophony of uncertainties, contradictions and perceptions—so prevalent in postmodernity and expected to be reflected in interviews and visual framing analysis related to a political, economic, social, cultural and environmental flashpoint like the sands—could be sapped and smoothed over in a reduction to themes aimed at submitting an orderly account of my findings. I am also mindful of Gamson and Modigliani's warning against "the tendency to impose elite dichotomies such as 'liberal' and 'conservative' [or analogously here, perhaps 'pro-

environment' and 'pro-development'] on the mass public whose beliefs are not organized by such dimensions" … a lesson which they suggest is ignored "because of a methodological tradition that assumes the task is to array relevant publics on a pro-con dimension" (1989, 36). If my investigation situates the positioning of Alberta as a conversation, then it seems appropriate to analyze and present my data as such.

Second, the potential impact of this work—its transformative potential—is best served through an arts-based format that would make it more accessible to audiences outside of the academy as well as within it (Barone and Eisner 2012; Finley 2011a; Knowles and Cole 2008; Woo 2008).

Third, my background in writing for diverse performative media (Part 1.4 above) provides a fitting foundation for an arts-based inquiry. In citing the lack of background and skill in artistic disciplines as a huge obstacle to arts-based research, Eisner (2008) implies conversely that experience in creating artwork would benefit this kind of inquiry.

Finally, rather than pre-empt more traditional avenues of qualitative data-gathering and analysis, an arts-based approach builds on my interviews and visual framing analysis to deepen my exploration. Arts-based research can function as a methodological supplement to a project as well as standing alone as a form of qualitative inquiry (Knowles and Cole 2008).

I have sought to build on my interviews and visual framing analysis to produce something deeper and more contributory than the mere sum of its parts. Thus, I have integrated and animated my research in a script that blends elements of documentary film with scripted drama, creative non-fiction and comedy performance. My choice of each form is explained here in turn.

Using conventions of the documentary film is organic to the data under study, both in terms of the films/videos themselves (invoking my visual framing analysis) and in a primary way in which they present their data, which is interviews (invoking my interviews of their creative principals). In keeping with the critical orientation of my study, the documentary film can be seen as "that rare medium in which the common person takes on large, important issues and shakes up society" (Rabiger 2004, 3), while politically intermingling creative dissent and the profit-driven entertainment apparatus (Aguayo 2005). As such, the form is "a critical part of our democracy" (Bernard 2004, 5), "linked to the public as a social phenomenon" and the notion, attributed to Dewey (1927), that citizens can unite to serve the public good "and so hold to account the entrenched power of business and government" (Aufderheide 2007, 5). Canada's formative role in the development of the documentary form stems from John Grierson's founding leadership of the National Film Board (NFB), an institution which Druick (2007) views as an active instrument of national identity-building based on primarily liberal social values. The documentary film has grown tremendously in public profile and popularity in recent years: witness the commercial success of anti-establishment filmmakers like Michael Moore—the subject of an investigative documentary in his own right (Melnyk and Caine 2007)—Morgan Spurlock and the Yes Men; the widespread resonance of the Canadian exposé, *The Corporation* (Achbar and Abbott 2003); and the triumph of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim 2004) both onscreen and at the Nobel podium. All of this suggests the suitability of this format to my longer-term quest to engage audiences with my research by producing it as an independent film or for a

television, radio or other broadcaster. (The satirical documentary film as a form is highlighted below.)

The second element, scripted drama, arises from my synthesizing diverse interests and voices from my research into characters situated in a narrative structure. That these voices may eventually be presented in a documentary-film format does not seem to stretch Grierson's oft-cited (and broad) definition of the form as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Hardy 1966, 13), particularly if the dramatization is acknowledged, as it is ethically required to be. The line between documentary and dramatic film has always been blurry. Commenting on the landmark documentary, *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty [1922] 1998)—in which an Inuit man and his "photogenic but fake nuclear family" appeared in scenes depicting a traditional Inuit lifestyle, some of it outmoded but re-enacted for the film (Aufderheide 2007, 28)—Grierson ([1946] 1966, 148) states, "You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it." By the late 20th century, film culture had created "a rich corpus of hybrid texts which show, in increasingly self-conscious, even *generic* ways, the creative merging and synthesis of documentary and fictional narrative cinema" (Rhodes and Springer 2006, 4). This includes staged documentaries, 'mockumentary' parodies and other hybrid variants (McLane 2012). In appropriate cases, "fictional explorations allow us to penetrate more freely and intimately into the particular subject matter, to identify with the characters and situations in new ways, and to speak from the perspectives of others" (McNiff 2008, 38). As McNiff notes, fictional interviews can help to integrate diverse data collected from several different interviews.

The third arts-based form blended in my approach, creative non-fiction, offers literary techniques from fiction to present facts about places and people, as well as actual feelings and ideas, in ways that can engage readers. In advocating "less boring" qualitative research reports, Caulley (2008) suggests practices such as opening with vivid prose; showing (i.e. writing dramatically in scenes) rather than merely telling what happened; providing realistic details; using literary tactics around tone, allusions, rhythm and such; and ending on nuance rather than the obvious. Like narrative ethnography, creative non-fiction is "factually accurate," but "the story is polyphonic with the author's voice and those of other people woven together" (Tedlock 2011, 336). I have used these techniques, for example, in scripting and performing comedic but pointed, latter-day interviews with colourful figures from Alberta's history, who share their period-situated perspectives with a contemporary audience (Takach 2010, 2011).

Incorporating the final element, comedy, into this project is rooted in the nascent genre of 'eco-comedy' scholarship grounded in rhetorical analysis and performance studies (Fisher 2010; DeLaure 2011); in my own experience as a professional performer; and in the subversive, unifying and transformative potential of humour itself—and its applicability to environmental communication—as highlighted in Chapter 4 above. The satirical documentary film, popularized by Michael Moore (e.g. 2003, 2004, 2009), Morgan Spurlock (e.g. 2004, 2007, 2011) and the Yes Men (Ollman, Price and Smith 2004; Bichlbaum and Bonanno 2010), merrily blends mischievous parody and polemics to foster the creation of counterpublics, engaging audiences in the filmmaker's quest to expose fallacies and injustices—typically perpetrated by powerful entities like governments or corporate conglomerates—and reveal their absurdity. Rooted in

documentary inquiry, political activism and guerilla theatre, these "ironic activists" invite audiences "to not only get the joke, but to actively take up the issues at hand as their own" (Day 2011a, 148). At the same time, this form of activism "works to push issues that may be peripheral to the wider public debate into the dominant public sphere, ideally helping to incrementally shift or reframe that debate" (Day 2011b). The form's maverick sensibility appeals to popular resentment and distrust of the over-privileged, which includes the mainstream (conglomerate-controlled and increasingly consolidated) mass media, which, along with special-interest groups and other elites, has replaced one-time beacons like poets, painters and politicians as arbiters of the public interest on issues such as the environment (Burgess and Gold 1982). This reflects Brulle's (2010) call for a new, broader-based collective social vision that engages citizens based on their enlightened self-interest as well as the long-term needs of the community.

In blending these four forms, I draw on the teaching of arts-based researchers (e.g. Denzin 2008, 2011; Rusted 2010b) that different artistic forms or genres can be combined in one project to present complex issues in diverse lights, or to examine an issue from the perspectives, and through the techniques, of different forms.

A fundamental challenge in arts-based research and particularly in writing performance scripts is negotiating the competing needs of remaining faithful to the data and creating work that will engage an audience (Saldaña 2005). Work perceived as too informational or didactic risks alienating people, while work seen as too fictional or created solely for entertainment risks diminishing its relevance to the audience (Sandelowski et al 2006). I ensured fidelity to my data by keeping the dialogue in my script in the context in which by participants provided it, and true to their apparent

intentions and voices. However, I accept Ackroyd and O'Toole's assertion that fictionalizing data—in this case, in dialogue—does not mean abandoning authenticity; rather, "it can enhance the truthfulness of the research as well as the experience of the audiences" … "portray triangulation between participant groups in ways unavailable to us in writing a standard research report" … and, by juxtaposing different voices, "reveal and emphasise important data analysis links and themes" (2010, 64).

I address audience engagement primarily in two ways. First, I focused on the more dramatically impactful "juicy stuff" from my data and analysis (Saldaña 1998), those "certain particular atoms of meaning from across time and space," constituted "within a precise structure so that when the audience summons heat and imagination, the points fuse and become, for them, in that time, emblematic of that portion of life" (Martini 2006, 98). Second, I added a satirical or ironic edge where appropriate, inviting critical reflection rather than merely reproducing the status quo or the unconstructive polarities characterizing the current state of discourse of environmental issues of resource extraction in Alberta and beyond. Here I heeded Saldaña's calls for artists "to free themselves from the hegemony of traditional and stifling academic discourse" (2005, 33), and to think more like an artist than a social scientist, a term which Finley (2011a) reminds us is a politically conservative construction and thus open to interrogation in critical arts-based inquiry.

Viewing the presentation of this study as a script invokes the ethnodrama, pioneered by scholars such as Mienczakowski (e.g. 1995, 2009) and Saldaña (e.g. 1998, 2005, 2011), and defined by Saldaña as dramatizing significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts […] personal memories/experiences, and/or print and

media artifacts…" (2011, 13). An ambitious exemplar of presenting scholarship in the form of a script (in tandem with other forms such as verse, memoir and visual art) is *Custer on Canvas,* Denzin's (2011) epic dramatization of the visualization of Custer's Last Stand—or, as Native Americans know it, the Battle of Greasy Grass—by Native and White painters since that fateful event in 1876, in seven short plays. This complex performance ethnography is populated by 100 characters drawn from historical figures from the American West (Native chiefs, White soldiers, White and Native visual artists, etc.), historical and latter-day art historians, scholars, thinkers and public figures, fictionalized Native tricksters and diverse other sources. The characters converse deeply and at length about the different depictions of the famous battle and interpretations of it as manifestations of American racism and colonialism, through a deconstructionist, postcolonial frame. The plays are foregrounded and accompanied by shared memories and reflexive analysis by Denzin, who also appears as himself in the script.

Observing the importance of reflexivity in arts-based research (Denzin 2011; Barone and Eisner 2012), it is appropriate for me to acknowledge my own biases. As a first-generation Canadian, I admit to empathy for marginalized outsiders and underdogs that academe calls the Other, and concerns at material excesses at one end of the socio-economic spectrum in the face of tragic want at the other end. As a self-employed writer, university sessional instructor and independent filmmaker, I have never had ties to any political party, as I subscribe to both Sir John A. Macdonald's view that "party is merely a struggle for office, the madness of many for the gain of a few" (Nixon 1967) and the Marxist disinclination (attributed to Groucho, not Karl) to belong to any organization that would accept me as a member (E. Beck et al 1980). As a student of environmental

communication and an adherent to Grant MacEwan's (1969) creed and ecological sensibilities, my respect for the Earth's natural systems and all living things outranks my focus on the pursuit of financial gain. Yet I bring the ethic of a distant first career—being able to understand and advocate for any side of an issue—to bringing out the diverse voices involved in the filmic discourse of place-identity in Alberta today.

In aid of such reflexive practice come two cautions concerning the arts-based expression of my research. The first is to beware of the appealing, tidy elegance in the dialectical approach to reason, commonly attributed to Hegel, whereby apparently contradictory positions (thesis and antithesis) are juxtaposed to reach a higher truth (synthesis)—although Mueller (1958) sees that as a distortion of Hegelian thought and traces it back to Marx (Karl, not Groucho). This reminds us not to fall into the kind of simplistic binaries that have led to such stunning polarization in the positioning and contesting of Alberta through films and videos that negotiate environmental concerns around resource extraction. A second, related caution comes from my screenwriting experience, which teaches that the best antagonists—for the purpose of this study, voices opposing a position with which I agree—oppose not out of malevolence, but in the belief that they are doing the right thing. Scripting characters with this kind of empathy engenders deeper explorations of conflicts, personalizes issues and raises questions likely to resonate more with a wider range of the public than, say, an advocacy documentary preaching one view to the converted while being dismissed or ignored by proponents of another view. The lesson here is that this study should aspire to provide a forum rather than a soapbox.

In creating the script, I began by returning to the log of my interviews and visual framing analysis to isolate diverse worldviews (e.g. jingoistic, anthropocentric, dystopian), attitudes (e.g. outrage, reassurance, denial) and emotions (e.g. pride, fear, greed) manifested in the framing of Alberta by my interviewees. I synthesized all of these into distinct voices and then identified participants as characters, and/or created composite characters to express them as appropriate. I avoided merely having one character express one attitude, which would risk oversimplifying the complexities and contradictions inherent in negotiating place-identity. Instead, I envisioned a cacophony of voices playing off each other, agreeing on some issues while arguing on others.

Selecting characters was based on a subjective identification and assessment of two factors: first, the apparent significance of the films associated with those sources to the visual discourse of place-identity in Alberta, determined by the frequency of their films being mentioned by my interviewees (other than their creators) and by those films' profile in the popular media, determined by my online searching; and second, by the subject filmmakers' ability to express a distinctive voice in that discourse.

My selections were not exhaustive, representative of a totality, or even an attempt to balance the kaleidoscopic panoply of interests involved in, or affected by, exploiting the sands. Attitudes or perspectives that are pertinent but secondary to the discourse of Alberta's place-identity and not projected by my main characters (the directing minds of the films and videos) were incorporated in the script through supporting characters such as a journalist, an unseen program director and two scholars caught in the crossfire.

In presenting these different voices, it was important to account for the news media, diverse as it may be due to technological diffusion, though increasingly less so

with consolidated ownership of popular, 'mainstream' outlets. Here I bolstered my efforts to see more than two sides to issues, and to avoid, first, adopting a legalistic, dualistic, 'either-or' perspective in both my analysis and representation, and second, blindly taking up and reproducing the reductionist binaries marking many media constructions of complex matters such as defining Alberta and developing the sands. While such constructions add the dramatic requisite of conflict to media reports, the effort in journalistic practice is commonly flimsy, included simply to seek 'balance' (or its appearance) for logistical or hegemonic convenience.[5] A critical approach requires being aware of the framework in which public debate is constructed, and interrogating the framework itself rather than merely parroting those perspectives, whether hegemonic or otherwise. Thus, in seeking to shed light on the milieu in which at least 'mainstream' media operate, I draw on my contextual research and interview data to dramatize media practices such as agenda-setting, priming and especially framing.

I have positioned and dramatized the characters in a narrative conversation in which the characters may explain their work in response to the work that came before them, or in terms of their missions in creating their films and the strategies that they use to achieve their aims. Their interaction embraces salient aspects of the five-part arc of the questions posed in my interviews (Part 5.1 above). Because my research considers visual representations, I included images in the script as a backdrop to the characters' actions and dialogue—for example, as Denzin (2011) did in *Custer on Canvas*—to add another

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[5] A filmmaker illustrates this flawed practice as follows: "In the Q&As, I like to show a paper covered with dots, a plethora of black dots and one red one, and point out the fallacy of 'objective' reporting providing an interview with a member of each of the two groups. That's not objective!" (Wilkinson 2012, 6)

dimension to their arguments and to bolster the sensory and emotional impact on viewers, as my interviewees' film and video work aimed to do.

Certainly, untangling and definitively resolving opinions in the intricate web of issues around globalization, consumerism, economic development, environmentalism, science, place-attachment and much more exceeds the scope of any single dissertation or artwork. However, it is the task, and some would say the duty, of the artist and/or researcher to help people at least begin to make sense of issues, so that they can make informed choices which (hopefully) lead to constructive actions—actions which, in MacEwan's (1969) words, leave the vineyard in better shape than we found it, or at least don't decimate and pave over it completely. As Burke ([1938] 1973) observes, literature—and for this purpose, storytelling—is equipment for living.

5.5 Conclusion: methods and context

In sum, this study unfolds in three cumulative stages: (a) interviews with principals of the films selected for study, supplemented by (b) a critical visual framing analysis of the films, positioned as an evolving discourse and synthesized and (re)presented in (c) a script for a documentary film or television program. The next Chapter 6 provides context on visuality generally, images of Alberta and resource extraction specifically, and frames available in the positioning and contesting Alberta in films and videos that negotiate environmental issues concerning resource extraction.

Chapter 6: Images of Alberta and the Sands

This chapter foregrounds my data with brief, contextual overviews of visuality in general, followed by discussions of historical visualizations of Alberta in the context of natural-resource extraction, and of the framing of those visualizations.

6.1 Visuality generally

Knowing the world through images is a feature of modernity and postmodernity, owing partly to the proliferation of images in these eras and partly to vision having become a primary way in which power is exercised in society (Banks 2007). Vision has grounded efforts to understand and transcend contemporary life in the work of scholars as varied as John Dewey (1896), Walter Benjamin ([1936] 2008), Marshall McLuhan ([1964] 1994), Laura Mulvey (2009), Susan Sontag (1977), Michel Foucault (1980), Martin Heidegger ([1982] 1998), and Donna Haraway (1989). Carey sees the media as part of "a vast social project [...] undertaken to constitute a visual society [...] whose stretch and sphere of domination is enlarged"—a project that entails defining knowledge as a metaphor of sight, and using technology which enlarges and focuses vision (1990, 35). As a way to express the identity of a place, images and communal symbols reinforce cohesion and affect the nature and duration of hegemonies; as such, images become central to the power of a state, and thus "seizure of the instruments of imagery, as much as weapons of destruction, will be a threat of the 21st century" (Price 1995, 56).

Beyond domestic application, images also position a state in the global marketplace, as an instrument of "soft power," contrasted with the time-honoured exercise of military force (van Ham 2010b). The role of images can be seen in many

ways, for example, in treating photos as both reflections and shapers of history (Trachtenberg 1989) or as constructed manipulations of reality (Goldstein 2007), and debates around the perceived competing needs of capturing reality and artistic expression in photography, for example, are as old as the medium itself.

6.2 Images of Alberta and natural-resource extraction

Images have played a formative role in the evolution and mythology of Alberta and its identity since European contact (R.D. Francis 1989, 1992), which followed about 10,000 years of Aboriginal habitation (Berry and Brink 2004). These images mirror both popular perceptions of nature and the environment held by the French and English powers which colonized Western Canada, and the understandings and experiences of its visitors and residents; R.D. Francis (1989) categorizes these images in five overlapping periods as an evolution from a barren, inhospitable wasteland (perceived from approximately the years 1650–1850) to both a Romantic, Edenic wilderness and the breadbasket of the British Empire (1845–1885), a utopian promised land for settlers (1880–1920), a harsh place to be conquered in asserting Canadian nationhood (1880–1940), and a mythical "region of the mind" (p. 193) (after 1945). Uniting these five periods is a view of Alberta's vast wilderness as grist for empire, a colonialist idea that attracted foreign trade and investment by way of fur traders and, by the 1870s, ranchers. Then came the farmers and tourists, responding to aggressive marketing campaigns by the federal government (seeking a human land bridge to British Columbia, for reasons including nation-building and preventing American expansion) and the then-new Canadian Pacific Railway (seeking profits) in the 1880s and beyond (E. Hart 1983; D. Francis 1997).

Popular images of the open range, golden wheat fields and soaring Rocky

Mountain peaks framing impossibly azure lakes beckoned scores of settlers and visitors—the Rockies' vaunted potential for tourism led to the creation of Canada's National Parks system (Campbell 2011)—and inspired great bursts of literary, painterly and other artistic creation addressing perceived essences of Alberta through representations of its landscape (e.g. Wiebe, Savage and Radford 1979; Hines 1981; Kyi 2005*;* Ainslie and Laviolette 2007). These images tend to trade on popular, deeply entrenched ideas of the West (Dippie 1988) and/or Alberta (van Herk 2001; Sharpe 2005) as bastions of rugged individualism, free enterprise and unlimited opportunity.

The major discovery of oil at Leduc, which swept Alberta from an indebted byway of the nation into modernity and prosperity, was emblazoned into provincial lore by a carefully crafted spudding ceremony on February 13, 1947, complete with dramatic gas flare. This event, staged for reporters and public officials, was captured and widely disseminated in photographs and film footage that came to symbolize Alberta's identity as an oil producer. These images projected the ingenuity, hard work and masculinity of resource extraction, declaring "in no uncertain terms that human industry can control or bend nature to our economic purposes"; linking "entrepreneurship and resource exploitation as interrelated virtues"; and establishing "a singular, utilitarian vision of nature that becomes unquestioned…" (Davidson and Gismondi 2011, 31). Resource extraction becomes heroic (Gismondi and Davidson 2012).

Today, these traditional images of Alberta are being positioned and contested via conflicting visuals around resource extraction in representations of Alberta's place-identity, in the wake of rising international attention focused on the sands. Key reasons for this are highlighted briefly here.

Brought to the attention of Euro-Canadian fur-traders by a Cree man named Swan in the early 18th century, the resource, visibly seeping from the banks of the Athabasca River, was used by Natives to seal their canoes (Palmer and Palmer 1990). After decades of investment by, and jurisdictional tensions between, the Canadian and Alberta governments, the resource grew from the subject of initial experiments in separating bitumen from the sands in the early 20th century to the start of commercial production in the 1960s. That was accelerated by OPEC's oil embargo in 1973, the rising global demand for oil, escalating oil prices, technical improvements and other economic efficiencies, and enabled by substantial investment from the American oil industry, which was extensively involved in developing Alberta's oil industry after Leduc and interested in developing 'unconventional' oil for its domestic markets (Chastko 2004).

As befits its being called the world's largest industrial project (Leahy 2006) and the largest known capital project (Nikiforuk 2010), the consequences of the sands are globally significant. The project has become an escalating magnet for international interest and controversy, attracting enormous investment from not only Canadian concerns but also major American oil companies like Exxon Mobil and offshore enterprises such as BP (Britain), Total (France), Statoil (Norway), Korea National Oil Corp. and China National Petroleum Corp. Over the next quarter-century, the project is estimated to add $2,077 billion in new investment, GDP of $2,106 billion for Canada (76% of it in Alberta) and $521 billion for the US, tax revenue of $311 billion for Canada ($105 billion for Alberta) and more than $623 billion in cumulative royalties for the province (Honarvar et al 2011). Revenue from non-renewable energy royalties comprised

almost 30% of Alberta's forecasted budget in 2012 (Alberta 2012b), and at one point, the sands were expected to make up 20% of Alberta's GDP by 2020 (Timilsina et al 2005).

However, this kind of development comes with costs. The aggressive—critics say unbridled—exploitation of the resource under the Alberta government's stewardship has fuelled escalating protests at home and especially abroad over the resulting devastation of air, water, land and wildlife (e.g. Pratt 2010; Sands and Brooymans 2010; McFarlane 2009). Increasingly, Albertans are being portrayed as environmental pariahs (e.g. Marsden 2007; Kunzig 2009; Nikiforuk 2010). Growing concerns in the U.S. about Alberta's "dirty oil" are being reflected in the media (e.g. *Economist* 2008; Blanchfield 2011; *New York Times* 2011, 2013) and in a petition by nearly 50 members of the US House of Representatives to the Secretary of State to stop Enbridge's proposed Keystone XL pipeline from bringing oil from the sands across ecologically sensitive terrain to US refineries and to tankers on the Gulf Coast (Feldman 2010). This is particularly problematic for Alberta, as 85% of the province's exports and half of its oil and gas production currently go stateside, while two-thirds of foreign investment in Alberta and 60% of its foreign visitors are American in origin (Alberta 2011a).

Beyond all of this are immense social and municipal costs; the burden on overused infrastructure, the devastation of traditional Aboriginal lifestyles in the region and the incidence of an unusually high number of cancers downstream of the industry's work (Radford and Thompson 2011). Nikiforuk (2012a) argues that the royalties from the sands detach Albertans from their elected officials by diminishing the state's need to tax citizens to pay for public services, thereby eroding the quality of democracy in accordance with Friedman's (2006) 'First Law of Petropolitics.'

Images of the sands follow the visual tradition of representing Canadian landscapes as sites of exploiting natural resources and "as part of the industrial and cultural aesthetic of the nation" (Davidson and Gismondi 2011, 32). In their discursive study of the sands, Davidson and Gismondi read two major visual trends from 1900 to the 1970s: the scientific and technological struggle to tap the resource riches, and the resolve of private and public interests to open the northern frontier to unconventional oil extraction. They position visual representations of extracting bitumen, sanctioned by the state as an active promoter of the oil industry, as "in essence, the normalization of mass destruction" (61). The strong ties between the state and the petroleum industry are reflected in the exceptionality, by Canadian political standards, of Alberta's 40-plus-year rule by one political party, and the province's aggressive promotion of the oil industry raises the issue of how beholden it has been and continues to be to that industry. This is why the issue of democratic, public dialogue is central to this dissertation. Recognizing the role of petropolitics, Davidson and Gismondi see the sands as spotlighting the colossal costs of society's dependence on oil, and as a site for rising resistance to Neoliberalism's environmental and other injustices, as well to as its distortions of truth, epitomized in attempts by the oil industry and the government to depict industrially mined land as a reclaimed ecosystem. As the sands gain public profile, they have become a site for contesting Alberta's identity (Gismondi and Davidson 2012) and even Canada's identity (Nikiforuk 2010).

Seen from the perspectives of a broader public engaged through the mass media, we may pinpoint a seminal point in the *filmic* discourse around the sands pertinent to this study back in 1977, when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) produced a one-

hour TV movie called *The Tar Sands* (Pearson 1977) as part of its docudrama anthology series, *For the Record* (1976–1985). This film presents what the CBC's opening disclaimer calls "an imagined recreation of negotiations" which led to an agreement among the governments of Alberta, Canada and Ontario and three multinational oil companies launching the Syncrude consortium's flagship extraction project in the sands. As the negotiations were held privately, the public broadcaster presented "a fictional work based on certain known events" with the characters identified as played by actors representing either real people or fictional composites.

In my reading of *The Tar Sands,* the Alberta government, led by a well-meaning but pragmatic Premier Peter Lougheed, defied the cautions of its dedicated public servants to compromise the province both environmentally and financially in acceding to the demands of shady, profiteering oil executives. The Toronto International Film Festival's *Canadian Film Encyclopedia* says the film "raises important ethical issues – not least in its (characteristically Canadian) portrayal of Lougheed as the 'little man' destroyed by a system he can never begin to understand" (Morris n.d.). My impression of Albertans from the film, as manifested in the dramatized actions of the provincial executive presumably representing them, is that they ultimately privilege economic development and job creation over ecological and human (specifically labour) concerns, and perhaps even fairness in general. The premier may have received that same impression, as he sued the CBC—which had delayed broadcasting the film due to legal concerns (Pratley 2003)—and settled out of court for an undisclosed sum.

Other pertinent investigations of the sands by the CBC, not strictly via film or video but in television programs, occurred on its longstanding science series, *The Nature*

of Things, hosted by the well-known biologist and environmentalist, Dr. David Suzuki. The broadcaster aired "When is Enough, Enough?" (Bowie 2004), a critical look at the sands from the perspective of members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation in Fort Chipewyan, located 200 km downstream from the project. The program depicted despoiled, once-pristine landscapes while exploring themes of environmental justice, along with the greed and what Harold Innis (2008) would call the present-mindedness of the proponents of exploiting the sands at a record pace. Two years later, the CBC would air an updated episode of *The Nature of Things* titled "When Less is More" (Bowie 2006), followed by a documentary news report for its flagship news program, *National,* called "Crude Awakening: Alberta's Oil Patch" (Burgess 2007). These two productions echoed their predecessor's visual and narrative themes in respectively questioning the duties of government, industry and consumers in light of the sands' deadly effects on local and global environments (Bowie 2006), and presenting concerned Albertans' calls to decelerate development and reduce those effects (Burgess 2007).

These broadcasts by the CBC fall under its statutory mandate to, among other duties, inform, enlighten and entertain and "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity" (Canada 1991, ss. 3(1)(l), (m)(vi)). However, three factors suggest additional, and possibly political, forces at work. The national public broadcaster has both a longstanding reputation in some circles of Canadian popular culture for a leftist bias (Lilley 2011), and a notoriously antagonistic relationship with the Conservative governments in power both federally and in Alberta while two of the latter three projects in question were released. In fact, the broadcaster's CEO ordered an investigation into federal Conservative allegations that the CBC is biased towards the opposition Liberals

(Raj 2010). Perceptions of bias might seem consistent with the highly critical position taken in those three CBC productions towards the further accelerated development of the sands under the stewardship of the current Alberta and federal governments, as well as in the CBC's 1977 docudrama, *The Tar Sands,* when the Liberals held power federally. However, none of this diminishes the notion that broadcasting the four programs on a subject of public interest and concern falls within the CBC's mandate. Also, 'critical' is not necessarily 'leftist' nor 'biased.' Moreover, the investigation ordered by the CBC and conducted by five media scholars, which examined some 16,000 radio, TV and online news stories from 2009–2010 (Spears, Seydegart and Zulinov 2010), revealed, in the reading of the CBC's CEO who commissioned it, that the public broadcaster not only allocated more time to the federal Tories than its private competitors, CTV and Global, but also tended to treat them more positively. While, the CBC's news editor called that reading a likely simplification of the results, perceptions of a leftist bias at the CBC persist (Smith 2012), and the issue resurfaces later below.

6.3 Framing Alberta

This chapter concludes by building on, and modifying, Chong and Druckman's (2007b) four-step catalogue of best practices in framing analysis, as introduced in Part 5.3 above.

The first step is identifying an issue, event or political actor. Here, the issue, derived from the primary research question in this study, is: how is Alberta negotiating environmental issues concerning resource extraction—and particularly the sands?

The second step requires highlighting specific attitudes towards that issue, which I supplement by adding examples from my literature review and media scan expressing those attitudes. Within the predictable polarities of attitudes towards a controversial issue

like developing the sands—ranging from unbridled support for Alberta's development-friendly stance through to ambivalence to adamant opposition—are diverse interests and motivations. A very brief summary is provided here.

The heaviest support for Alberta's current course tends to come from those with direct financial interests in the sands. As noted in Part 6.2 above, expressions of support for Alberta's energy projects extend to conflating the province and its citizens with its energy resources as a point of pride, as the oil industry has done (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2010b). The gargantuan economic impact of the sands, with its attendant financial boost to governments across Canada, along with the political benefit of generating jobs in Alberta and well beyond (Honarvar et al 2011), has made federal (Payton 2012) and provincial (Redford 2013) authorities ardent defenders of accelerating extraction—all while professing support for their existing environmental measures, the practical impact of which critics strongly contest (Mech 2012; Candler et al 2010). Reflecting what seems to be a common theme in the public discourse—and the tensions around the sands—the Canada West Foundation, a self-styled, (debatably) independent voice of the West, sees the project as critical to Canada's economic competitiveness, and positions addressing environmental concerns as an incident of the industry's 'social licence' to extract the resource—all while calling on government to streamline regulatory and environmental approvals to *accelerate* extraction (Holden 2013).

Others recognize the practical and economic necessities of the sands in a petroleum-based economy, but call for drastic change in the province's stewardship (Nikiforuk 2010). Still others express increasing disfavour for Alberta's management of the sands. For example, after the CBC aired the critical documentary, *Tar Sands: The*

Selling of Alberta (Radford 2008), the wide spectrum of comments on the broadcaster's website included, for example, on March 14, 2008: fear for the province (expressed by 'Bruno Marocchio'); disgust at the ecological harm done by the sands ('Hussein Bazzi'); embarrassment at being an Albertan ('Ty'); horror at the present-mindedness of the sands ('Ellen Lee'); calls to nationalize the sands ('Jean-Francois Richard', 'Dan Taylor'); and a plea for greater personal and public action on more "democratic, participatory and environmentally sound" ways to extract the sands ('Natasha') (CBC 2008). Other attitudes are discussed below in the context of specific frames.

The third step in Chong and Druckman's (2007b) account of best practices requires inductively identifying an initial set of frames from the literature, media and other sources described in Part 5.3 above, to provide the set of "'culturally available frames' in elite discourse" (107) embodied in my research question. I supplement that approach here by noting prominent exponents of the frames and offering possible reasons for their use, drawing on critical analysis and attitudes as noted above. I have identified and titled 15 initial frames for positioning and contesting Alberta in negotiating environmental issues concerning the sands:

> *Pride:* Alberta *is* energy (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers [CAPP] 2010b), so opposing development of the sands is un-Albertan (Davidson and Gismondi 2011; Canadian Press 2012b; Thomson 2013b). Taking its name from an ad campaign by CAPP, this frame is used by advocates of accelerating the extraction of bitumen and maximizing the economic benefits of the resource to: (a) government by way of royalties on non-renewable resources, taxes and such; (b) investors in government

bonds and particularly in ventures and corporations involved in extraction; (c) people working directly in extraction or benefitting from it indirectly through the income that it generates. The frame conflates Albertans' identity with their largest economic sector, trading on the colonialist pride that comes with taming the harsh obstacles of the frontier, be it vast distances, a fierce climate, the technological challenges of extraction, or Aboriginal and other dissenters found blocking the path to extraction. Critics would see that pride more as either bullying, greed or arrogance, or, read more clinically, as defensiveness or self-doubt rooted in a fear of losing an economic privilege or livelihood (Radford 2012; Takach 2010).

Green: Alberta's bitumen is "green" (Koring 2013) and the environmental impact of the sands is negligible or manageable (Thomson 2010b). This frame brings together a variety of emotional and mental roots—fear and denial, among many others—and expressly minimizes ecological concerns over extracting the sands out of either genuine conviction or, in the eyes of critics, willful blindness or fraud. It is favoured by proponents of developing the sands. A more generic and extreme variant of this frame is denying that global warming is scientifically settled (Bell 2009; Frontier Centre for Public Policy 2013b); the sitting provincial official opposition leader's using such a *denial* frame (Canadian Press 2012a) is said by Alberta's former premier to have cost that opposition party the last election (Canadian Press 2012c).

Ethical oil: Alberta is a safer, friendlier and more democratic source of oil than petro-dictatorships (Levant 2010; Weismiller 2013). This frame is used by advocates of developing the sands to suggest that as a liberal democracy, Alberta/Canada is more 'ethical' than such quintessential 'petro-states' as Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Iran, which are seen as suspending democratic values and human rights. Coined by Levant (2010), a former tobacco lobbyist who took up arch-rightist neoliberal punditry, the 'ethical oil' argument has been rejected as more rhetoric than actual ethics (Macdonald 2011), as it purports to define our standards against the world's worst rather than an idea of the best (Simpson 2013). Yet this frame is routinely invoked, if not in name, by the oil industry (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2010a) and its greatest cheerleaders, the federal and Alberta governments (Wells 2012; Redford 2013). Notably, the sitting prime minister emerged from the 'Calgary School' of rightist political thought, based at this university and intellectually fuelling the rise of the Reform Party, a forerunner of the current federal administration.[6]

Money: The sands generate jobs, investment, wealth and taxes, so everybody wins (Alberta 2013b; Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2010b). Read critically, this frame is likely the one advanced most honestly by proponents of developing the sands, whether at an

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[6] The PM's ties to the so-called 'Calgary School' and an early coining of that term are presented in a policy paper written for the US-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (Rovinsky 1998).

accelerated rate or otherwise. Because the provincial government collects royalties on all publicly owned natural resources in the province, and the sands generate a staggering level of economic activity and wealth (Honarvar et al 2011), all Albertans can be said to benefit from exploiting the resource—though the less wealthy are becoming increasingly marginalized in Alberta (D. Gibson 2012). The underside of this frame begs what one of my participants suggests is a major issue around the sands beyond economy vs. environment: whom the boom is ignoring, leaving behind, or harming (Potter 2012). Thus, this frame tends to dominate the discourse on the sands as much as it does federal and provincial government policy on developing the resource.

Progress: Alberta's initiative, technology and knowhow will see us through the environmental challenges associated with extracting the sands (Alberta 2013c; Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2012b). This frame is also advanced by a wide range of sources, from the most zealous proponents of extracting the sands to passive worriers who hope that all of the concerns associated with the sands will simply go away. For example, this frame appears in a report on the sands from an institute based in Québec (Desrochers and Shimizu 2012), a province which also benefits significantly from the economic activity generated by the sands. Read critically, the widespread adoption of this frame reflects not just a broader faith in science as a panacea for the ills inflicted by

humanity on the planet and itself, but at least a partial abdication of the responsibility to help to alleviate those ills, if not cure them.

Status quo: Albertans are doing their best on the sands, so let's just keep working and get the job done (Alberta 2013d; Redford 2013). This frame is a more implicit and populist version of the *green* or *denial* frames. Read critically, it is deployed either intentionally, unconsciously or deviously to avoid addressing the ecological, social, cultural, political or other impacts of the sands. Its use transcends the sands' most vocal proponents to embrace the culture of affluence and indifference among Albertans—manifested in the nation's highest standards of living and record-low voter turnouts—that critics suggest has muted Alberta's earlier, more radical impulses (Taras 2006; Takach 2010).[7]

Bridging: The sands (and oil generally) are a temporary solution, but still necessary to run society until we find the necessary alternatives (Roberts 2004). Ostensibly presented as a voice of reason and balance, this frame seems eminently logical, as most Canadians' lives would grind to a jarring halt without oil. However, read critically in light of concerns about the sands on the health of local Aboriginal inhabitants, for example, it seems to be overreaching to use this frame as automatic justification for the likely tripling of bituminous production levels between 2010 and 2035 (National Energy Board 2011). In invoking the possibility of alternatives to fossil fuels, this frame reveals its kinship to the *progress* frame,

[7] As to Alberta's radicalism, see Bright (2006).

although the former positions our use of oil as an ecological problem while the latter focuses on our rescue by technology. In the end, it is a universal, gentler version of the *status-quo* frame and hardly unique to Alberta.

Compromise: We still need oil, but we must brake the unsustainable pace of extraction of the sands (Nikiforuk 2010; Leach 2011). Closely related to the *bridging* frame but taking an ecocentric turn, this frame seems to put a moderate face on ecological concerns about developing the sands. Yet deep-green critics would argue that it does not do enough to alleviate the ecological and other problems of the project. More ardent advocates of extraction would counter that all Albertans and others use products from oil produced from the sands, and cite the world's rising demand for energy as the global population and consumer demand keep growing, particularly in rapidly developing nations like India and China. Notably, the frame is used by different parties for sometimes opposite reasons: for example, Nikiforuk (2010), an environmental writer and advocate, calls for a slowdown mainly for social and ecological reasons; Leach (2011), a business professor, does so to maximize the province's economic competitiveness over the long term; and voices from the oil industry invoke it to cite the challenges of rising costs and labour shortages (D'Aliesio and Markusoff 2008). Thus, using this frame risks the fate of many compromises in ultimately satisfying no one.

Sellout: Albertans/Canadians are prostituting their birthright to foreign profiteers (Climate Action Network Canada 2012) and at fire-sale prices (Nikiforuk 2010). This frame imports tribal concerns into the discourse, shifting the focus to a point of national pride that finds intellectual ballast in political economy and particularly in the early works of Innis ([1930] 1999, [1940], 1978). It is invoked by nationalists concerned with the so-called 'Dutch disease' of depending too much on a single resource commodity to fuel an economy. While apparently critical in its orientation, it is open to criticism for denying the project's threats on social, cultural, political, ecological and other grounds. An attack on Alberta's management of the sands as giving away our bitumen to foreign enterprises at royalty rates lower than many other jurisdictions is bolstered by tossing into our largesse the boreal forest, clean air and fresh water.

Rogue: Alberta's/Canada's inaction on climate change in general and the sands in particular is tarring the nation's international reputation (Indigenous Environmental Network 2013; B. Walsh 2011). This echoes the *sellout* frame in its appeal to national pride and adds a sense of shame that draws on Canada's prior, sterling reputation for peacekeeping, moderation and politeness in the eyes of the world. Advanced by advocates for decelerating or ceasing development of the sands, it can be taken as a converse of the *pride* frame in approaching Alberta's management of the sands tactically as an attack rather than a defence. This frame plays off fears over Canada's sinking reputation on the global stage,

exemplified by its being the first nation to pull out of the Kyoto Protocol (B. Walsh 2011) and its subsequent, and partly consequent, failed bid for a seat on the UN Security Council (Heinbecker 2013). The battles over the proposed Northern Gateway and Keystone XL pipelines to carry Alberta's 'dirty oil' into the US, as well as the EU's singling out the sands for censure, suggest that this frame has made a mark in international politics.

Greed: Albertans have been bought off by affluence and look the other way on the sands (McKibben 2012c; Gillespie 2008). This expresses the evil underbelly of the *money* frame in the same, direct way. Consequently, in my perception, it is proffered by opponents of Alberta's management of the sands and/or the project itself more commonly than other frames, as is its converse frame supporting accelerating the extraction of the sands. Money remains a deeply resonant theme in the capitalist system, particularly under neoliberal imperatives that have characterized Western political regimes in recent decades and certainly Alberta since the oil strike at Leduc in 1947.

Eco-justice: Northern Alberta and downstream Aboriginal populations are being sacrificed for economic interests in the sands (Mercredi 2009; Forest Ethics 2013). Rooted in countering environmental racism—that is, ecological harm levelled at an identifiable racial group—this frame finds rising support as the rights of indigenous citizens gain greater profile in the public sphere. The UN has held annual meetings of its Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues since 2002 (United Nations

2013), and eco-justice has emerged as a social movement since the 1970s (W. Gibson 2004) and an area of pedagogical concern (Bowers 2001). This frame appeals to our guilt and moral outrage at people being treated unfairly, particularly those who are already disadvantaged socially, economically and otherwise in colonialist society's extended stampede to progress. While many would not argue with such a frame in polite society, its greatest critique in the context of Alberta and the sands takes the form of dishonouring it entirely in practice, at the expense of citizens of communities like Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay.

Health: Albertans are making themselves and the planet sick by extracting the sands (Marsden 2007; Weber 2011). This transcends the eco-justice frame in positioning the sands as a threat to the Earth and all of its inhabitants. Its breadth and universality let it express diverse attitudes, such as guilt, concern, shame, fear, outrage and panic felt by advocates of decelerating Alberta's unbridled extraction on health-related grounds. It has been hotly contested, at least in Canada, as until recently, both the federal and provincial governments repeatedly denied any links between the sands and rare cancers diagnosed in downstream, Aboriginal communities—and in the eyes of critics, failed to monitor local air and water quality properly (Radford and Thompson 2011). Scholars call for reframing climate change as a public-health issue to stoke behavioural change (Cardwell and Elliott 2013).

Present-minded: Albertans are immorally sacrificing the future of our planet and our descendants (Bouchard 2009; Nikiforuk 2010). Extending Innis' (2008) notion of societal short-sightedness to the ecological sphere, this transcends even the health frame in invoking a responsibility not merely to the living, but also to the unborn and therefore to the survival of life on Earth. It remains a staple among the most ardently ecocentric opponents of the sands and thus typically outside of the flow of the 'mainstream' (corporate-owned) media and overwhelmed by frames such as *status quo.* However, its invocation by religious authorities (e.g. Bouchard 2009) opens up possibilities for new avenues and new (and perhaps more culturally diverse) participants in the discourse. Ultimately, Alberta's management of the sands may well be the greatest moral issue to face any Canadian province in terms of the global attention that it attracts, the project's immense ecological, economic and other consequences, and its serving as a bellwether in the emerging clash of values over those consequences. In this light, this frame could serve as a valuable focal point for dialogue among the diverse interests in the sands, one that could, at least in theory, transcend political partisanship.

Ecocide: Alberta's management of the sands is an unsustainable ecological disaster that must stop entirely and immediately (Greenpeace Canada 2013; Galloway 2011). This frame marks the apogee of the deep-green, ecocentric end of Corbett's (2006) spectrum of ecological values. Unsurprisingly, then, it is marginalized in the overall discourse, although

high-profile adherents such as Greenpeace and the UK Tar Sands Network keep it in the public sphere, particularly with creative media stunts or 'actions.' *Ecocide* may be the antithesis of the *pride* frame here, as it stands to disrupt not only Alberta's largest industry, but the one most strongly conflated with its place-identity, at least by its political and economic elites. Thus, the frame can be read to counterbalance perceived excesses of more economically aggressive frames like *green* and *money.*

Adding an intermediary step to Chong and Drucker's (2007b) catalogue of best practices, I situate these 15 initial frames on the spectrum of ecological attitudes posited by Corbett (2006), as described in Part 5.3 and Fig. 1 above. With mildly modified labelling, this results in the following subjective alignment of frames, ranging from anthropocentric (instrumentalist) to ecocentric (transformational) ideologies:

INSTRUMENTALIST	CONSERVATIONIST/ PRESERVATIONIST	MORALIST	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Pride Green Ethical oil Money Progress Status quo Bridging	Compromise Sellout	Rogue Greed Eco-justice Health	Present-minded Ecocide

Figure 2. Alignment of frames

The fourth step cited by Chong and Druckman (2007b) involves analyzing my data to check for the presence or absence of these predefined frames. Expanding on that step to account for more humanities-oriented, contextual, qualitative questions as suggested by Kuypers (2010) and outlined in Part 5.3 above, this last part of my framing analysis is presented in the discussion of data in Chapter 7 below.

Chapter 7: Positioning and Contesting Alberta

This chapter presents data from my interviews and the films and videos under study in a visual framing analysis, situated as an extended discourse on representations of Alberta in the context of environmental concerns around extracting bitumen. Having outlined my research methods in Chapter 5 and provided a contextual overview of visuality, historical visualizations of Alberta and the available discursive frames in Chapter 6, I follow the fourth step in Chong and Druckman's (2007b) catalogue of best practices for framing analysis in media studies. I do this by checking for the presence or absence of the frames consolidated to conclude Part 6.3 above for each film/video, drawing on Entman's (1993) four sites of framing—communicator, text, audience and the broader culture—to ground an analysis. I consider the extended discourse chronologically from 2005 to 2102, adding a postscript on events occurring up to this writing in 2013.

7.1 *Pay Dirt* (2005)

The first production under study is *Pay Dirt: Making the Unconventional Conventional* (Palmer 2005a), a 48-minute documentary film directed and co-produced by Matt Palmer, a 20-year veteran of the film industry. Inspired by a book, *The End of Oil* (Roberts 2004), he addresses his view of the real question for debate: not the polarized issue of whether to exploit the sands, but how to transition from our hydrocarbon-based economy before the perceived onset of political, economic and ecological chaos precipitated by present paths of consumption. Motivated by curiosity and the need to produce a fundable project, Palmer singularly secured two-thirds of his $600,000 budget from the oil industry and struck an advisory board comprising representatives from that

industry and from the Pembina Institute,[8] a clean-energy think tank, and the Canada West Foundation,[9] questionably self-described as the only think tank serving as an "objective, nonpartisan voice" on Western Canadian issues. This board provided advice during scripting and editing, to give Palmer "the best stories from both sides" while serving his primary goal "to ensure that the content of the film was accurate, fair and balanced" (Palmer 2012, 4).

The film includes images of sped-up highway and freeway traffic, the Calgary and Edmonton skylines, the boreal forest, Fort McMurray, sands workers and equipment, and aerial views of unfathomably vast, terraced, open-pit mining, all of which have since become a hallmark of the genre that this film helped to create. Palmer obtained cutting-edge, HD camera equipment to try to depict the immensity of open-pit mining and the world's largest trucks, other advanced equipment and sophisticated plant operations employed to extract bitumen. These images are counterpointed by interviewees addressing social, environmental and technological issues around the sands. Palmer states, "I was trying to give the scale of the oil sands… to show it from the ground and the air. You don't understand the scale until you see the size and complexity of the trucks, upgraders, etc." (2012, 3). In positioning Alberta within an international economic web, the film offers images of Iraqi oilfields, the US capitol and US officials declaring their need for the sands. These too have become commonplace in documentaries today.

Pay Dirt premiered before a crowd of 1,200 at Jack Singer Concert Hall in Calgary in 2005, followed by television broadcasts on the CBC in 2006 and later on ACCESS and Canadian Learning Television. Palmer attributes his failure to place the

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[8] www.pembina.org
[9] cwf.ca

film in film festivals to its lacking sufficient controversy, opining that films opposing the sands will "go everywhere" while pro-sands and balanced films will "go nowhere" (2012, 3). Palmer declares that the polarization, anger and conflict driving media coverage of the sands make it challenging to have "middle-of-the-road, rational discussions" (6). Although he and his creative team were unknown in the screen trade when they pitched *Pay Dirt* to broadcasters and funders, they "benefited as the first ones out of the gate" (4).

In striving to achieve the proverbial Archimedean equilibrium, *Pay Dirt* makes no specific claims about the identity of the province and its citizens. The film positions the sands at the vortex of a rising, worldwide debate on the future of energy and its use in industrial society: Fort McMurray is presented as an archetypical boomtown testing the limits of the widely-held notion that growth benefits society. An environmentalist appears onscreen and politely doubts industry's claims of responsible development, but a member of the Pembina Institute sees mutual respect between environmentalists and industry. The moderation in the latter two scenes seems singular in the discourse.

Reflecting Alberta's vital and deeply entrenched ties to the United States both as a source of expertise and investment in the local oil industry and as the unquestioned dominant market for its products, the film captures Alberta's positioning as a safe, friendly and neighbourly supplier of oil to the US. Alberta's importance as the source of one-quarter of America's oil is echoed onscreen by assertions by the author of *The End of Oil* that an oil shortage would shake the foundation of our economy and that no viable alternatives exist yet.

In striving "to reframe the conversation by asking what is fundamentally important to us" and how best to use our finite energy resources (Palmer, 2012, 2), *Pay*

Dirt employs the *bridging* frame—oil is a temporary solution, but still needed to run society—and the *progress* frame, invoking technological ingenuity as the primary avenue to solutions around problems associated with oil. *Progress* is also evident—and dominant—in a companion one-hour film, *Pay Dirt: Alberta's Oil Sands: Centuries in the Making* (Palmer 2005b), a history of the development of the sands. However, this is tempered somewhat by a penultimate interview clip of Mary Clark Sheppard, the daughter of Karl Clark, the scientist credited with pioneering bitumen extraction, declaring that the bulldozing of trees for the first sands production plant broke her father's heart, and that he would be dumbfounded by sands operations today.

Through a critical lens informed by the thought of Innis, one could read the film, despite its singular and scrupulous attempts at neutrality, as positioning Alberta at two levels: first, broadly as a bellwether of the tensions and challenges facing global producers and consumers of oil, and second, as a geologically fortuitous branch plant of the world's largest economy, the USA. This was evidently not the filmmaker's intention, and positioning Alberta was never the focus of his project. However, by omission of any direct discussion in the film, Alberta's identity (whatever it may be) seems to be subjugated to forces of global capitalism and whatever collateral damage it may cause. A critical reading suggests that in presenting a massive, international economic apparatus—even combined with the inevitable collapse of its oily foundation—the film never questions the privileging of the primacy of the market or Albertans' attitudes towards balancing economic, environmental and other considerations raised by resource extraction. Such a reading seems consistent with Neoliberalism's denial of voice (Couldry 2010) and its reducing our identities to marketplace consumers (Dean 2008).

Nor can one ignore the significant funding contribution to *Pay Dirt* by the oil industry. This undermines Palmer's aspirations of fairness, balance and "middle-of-the road, rational discussions" (2012, 6), which, read critically, reflect the social values of the political and economic elites whose privileges are vested in maintaining the status quo of full-bore extraction. In this light, Palmer's claim around film festivals privileging the exhibition of films opposing rather than supporting Alberta's management of the sands underscores the fact that oppositional documentary films tend to be funded primarily by public-interest sources like peer juries serving arm's-length, government granting agencies. This is in contrast to video campaigns promoting extraction and its economic benefits, which tend to be sponsored by private interests in the energy industry, or produced by the provincial government's communications arm, the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau, to advance economic-development imperatives.

7.2 Context I: the sands get more engrained (2006–2007)

Pay Dirt's release was followed by a surge in the sands' profile, particularly in the US. In January 2006, the *60 Minutes* news program, American primetime TV's longest-running offering and its most frequent Neilsen-ratings champion (Edelstein 2008), aired a 13-minute segment called "The Oil Sands of Alberta." It positions Alberta as part of "the solution to America's energy needs for the next century" (Schorn 2006).

Over soon-to-be well-known images of vast open-pit mines, the world's largest trucks and the lively bar and casino scenes in Fort McMurray, a "boomtown" that "isn't in the middle of nowhere, but north of nowhere and colder than the Klondike," the voiceover narration gushes, "There is so much to scoop, so much money to be made." Shell Canada's CEO, a local MP and a VP from the Canadian Association of Petroleum

Producers (CAPP) extol the low risks and formidable potential for investment—$100 billion over the next 10 years, "bigger than a gold rush," booms the MP, Brian Jean. The narrator calls Albertans "blue-eyed sheiks [who] took to Wall Street … in their Stetsons to drum up support for the oil sands," and keen to "step up production quickly."

The only perceived impediment to developing the sands is a shortage of labour. Ecological concerns are raised near the end of the program: T. Boone Pickens, described as "a legendary Texas oil tycoon," states, "There's no question that they've got a mess up there. But I do think they'll take care of it over time." The lone environmentalist voice is the executive director of the Sierra Club, Elizabeth May (now Canada's first and only Green MP), who tellingly observes of the sands, "One of the reasons they can be mined the way they've been mined is the out-of-sight, out-of-mind aspect of it. And your film crew is one of the few that's gone in there to look at how devastating this is." This visual emergence of the sands in the wider public consciousness is reinforced by CAPP's VP, Greg Stringham, in stating that decision-makers in the US capitol were much more aware of the sands in 2006 than a couple of years earlier.

Read critically, the narration echoes Alberta's historical, rhetorical twinning to extractive capitalism and the larger-than-life ethos enabled by high commodity prices: "Everything about the oil industry has always been big… from the pumps to the personalities. But up here in Alberta, it's frankly ridiculous." Thus, *60 Minutes* trumpets the *money* and *progress* frames, and arguably implies the *pride* frame in positioning oil as central to Albertan life. The Alberta government's approval is suggested by posting the segment on its Municipal Affairs' website almost six years after it aired (Alberta 2011c).

The sands' profile rose again that summer, with Alberta showcased et the

Smithsonian Folklife Festival, "an international exposition of living cultural heritage annually produced outdoors on the National Mall… [and] …an educational presentation that features community-based cultural exemplars" (Smithsonian Folklife Festival, n.d.). Featuring only part of a country beyond the US is unique since the festival began in 1967. Critical readings point to other than cultural imperatives. In the second of two studies (2008, 2009) of Alberta at the Smithsonian in Washington—which included a parallel trade mission—Gauthier finds:

> It is as if the Folklife Festival were simply an excuse for Alberta government ministers and lobbyists to storm the American capital and get face time with lawmakers and industry insiders. The Smithsonian Institution's prestige provided the stamp of legitimacy for this diplomatic mission, and for some observers masked the heavily industrial focus of the Alberta program. However, for others, it was quite obvious that the objectives of cultural conservation were overshadowed by business and technology, much like the shadow cast on the Mall by the giant Caterpillar truck. (2009, 656)[10]

Similarly, in a critical discourse analysis of eight speeches made by Alberta government officials during the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Whitelaw (2007) finds three key themes which indicate how the government sought to represent Alberta's identity: that Alberta and America are (a) stable and secure trade partners; (b) a lot alike (independent,

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[10] Such a reading is supported by the government's own reports of the two events (e.g. Alberta 2006a, 2006b, 2006c), all of which expressly prioritize using the "the profile Alberta will have in Washington to reinforce our key messages in the U.S." (1), and which quantify the financial benefits of promoting the province there.

self-reliant and determined, with a common pioneering spirit); and (c) able to get along nicely without Canada. There, the iconic cowboy ethos was co-opted to depict the province as a bastion of rugged individualism, industry and independence. This argument is buttressed in *Alberta's Integrated Energy Vision* (Alberta 2006), a document released shortly after the festival, which proclaims, "There is a new attitude emerging, with Albertans experiencing a difference in how they view themselves and their province in light of its natural resource assets and the associated benefits" (5). In Whitelaw's eyes, both the government's discursive power-play at the festival and its embracing this "new attitude" are not only ironic, but a cause for concern. "In Alberta," he asserts, "the collectivization of identity, while appearing to condone individualism, in fact, creates the opposite effect: the state effects discursive closure around matters of citizenship" so that only its neoliberal version of identity counts (14). While not shown in a film or video—though likely on TV news clips—representations of Alberta in Washington, DC seem to advance the *pride, ethical oil* and *progress* frames.

The *60 Minutes* segment and the Smithsonian experience were followed by the onset of more critical representations of Alberta and the sands at home. A month after the festival, the CBC aired "When Less is More," an episode of its popular science program, *The Nature of Things* (Bowie 2006), following up on an earlier episode, "When is Enough Enough?" (Bowie 2004). Later came "Crude Awakening: Alberta's Oil Patch" (Burgess 2007), a news report for the CBC's flagship nightly news program, *The National.* These programs emphasized the massive environmental and social impact of the sands in both images and words. The former focuses on the plight of the Mikisew Cree living in Fort Chipewyan, some 200 km downstream from sands operations and the

oldest continuing European settlement in the province: they find their air and water poisoned and their rate of cancer abnormally high, and seek a moratorium on new developments there. The latter depicts concerned Albertans, notably the renowned water scientist, David Schindler, who cite well-documented health risks (long denied by the Alberta and federal governments) in calling for development of the sands to slow down.

Between them, these programs depict a brobdingnagian industrial process, with images of stripped boreal forest, vast, open-pit mines, 100-ton shovels feeding black sand into the world's largest trucks (yellow monsters, 380-ton payload, three storeys high), conveyor belts that seem unending, smokestacks belching grey exhaust and pipes spewing torrents of toxic, industrial sewage into tailings lakes. These are contrasted with bucolic scenes along the Athabasca River that belie the damage and show viewers Aboriginal ways of living that have been disrupted, likely irreparably.

These two CBC programs position Alberta as a place where people say and do nothing about industrial pollution. As a biologist, Kevin Timoney, explains, "Up in Fort Chipewyan, regardless of what science tells us, [then-Premier] Stelmach tells us, 'We're going to do this, so get out of our way" (Burgess 2007). With the sands, now Canada's largest source of greenhouse-gas emissions, Alberta is presented as turning the nation into not only an "energy superpower," but also "one of the most polluting countries in the world" (Burgess), blackening Canada's reputation abroad (the *rogue* frame). Hauntingly, Dr. Schindler muses that if he had the money, he would fly all Canadians over the sands, because if they saw the project, they would not permit it (Burgess), echoing Elizabeth May's comment on *60 Minutes* that the sands are out of sight, out of mind for most of us (Schorn 2006)—a reminder of the power of imagery. Thus, these first overtly critical

productions examined here focus on the *eco-justice, health* and *present-minded* frames in raising concerns about Alberta's management of the sands.

7.3 *Tar Sands: The Selling of Alberta* (2008)

Tar Sands: The Selling of Alberta (Radford 2008) was directed by the province's senior and probably most eminent filmmaker, Tom Radford, hired by a Toronto production company. The 41-minute film was commissioned by the CBC and broadcast in March 2008. Radford has deep roots in the province and in the tradition of challenging abuses of power: his grandfather helmed the *Edmonton Journal* in opposing the democratic abuses of the Social Credit regime in the 1930s. Radford has written, directed and produced over 50 films on Western history and culture, receiving domestic and international honours. He also co-founded a landmark production and distribution company in Alberta in 1971 which continues as a distributor of independent and educational film, and the NFB's Northwest studio in 1980. He has exhibited his photography at the National Gallery of Canada and edited two popular books on Alberta (Radford 1987; Wiebe, Savage and Radford 1979). As *The Canadian Encyclopedia* notes, "Tom Radford's influence on the provincial and national film scene has been considerable, both artistically and as an example for filmmakers working outside of the mainstream" (Murray 2013).

Tar Sands revives Radford's storytelling around Aboriginal life in the Athabasca River delta. His second film, *Death of a Delta* (1971), chronicles the Mikisew Cree's fight to stop the building of the W.A.C. Bennett Dam, called one of the world's largest earthfill structures (BC Hydro 2013). Shortly after that, he was hired by Syncrude to make a film on its environmental policies on extracting the sands, *Trade-Off,* but the project was never released, and he returned to the Fort Chipewyan area to make two other

documentary films, *The Man Who Chooses the Bush* (1975), about a Métis trapper, Frank Ladouceur, and *Mother Tongue* (1991) about Anne Anderson, who teaches and preserves Cree language and culture (Radford 2012).

Trained in history and informed by the work of Harold Innis, Radford sees Alberta and Canada as returning to the Hudson's Bay Company model, in which the colonizers—today, the foreign owners of multinational companies extracting the sands—live far away from the land that they plunder (2012). He summarizes an overarching theme of his work as the need to preserve disappearing things in Alberta, and his mission in general and in *Tar Sands* as asking, "How does a community fight back in the emerging global world?" (5). He sees Alberta as overcome by "an incredibly strong American influence, basically an imperial model concerned with security of energy supply and economic interests," leading to "a re-colonization of Alberta" (6), "a deep insecurity in the province" and Albertans "not wanting to rock the boat" (4) because they "are paid very well to forget about the discourse" to the extent that "denial comes to define an entire culture" (3). He finds it "telling that [then-Premier Ralph] Klein shut down "one of the best public television stations in the country, ACCESS, and Harper is dismembering the CBC now [through annual 10% budget cuts]. People don't want to talk about these issues in a colonial society."

Reflecting these attitudes, *Tar Sands* portrays the dark side of the oil boom hailed so vigorously on *60 Minutes* (Schorn 2006), and the technical advances featured in *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005a, 2005b). As its subtitle, *The Selling of Alberta,* suggests, *Tar Sands* depicts a province besotted by "a $100-billion energy bonanza" centered in "tar-soaked 'Fort McMoney', a modern-day Eldorado where rents are skyrocketing and cocaine abuse

is four times the provincial average" (CBC 2008), and where global investors are buying up Canadian sovereignty and poisoning Native communities. For Radford, the key story is "That Alberta is not to be thought of as a hinterland where we import tens of thousands of workers, tear apart the land and everybody goes home richer" (2012, 8). He challenges the government's claim that the sands are "building our province," finding it "doubly tragic" to see the Albertan ethic of pioneering and legacy-building "get lost at this exciting point in Alberta's history, and see it selling out its culture for its resources" (8).

With this framework, it is unsurprising to find the imagery in *Tar Sands* tending to be more apocalyptic than earlier in this discourse. The world's largest trucks, depicted as marvels of industrial power and efficiency in *60 Minutes* and *Pay Dirt,* become colossal scavengers scraping the enormous, scarred expanse of earth left after a battalion of trucks brutally stripped away the virgin boreal forest. We see migrant workers forced to live in tents, in contrast to well-heeled Washington lobbyists and investors giddily flying in from Norway, China, etc. to cash in on Alberta's bounty, all prodded by a provincial government that sees the land as "a sacrifice zone" and its indigenous inhabitants like the Mikisew Cree as "collateral damage" (Radford 2012, 7).

After its national broadcast on the CBC's *Documentary Zone* program, the *Edmonton Journal's* business columnist ventured into cinecriticism in dismissing *Tar Sands* as "pure fiction," "featuring the usual assortment of capitalist-bashing, America-loathing lefty ideologues" and "merely the latest in a string of sensationalist hatchet jobs on Alberta's key industry, courtesy of the national media" (Lamphier 2008, E1). This follows a tradition, common among those expressing 'Western alienation' from Central Canada's corridors of power, to position the CBC as leftist, and evinced in comments on

Tar Sands, posted on the CBC's website, expressing disdain at the film's leftist and/or Eastern biases in singling out Alberta for opprobrium ('Jack Anderson', 'Bob Vanderly', 'Jim Brenner', 'Russ', 'Riley Russell') (CBC 2008). The business columnist's critique was rebutted in the *Edmonton Journal's* editorial pages, as in a letter to the editor from the film's associate producer (Thompson 2008) listing the preponderance of local creators and interviewees in the documentary, thereby belying the business columnist's positioning of the film as an attack on the province by 'the national media' even if it was broadcast on national television. Such a positioning by the business columnist—adopting the *pride, money* and *ethical* frames—reprises the time-honoured tactic of Albertan politicians to deflect criticisms of the government's management of local issues by circling the wagons against the national media, federal government or other actual or perceived threats from beyond the province (Takach 2010).

Thus, the film adopts five key frames: *greed, sellout, health, eco-justice* and *present-mindedness*. Radford's critical approach presents a province in serious danger of losing its soul in a myopic and increasingly ardent effort to gain the world. *Tar Sands* stands as a keystone in the positioning of Alberta in the discourse as the first openly critical work on the sands from an Albertan filmmaker—and our most eminent one at that—challenging the status quo in a province deeply invested in extractive capitalism. But judging by viewers' feedback to the CBC, the film is also remarkable for the volume and intensity of the public reaction that it precipitated. This is likely to have been bolstered by the rising domestic and international profile of the sands and their consequences since 2004. In its dramatic contribution to this, *Tar Sands* seems to have increased the criticism and thus the polarization around the sands.

7.4 Context II: 1,606 dead ducks (2008)

Six weeks after *Tar Sands* aired, the sands became etched into the global visual palette. Ducks landed in a Syncrude tailings lake—usual deterrents failed to operate—and died. Covering 23 square miles along the Athabasca River (about the size of Manhattan), these toxic expanses of contaminated water, sand and bitumen are the endpoint for 90 percent of the water that industry draws from the river; grow by 400,000 gallons a day, enough to fill 720 Olympic swimming pools; and also leak (Nikiforuk 2010). Syncrude did not report the event, but a whistleblower alerted the authorities and Greenpeace. Syncrude was fined $800,000 and ordered to pay another $2.2 million towards avian research, conservation and education projects (R. v. Syncrude Canada Ltd. 2010) which was less than half of the company's daily profit of $7 million that quarter (Henton 2010). Although some 458 to 5,029 birds die in tailings lakes each year (Sinnema 2010) and 125,000 ducks are dispatched by Albertan hunters annually (Brooymans 2010), videos of these particular trapped, doomed birds and their sludgy corpses went viral on the Internet (Thomson 2010a), causing the prime minister to call it a PR disaster for Canada (Cotter 2008). Both a film studied here (Lavallee 2011) and the deputy minister then responsible for the Alberta government's communications (Benoit 2012) cite the incident as a significant point in already worsening public perceptions of our province.

7.5 *Downstream* (2008)

Downstream (Iwerks 2008) is 33-minute film by an acclaimed American filmmaker whose father and grandfather were Oscar-winning Hollywood insiders. Based in Los Angeles, Leslie Iwerks has produced documentary films, television specials, live webisodes and digital content for large American TV networks (Leslie Iwerks

Productions 2012), and her documentaries have screened at international film festivals.

Downstream springs from a documentary that was the first original-feature commission by Babelgum, a British online service which sought a feature on the sands to launch a series on global warming; Babelgum approached an LA-based agent, a native Albertan who suggested Iwerks (Volmers 2009). The sands attracted her as a story relatively unknown in the US, "And being an American, I felt sort of responsible, as we're the number-one consumer of Canadian oil… a huge pollutant" (J. Gilbert 2010). She aimed to show Americans that their largest oil supply was 'dirty' oil from across the border, and to spark questions, discussions and action on ecological and human-rights concerns about the sands (Iwerks 2012).

While researching her feature, Iwerks discovered John O'Connor, a soft-spoken doctor in Fort Chipewyan who had voiced his concerns over the abnormally high number of rare cancers and other health issues that he observed—concerns ignored or denied officially. She got Babelgum's consent to make a short film about it and submit it to the Academy Awards (Iwerks 2012). She sees Fort Chip's story as "a microcosm of a larger issue… going on all over the world" (J. Gilbert 2010, 2). She finds the government's denying that local water is polluted even as its officials fly into Aboriginal communities with cases of bottled water to be "kind of a funny visual" (Iwerks 2012, 3). Noting this expression of what Radford (2012) calls the culture of denial in Alberta, Iwerks observes:

> A lot of people from companies didn't want to speak. And John O'Connor had threats.[11] So, that's a prime example of … a

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[11] As *Downstream* chronicles, Alberta Health, Health Canada and Environment Canada filed charges against Dr. O'Connor with the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons, alleging 68 counts of double-billing, unethical financial practices and "raising undue alarm." All charges were dropped or dismissed. Dr.

> dangerous place to create waves when there's so much money at stake. You wouldn't think that about Canada—but when you're talking about big oil and big money, you're back in Russia! It's like the Mafia! (Carnevale 2009, 3)

Downstream shows "the destruction from the point of view of those who are affected by it" (3). We see ancient forests and the Athabasca River in contrast to sped-up images of highway gridlock, monstrous trucks in open-pit mines and toxic sludge cascading into a tailings lake; some of these images are recognizable from *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005). Rustic community life foregrounds an intimate study of Dr. O'Connor as he caringly counsels patients at his clinic and in their homes; as he explains the horrific illnesses that are devastating Fort Chipewyan; and as he humbly shows the camera a large quilt that locals created for him as a parting gift.

Contrasting these intimate moments of compassion are interviews with officials from government and industry who cite the stringency of Alberta's environmental standards and their enforcement with what I read as almost clinical detachment. The water scientist, David Schindler, the biologist, Kevin Timoney, and the environmental writer, Andrew Nikiforuk—all of whom appear in various critical films studied here—assert a contrary view with passion and conviction. While Iwerks sought to present a balanced perspective (Goldstein 2008), she found it very difficult to access the oil industry (J. Gilbert 2010), echoing Palmer's (2012) note on industry becoming more cautious since the sands gained more profile. The overall impression is one of fragile community and traditional, native lifestyles being callously sacrificed to a distant

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O'Connor moved his practice back to Nova Scotia, although he continued to consult patients in Fort Chipewyan via videoconferencing and telephone.

political and economic juggernaut, channelled by government and industry in Alberta.

As for impact, the Alberta Environmental Network (2009) declares that the film has "raised unprecedented awareness in Canada and the U.S. regarding the environmental and social impacts of the tar sands," and reports that it was screened for members of the Obama Administration by members of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a powerful American environmental-action group claiming 1.3 million members (Natural Resources Defense Council 2012). The film was shortlisted for 'Best Documentary Short Subject' at the Academy Awards in 2009, but not nominated. The ensuing publicity, noted as unusual for a film seen by relatively few people (Volmers 2009), undercut Alberta's efforts to boost production and sales of its bitumen, and to manage its environmental reputation. In fact, the negative spotlight arising from audiences' reaction to *Downstream* compounded the mounting criticisms following Radford's film, *Tar Sands,* and the highly inconvenient (and visually potent) demise of those 1,606 ducks.

To make matters worse for the Alberta government, its then-minister of culture, Lindsay Blackett, mused that he might have withheld funding from Alberta's film-development program—although funding is automatic if specific criteria (e.g. personnel, location) are met—had he known how critical Iwerks' work would be: "Because if I'm going to actually invest money on behalf of Albertans into a film, the whole idea is to show Alberta in a better light, to create an economic diversification to help them," he declared (CBC News 2008b). The ensuing backlash from parties like the Council of Canadians (Christian 2008) and the *Los Angeles Times* (Goldstein 2008) attacked Alberta for censorship, reinforcing the very point that *Downstream* makes: that in supplying the world's largest market for oil, Alberta tramples on human rights as well as human and

environmental health. Blackett hastily backtracked and "reaffirmed his commitment to local filmmakers, free speech and artistic freedom" (Volmers 2009, C1).

Despite *Downstream*'s splash in positioning Alberta as extractive capitalism at its callous apogee through the *rogue, eco-justice, health, present-minded* and *ecocide* frames, Iwerks is disappointed in its dissemination. The film was screened in Fort Chip, Edmonton and Calgary and at international film festivals, but not in theatres, although it is available on DVD. "It's very challenging for environmental documentary films to get distribution," she observes, "especially short films" (2012, 2). Yet in raising awareness of Canada's 'dirty' oil among an American populace that her film depicts as uninformed on the issue—despite the glowing *60 Minutes* segment (Schorn 2006) and Alberta's efforts in Washington, DC—Iwerks' work apparently helped to precipitate a concerted reply.

7.6 *An Open Door* (2009)

Faced with increasing, unflattering representations of Alberta, the government assigned its response to its communications arm, the Public Affairs Bureau (PAB). The PAB has been criticized in the Legislature (Hinman 2008), the academy (Kiss 2008), the media (Laghi 1989) and popular literature (Taft 1997) as a propaganda vehicle. Roxanna Benoit, a senior lawyer versed in government and public policy and then recently returned to her native Alberta to serve as the PAB's managing director, summarizes the situation:

> There was high-level recognition that the province was changing, the population was growing and people were coming here from all over the world. The province was in the middle of a high economic upswing. We felt we needed to help Albertans understand their problems and help reflect this new reality. …

> Albertans have a tendency to keep their heads down and do their own thing. But we realized that the whole world was watching us and not liking what they saw. Then came the day the ducks died. It was clear that this would impact business and immigration coming into Alberta. We wanted to explain how our values drive our decisions.
>
> We found a positive perception of the place and the people, although it was a little stereotyped. We broke from this when we asked about Albertans' values on energy and the economy. We found a disconnect between the values that Albertans felt they had and the values perceived to be driving our decision-making. We had to address this gap. There is value placed on the environment in Alberta, and we needed to show how those values would let us make decisions about this place. (2012, 2)

Thus, in March 2008, the government began a $25-million campaign to rebrand the province, replacing its longstanding, economic-development slogan, 'the Alberta Advantage.' As Benoit recalls, the new brand was to be an open one, comprising a slogan and images that anyone could use. Following the usual government vendor-selection process, the PAB chose a consortium led by Calder Bateman, an Edmonton-based firm, and including Identica, the branding subsidiary of Cossette, the largest communications firm in Canada (Calder 2012), and researchers, experts in branding, advertising and social media, communications strategists and a pollster (Benoit 2012). The supporting research used 33 focus groups with 'informed citizens,' young adults and business leaders, plus

telephone surveys of 800 Albertans, 800 Americans and 1,200 Canadians. Brand testing followed in eight focus groups held in Edmonton, Calgary, Stettler and Toronto, plus 250 online interviews. The findings confirmed perceptions of Alberta as a place of natural beauty, but needing work in the areas of openness, compassion and environmental stewardship (Harris/Decima 2009).

While Benoit notes that the place-branding campaign concerned more than advertising, the environment or the sands (Benoit 2008), or taxes and money (Benoit 2012), the premier's office declared that the project aimed beyond the habitual goal of place-branding exercises—to attract skilled workers, investment and tourism to the province and to market local products and services—to negate perceptions of Alberta as a producer of dirty oil (Markusoff 2008). Benoit suggests that there were two primary target audiences for the rebranding campaign, Albertans and other Canadians, as affecting other intended markets like the US was a huge undertaking (2012). Other clues point to the US as a key, if collateral, target. First, the American market is crucial to Alberta's economy, buying almost 90% of the province's exports (Alberta 2011a) and delivering two-thirds of its foreign investment and 60% of its foreign tourists (Alberta 2011b). Second, almost 30% of the participants in the Alberta government's branding survey were Americans. Third, ads in American publications (Markusoff 2008) and an announcement of the pending release of the video a week before President Obama's visit to Canada (Pratt 2009) further suggest US audiencing, as does a subsequent ad in the *Washington Post* (at a cost of $55,800) that was originally intended as an opinion column defending the sands industry, but rejected by that newspaper (O'Donnell 2010). Finally, Alberta opened an office in Washington in 2004 to "promote Alberta's economic and

policy interests in key areas such as energy, environment and agriculture" (Alberta 2012c). That motives for the branding were economic as well as cultural was affirmed by the then-premier's justifying the $25-million rebranding campaign relative to an anticipated return of $40 billion in economic benefits (Audette and Henton 2009).

The PAB spent $4 million on three fronts: its research, a branding slogan, "Freedom to create, spirit to achieve", and a 2.5-minute video slideshow called *An Open Door* (Alberta 2009). A principal of the Edmonton-based firm leading the branding consortium, Frank Calder (2012)—a leader in Alberta's marketing and communication sector—recalls that the branding video was intended to be ancillary to the larger, external marketing campaign. But due to declining oil prices (and consequently, provincial royalty revenues) and the economic downturn, the rest of the $25 million was abandoned, leaving the video as the campaign's flagship. "When we decided to do it, a $12-billion surplus was forecast," recalls Benoit, "but by the time it was launched, there was a deficit. There was political turmoil inside the government at the time. All of these factors affected the outcome" (2012, 5).

The video was designed "to round out the perspective of Alberta, and reflects some traditional imagery of Alberta, rounded out with some urbane, urban, cultural, multi-ethnic images" (Calder 2012, 5). It unfolds in 36 frames, brimming with panoramas of the province's natural splendour. Reflecting the title, about half of the shots depict wide-open spaces under expansive, azure skies, including such iconic Albertan tourist-marketing subjects as the Rocky Mountains, fields of grain and the eerie badlands. Voice-over narration accompanies each image, repeating text that appears onscreen in some cases, contributing to positioning Alberta as open for people to pursue unlimited

opportunities and realize their dreams. An anthemic conclusion echoes American political rhetoric: "We hold true to the belief that our path from the past to the future can be made wide enough to carry the dreams of all Alberta … of all Albertans" (Alberta 2009). The province is presented as a beautiful backdrop for any human endeavour, suggesting an ecocentric gloss on an anthropocentric core (Takach 2013a).

The only reference in *An Open Door* to Alberta being a producer of energy is a backlit shot of a pumpjack at sunset that appears in a fleeting, briskly converging quilt of 16 images comprising a later frame which also includes a shot of wind turbines foregrounding a grain field and the Rockies. Read critically, this invokes Mirzoeff's observation of neoliberal positioning:

> The numerical majority finds itself in the position of Minority, unable to influence the key practices of security, finance, and ecology that determine their conditions of existence. This new Minority requires a new claim to rights, especially visual rights, because so much of globalization is conducted as a form of invisibility, in which the citizen has no right to look but is asked to 'move on, there's nothing to see.' (Smith 2008, 30)

To which citing of Jacques Rancière's (2001) policing analogy, Mirzoeff later adds:

> Only there is, and we know it and so do they. Critical visuality studies claims the right to look at that which authority wishes to conceal. (Mirzoeff 2013, xxx)

Thus, in considering the political, economic and environmental contexts in which it was produced and a likely key audience (the American oil market), *An Open Door* uses the *status quo* frame, suggesting that all is well in Alberta—as all place branding must do.

For branding purposes, then, when it comes to the sands, there is indeed 'nothing to see.' However, this approach is belied by five significant factors suggesting that the sands have become an indelible aspect of who we are as Albertans as an expression of our most profound beliefs, values and priorities. First, the sands ground what has been called the largest industrial project on Earth (Leahy 2006); can that be ignored outright? Second, revenues from non-royalty resource revenues make up an estimated 19% of Alberta's public revenue in 2013—down from the 28% estimated in 2012 due to market discounts on bitumen (Alberta 2013a). Third, a rising proportion of that revenue is due to the sands due to the ongoing decline in conventional oil production here (Alberta 2013a). Fourth, the province boasts a strong visual tradition foregrounding the oil industry (Part 6.2 above). Finally, for the province's largest and certainly its most powerful industry, "Alberta Is Energy" (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2010b).

So there is a substantial disconnect between the positioning of Alberta in *An Open Door* and in other productions and events considered here. The former deals with environmental concerns by ignoring them—the *green* frame—despite assertions by the Premier's office that it was produced to counter negative perceptions of the province due to its management of the sands (Audette and Markusoff 2008). Ironically, the video seems to reinforce the very stereotypes that the PAB's research indicated needed work: perceptions of Alberta as a beautiful place, but lacking in compassion for its people and respect for its natural environment (Harris/Decima 2009). When asked about this apparent disconnect, Benoit explains:

> There was no ecological piece because the video was supposed to be about us and our values, as opposed to only about energy.

> Albertans' values towards this place would not allow us to do what some are alleging we were doing. We planned to build on that in the ensuing branding campaign and use it as a basis for explaining why we were doing what we did and how it would affect what we do in the future…
>
> This was such a change, so different from what people had seen government do. It wasn't understandable in five seconds looking at a picture. We needed to get people to think, and there is no time for that anymore. (2012, 5)

An Open Door became a public-relations debacle, panned by critics, columnists and the blogosphere, not least for its initial version featuring an image taken not in Alberta, but in northeast England (Wainwright 2009). The director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation stated, "Don't try to pretend that we don't have the oil sands and we simply are just a bunch of parks and people who are out there to achieve and create or whatever the words were" (Canadian Press 2009). When a new premier took office upon her predecessor's retirement, she declared the rebranding defunct (Braid 2011), and the slideshow subsequently vanished from the government's Web page.[12]

So *An Open Door* is part of a larger, incomplete project. But beyond the PAB's focus testing, its 'soft launch' at a conference by the then-premier and favourable anecdotal accounts from government (Benoit 2012), its largely negative reception in the public forum suggests that this explanatory context remains lost on the wider public and

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[12] However, it is available as at this writing on YouTube as *Alberta: An Open Door to Opportunities,* posted by "alberta taiwan" with perhaps Taiwanese subtitles and 202 viewings at www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3Ve-RUBv5w (accessed May 13, 2013).

thus also on the discourse of place-identity around Alberta and the sands.

7.7 *Petropolis* (2009)

When the Alberta government launched its rebranding campaign, the premier's director of communications told the media that the rebranding campaign aimed "to tell the world that we're producing clean energy," adding, "I don't think we can leave that job to Greenpeace and the Sierra Club" (Markusoff 2008, B8). In fact, Greenpeace, the world's most prominent environmental-activist organization, had already contacted Peter Mettler, an acclaimed Toronto-based cinematographer, filmmaker and experimental artist working in sound and image, whose work is featured in two books (Pitschen and Schönholzer 1995; White 2006). In 2008, Mettler was researching and exploring the contents and flight-paths of clouds for his latest project, and having seen images, and heard, of the sands, he was interested to see what rises into the atmosphere there (2012a). So he volunteered to shoot Greenpeace's film in return for consent to use any of the footage in his new film. His contact at Greenpeace Canada "had a Greenpeace-type project in mind where we would go and interview people and different experts, and it would be very interview-based, information-based" (Mettler 2012a, 2).

They started filming interviews at locations around the sands, but were shut down by extraction companies' security forces. Mettler was struck by, first, "a kind of an uneasiness and possibly also a bit of the feel of the gold rush, a temporary state, where the whole thing could go in several directions at any time" (2012a, 1), and second, by the contrast between the visible "money-grabbing" in Fort McMurray and the Aboriginal community in Fort Chipewyan, with its residents' traditional way of life, livelihood and health threatened by the toxic fallout of bitumen extraction. After an exploratory

helicopter flight and cued by Mettler's work on clouds, they settled on aerial photography to show the panorama of the sands. Fine-quality camera equipment was needed to capture a steady image, which was required from altitudes over 1,000 feet, ostensibly the legal limit of the extraction companies' airspace. Mettler recalls his epiphany:

> So when I saw that footage … I thought, "Wow, this would make an amazing kind of film in its own right." And I proposed to Greenpeace that we do that and that I be allowed to make a film on my terms… and that it would not a typical Greenpeace-style film, but that interview footage that we shot could be a backup on the website. (3)

The resulting 43-minute film, *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands* (Mettler 2009), became a landmark in filmic discourse around the sands. It blends documentary with a critical genre of environmental photography known as the toxic sublime (Diehl 2006), popularized in the work of Edward Burtynsky in exhibitions and books like *Burtynsky Oil* (2009), and featured in a well-known film, *Manufactured Landscapes* (Baichwal 2006), on which Mettler served as cinematographer. As Peeples (2011) explains, "the toxic sublime produces dissonance by simultaneously showing beauty and ugliness, the magnitude of the projects and the insignificance of humans… [and] questions the role of the individual in the toxic landscape while simultaneously eliciting the feelings of security and risk, power and powerlessness" (377).

In keeping with Mettler's experimental style, *Petropolis* is an extended aerial tour of the sands region in conspicuously long shots accompanied occasionally by onscreen text culled from work by Nikiforuk (2010) and by a haunting, tonal soundscape with a

rhythm suggesting a heartbeat, co-created by Mettler. That we can see the helicopter's shadow and hear it in the background reflects Mettler's aim to show that we are all implicated in the use of oil-fuelled technologies, including filmmakers who use it in helicopters, their cameras and so on (2012a).

The film opens on a fly-over of the Athabasca River, which winds through immense, green boreal forest. Eventually, extraction plants and their fumes appear in the distance. We are flown over the brobdingnagian sands operations: mines and tailings lakes, plus the steam-assisted gravity drainage side, which Mettler notes "wasn't really possible to show because it's invisible, even though in some ways it hurts the environment more than the other processes" (2012a, 4). The camera follows the eerie repetition of a bulldozer-style behemoth, scooping out bitumen-soaked sand and dumping it into the beds of a fleet of the world's largest trucks, which haul it away for separation. Finally, we see the aftermath of extraction: the eviscerated, seemingly endless open-pit mines. The camera links air to ground by agilely zooming in and out.

Mettler originally planned voice-overs, but cut them to a few onscreen titles, so viewers could focus on relationships within the landscapes and the grand scale of extraction from the perspective of "a technological robot … run by three people in this helicopter, like two eyes in the sky" (5). Beyond logistic and aesthetic factors leading to the aerial shoot, a key factor was financial. As *Petropolis* "didn't really have a budget," more elaborate filming "would've meant a whole other level of strategy and fundraising and preparation to make the film" (6).

In positioning Alberta's natural and industrial landscape in relation to the sands, Mettler did not so much "have a blueprint ahead of time" as follow his artistic practice of

"discovering the images I want to show as I'm making them" (5). He resists the polarization of depicting "the evil corporations versus the environmentalists," and believes that humans try to improve our lives with technology, but don't understand its long-term implications. He illustrates this Frankenstein effect in closing, voice-over narration by citing the story of Karl Clark's horror at where his work had led—presented earlier in *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005b)—and inviting us to ponder, "What will we do next?" (Mettler 2009). This finale, even with its question read as an inquiry rather than an indictment (White, n.d.), and the titles help posit the film's frames as *health* and *present-minded.* On viewing the initial interviews, particularly those with residents of Fort Chipewyan, never included in the film, but added to the film's DVD release and website—a critical reading can add *greed, eco-justice* and *ecocide.* This is exemplified as Marie Adam, an elderly Aboriginal resident of Fort McMurray, remarks on the rampant destruction of water and air and the cancers caused by the sands, reminding us that "money can't be eaten" (Guise 2009). Mettler sees the film "as a story about greed, the economy and the systems we have in place to run the show" (2012a, 8).

Petropolis premiered in Nyon, Switzerland in April 2009, within a month of the launch of *An Open Door* (Alberta 2009), the Alberta government's declared effort to pre-empt *Petropolis'* producer, Greenpeace. Mettler's film travelled to many festivals domestically and abroad, enjoyed a domestic theatrical release, secured an American distributor and was televised by Europe R2 Television, a large broadcaster. It is released on DVD and downloadable on iTunes. Mettler sees a synergy in making a film that would appeal not only to "Greenpeace people, the already converted," but because he is considered an art and documentary filmmaker, also to "a whole different circuit of

exhibition and festivals than anything that they ever made would because their films tend to be more agitprop" (2012a, 3–4).

Aided by sponsorship from Greenpeace (the film) and the Oak Foundation, an international group of charities (the webisodes), *Petropolis* bridges online, festival, cinema and home (TV, DVD) viewing audiences with singular breadth. With sparse titles, only a brief epilogue and no customary chorus of documentary talking heads, the film's predominant reliance on imagery stands to make it more portable globally than any other film in this study; in fact, more interviewees (five) mention this than any other film. Thus, *Petropolis* singularly positions Alberta as the site of humanity's mighty assault on nature in a spectacle that *The Guardian* calls "beautifully apocalyptic" (Clarke 2010). Mettler's prior work in progress involving clouds was released later as a feature-length documentary, *The End of Time* (Mettler 2012b). Despite his original plan to include his footage of the sands in that film, "*Petropolis* became, shall we say, so profound or defined in its own right that putting shots of it into the new film didn't make sense anymore, it just didn't feel right. I never ended up doing that" (Mettler 2012a, 6).

7.8 *H_2Oil* (2009)

Two weeks after *Petropolis* debuted abroad, a 76-minute documentary, *H_2Oil* (S. Walsh 2009a), premiered at Toronto's Hot Docs Film Festival, the work of a Montréal-based filmmaker, Shannon Walsh, then a PhD student in education. She had made a few short agitprop films by 2006, when two friends sought filmmakers to help probe the fate of their third-generation water business in Alberta. Contemplating a short advocacy piece on water, Walsh went west and "watched the diminution of their well with the camera and

started seeing the effects of the tar sands. It was like walking into a film already being made" (2012, 2).

Her goal for *H_2Oil* became to "produce a tool for further movement-building, to question the logic and trajectory of proceeding with the tar-sands project, and to slow it down and stop it" (2). She sees the film as bringing "the indigenous struggle" to people and reducing racism, as "communities are all downstream [from the sands] through the Athabasca River delta." She situates her film as "about real people, not abstract impacts" and, echoing Radford's (2012) preservationist plea, "built on the sounds and the images that are quickly diminishing in Alberta […] not with nostalgia, but with hope, that we will attempt to make this place, and the people within it, come alive" (2009b).

Walsh draws on diverse documentary styles. TV images provide geopolitical context, such as the PM waxing rhapsodic about the epic size of the sands, which the narration states is "quickly becoming the largest industrialized project in human history, with a proposed fivefold increase in production." Aerial footage of open-pit mines and industrial activity show the scope. But the intimacy of the struggle against the sands is illustrated via cinéma vérité, as a handheld camera follows her friends to their water well and in their quest for answers from government authorities, and also Aboriginal residents in Fort Chipewyan facing what one local leader calls genocide by government and industry. Emotional shots of her friends reacting to their nearly empty well (which she says inspired *H_2Oil,* after which they "all went home and cried" (2012, 3)) and a young woman stricken by cancer (one of many unusual local health tragedies, summarized in a shot of a local graveyard), impress that the province has sold its soul for oil money.

Walsh also includes three short, 'Tar Sands 101'-style sequences created by an

Oscar-nominated animator, as "in 2006, there was no knowledge of the tar sands back East" (2). Characterized by inky spills seeping across maps and landscapes, these set the tone for later image-makers in depicting the vast reach of the sands through pipeline networks and ecological devastation—particularly of the fragile supply of freshwater—and the prostitution of the nation's sovereignty under trade agreements designed to secure America's energy needs, but without retaining a secure supply locally.

Although the industrial apocalypse looms large in the film, Walsh also shows the natural landscape devastated by the accelerated extraction of the sands:

> One thing I tried to show was that Alberta is so beautiful. Many in the East perceive that the oil patch was a desert. … Alberta also has an image of ranching like the American Midwest, when in fact Alberta has one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world, this giant sponge holding water in a lush forest and then releasing it gradually into the atmosphere. That's impossible to replace. … It's not just a field that you can put some sweetgrass and a fucking couple of buffalos on (pardon my language), as government and industry would have us believe. I had to try to represent that in some way. (2012, 3)

Ultimately, Walsh feels that the film is about "oil extraction versus water in stark opposition, water representing actual life and the world we live in, the trees, animals and air, versus something frivolous, greedy and expendable" (4). She struggled with cutting her friends' story from the film, fearing that it distracted from her focus on the sands. But she retained them as "Joe and Jane Everyone, average, Albertan White people" to whom

viewers could relate and without whom audiences would discount the film "as another unfortunate contextualization of the deeply racist society in which we live, another unfortunate Aboriginal story" (2–3). As in *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008) and *Downstream* (Iwerks 2008), Alberta is characterized as a puppet of globalization in general and the US in particular. Thus, the film employs *sellout, greed, eco-justice, health, present-minded* and *ecocide*, the full gamut of more ecocentric frames.

The film had a theatrical release in Canada—no small achievement in a nation in which English-language filmmakers enjoy a minute portion of the theatrical distribution and box-office receipts (Acland 2002)—and screenings at film festivals, community events and classrooms, as well as shorter, edited versions broadcast on Global TV and Télé-Québec.[13] Walsh is surprised at the minimal editorial problems that she encountered from broadcasters taking political sides on the sands; she attributes this to the novelty of the topic in 2009 (2012). *H_2Oil* also has a DVD release. She cites industry blogs criticizing the film as "not providing the whole story" and agrees, noting the depth and complexity of details around the sands and, as to balance, that "the industry's story is being told with million-dollar budgets" (5). She wonders whether *H_2Oil* would be more popular if were less political, but feels that it is "part of building a movement to oppose the tar sands," though ultimately it is up to citizens to "take up the call, mobilize communities to slow down the process and ensure that it's not just a green-light thing."

In considering the discourse around Alberta and the sands, Walsh observes, "I think that the propaganda machine of the Government of Alberta is such an important part of the story. Often, we are using the same images that they are. It's really about

[13] This study does not include a review of those edited versions, or of a French-language version of *H_2Oil* and its comparison with the original, English-language version.

framing; that's an important part of the story and will be ongoing" (6). In echoing the view that "reframing *is* social change" (Lakoff 2004, xv), Walsh invokes the power of positioning (beyond the representation itself) in informing and potentially shaping public attitudes towards not only issues like exploiting the sands, but also those responsible for managing the project. As the government's rebranding video (Alberta 2009) shows, place branding and reputation management have assumed paramount importance in an age in which economic power has replaced military force as a means of maintaining and expanding empires (van Ham 2010a, 2010b).

7.9 *Land of Oil and Water* (2009)

Land of Oil and Water: Aboriginal Voices on Life in the Oil Sands (McArthur and Cariou 2009a), a 44-minute film, premiered at Vancouver's DOXA Documentary Film Festival in May 2009, the work of two University of Manitoba professors, Neil McArthur (philosophy), also a writer and filmmaker, and Warren Cariou (Aboriginal literature), also an acclaimed author. The $10,000 budget was self-financed out of a desire to proceed without waiting on funding applications (Cariou 2012).

The film follows Cariou (partly Métis), who, on learning that Alberta-based oil companies are expanding into his native Northern Saskatchewan, talks with Cree, Dene and Métis people about their hopes and fears around exploiting the sands there, then travels to Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan to learn of Alberta's experiences after three decades of development. The latter became the focus of a 15-minute extract from the film, *Overburden* (McArthur and Cariou 2009b). Curious and concerned about the sands' effect on Aboriginal communities, Cariou sensed "a vacuum in material addressing them visually" and a need "to show the scale of the project" (2012, 1). Like his predecessors,

he was unaware of any documentaries on Alberta. His sense of corporate productions on the sands is that "it was about giant machines and people were miniscule in comparison." Suspicious of development—on which Alberta "puts the pedal to the metal"—he always thought that Albertans' general silence on the oil companies' decades of free rein signalled acquiescence, lack of understanding, or oil being tied into so many people's livelihoods that "they can't step back and question it" (2).

Cariou and McArthur sought to give voice to Aboriginal communities frustrated by unanswered pleas to stop the rising extraction devastating their health and culture. Yet they worried about whether locals would talk on film. They sought to show "the effect on 'real' people who are not apologizing for, or hugely benefiting from, the tar sands" as opposed to "a canned response … experts, Greenpeace etc." that were already served by news media, and to "contrast between the human stories and the … juggernaut going on around them" (Cariou 2012, 3)—a story of human dignity rather than "another dysfunctional reserve" (5). With Canada being "advertised internationally as a place where human rights are sacrosanct and we have pristine nature," the filmmakers "wanted to show an image that most people don't know about or want to think about" (4):

> We used a [helicopter] fly-over … right into a smokestack. We showed all the machinery and smoke over the camera. We showed Syncrude and the operation … [in] that glow close to the beginning of darkness. There's a nature scene, the camera drops, then comes up again, very menacing. The opening and closing shots were of a fly on a spiderweb in the muskeg. The fly doesn't get stuck. We

> tucked in symbolism, our little bit of hope at the end that we can escape it all.

Pristine forest and marshland contrast with scarred earth, grey air and toxic sludge that was once water. The film connects viewers to indigenous locals with diverse views on the sands—for example, 20-somethings praise the unlimited economic opportunities, but the Rezz Dawgz, a hip-hop/rap group providing the film's Spartan soundtrack, rap, "We used to love this land/ But we don't like what's left." One rapper, Blair Faichney, declares, "They've pretty much stripped our land and just fed everybody money to keep their mouths shut." Cariou likens resource extraction to cultural genocide, and sees the locals "committed to place, unlike those who work there and live elsewhere or leave after five years" because "[p]lace is not interchangeable for indigenous people" (4).

As in *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008), *Land of Oil and Water* presents Alberta as an unfettered, colonial enterprise, Canada's own myopic, economic Manifest Destiny of individual enrichment, an infinite, unstoppable reservoir of cultural and ecological plunder. The unvarnished and unfailingly eloquent accounts of the Aboriginal community's defenders, bracketed by Cariou's sensitive narration, offer an intimacy contrasting sharply with slicker, hard-hitting productions. In considering the tensions between economy and environment at Fort Chipewyan, Cariou observes that nature "looked so beautiful and pristine, but it wasn't. … The pristine and the tainted are separated, but both are constructs, fictions in a way" (2012, 4). He sees "a double-natured identity of Alberta as a pristine, eco-tourist destination and a place where there is destruction" (6). And yet, he states, "I wasn't thinking of presenting an alternate identity on Alberta, but the future of Saskatchewan in terms of the tar sands. I find it interesting

that people responded to it as a commentary on Alberta identity" (2). Thus, the film uses the *eco-justice, health, greed* and *ecocide* frames, firmly on the ecocentric side of the spectrum. In its quiet way—which includes a teaching resource sent to some 200 schools in Ontario and screened for more than 50,000 students (McArthur and Cariou n.d.)—the film makes its mark on the discourse with its singular focus on Aboriginal voices on the sands, not simply as they have been portrayed in productions by the oil industry (happy entrepreneurs and employees) and concerned documentarians (victims), but as conflicted citizens on the front line facing Alberta's massive march to more and more extraction.

7.10 *Dirty Oil* (2009)

In October 2009, the Hollywood filmmaker, Leslie Iwerks, premiered *Dirty Oil* (Iwerks 2009), the 75-minute, expanded version of her earlier, short documentary, *Downstream* (2008), at the Hamptons International Film Festival in New York. While retaining the story of Dr. O'Connor at Fort Chipewyan featured in *Downstream, Dirty Oil* also zooms out to examine the role and effect of oil in American society. Beyond footage of increasingly familiar razed forests, open-pit mines and toxic tailings lakes are shots of American presidents, Midwestern refineries, Arab insurgents, Shanghai, calving glaciers, wind turbines, multinational oil-company headquarters and aerials of the Earth itself. The sands' global connections and the project's contributions to poisoned air and water, increased diseases, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, displaced populations, lost freshwater and other horrors are juxtaposed with the genocidal and biocidal effects on Aboriginal populations in Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay, recounted by its residents.

As in the *60 Minutes* segment (Schorn 2006), Alberta and especially Fort McMurray are positioned as the world's final frontier for profitable oil extraction, a gold-

rush place in which companies reap massive profits, novices can earn six-figure incomes and people are literally dwarfed by the sands and the attendant technologies like the iconic yellow truck. In response, CAPP's VP, Greg Stringham, expresses his faith in technological improvements to sands operations (the *progress* frame), while scientists David Schindler and Kevin Timoney and Alberta's Greenpeace rep detail the ecological devastation caused by extraction. Alberta's then-minister of energy, Mel Knight, declares that Alberta's environmental standards and legislation "lead the world," but says the problem is that this is not communicated well because "it's not flashy or sexy" (the *green* and *denial* frames). As Timoney and Andrew Nikiforuk point out, Alberta's laws are rarely enforced, and the monitoring of air and water quality by government and industry is both secretive and suspect. This is reinforced by testimony from locals about deformed fish and undrinkable water, and from Dr. O'Connor, whose story graced *Downstream.*

Dirty Oil incorporates elements of most of the productions noted so far: the global and longer-term perspectives of *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005a) and *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008), the ecological conscience of David Suzuki's CBC programs (Bowie 2004, 2006), the intimacy and educational function of *H_2Oil* (S. Walsh 2009a), the aerials of *Petropolis* (Mettler 2009) and the Aboriginal perspective in *Land of Oil and Water* (McArthur and Cariou 2009). In the hands of a well-known, independent American filmmaker with authority and resources to produce and distribute a major film, the overarching portrait of Alberta that emerges is, as a regional director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, Henry Henderson, puts it in *Dirty Oil,* an exemplar of a place where you get:

> Big people picking on small people and assuming they can get away with it, taking what is others' and turning it to their own ends

> as if they are blessed... It is bullying at the worst level, it puts people who cannot protect themselves in harm's way and that's maddening. (Iwerks 2009)

Iwerks sees Alberta as a site for bullying by Big Oil as a key theme of her film (Iwerks 2012). A British review notes the film's exposing corporate bullying, as well as the poisoning of Aboriginal communities, in Alberta in extracting the sands (Foley 2010). Referencing Iwerks' main target audience, Nikiforuk muses in the film that rising American resistance to Alberta's 'dirty' oil "might actually get us to clean up." Ironically, Alberta is presented as in need of saving from itself—by the principal customers for its bitumen!

Thus, the film deploys the *rogue, greed, eco-justice, health, present-minded* and *ecocide* frames. Iwerks' cinematic assault illustrates the documentarian's challenge to get different perspectives on controversial issues like the sands. After noting her difficulties in accessing sands operations and sources involved in extraction—difficulties not as evident when Palmer made *Pay Dirt* in 2005 and also noted by Mettler (2012a) and Walsh (2012) in making their films—Iwerks states:

> I might have … my own point of view, but I try and at least bring both sides of the story to the public and let them decide for themselves what they want to believe. … So it was fascinating to hear the information that seems so researched on the science and environmental side, versus the regurgitated facts that came from the government and the industry side. Every fact that was spewed out on the government's side was completely torn apart by the

> other side. There was so much information it was hard to distil it all... (Carnevale 2009, 4)

The film's profile was raised with support from Babelgum (the British Internet TV service that commissioned *Dirty Oil* as its first feature), the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Co-operative Group, a clean-energy consortium (Iwerks 2012; J. Gilbert 2010) working with the WWF (World Wildlife Fund n.d.). It was further enhanced by the media spotlight on Iwerks' earlier film, *Downstream* (incorporated into *Dirty Oil),* being shortlisted at the 2009 Oscars, and also by the brief brouhaha over Alberta's culture minister's musings about withholding government funding from films not portraying the province positively (CBC News 2008b; Volmers 2009). As the longest work studied to this point and embracing the full panoply of moralistic and transformational frames, the film can be seen as a consolidation of filmic dissent on the sands in late 2009.

7.11 Context III: COP 15 in Copenhagen (2009)

Growing resistance to the sands coincided with the run-up to the United Nations' Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009, attended by 115 leaders, with over 40,000 representatives of governments, NGOs, faith-based groups, media and other agencies applying for accreditation (United Nations 2013). 'COP 15' continued work begun under the Kyoto Protocol. Although the ensuing Copenhagen Accord failed to establish a binding consensus on reducing anthropogenic greenhouse gases to replace Kyoto (SourceWatch 2010), it did spotlight climate-change issues in the public sphere and consequently may be seen as a further impetus for scrutinizing major industrial projects like the sands. This was evidenced by a media study showing a 45-percent surge in coverage of the sands from November to December 2009: the study noted attendance

at COP 15 “not just by world leaders but by all manner of environmental organizations and militants,” and attributed the spike in coverage to “protests by these groups and accusations against the oil sands from government figures, Canadian and otherwise,” leading to “environmental stories rather than economic, the vast majority of which were negative” (Canada West Foundation 2010, 1).

7.12 *Canada’s Oil Sands: Come See for Yourself* (2010)

The stage was set for the oil industry’s response through its voice, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP). CAPP’s member companies produce some 90 percent of Canada’s natural gas and crude oil. Based in Calgary, CAPP exists “to enhance the economic sustainability of the Canadian upstream petroleum industry in a safe and environmentally and socially responsible manner, through constructive engagement and communication with governments, the public and stakeholders in the communities in which we operate” (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2012c). Reflecting a cultural shift from members’ concentration in engineering and accounting, CAPP’s first media-relations hire, Travis Davies, now works on a team of 17 serving as an internal PR agency (Davies 2012). He sees “an intimate relationship between Albertans and the energy industry” (1).

CAPP launched a video campaign to expand its media channels and “to build credibility and ensure that all our facts are correct” (3). Following industry practice, CAPP issued a national call for proposals and hired a Toronto agency to produce the videos. In January 2010, CAPP launched its online video campaign with *Canada’s Oil Sands: Come See for Yourself* (2010), the 16-minute flagship for a series of shorter pieces for different audiences. These videos “focus on real people in the industry, shooting

workers in their natural work environments" and are unscripted to lend "authenticity and an air of credibility" (Davies 2012, 3). Davies comments, "We needed to do it differently, especially for an industry with low credibility; people do not trust us." CAPP "stepped outside the box to make the film, based on research targeted to a specific audience and a specific key message" (4). Perceiving that "public discourse on the oil sands was polarized in the media," CAPP's approach was surgically focused:

> We sought the soft, moderate audience, not necessarily landing on a hard position on the oil sands, one on the periphery and not creating all this noise. To be perfectly specific, we were looking for women aged 30 to 55 in urban centers and outside Alberta, as well as influencers: people who are politically active, write letters to the editor and so on. (Davies 2012, 3)

Canada's Oil Sands is a primer premised on the world's need for "lots" and "secure, responsible supplies" of energy, "developed in the most environmentally responsible and sustainable way that we can," with "Canada's oil sands … uniquely situated to play an increasingly important role." In choosing imagery, CAPP sought to show that "smart, passionate people work in the oil sands" and that they "care about the environment" (Davies 2012, 4) and their work. The video was "less about place and more about the people working there" (3).

Mining is presented in closer, tighter shots relative to the expansive aerials in the critical documentary films, suggesting a process that is carefully managed, thoroughly regulated and scrupulously monitored. We see technology as the solution to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and the industry's colossal use of water. The newer process of

bitumen extraction, steam-assisted gravity drainage, is illustrated in an animation without reference to its more intensive use of energy and its risks to aquifers. The tailings lakes look blue, their toxicity invisible. Talk of land reclamation accompanies footage of lush-looking muskeg and bison. We see flowing rivers and trees aplenty. Fort McMurray appears as wholesome, with a family relaxing in a park, cyclists, skidoos, a college, etc. An earlier video, *A Side of Fort McMurray You Haven't Seen* (CAPP 2009), adds visuals like a theatre, truckers and a mosque. A Syncrude VP stresses the company's extensive consultations with every affected Aboriginal community, and a suited Aboriginal man says sands companies "wholeheartedly support" Aboriginal-owned businesses.

The sands are described as not merely Albertan, but Canadian, with major economic benefits to manufacturing in Ontario and Québec. The video closes with shots of the White House, other US landmarks and the Calgary-based US consul general's observation that "Canada is among the US's safest, most reliable and most significant trading partners," emphasizing the American concern for "national energy security." Citing Canada deviates from the Alberta government's omitting Canada from its discourse of provincehood at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2006, but it does underscore the undisputed importance to both government and industry of swaying American public opinion to support importing bitumen and building more pipelines to accelerate that, in the interests of 'security.' Davies situates CAPP's approach:

> Our long-term strategy began in a climate of anger and distrust. Our first step was to acknowledge people's concern, take a bit of a beating, say our *mea culpas* and listen to their anger, following the risk-communication model. At some point, people ask you to talk.

> We wanted to show that we are accountable and happy to share that data.
>
> We would do the video differently today because we're in a different spot now. … Our polling shows that people are aware that CAPP is working on the environment, but the fact that our economic footprint falls across the country is less well-known. [Today, we would include] less fact and more emotion. We would add that emotion and attach it to people and their passion. Where we were not successful, we tried to fight emotion with fact. Now we use real people, focusing on increasing the base of understanding and instilling a sense of pride in developing our natural resources and a sense of values around the production of resources. We would focus on the environment and the economic benefits to Canada, the US and globally. (5)

Davies observes that social media have become very important to communicate, as does the PAB—whose failure to act quickly on social-media messaging about using a non-Albertan image in its rebranding slideshow helped to sink it (Benoit 2012). He also notes that attaching video assets facilitates forwarding them to others. As of July 2013, Part 1 of *Canada's Oil Sands* had logged almost 39,000 views, 112 likes and 207 dislikes on YouTube, while Part 2 recorded about 7,000 views, 41 likes and 36 dislikes; this does not include viewings on CAPP's own website, numbers of which are not displayed.

In positioning Alberta as a friendly, stable and environmentally responsible neighbour, producer and supplier of oil, the video epitomizes the use of the

anthropocentric *ethical oil, money, progress, status quo* and *bridging* frames by those standing to gain financially from fast-tracking further extraction. The video marks a key shift in imagery around the sands, away from privileging mighty machinery—a trend cited by Cariou (2012)—to featuring people who run it.

7.13 *Rethink Alberta* (2010)

Six months after CAPP's video launch, Corporate Ethics International (CEI) unleashed its 98-second *Rethink Alberta* video (2010) online and a parallel billboard campaign in four American cities and London, England. Founded by "many top environmental and environmental health markets campaigners from the U.S., Europe, and Canada," the US-based group aims "to bring corporations back in service to and under the control of the citizenry" (Corporate Ethics International n.d.a) and improve business ethics. Its first campaign led to Wal-Mart's adopting a major sustainability initiative (n.d.b), and in 2008, it launched an environmental campaign against the sands, which CEI calls "the poster child for why the US needs to end its addiction to oil" (n.d.c). This responded to "pro-oil sands lobbying and advertising in the United States by the Alberta government and the province's oil industry" (Jones 2010), epitomized by a $55,800 full-page ad in the *Washington Post* bought by the province two weeks earlier, after that newspaper rejected it as an op-ed piece (O'Donnell 2010).

Rethink Alberta opens on classic tourist images of Alberta—wildlife, mountains, lakes, wheat and cowboys—with narrated, rhapsodic prose like "There's a place where snow-capped mountains kiss golden sunsets." Then comes the challenge, "Think you know Alberta? Think again." An image of a deer in nature morphs into quick shots of stripped boreal forest, open-pit mining, toxic waste pouring into a tailings lake and

smokestacks spewing bilge, repeating and ending on heart-wrenching photos of dead ducks trapped in oily sludge, invoking that notorious, aforementioned incident in 2008.

Although *Rethink Alberta* invites viewers considering visiting the province to "think again" because of its mismanagement of the sands, CEI's then-executive director, Michael Marx, suggests that the video was not aimed at tourism (being released in mid-summer, when most travel plans have already been made), fixing its true message as urging the Alberta government to "stop the public relations and start the dialogue on how to manage the oil sands" (Gerein 2011). Marx defines the twin needs of a successful boycott as both visibility beyond Alberta and a targeted constituency inside it:

> [Albertans] resented the campaign, but they were paying more attention to the string of bad news that emerged after the boycott … [which] because of its perceive[d] 'extreme position' actually created space for moderate politicians and media voices to call for reforms. Government and oil companies were forced to acknowledge the veracity of the criticism. (Marx n.d., 1)[14]

As for the video's potential impact on tourism, one survey revealed that the number of Britons and Americans who considered visiting Alberta (54 percent of Britons, 49 percent of Americans) fell by about half after viewing the *Rethink Alberta* video; the stakes are substantial, with 828,000 American visitors spending $583 million and 229,000 Britons spending $260 million in Alberta in 2008 (D'Aliesio 2010).

As of July 2013, the video had more than 102,000 viewings on YouTube, with

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[14] Marx had left CEI by 2012. My efforts to contact and interview him were diverse, protracted and unsuccessful. Eventually, I made contact with a member of the anti-sands campaign, responsibility for which was shifted from CEI to the UK-based No Tar Sands Network.

several hundred diverse comments, 177 likes and 235 dislikes—compared to 4,716 viewings of the Alberta government's rebranding video before its withdrawal. That *Rethink Alberta* got more than 4,000 online viewings in the 21 months preceding this writing—a period beginning 16 months *after* its launch in July 2010—speaks to the ongoing power of online advocacy. It may also speak to the passion aroused by social dissent, given that at this writing, the video received almost three times as many YouTube viewings as CAPP's defence, *Canada's Oil Sands* (2010).

Whatever its effect on tourism, *Rethink Alberta* remains a direct broadside in the visual positioning of Alberta around the sands. Its perversion of Alberta's traditional imagery and use of the moralist *rogue, eco-justice* and *health* frames ride the rising tide of concerns expressed about the province's record on the environment, human rights and Aboriginal issues.

7.14 "Alberta: Tell It Like It Is" campaign (2010)

In September 2010, two months after *Rethink Alberta*'s release, the province launched a video campaign as part of its "Alberta. Tell It Like It Is" campaign, which had begun that June. Unlike its rebranding effort, *An Open Door* (2009), the nine new videos, fronted by *About the Oil Sands* (Alberta 2010a), directly address the sands and the province's management of resource extraction. As one of its creators, an Alberta government employee, explains:

> It wasn't just the video landscape, but the whole atmosphere of what was said about Alberta in 2009–2010. There were lots of demonstrations, activists, etc. and it all came to a head when

Avatar came out and people said Mordor was like the oil sands.[15] … We got a lot of comments from Albertans who were deeply insulted and wanted to defend themselves, not just about the oil sands but over our reputation as Albertans, which was on the line. Research backs this up, but personally, as an Albertan, I was offended. That's not what Alberta is like. … International stakeholders—trade and investment partners—were affected by all of this media talk and activist activity.

[…] We had seen videos showing the oil sands in a bad light, and that wasn't the whole story. We wanted to show the good work being done up there: reclamation, Aboriginal employment, that's part of the background. It's also innovative and monumental to discover the oil sands in the 1920s and develop them to what they are now. If you listen to the naysayers, you would think that Alberta is one massive mine. We wanted to show a more balanced view. People were reacting to the totality, the buildup of [video] stuff, *Dirty Oil* [(Iwerks 2009)] with an American actress [Neve Campbell] as host, Lush cosmetics and Walgreen suggesting a boycott of Alberta oil, the "Rethink Alberta" campaign suggesting that people not visit Alberta because it's one big tar-sands mine.

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[15] *Avatar* (Cameron 2010) is Hollywood's all-time top-grossing film (IMDb 2013), depicting the struggle of a peaceful society living in harmony with nature to save its world from environmental destruction by brutal, imperialist forces. Mordor is a term borrowed in popular usage from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* to connote a shadowy place of death and destruction, visualized for contemporary audiences in film (e.g. Jackson 2001).

> But the oil sands is just a tiny section of Alberta up in the northeast corner, although you would get a contrary impression because the activists' voices are louder. So then CAPP got involved, then the Government of Alberta got into reputation management, of which the videos are a part. (Anonymous 2012, 1)

About the Oil Sands was filmed in a month and filled out with stock footage. Other "Tell It Like It Is" videos cover air, water, biodiversity, site reclamation, Aboriginal workers, life in Fort McMurray and research on the sands and carbon capture and storage. The visual strategy of the campaign and its flagship video was:

> We wanted to stay with the people. The usual big equipment is shown so much that it is become an iconic image of the oil sands, the great, big truck with the great, big wheels in the great, big mine. We wanted to show a lot of highly educated, highly competent people working in the oil sands, not a faceless, big, black thing with machines all over it... (Anonymous 2012, 4)

Albertans are depicted as calm, matter-of-fact and proud of their work in the sands, their responsible management and the technology that they feel will continue to improve the efficiency of production and its ecological impact. For example, in *About the Oil Sands,* a brief aerial shot of a tailings lake, admitted by the onscreen narrator, Alberta Energy's Charles Ward, to be "an ugly eyesore," is followed by citing the "fantastic… great progress" on shortening the lifecycle of those lakes, over footage of reclaimed muskeg and nature. The focus of extraction is said to be shifting to in-situ, steam-assisted gravity drainage, which is presented as less harmful environmentally than open-pit mining—a

claim contested beyond government and industry (e.g. Mettler 2012a). The calmness of the narrators, the slower-paced editing and the lower-key background music offer a softer presentation than most of the work studied here.

The overriding ethic of the videos is captured by one of its creators:

> Albertans are optimistic, forward-thinking and modern. They're the kind of people who want to keep Alberta beautiful, not just look but keep and improve our good quality of life in everything Alberta does. This is perceived as arrogant by some. But it's a reaction to caring about what people think about us on the international stage. We want people to come here and see Alberta is a great place. We're always working to keep improving things.
>
> … Albertans are certainly working to make these things right. We're the most regulated place in the world, it's been said, in terms of making sure that things are done to keep things in check so it doesn't ruin the environment and make things unsafe. There is a federal and provincial system to monitor the air and water quality and make it the best in the world. (Anonymous 2012, 2)

As well as online, the videos were presented at conferences, tradeshows, etc. and given to visitors touring the sands, accompanied by an e-card campaign and fact sheet, and even an ad in New York's Times Square (Anonymous 2012). *About the Oil Sands* logged about 21,000 viewings, 26 likes and 17 dislikes on YouTube as of July 2013, and a similar but longer video, *Alberta Oil Sands: About* (Alberta 2010b), was posted on

YouTube by the province in June 2010, receiving almost 49,000 viewings, with the (dis)likes tracker disabled.

Exuding initiative, optimism and a restrained confidence and pride in both place and resource extraction, buttressed by the rationality of science and technology, the government's positioning of the province and the sands uses the anthropocentric frames of *money, progress* and particularly *status quo* to suggest that all is in hand on the sands. In moving to a softer approach, *About the Oil Sands* and its ancillary videos follow the strategy, tone and content of CAPP's video work: they humanize the sands by focusing on people rather than on the industrial apparatus (to which critics might add 'power relations' and 'injustices') that they serve.

7.15 *Tipping Point* (2011)

In January 2011, the CBC re-entered the fray with the most ambitious production undertaken on the sands to date with *Tipping Point: The Age of the Oil Sands* (Radford and Thompson 2011). The 90-minute film was co-directed by Alberta's preeminent documentarian, Tom Radford, and Niobe Thompson, an Alberta-based filmmaker whose training includes postdoctoral work in anthropology while co-producing *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008) for an earlier episode of CBC's *The Nature of Things.* Thompson surveys the filmic discourse as follows:

> Except for *Paydirt,* which positively depicts the engineering challenges of the tar sands, the rest of the films were negative in terms of the effects of development. The filmmakers' intent was to produce a polemic, as in *H_2Oil*. Including [Athabasca Chipewyan] Chief Allan Adam, David Schindler, Andrew Nikiforuk, emotional

> sound design, speed-ramps on the tar sands and gritty colour correction show an intent to achieve an effect on the viewer, which succeeded. It's not dishonest to make a film seen as an attack on the tar sands. But if you didn't know differently, it would be astonishing that Albertans would make such a Faustian pact. I have a more nuanced view as an Albertan because oil money funds our films! I have a sense of outrage as an Albertan. Very few of those films are by Albertans, only *Pay Dirt*... (2012a, 1)

Thompson notes that the world of feature documentaries is "incredibly crowded" (2) and that securing funding to produce them has become increasingly difficult, although, paradoxically, public interest in such films has never been greater. Echoing the shift noted as early as the *60 Minutes* segment (Schorn 2006), he sees much more knowledge and interest around the sands between Radford's and his pitching *Tar Sands* in 2006 and *Tipping Point* in 2009 to international broadcasters and film festivals. He believes that the CBC's decision to proceed was probably because the filmmakers were Albertans and the work would feature Albertan voices. As David Suzuki wished to do a film on the sands, the CBC turned their proposed one-hour documentary on water and the sands—inspired by David Schindler's research into the source of rare cancers in Fort Chipewyan—into a two-hour special airing in the combined time slots of *The Nature of Things* (hosted by Suzuki) and *DocZone*.

Thus, *Tipping Point* became a rare opportunity, made with a $1.2-million budget (huge for a Canadian documentary) and spending a year deeply following Dr. Schindler's scientific research and the fear and anger in Fort Chipewyan—far longer than the "quick

and dirty snapshot" afforded by Iwerks' prior, short "'j'accuse! movie," *Downstream* (2008) (Radford 2012, 7). This is interwoven with a parallel story, the fight to stop the killing effects of the sands undertaken by François Paulette, a pioneering advocate for Aboriginal rights in a Canadian Supreme Court case (*Paulette v. The Queen* 1976). His fight includes enlisting the support, on camera, of the Canadian-born filmmaker and Hollywood box-office champion, James Cameron, whose recent, environment-themed blockbuster, *Avatar* (2010), Paulette and others liken to what sands extraction is doing to Fort Chipewyan. Radford explains the filmmakers' motivation:

> We made *Tipping Point* because we felt that if we can't have a dialogue on the oil sands, where can you start? It's not even dialogue in Alberta, where everyone drives big vehicles and is unconnected to what's happening to the planet. In Alberta, global warming is viewed as a positive, giving us a few extra days on the golf course each year. (2012, 6)

In choosing imagery, they focused on "images of scale"—documentarian practice dating back to *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005a)—because "most people don't understand how big the sacrifice zone, to use Schindler's term, is," states Radford (7). He views the boreal forest as "the lungs of the planet" and sought to "find a language for that." So *Tipping Point* provides helicopter shots of huge flocks of snow geese, ecological systems and the mines for which they are sacrificed. On a more intimate scale, the filmmakers sought to show the human costs of extraction, memorably exemplified in a living-room scene in Fort Chipewyan, in which a family gathers around a wall of photos and tearfully points out local cancer victims.

Tipping Point premiered to 580,000 viewers on the CBC and more than one million Canadians have seen it on rebroadcasts, reports Thompson (2012a), most recently in March 2013. "We have to make our peace with Canadian Tire ads," he says, observing that television is still the best way to draw a big audience in a world of media fragmentation. "It's imperfect, but we do reach people" (4).

Radford (2012) notes an apparent divide between those who wanted a discourse on the sands and those who saw the film as an attack on who we are as Albertans.

The film was reviewed favourably in entertainment and scientific journals, and also by a scholar (McMillan 2012). It is seen as the leading film on point by independent filmmakers interviewed for this study (S. Walsh 2012; Cariou 2012; Lavallee 2012):

> [I]t is the best film on the sands because it got the big picture and captured key moments really well… The filmmakers had an intuitive sense that something was about to happen and managed to be there to capture it, as was the case with James Cameron's visit to Alberta… one Aboriginal man in the film tells him, "That movie you made *[Avatar],* that's about my life"… [and] catching Alberta's environment minister, Rob Renner, in a lie when journalists confronted him with Schindler's report refuting Renner's denials of any studies documenting toxins in the Athabasca River. (Lavallee 2012, 3)

Thompson notes many positive letters published in the *Toronto Star, Montreal Gazette* and *Edmonton Journal* (2012a). The CBC's online comment space recorded 84 posts from January 14, 2011 to April 8, 2012, expressing divergent perspectives, with recurring

themes being environmental concern and anti-development bias; a large majority of responses to these posts (indicated by counts of "agree" and "disagree" clicks) noticeably favour the environmental priority, which may (not) reflect the preferences of the CBC's audience generally.

However, the oil industry (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers 2011) and the business press (Foster 2011) contested the *science* in the film. A national newspaper review opined that the film was insufficient to cover a very complex issue (Doyle 2011). The *Calgary Sun* disparaged "the Toronto filmmakers who made *Tipping Point* and don't understand Alberta" (Radford, 2012, 5). Two other singular attacks on the film occurred. First came a letter-writing campaign from what appeared to be the province's grassroots:

> Very soon after the broadcast, the predictable complaints born of Alberta's persecution complex started, and we faced a huge job defending the film's credibility. I suspect that the Public Affairs Bureau, CAPP and the PR departments of the oil companies marshalled the campaign of aggrieved Albertans against the CBC for broadcasting 'two hours of fabricated lies.' I say this because the letter-writing was so prolific and the arguments unchanging, consistent and the same as those made by the large PR companies, the PAB and CAPP. (Thompson 2012a, 7)

Second came a formal complaint to the CBC alleging that *Tipping Point* was biased in its treatment of the sands. In dismissing the complaint, the CBC's Ombudsman writes:

> While there are bound to be hard feelings … in the struggle over

> the destiny of the Albertan oil sands, a documentary that raises awareness of the need for stronger programs to monitor environmental effects is not an act of hostility or an attempt to denigrate those who favour the project. Done well, it is an act for the common good. (Lapointe 2011, 6)

"We got a glowing review, but it consumed vast amounts of time," recalls Thompson (2012a, 7). "I'm sure that was a victory for our critics. Then came three-year funding cuts to the CBC. I can't imagine that a film like *Tipping Point* didn't play a role in that."[16] Regarding the complainant to the CBC, a Ms. Stirling-Anosh, he states, "Neither of us have any evidence on the matter, but the nature of her correspondence [her language and its recurrence in other 'grassroots' complaints] convinced us and our co-producers at CBC that she was a mouthpiece for a coordinated, corporate program to dismantle the documentary after the fact" (2012b).[17]

Tipping Point played the environmental film festival circuit, community screenings and through the Natural Resources Defense Council; Al Jazeera re-versioned it for its *Witness* strand, and 133 nations saw it as *Until the Last Drop*; and it also played in Norway, Japan, etc. (Thompson 2012a). However, the film did not meet its creators' hopes of selection in leading documentary film festivals such as the IDFA,[18] for which the CBC's preference for narrated stories is "the kiss of death" (Thompson, 2012a, 7) in

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[16] The federal government provided $1.15 billion per year to the CBC, about 64 percent of the public broadcaster's budget. The government's funding cut of $115 million over three years starting in 2012 was 10 percent of that budget (CBC News 2012).

[17] Stirling-Anosh is listed as a research associate for a body devoted to advancing "policy choices that will help Canada's prairie region live up to its vast but unrealized economic potential" (Frontier Centre for Public Policy 2012, 2013a). A media release from the group during this writing leads with quotes which essentially deny that anthropogenic greenhouse-gas emissions are causing harmful global warming, and declares that CO_2 emissions help the environment by improving crop yields and forest growth (2013b).

[18] International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam

an era of auteur documentaries exemplified by Michael Moore:

> We can't do this with the oil sands because it's part of larger issues from First-Nation rights, to the poisoning of rivers and the responsibility of science in our society, to peak oil. The interests there are bigger issues, so *Tipping Point* had to be a larger narration, a Griersonian film,[19] but by definition kind of old-fashioned now. (Radford, 2012, 12)

Nor was even distribution in Alberta a given:

> It's frightening because there is no *Tipping Point* at Albertan film festivals; silence seems to be the preferred option. It's fine for movies about oil in Burma and Ecuador, but the oil sands are a little too close to home. Where do film festivals get their money? Oil companies or those who work for them. It's a closed loop. In the last 15 years, there is no way to get a film [like this] originated in Alberta. There is no *Tipping Point* without *The Nature of Things.* (Radford 2012, 8, 7)

The film's sweeping, unflinching depiction of Alberta and the sands uses the gamut of moralistic and transformational frames: *sellout, rogue, greed, eco-justice, health, present-minded* and *ecocide*. Its online and international dissemination may make it the most widely seen, and the most comprehensive, production on the sands to date, even if its critical, even frightening, portrayal of the province is unwelcome at home.

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[19] Radford's reference to "Griersonian" invokes John Grierson (1898–1972), the founding commissioner of the National Film Board, and his view of the documentary film as an active expression of humane, democratic values—propaganda for the public good—in counterpoint to the evil, authoritarian propaganda practised by Nazi Germany at the time (Hardy 1966; Babe 2000b; Druick 2007).

7.16 *White Water, Black Gold* (2011)

Popularly perceived as more environmentally friendly than Alberta, neighbouring British Columbia boasts several filmmakers who released documentaries related to the sands in 2011. The first of three examined here, premiering that March, is *White Water, Black Gold: A Nation's Water in Peril* (Lavallee 2011), a 64-minute investigative, point-of-view film by David Lavallee, a Rocky-Mountain hiking guide, recent MA in psychology and environmental activist, inspired to make films by *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim 2006) and *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008). Born in Alberta and recently fled to BC, Lavallee explains his sense of the discourse on Alberta and the sands as:

> The tar sands have earned us an international reputation, and these documentary films are probably part of earning Alberta that reputation. … In the petrodollar province of Alberta… the government is more beholden to oil companies, which is where its money comes from. The government is not taxing its people. This is why it's exceptionally hard in Alberta: it's not just the caribou, but democracy that's in peril. … Stifling dissent is like dictatorship. We're not there yet, but we are on the slippery slope. (2–3)

White Water, Black Gold aims to "kick-start a national conversation on the tar sands [that] pipelines are forcing us to start" (5) because they affect an element essential to life. The film follows the filmmaker's three-year journey to investigate the sands' profound threat to half of Canada's water. The quest begins with Lavallee's climb to the high point from which water flows into the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans, and

proceeds by canoe along the Athabasca River to the sands, to Fort Chipewyan, through ecologically sensitive areas of the British Columbia coast and ending at the port of Kitimat, BC, terminus of Calgary-based Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline.

One glaciologist shows how glaciers are "almost being decapitated" while another observes the irony in extraction companies contributing to depleting the glaciers on which they depend for their operations. Drs. Timoney and Schindler explain the science of toxic tailings lakes, and members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation share how they are being poisoned by the water on which their traditional livelihood has depended for millennia. In an emotional scene at a community meeting in Fort Chipewyan, locals pillory three Suncor representatives for the company's polluting the Athabasca River and not telling anyone. Alberta's attitude to indigenous people and others downstream or offside of development is captured when one Suncor rep apologizes for the company's not meeting earlier, noting that the locals actually came out ahead because this time take-out fried chicken was served. At the National Energy Board's hearing on the proposed pipeline in Kitimat, one Aboriginal resident states, "Two hundred days of the year, we're going to wake up in the morning, wondering if this is the day our community dies. Does any company have the right to make us live this way?"

The harshness of extraction's effects and the callousness of extraction companies is juxtaposed with views of nature during Lavallee's journey, accompanied by acoustic guitar music and sweet voices. His silently gliding canoe is met by ominous, belching smokestacks of a plant. Contrasting images of purity and destruction are reinforced by counterpoint editing. The film ends with a montage of kayakers, backpackers, spewing toxins, sands plants, glacial recession, pipelines and gutted adjoining land, refinery row,

contaminated and deformed fish, an eagle, a bear, a whale, healthy fish, flowing water, beautiful vistas and mountain panoramas, smokestacks and toxic sludge spewing into tailings lakes. In reasserting his theme, Lavallee's narration quotes the naturalist, John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe" (1911, 110).

White Water, Black Gold has screened at dozens of public events across Canada and in the US. A CBC podcast and a Canadian TV premiere on TVO occurred in 2012. It uses the now-familiar moralist *(rogue, sellout, greed, eco-justice* and *health)* and transformational (*present-minded)* frames. However, it extends the discourse by tracking the sands' effects beyond Alberta to emphasize the interconnectedness of all life, an ecocentric theme that flows through Lavallee's story like the water in its title. While other films emphasize Alberta's ties to global economic forces (notably the US) as an opportunity and/or a problem, this one links the province to ecosystems and communities through neighbouring BC to the Pacific Ocean, emphasizing Alberta's responsibility to the world and its perilous failure to meet it.

7.17 *Peace Out* (2011)

The second in BC's filmic trilogy addressing the sands, premiering in October 2011, is *Peace Out* (Wilkinson 2011) by Charles Wilkinson, who left his native Calgary decades ago because of its "honkytonk, temporary worker mentality" (Wilkinson 2012a, 5). His credits include more than two dozen feature films, documentaries, TV movies and episodic TV programs in Canada and the US, and a book, *The Working Director* (2013). He understands popular portrayals of Calgary as "Texas without capital punishment—yet" (2012a, 1), but observes that "as a mass medium, film is the second most expensive

art form after architecture," which "tends to cause film to make sweeping generalizations and go to drama whenever possible." Here he cites Fort McMurray, where "You'll find far more happiness in the suburbs than crack downtown, yet the media report 'Fort Crack'" (2). Similarly, he finds bitumen-industry workers more worldly, informed and conflicted than the "bullish cowboys" depicted in the media. As for Albertans:

> I sincerely sense that the vast majority of Albertans care deeply about their legacy. But they are bombarded cleverly by 24/7 messaging by corporations that we are doing our best on the tar sands. People must feed their families and have no time to study the veracity of claims. Politicians are beholden to the resource companies. … It's like you're in a relationship with someone who cheats on you, but they're nice to the kids and they pay some of the bills, so you turn a blind eye to it. Albertans are not stupid enough to believe that these resource companies have their best interests at heart, but they figure, "Ah, maybe the next generation will fix it." (4)

He feels that Canadians see Alberta as "a brasher younger brother" with "a chip on its shoulder," and that "the redneck-cowpokes view, underwritten by corporate interests, creates a tremendous wedge," which he aims to help overcome with his film (6).

When Wilkinson heard of the construction of another dam in Fort St. John on the Peace River, he went there, "looked at Mordor" and felt, "I cause that every time I turn on the lights, turn up the thermostat or gas up the car" (5). Thus, he came to *Peace Out* "not as an activist or environmentalist, but as someone sincerely wanting to know why

that despoiled situation came about. Most of us don't realize *we're* the guys with the chainsaws and the oilrigs. Those people are acting for *us."* So his target audience is people who are unconvinced of climate change or human effects on the Earth, plus "those who are struggling with what they can do" (6). He self-financed the film from his teaching earnings, an independence that he credits with getting him access to CAPP, for example, which he says might be less inclined to talk with the CBC or the NFB.

With an opening shot of a clock-radio starting his day, Wilkinson shows the ubiquity of energy and electronic gadgetry in our lives; how industry "has a free lunch on water" (the sands are said to use enough each day to supply two million people); and (over a shot of an open-pit mine) how "we've destroyed the world," sacrificing and transferring huge amounts of land, water and natural gas-fired power to northern Alberta "for dirty oil bound for Texas." Sped-up point-of-view shots from inside a car barrelling down the highway illustrate the breakneck pace of life and energy it uses. Aerial shots of refineries and operations in Fort McMurray accompany interviews with now familiar faces—Dr. Schindler, CAPP's VP and Alberta's Greenpeace rep—and other scholarly, financial, political, corporate and activist commentators. Wilkinson breaks with custom by having interviewees look straight at the camera, emphasizing their speaking directly to us rather than merely being observed by us. Over a final shot of a pristine river, Wilkinson concludes, "Are our grandchildren going to hate us for what we've done? Absolutely, yeah. They'll wonder why we couldn't just turn things off."

The film has screened in film festivals in Canada and the US. Wilkinson signed a distribution deal in Canada and the US for all media, and has an international distributor. *Peace Out* has also played in theatres across Canada, and enjoyed a TV premiere on

SuperChannel and a DVD release. A companion book, also titled *Peace Out* (Wilkinson, forthcoming), is slated for publication in autumn 2013.

Peace Out deals with the sands not so much as a window into positioning Alberta, but as part of an energy bonanza around Peace River that raises larger questions about our use of energy. Still, in depicting the province as an apogee of endemic energy gluttony, it uses the *bridging, compromise, sellout, health* and *present-minded* frames in calling for rational dialogue towards stopping "further destruction" (7) through the sands.

7.18 *On the Line* (2011)

The third BC-based work studied, *On the Line* (Wolf 2011), premiered two days after *Peace Out,* at the Vancouver International Film Festival. The 68-minute film examines a second controversial pipeline proposed to carry bitumen from the sands, after Keystone XL: Calgary-based Enbridge's proposed 1,170-km Northern Gateway pipeline from refineries in Bruderheim, Alberta through ecologically fragile areas in BC (including 773 waterways) to Kitimat, for shipping to Asian markets. The film chronicles Wolf's self-propelled, 2,400-km trek along the pipeline's GPS track to determine the true impacts of the $5.5-billion megaproject. Wolf has canoed across Alberta on the North Saskatchewan River, walked from Edmonton to Jasper and shot a short film about Vulcan. His take:

> There's definitely more to Alberta then Fort McMurray and rural Alberta north of Edmonton to Grand Prairie. … However, oil and gas *is* Alberta, you can't really get around that. Once Alberta was cowboy country, but now its self-identification is with oil and gas. Oil and gas rules. Some people didn't want to talk on camera as not to offend their neighbours. They have to deal with the

> pumpjack on their land. Lots of people are resigned to it and feel small next to it, though some make $170,000 a year working in the tar sands. There's definitely a feeling of powerlessness. (2012, 1)

Wolf saw *Petropolis* (Mettler 2009) and found it "nicely shot," but its "engendering a bludgeoning helplessness" inspired his intention to "do something motivational and positive" (Wolf 2012, 1). Having read *Tar Sands* (Nikiforuk 2010) and been asked by the co-founder of the conservation group, Pacific Wild, to make a film that walked the pipeline route, Wolf saw an opportunity to connect the pipeline, the sands and "the encroachment on lost wilderness by industry and humanity without a sustainable balance," all through "on-the-ground education, not just talking points on either side" (2). Believing it pointless to show such a film to "professional activists," he aimed for a broad audience by bringing a rough-and-tumble humour to the ardour of walking, hiking, biking, rafting and kayaking along the proposed pipeline's path, trying "not to be exhausting or bludgeoning like *Petropolis"* (3).

So *On the Line* avoids experts to let Albertans who live and work along the pipeline tell their own story of the oil patch. We hear from farmers, a cab driver, an environmental clean-up worker, etc., but there is no narration, which Wolf feels keeps it "more genuine" (4). Macro shots "create intimacy," exemplified by close-ups of a bee on a highway shoulder that is blown off its path by a transport truck speeding past. "It's important to give the viewer a real feeling, he states. "I find aerial shots detached."

On the Line played film festivals and aired as an edited, 52-minute version on the Documentary Channel and on CBC. It screened across BC, and DVDs are distributed at

the Mountain Equipment Co-op, where Wolf works. He tried to get the film into Albertan film festivals, but "couldn't get much traction" (3).

From its ground-level, DIY perspective, *On the Line* positions Albertans as caught in the crossfire of economic benefits and ecological calamity, ordinary people who by geological chance find themselves overrun by something much larger: "Good people, and if anyone else was in their shoes, they would probably do the same thing" (6). Thus, the film may initially seem more moderate than other, critical works studied here: its tone is certainly the jauntiest and least formal. But once Wolf leaves Alberta, his interviews with fishermen, a tour guide, landowners, a wildlife photographer, indigenous locals and other British Columbians encountered on his odyssey through proposed pipeline territory—along with that unfortunate bee along the highway, reproduced in logo form in the film's publicity material—suggest the *greed, eco-justice, health, present-minded* frames regarding Alberta, personified by Enbridge as the antagonist in the film.

A local opposition MP, Nathan Cullen, cites the potential sacrifice of culture and traditional ways of life for Enbridge's corporate profit—and, as amply shown, dubious pipeline-safety record—and declares, "People don't make the land. The land makes the people. So why would we give up who we are?" So by inference, not only has Alberta sold its soul to the sands, but, as shown in *White Water, Black Gold* (Lavallee 2011), it aims to drag 'pristine' BC down with it.

7.19 *Pipe Dreams* (2011)

Hollywood's Leslie Iwerks returned to the discourse with *Pipe Dreams* (2011), which premiered in Los Angeles in November 2011. Unlike *Downstream* (2008) and *Dirty Oil* (2009), Iwerks' 39-minute film is set not in Alberta, but in rural Nebraska, site of the

Ogallala Aquifer, a vital water source facing destruction by the construction of TransCanada Pipelines' Keystone XL pipeline, which would move bitumen south to refineries on the Gulf Coast of Texas.

Recast in his role of dodgy villain (e.g. as in *Tipping Point),* Alberta's then-energy minister, Rob Renner, emphasizes Alberta's global leadership in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and America's need to choose between importing oil from enemy nations or from its friendly northern neighbour—a choice that advocates of renewable energy and reduced consumption would call falsely framed. A Canada Goose, staggering under the weight of oil that had burst from a pipeline operated by another Alberta-based giant, Enbridge, in Michigan becomes a visual metaphor for Iwerks' representation of Alberta's/Canada's disregard for, and failure to prevent and clean up, the toxic, sludgy consequences of delivering its product. Renner's calling that clean-up successful is belied by local media reports of a catastrophe and aerial images of a sea of oil snaking through a forest. An elderly couple in their kitchen and others describe how TransCanada officials intimidate people into signing easements without proper background, sometimes even without disclosing the easement's path first.

Iwerks observes rising environmental and human-rights concerns over the period of making her three films involving the sands, and that "In the US, it's hard to get people to care about something unless it affects them, but when the Keystone pipeline came to the US, they cared" (2012, 2). *Pipe Dreams* was shortlisted for an Academy Award in the short-documentary category for 2011, raising the film's profile. Iwerks gave copies to members of Congress and screened it in Washington, DC and at film festivals. She continues to seek a distribution agreement on all three of her films involving the sands,

noting that pipelines are "still an issue" (2).

In positioning Alberta/Canada as a puppet for Big Oil, laying waste to everything in its path in pursuit of profit, and as the arch-villain in what the DVD package calls "the greatest environmental battle in the US today, the Keystone XL Pipeline," *Pipe Dreams* develops the theme of corporate power in Alberta, seeded in productions examined above. However, Iwerks' film brings fresh framing into the discourse: instead of indigenous communities in distant northern Alberta (*Downstream, Dirty Oil)* or British Columbia and its citizens (*White Water, Black Gold, Peace Out, On the Line),* it presents the victims of the sands juggernaut as small farmers and landowners across "the heartland of America." Thus, positioning Alberta in the context of environmental issues involved in the sands, the film hybridizes and consolidates the *rogue, greed, health* and *present-minded* frames into a new frame of Alberta/Canada as a *globalist bully*. For a province in a region with an identity long reflected by a defensive frame as a colony of Central Canada (Innis [1923] 1971; Melnyk 1992, 1993; Takach 2010), this is irony indeed.

7.20 Context IV: Kyoto and pipelines (2011–2012)

Two high-profile events involving the sands and likely affecting Alberta's reputation occurred in winter 2011–2012. Canada became the first nation to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol, citing financial penalties that would accrue for failing to meet its obligations to cut its greenhouse-gas emissions by five percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012 (Curry and McCarthy 2011). *Time* magazine (B. Walsh 2011) and others linked this to Alberta and the sands. Later, President Obama rejected the proposed Keystone XL pipeline to move bitumen down to refineries in Texas

(Goldenberg 2012). Adjudication on TransCanada's revised and resubmitted application, and the push for Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline, are pending as of this writing.

7.21 *Vote BP for Greenwash Gold* (2012)

As the sands create lucrative investment opportunities for foreign enterprises like British Petroleum (BP), France's Total and the China National Petroleum Corporation, so do they inspire strong resistance aboard. An example is the UK Tar Sands Network (UKTSN), dedicated to "stopping the world's most destructive project" (2013). Its "No Tar Sands" campaign—absorbing the "Rethink Alberta" campaign begun by Corporate Ethics International (Part 7.13 above)—has drawn headlines for staging creative protest performances such as the 'oil orgy' sprung on the Canada-EU Energy Summit (UK Tar Sands Network 2011a) and a tarry adaptation of the ballet, *Swan Lake,* disrupting a BP-sponsored opera event at Trafalgar Square (2011b). UKTSN's partners include the Indigenous Environmental Network, Greenpeace, the Council of Canadians, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and others (UK Tar Sands Network 2013). Its actions on the sands began when it invited indigenous delegates to a UK climate conference in 2009 at which *H_2Oil* (S. Walsh 2009a) was screened. UKTSN's founder, Jess Worth, was astounded at the sands project (Coats 2012).

In April 2012, UKTSN released *Vote BP for Greenwash Gold* (Dick 2012), an 84-second online video, as part of its campaign challenging BP's status as a 'sustainability' sponsor of the 2012 London Olympic Summer Games. This stems from BP's major investment in the sands—which UKTSN views as killing the environment and Alberta's indigenous population—and two other environmentally controversial projects. For UKTSN's Emily Coats, whose recent MSc work in nature, society and environmental

policy examines resistance to the sands, the global perception of Alberta is that government and the oil industry run the show, "rampaging people's lives":

> But everyone else is implicated, too. It's taboo not to like the tar sands in Alberta. ... There is an Oil Sands Discovery Centre in which they ask, "How dare you not be impressed by the struggle to get this resource out of the ground?" … Everyone is caught up in oil. It's so integrated into our economy, it's hard to oppose it. So we're caught between blaming everyone and blaming no one. (1–2)

UKTSN's goal for the video was to convince the European Union to adopt legislation labelling bitumen as 23 percent more emissions-intensive then regular oil in the face of the requirement under the EU's Fuel Quality Directive to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions from transport fuel sold in Europe by 6 percent (Coats 2012). The direction of the video was left up to an independent filmmaker, "though we shared ideas on framing the issue" (4).

Vote BP for Greenwash Gold is a gory, guerrilla-style animation in the tradition of *Southpark.* An Olympic cyclist sporting BP's signature green and yellow pedals through Alberta's wilderness, leaking a trail of oil drops that instantly poison wildlife, suffocate a protesting Aboriginal man, level forests and lay waste to the landscape, which gives way to polluting refineries that pop up across the globe and turn oceans to toxic black. Accompanied by an industrial, thumping-bass soundtrack, the cyclist is revealed as an oily skeleton, the Canadian flag drips tar and the last screen calls on viewers to vote for BP to win the gold medal in greenwashing. Coats sums up the visual approach:

> We often try to use subverted versions of popular images, as in the cyclist video, showing the Canadian flag with oil dripping from it, as we did with BP. We're not only saying this is bad, but we are distorting powerful branding and subverting the logo. We use imagery focusing on … the most powerful images we can find. I am becoming desensitized, but people still find it powerful. (4)

The video garnered over 18,000 viewings, 86 likes and 5 dislikes on YouTube as of July 2013. Although initially, the UK government lobbied against singling out bitumen, the nation later abstained from the vote (Coats 2012), and the EU executive ultimately upheld its proposal to label bitumen as highly polluting (Lewis and Jones 2013). After UKTSN's 'medal' presentation—BP finished second in the public vote—seven arrests were made for spilling, and cleaning up, the green custard crowning the three finalists (Laville 2012). Coats appreciates that the group can't stop the mining in Alberta from London, but can raise awareness of it, as in giving Canada's natural resources minister a greenwashing award, which "received a lot of coverage in Canada, though not in the UK" (Coats 2012, 4). She says it's hard to measure how much of a difference UKTSN makes, but its being "very small" and "nimble" lets it combine structured and reactive storytelling, and it is "always reframing to remain relevant" (5).

In positioning Alberta/Canada as criminally indifferent to ecological issues and Aboriginal people, and as giving BP free reign to rape the landscape and kill all life in its path, *Greenwash Gold* adopts the *rogue, sellout, eco-justice, health* and *ecocide* frames. Unlike *Pipe Dreams* (Iwerks 2011), the video frames Alberta as a globalist stooge rather than a globalist bully.

7.22 Alberta's new marketing video (2012)

The province produced an untitled three-minute video unofficially called *A Day in Alberta* (Alberta 2012d). With found government footage, voice-over narration and upbeat music, it is a "kind of inspirational piece" to show "what Albertans are like" (Anonymous 2012, 5). It accompanied the premier to the London Olympic Games, and in Chinese translation, on an Asian trade mission, in 2012. Unreleased publicly at this writing, it suggests the government's latest positioning around the sands.

Beyond a brief introduction from the premier, the video cobbles together familiar stock footage: I recognized a few shots used in the introduction of my own short film, *Dual Alberta* (Takach 2008a). There are time-honoured images—Rocky Mountains, vast blue skies, canola fields, cowboys and Northern Lights—plus workers in lab coats, skiers, children, seniors, bustling cities (notably Calgary), much machinery, happy visible minorities, an orchestra, etc. The current premier introduces "a place of incredible opportunity and immense beauty" and the narration calls Albertans "entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders" who "work smart, play hard and live large." Stepping beyond the generic and ultimately failed provincial rebranding in *An Open Door* (Alberta 2009), this video presents a more varied portrait ("Yeah, we're complex," the narrator half-laughs over images of the Calgary Stampede and a skateboard park) and does mention "natural resources" and include a quick shot of an iconic, yellow truck in a bitumen mine.

Of course, it is hardly for a video marketing trade, tourism and investment abroad to address complex issues around the sands. But at least this production does not ignore the project entirely, like *An Open Door.* Unconnected to either of those government productions, an Albertan videographer/video editor, wrestling with the dualities of a

province marketing economic opportunity and environmental beauty simultaneously, muses, "Maybe that's what Travel Alberta is trying to do, not let people see the real deal, that we're a tar pit. But Alberta is also the most beautiful place in the world" (Sereda 2012, 4). In terms of the sands, then, the government's new video may be read as adopting the *green* frame, as I read *An Open Door*.

7.23 Postscript: More resistance to the sands (2013)

Opposition to the sands continues into the year of this writing. Mocking the *green* frame, Dr. Schindler showed an Ontario audience an aerial photo of open-pit mining and declared that the Alberta and federal governments "seem to think that Americans believe in magic fairies—just shut your eyes and say the oil sands are clean four times and it happens" (Spears 2013). Online activism beyond Alberta in the tradition of the UK Tar Sands Network continues with videos like *Tar Sands Timmy* (Fiore 2013), a scathing animation by a Pulitzer-winning American political cartoonist that satirically purports to sell Americans on importing more bitumen from the sands despite its ecologically devastating side effects and economic benefits that the video presents as vastly less than advertised by proponents of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.

Two filmmakers whose works are studied here have new projects dealing with the sands and our use of energy generally, respectively. Charles Wilkinson, the director of *Peace Out* (2011) premiered *Oil Sands Karaoke* at the Hot Docs film festival in Toronto in April 2013. The film explores the lives of residents of Fort McMurray, dually perceived in the public sphere as "the economic engine of the country" and "the poster child for all that's wrong with our world" (Wilkinson 2012b). Building on his earlier film, *Paydirt* (2005a, 2005b), Matt Palmer plans to release an ambitious 'multi-format'

documentary film, *Unintended Consequences,* offering a broad look at global energy's future (Palmer 2012). Apparently grounding both projects are the filmmakers' aims to address the divisive and unconstructive polarization around the sands, whether by way of Palmer's macro analysis of our use of energy (tackled in Wilkinson's earlier film) or by Wilkinson's bringing "hardhats and hippies" together in a karaoke bar in "Fort Mac" (Wilkinson 2012b).

A second *New York Times* editorial opposing the sands (2013)—the first came in 2011—was followed immediately by the Alberta government's buying another major, costly ad promoting the sands and the proposed Keystone XL pipeline in the *New York Times* (Bennett 2013) and the *Washington Post* and news websites (Weismiller 2013). The government's spending another $107,000 lobbying for the oil industry during deficit budgeting while bitumen companies earn billions in profits (bolstered by public subsidies and concessions) speaks barrels about Albertans' perceived priorities late in the Age of Oil.[20] At the National Renewable Energy Forum in Toronto, the province announced a forthcoming strategy to direct the production of solar, wind and geothermal electricity as of 2014. A professor and clean-technology advocate who chaired a panel on the new plan at that forum, Kris Hodgson, suggested that in the wake of all the opposition to Keystone, the plan could improve Alberta's international reputation and "offset the incredible public-relations issue they are facing with the oilsands" (Kleiss 2013), as "[o]n a global scale, nobody has a reputation quite so bad as Alberta's oilsands" (Thomson 2013a, A19). The province opened new trade offices in Brazil, California, Chicago, China, India

[20] Alberta's budget deficit is curable in the eyes of the Conference Board of Canada and others by instituting a provincial sales tax, as every other province has (Canadian Press 2013)—and/or by giving Albertans a rate of return on their natural resources closer to that collected by other oil-producing jurisdictions (Weir 2010).

and Singapore, on top of its existing 10 offices as part of a broader trade strategy, partly to combat "some international audiences' … equating Alberta with irresponsible energy development, specifically in the oilsands" (Alberta 2013e, 9). Finally, after two American documentary filmmakers seeking to raise funds online to produce an exposé on the sands broadcast a satirical trailer on YouTube mocking the province's "Remember to breathe" tourism campaign, Travel Alberta demanded the trailer's removal and threatened to sue for copyright infringement (Stephenson et al 2013).

The positioning and the contestation of Alberta around the sands continue.

7.24 Summary and prelude to script

The 2005–2012 period marks a watershed in visual environmental communication around the sands, which I situate as a bellwether in the ongoing debates around extracting fossil-fuel-burning resources, manifested in Alberta's place branding in a globalized and highly visual society. During this period, documentary filmmakers and professional communicators took up this discourse in film and video, as recapped here.

This study begins with David Suzuki and the CBC invoking the *present-minded* frame in asking "When is enough, enough?" (Bowie 2004). *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005a, 2005b) investigates the sands with financing from the oil industry, which its director admits could not happen today (Palmer 2012), and presents the more anthropocentric *progress* and *bridging* frames. After *60 Minutes* (Schorn 2006) trumpets the *money* frame and the Alberta government advances the *ethical oil* frame at two high-profile events in Washington, DC, the CBC returns to the topic (Bowie 2006; Burgess 2007), culminating in the critique of *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008), using the *greed, sellout, health, eco-justice* and *present-minded* frames. Adding a critical American perspective, a prominent

Hollywood filmmaker (Iwerks 2008, 2009) uses the *eco-justice* frame to tar Alberta's reputation in its largest energy market. Alberta's (2009) provincial rebranding tries the *green* frame to ignore the sands altogether, while a prominent film blending documentary and art (Mettler 2009) paints the sands as toxically sublime, apparently through a *present-minded* frame. That another oft-cited film, *H_2Oil* (S. Walsh 2009a) still looks to cast light and educate on the sands and its effects suggests that the project is still emerging in the public sphere in 2009. *Land of Oil and Water* (Cariou and MacArthur 2009) shares Aboriginal perspectives via the *eco-justice* frame, while COP 15 boosts the *rogue* frame globally for Alberta's care of the sands.

Faced with this increasing, negative positioning of Alberta, CAPP (2010) launches a video campaign, highlighting people, not machines, through the *green, ethical oil, progress* and *money* frames, as does the Alberta government's new suite of videos (2010). *Rethink Alberta* (Corporate Ethics International 2010) gives Alberta another international black eye by evoking the notorious dead-duck incident, and the CBC's blockbuster, *Tipping Point* (Radford and Thompson 2011), brings the full battery of critical frames to bear, even if the film is shunned or attacked inside the province. A tarry trilogy from BC around water (Lavallee 2011), energy use (Wilkinson 2011) and a proposed pipeline (Wolf 2011) echoes those critical frames, and *Pipe Dreams* (Iwerks 2011) consolidates a new frame of Alberta as *globalist bully*. As Canada's abandoning Kyoto and controversies over the proposed Keystone and Northern Gateway pipelines enhance Alberta's *rogue* framing, *Vote BP for Greenwash Gold* (Dick 2012) voices rising resistance to the sands abroad.

From the foregoing presentation of the results of my interviews and visual framing analysis, situated in a discourse positioning and contesting Alberta in light of environmental concerns about extracting the sands, a culminating, integrative analysis and synthesis of that data as an arts-based research text (a script) follows in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Tarred and Feathered (A Script)

FADE IN:

MONTAGE:

A. Paul Kane painting, *Fort Edmonton*, 1849–1856

B. Poster, "Canada West: The Last Best West: Homes for Millions," circa 1905

C. Movie poster for *The Calgary Stampede*, 1925

D. Footage of Leduc gusher, 1947

E. Bumper sticker, "Let the Eastern bastards freeze in the dark," circa 1980

F. Travel Alberta poster: "Remember to breathe," 2012

CU[21] – YVETTE

Glossy-sharp YVETTE looks firmly at us, speaking in a crisp Université-Laval accent.

YVETTE
In many ways, I am the last person who should be talking to you about Alberta. In fact, many of you might say I am the antithesis of Alberta: a female, urban, university-educated asthmatic from Gatineau.

As she COUGHS dutifully into her elbow, the camera slowly PULLS BACK, revealing her blazer, adorned with a CBC logo.

YVETTE (CONT'D)[22]
We know Alberta as Wild Rose Country. A cowboy, testosterone-soaked place... with good, old-fashioned, rural values... where people just roll up their sleeves and 'get 'er done'... a place where the air is still fresh.

She COUGHS again. The camera PULLS BACK to reveal her seated behind a talk-show host's desk.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
In fact, Alberta is a cradle of first-wave feminism in Canada, and is among our most urbanized provinces. It has claimed our most highly-educated population.

---

[21] CU = close-up shot, beginning in this instance on Yvette's face
[22] CONT'D = continued, meaning that the character's speech continues, uninterrupted by others' dialogue

The camera PULLS BACK further to reveal a dazzling panorama of Lake Louise.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
It repeatedly ranks as the best place for learning in Canada. And it has almost the highest rate of asthma in the land.

She stifles another coughing fit. A businesslike FILTERED VOICE chimes in over the studio's sound system.

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)[23]
With the highest per-capita GDP, at least Albertans' coughs are <u>productive</u>.

She glares O.S.[24] to our right.

YVETTE
And one other thing. As the province is the biggest magnet for domestic in-migration in Canada, many Albertans come from other parts of the country.

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
Like Toronto.

She conceals her disgust by stifling a false cough.

YVETTE
A place boasting of its Western hospitality... while hatching all of our major, national protest parties, and reportedly the angriest province in Canada. A province of self-styled 'mavericks'... who have changed governments just three times since 1905. A hefty net contributor to Confederation... which has been called the most American province in Canada.

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
Don't forget the scenery.

YVETTE
A place of astonishing natural beauty... and the site of its massive destruction.

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
Five seconds... four... three... two... action!

---

[23] V.O. = voice-over, here diegetic, i.e. heard by onscreen characters and audience alike
[24] O.S. = offscreen

The camera PULLS BACK further to reveal the front of her desk, prominently featuring the title, *Film Rap*, and a large CBC logo.

YVETTE
Welcome to *Film Rap.* I am Yvette LaFette. Today, we meet independent documentary filmmakers and producers of advocacy videos who have taken on environmental issues around Alberta's tar sands --

She winces. Her hand snaps reflexively to an earphone in her ear.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
-- oil sands.

Glaring O.S. again, she recovers swiftly.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
That even the terminology is contested shows the controversy around what's been called the world's largest industrial project. But it was not always so.

INSERT – ATHABASCA RIVERBANK, CIRCA 1700

A Cree man, SWAN, points two FUR-TRADERS to bitumen seeping from the riverbank.

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The world's third-largest deposit of oil came to Whites' attention in the early 18th century. Cree locals used the bitumen to seal their canoes.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF KARL CLARK, 1920s

As he experiments with separating bitumen in a washing machine.

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
After years of initial experiments funded and conducted by the federal and Alberta governments, Karl Clark, a scientist at the nascent Alberta Research Council, refined a process using hot water to separate bitumen from sand in the 1920s.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF BITUMOUNT EXPERIMENTAL FACILITY, 1940s

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
This fuelled decades of efforts at commercial production -- and turf wars between Ottawa and Edmonton -- until the 1960s.

INSERT – PHOTO OF J. HOWARD PEW, CEO OF SUN OIL

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Other vital factors in the development of the t -- oil sands -- were significant American investment from Sun Oil, which was looking for foreign sources to replace the eventual decline of Texan crude...

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF GAS-STATION LINE-UPS, 1970s

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
…the oil shortage accelerated by OPEC's embargo in 1973, rising global demand, escalating oil prices...

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF HUGE EXTRACTION MACHINERY

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
…and technological improvements and other industry efficiencies that reduced production costs and enabled extraction on a much larger scale.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF PETER LOUGHEED AND OIL EXECS, 1970s

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In 1975, Alberta, which owns the resource, struck a deal with the federal and Ontario governments and three multinational oil companies. This launched the Syncrude consortium's flagship extraction project.

INSERT - MONTAGE OF STILLS FROM *THE TAR SANDS* (1977)

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In 1977, the CBC aired an imagined recreation of those negotiations in a TV movie called *The Tar Sands* --

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
-- oil sands --

YVETTE (V.O.)
-- no, it was *Tar Sands* -- as part of its docudrama anthology series, *For the Record*. Alberta's premier, Peter Lougheed, sued us for defamation. The *Canadian Film Encyclopedia* describes our portrayal of him as "characteristically Canadian," the "'little man' destroyed by a system he can never begin to understand." We settled out of court.

INSERT – ANIMATED WORLD MAP

Consecutively highlighting SAUDI ARABIA, VENEZUELA, ALBERTA, IRAN and IRAQ, showing estimated NUMBERS of recoverable barrels of oil in each site.

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Bitumen production continued, largely under the public radar, for a generation. But that changed. In 2004, the United States deemed the extraction of the sands to be economically viable.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF AGGRIEVED FORT CHIPEWYAN LOCALS

SUPER[25]: "*WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH?* (CBC, 2004)"

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That year, we aired an episode of David Suzuki's popular science series, *The Nature of Things*, showing the devastating effects of oil-sands extraction on the environment, especially on the Mikisew Cree First Nation living downstream in Fort Chipewyan.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE (CONT'D)
Then the filmic floodgates opened.

INSERT – CALGARY SKYLINE

In the foreground, MATT brandishes his camera.

SUPER: "MATT PALMER, FILMMAKER, CALGARY"

MATT
There was nothing out there on the oil sands in 2003 when I started on *Pay Dirt.* I wanted to take a balanced look at our use of energy in a petroleum-based society. I convinced the oil industry to fund a good chunk of my film. I doubt that could happen today.

BACK TO SCENE

The camera PULLS BACK to reveal TOM seated on a faded couch next to Yvette's desk. Tom respectfully directs the camera to pull back further.

---

[25] SUPER = text superimposed onscreen

The camera PULLS BACK further to reveal that the backdrop of Lake Louise is a mural, behind which is a second image, of an open-pit bitumen mine, with CABLES, TRIPODS and other incidents of a TV studio. Tom nods a thanks to the camera.

YVETTE
I am joined by Tom Radford, the dean of Albertan documentary filmmakers. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* calls him considerably influential on our national cinema. He has made over fifty films, three of them in the Athabasca River delta in the 1970s -- and more recently, two films for the CBC, *Tar Sands: The Selling of Alberta* in 2008 --

Her hand darts to her earphones. She glares O.S.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
It's the title. We can't change it now!

Realizing her gaffe, she affects uber-poise and a thousand-watt smile into the camera.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
-- and *Tipping Point: The Age of the Oil Sands,* co-directed with Niobe Thompson, in 2011. So tell us, Tom, how do you see Alberta and environmental issues around the oil sands?

TOM
As a third-generation Albertan, my deepest concern is that Harold Innis was right. Alberta started as a colony of a colony, Canada. Then it got control of its natural resources. But it fell victim to neoliberal politicians who sold our soul -- and the health of our air, water, citizens and wildlife -- to foreign interests.

YVETTE
Where do rank-and-file Albertans stand on the oil sands?

TOM
As you said, it's the wealthiest province, thanks to all the oil money. Albertans are unconnected to events around the rest of the planet. They see global warming as two extra weeks on the golf course each fall. We need a dialogue in Alberta, where the main discourse on oil extraction is no discourse at all. People don't want to talk about these issues in a colonial society.

YVETTE
So where does documentary film fit into the dialogue?

INSERT – UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Foregrounding an ivy-covered building, two tweedy scholars, PROF. DEE and PROF. DAUM, fight to maintain eye contact with the camera as STUDENTS swarm by them.

SUPER: "PROF. DORIS DEE, CITY UNIVERSITY"

PROF. DEE

Documentary film straddles the ideals of the social sciences and the aesthetics of art and entertainment, interrogating society's power relations and dominant institutions, discourses and cultural assumptions.

SUPER: "(WAYNE 2008, 82)"

SUPER: "PROF. JASON DAUM, SUBURB UNIVERSITY"

PROF. DAUM

In its critique of capital and state power, a strain within the culture of documentaries contacts with critical theory.

SUPER: "(IBID., 94)"

PROF. DEE

Only in two other periods, the 1930s and the late 1960s, did the documentary genre experience a collision with activist politics. We are currently in the third wave of the activist documentary impulse, which began percolating in the early 1990s.

SUPER: "(AGUAYO 2005, 231)"

PROF. DAUM

During this documentary renaissance, the genre's popularity has exploded into the public sphere. We are in the midst of a unique historical moment for activist documentary film and video. It's a complex communication environment, intermingling the creative left and the profit-driven entertainment apparatus.

SUPER: "(IBID., 230, 231)"

BACK TO SCENE

Yvette adjusts her makeup, startled at being caught on camera so soon.

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
Blips on the radar! A disgruntled rump minority, hardly reflecting the views of ordinary Canadians.

Yvette stashes her makeup, glances O.S. and arches an eyebrow.

YVETTE
Thank you, Professors. So let's learn more about how documentary filmmakers are negotiating the challenges of positioning Alberta in exploring environmental concerns around the oil sands.

The camera PANS LEFT, past Tom, revealing JOE sitting on Tom's left. Joe glances at the mining backdrop and looks puzzled. On cue, the backdrop MORPHS into a panorama of a receding glacier.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
Joining us is Joe Willawol, a documentarian whose films include *White Water, Black Gold... Peace Out* and *On the Line.* Joe, you're based in Vancouver, you've done graduate work, you teach university courses. What brought you into the discourse of Alberta, the environment and the oil sands?

JOE
I'm an escapee from Alberta, so I have a personal interest. But I have larger concerns. Here are some.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF BITUMINOUS FOOTAGE

SUPER: *"WHITE WATER, BLACK GOLD* (LAVALLEE, 2011)"

A. Athabasca River panorama.

JOE (V.O.)
First, Alberta is depleting and despoiling one of the world's great watersheds, using up three million barrels of precious drinking water each day to produce tar-sands oil, the burning of which is cooking the planet.

B. Natural gas burning from a smokestack at a tar-sands plant.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It's wasting horrendous amounts of non-renewable energy, natural gas, to process tar-sands sludge: enough to heat three million homes in one day.

C. Wilderness along the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline route.

D. Huge trucks stripping boreal forest.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And it's pushing to build vast pipelines across fragile ecosystems likely to be destroyed in the almost certain likelihood of a spill.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
So let me ask --

JOE
And let's not forget the inspiration of Tom's last film, *Tipping Point,* the best work on Alberta and the tar sands. It got the big picture and captured key moments, like an Aboriginal man telling James Cameron, "That film you made, *Avatar,* that's our life!" -- and the Alberta government's lying denials of the impact of extraction on Native communities.

YVETTE
All right. Now --

JOE
I also want to thank the CBC for having me here, and encourage you to broadcast all three of my films.

Yvette cringes, reaches for her earphone and closes her eyes.

TOM
Joe raises a good point. We were able to make *Tipping Point* only because of significant production budgets from the CBC as broadcaster. One-point-two million dollars is puny by Hollywood standards. But only a budget like that let us take a broader view by following the science and the stories of the oil sands for a year.

Yvette cringes, cups her earphone and stifles a cough. Tom and Joe shoot her inquiring looks. She flashes a forced smile.

YVETTE
Let's meet our next guest. Leslie Iwerks is a third-generation creator of films from Hollywood. Her grandfather co-created Mickey Mouse. She has made three documentaries involving the oil sands -- *Downstream, Dirty Oil* and *Pipe Dreams* -- two of which have been shortlisted for Oscars.

INSERT – STREET LINED WITH PALM TREES

LESLIE turns off her camera and thanks a departing INTERVIEWEE.

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Leslie, how important is the climate for production to making films contesting a project like the oil sands?

LESLIE
It's huge, of course. You can do more on a six-figure budget than on a shoestring. But the real key is distribution, which is hard to get for docs. You can make the films, but it's a real grassroots grind, one audience at a time, to get people to see it, at a festival screening or even in theatrical release.

BACK TO SCENE

Camera PULLS BACK to reveal Leslie on a large viewing screen in the TV studio.

YVETTE
How common is a theatrical release for documentaries?

LESLIE
(onscreen)
Of all the films on the tar sands, I believe only *Petropolis, H_2Oil* and maybe *Peace Out* have made it to general theaters. And even then, only in limited runs.

YVETTE
And you're working from Hollywood! Canadian work claims barely a sliver of theatrical distribution, and just three percent of box office receipts in 2009.

LESLIE
(onscreen)
But the real prize in distribution is a TV deal. And that's harder to come by than the truth on the tar sands from those who benefit most from exploiting them.

Her lips keep moving, but her sound trails off. Yvette glances O.S. to our right.

YVETTE
Our next guest can speak to this. He's an acclaimed writer, a prof at the University of Manitoba and the co-director of *Land of Oil and Water: Aboriginal Voices on the Tar Sands.* Welcome, Warren Cariou. Your film was completely DIY, was it not?

PULL BACK to reveal WARREN seated to Joe's left. Warren glances at the glacier backdrop, which, on cue, MORPHS into a panorama of bucolic marshland.

WARREN
That's true, Yvette. I was researching the effects of extracting the tar sands for a novel, but I found a much larger story, one that needed to be shown visually, on film, to have a bigger impact. I teamed up with Neil McArthur, a filmmaker. We didn't know enough about the movie industry and we didn't want to wait on funding processes. So we made the film ourselves, and had to work out how to get people to see it.

YVETTE
If distribution is such a challenge, what is it about the oil sands that prompts approaching it on film?

WARREN
The enormous scale of the project. It's stunning.

JOE
It would dwarf the Third Reich.

WARREN
Also, there wasn't much addressing them visually at the time. *Petropolis* was unknown to us then.

INSERT – ART STUDIO

PETER trains his camera on an installation piece.

SUPER: "PETER METTLER, VISUAL ARTIST & FILMMAKER, TORONTO"

PETER
In making *Petropolis,* we realized the only way to really show the scale of tar-sands operations is to go up, and see them from the sky.

INSERT – RAPID-FIRE MONTAGE OF AERIAL STILLS

SUPER: *"PETROPOLIS* (METTLER, 2009)"

A. Partially excavated landscape.

B. Open-pit mine with a gargantuan, earth-moving shovel truck.

C. Scarred earth.

D. Pipeline dumping toxic wastewater into a tailings lake.

E. Oily tailings lake.

BACK TO SCENE

TOM
Most people don't understand how large Alberta's sacrifice zone is, to use Dr. Schindler's term. The boreal forest being ripped out in open-pit mining is also the lungs of the planet -- vital, not just beautiful.

LESLIE
(onscreen, sound quality fading)
The destruction of land is highly visual and heart-wrenching.

TOM
The tar sands are not just Fort McMurray, but the World Heritage Site of the Peace-Athabasca delta.

INSERT – GEESE FLYING OVER OPEN-PIT MINE

SUPER: *"TIPPING POINT* (RADFORD & THOMPSON, 2011)"

TOM (V.O.)
Millions of birds, and land animals are there, along with one of the last undisturbed ecosystems in the province. We must find a language for that.

BACK TO SCENE

TOM (CONT'D)
We need to show what's at stake, especially if you are extracting as much and as fast as you can.

INSERT – VIEW OF SYNCRUDE PLANT AT SUNSET

SUPER: "*LAND OF OIL AND WATER* (McARTHUR & CARIOU, 2010)"

WARREN (V.O.)
There's also the physical size of the industrial apparatus. The extraction plants are immense...

INSERT – VIEW OF TRUCKS AT WORK

SUPER: *"PETROPOLIS* (METTLER, 2009)"

PETER (V.O.)
The largest trucks in the world are there. They dwarf humanity, almost to the point of invisibility.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
So your screen language draws on the physical enormity of the industrial infrastructure, and of the landscape that it affects?

TOM
That's part of it for sure. But we also show the smaller-scale stories. The people affected by extraction.

INSERT – VIEUX-MONTRÉAL STREET

SHANNON interrupts her canvassing for signatures on a petition.

SUPER: "SHANNON WALSH, FILMMAKER, MONTRÉAL"

SHANNON
The catalyst for my film, *H_2Oil,* was the camera following my friends, Cathy and Aaron, to their water well, downstream of tar-sands operations, and finding almost nothing left. We all went home and cried.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF FARMER, CORN-MAZE OWNER, LANDOWNERS

SUPER: "*ON THE LINE* (WOLF, 2011)"

JOE (V.O.)
On the Line takes us to farmers and landowners who live along the proposed route for Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline, and shows how they'd be affected.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF DR. O'CONNOR AT WORK AND AT HOME

SUPER: "*DOWNSTREAM* (IWERKS, 2008)"

LESLIE (V.O.)
(poor sound quality)
My films do the same with TransCanada's proposed Keystone pipeline.

The visual of Leslie begins to pixilate.

LESLIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And we follow Dr. John O'Connor, who blew the whistle on government denials of the deadly effects of extraction on his patients in Fort Chipewyan.

INSERT – SOMBRE ABORIGINAL FAMILY IN LIVING ROOM

SUPER: *"TIPPING POINT* (RADFORD & THOMPSON, 2011)"

TOM (V.O.)
One scene in *Tipping Point* takes us into a local family's living room. They point out wall photos of relatives they've lost to rare cancers.

INSERT – MAN WITH GROTESQUE FISH

SUPER: *"TIPPING POINT* (RADFORD & THOMPSON, 2011)"

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
A fisherman shows us deformed fish that he caught on the Athabasca, downstream of the tar sands. He says that didn't happen before the tar sands.

INSERT – BEE BLOWN OFF HIGHWAY SHOULDER BY PASSING TRUCK

SUPER: "*ON THE LINE* (WOLF, 2011)"

JOE (V.O.)
On the Line opens on a shot of a bee blown away by a big truck speeding to the tar sands.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
Let's step back a bit. Alberta has long been depicted as a land of opportunity. Your films position the province as a final frontier, a climactic battleground between the rapacious juggernaut of extractive capitalism, and the precious natural systems that sustain the Earth. Isn't that a little simplistic?

TOM
Well, that binary certainly is. And it's a false one, too. Because if the environment can no longer support the systems that are essential to life, then it's game over for us all. And that includes corporate profits.

Yvette winces in response to something in her earphone.

YVETTE
Watching all of your films might give viewers certain notions of the oil sands and Albertans. Joining us here on *Film Rap...*

The camera pans left to reveal TARLA in demi-glasses and smart business suit.

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...to help give us a full perspective are Tarla Simko from the Government of Alberta...

The camera pans further left to reveal BILLY: splashy tie, artsy business suit.

YVETTE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And Billy Barklee from Barklee Houllam Flint, a full-service public-relations and communications firm with offices in Calgary, Edmonton and fifteen other locations across the US and Canada.

BILLY
Sixteen. We cut the ribbon in Fort Mac last week.
(winking)
Didn't we leak that to you?

JOE
If you didn't, your client's pipeline prob[ably] --

Joe is frozen by Yvette's icy stare. As one, Tarla and Billy turn to the marshland backdrop, which MORPHS back into the panorama of Lake Louise. Startled, they turn towards the camera. The backdrop MORPHS into an image of Syncrude's reclaimed Bison Paddock.

YVETTE
Welcome, Tarla and Billy. Tarla, as a senior communications specialist at the Public Affairs Bureau, what's your take on these documentarians' depictions of Alberta and its stewardship of the oil sands?

TARLA
Yvette, it's horrible to watch my province portrayed as a big, black pit. Albertans are deeply insulted at having people see us this way. Alberta is working hard to make these things right. We're the most regulated place in the world, it's been said, in terms of making sure that things are done to keep things in check so it doesn't ruin the environment and make things unsafe.

JOE
Regulations are one thing. Actually enforcing them and funding that are quite another.
(off Yvette's look)
Right. Sorry.

YVETTE
Billy, your firm has worked for the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and other key players on Alberta's business scene. How do you see these documentaries from a PR perspective?

BILLY
Yvette, Albertans get that we have a world-class resource, but that we can't destroy the planet with it. There's an intimate relationship between Albertans and the energy industry, and we can't escape that. Sure, oil is big money here. But Alberta is one of the few democratic societies with development on this scale -- and where folks like these filmmakers are free to make whatever they want about it, to show the world.

YVETTE
Are the oil sands an image problem for Alberta?

Tom, Joe and Warren trade wide-eyed looks muzzling their reaction: duh!

TARLA
Albertans wanted us to defend them against attacks on the oil sands by the activists, and in films like *Avatar*. It's just not the whole story. So we launched our video campaigns to show people that Alberta is a great place.

YVETTE
How would you have the world see Alberta?

Tarla glances at Billy, who glances O.S. to our right and nods.

TARLA
Let's show you. Roll first clip, please.

Everyone looks to the studio screen, to which the camera pans and slowly zooms in.

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
This is the Alberta we know...

RAPID-FIRE VIDEO MONTAGE (ON STUDIO SCREEN):

A. Breathtaking Rocky Mountains.

B. Golden fields of grain, windswept and waving in the summer-evening light.

C. Buff, plaid-shirted cowboys on horseback.

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Stop projection, please. Sorry, that's an older piece.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
That's not the Alberta we know?

TARLA
Of course it is.

BILLY
If I may.

Tarla offers him a jaunty wave to proceed.

BILLY (CONT'D)
If Alberta has, as you said, an image problem, it's because we haven't always done as good a job as we can to tell our story to the world.

TARLA
Absolutely. First, the oil sands is just a tiny section of Alberta, up in the Northeast corner --

Joe is about to interject, but looks at Yvette and glumly reconsiders.

TARLA (CONT'D)
(off Joe's reaction)
-- although you would get a contrary impression, because the activists' voices are louder.

WARREN
(softly)
When they're allowed to speak.

YVETTE
Everyone has their time here. Tarla?

TARLA
Merci, Yvette.
(MORE)

TARLA (CONT'D)
Second, the activists aren't telling the whole story of the oil sands. Let's talk about the reclamation, the amazing technological innovation, all of the Aboriginal employment. Roll second clip, please.

Again, all look to the studio screen.

VIDEO MONTAGE (ON STUDIO SCREEN):

A. Government worker demonstrating water-quality monitoring equipment.

B. Alberta Research Council lab staff working with a CT scanner.

C. An Aboriginal man in a suit.

SUPER: *"ABOUT THE OIL SANDS* (ALBERTA, 2010)"

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
If you take a good look at what's really going on, you'll find highly educated, competent and dedicated Albertans working in the oil sands. Not a faceless, big, black thing with machines all over it.

SUPER: *"CANADA'S OIL SANDS* (CAPP, 2010)"

D. Workers at bitumen plant.

E. Government scientist with forest in background.

F. Syncrude worker showing a reforested marsh from the company's reclaimed mine.

BILLY (V.O.)
People who care about their work, the environment and our legacy to future generations. People who are meeting industry's challenge to manage this vast resource in a way that balances energy security, environmental performance and economic growth.

G. Bustling, wholesome-looking downtown Fort McMurray

H. Family walking, cyclists and joggers in Fort McMurray park

I. Skidoos gliding across virgin snow.

J. Welding trainer and trainee.

K. Aboriginal planners.

TARLA (V.O.)
There's a new attitude emerging in Alberta around how we see ourselves and our province in developing our natural-resource assets, and all the benefits that come with that. We're always working to keep improving.

BILLY (V.O.)
Albertans are proud of the way they're developing their natural resources. There's a strong sense of values around resource production.

BACK TO SCENE

BILLY (CONT'D)
In fact, Yvette, I'd say Alberta is energy.

The camera PANS from beaming Billy to the other guests' muted reactions -- approving Tarla, stoic Warren, outraged Joe and aghast Tom -- then returns to:

YVETTE
Thank you, Tarla and Billy. Now let's throw it open for discussion. Would the filmmakers agree that Alberta is best represented by energy?

TOM
It's a powerful metaphor. Albertans are certainly energetic -- except when it comes to two things.

INSERT – NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL WITH HIGHLIGHTED PASSAGE:

"'Tarsands' is inaccurate and pejorative. It has become part of the rhetoric of extremists who are anti-oil and who want to shut down the industry."

SUPER: "*CALGARY HERALD,* APRIL 21, 2011"

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
First, public discourse on the tar sands. You can't say 'tar sands' anymore, you must say 'oil sands.'

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Until 1988 -- I believe the year the Mulroney government passed the Free Trade Agreement with the US -- everybody called it 'tar sands.' Now it's seen as a pejorative term invented by Greenpeace.

BACK TO SCENE

TOM (CONT'D)
If you've lost sight of your history to that extent, what's happened to your culture?

INSERT – TABLE OF VOTER TURNOUTS IN ALBERTA

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And second, voting in elections. Albertans consistently record the lowest electoral turnouts in Canada. Denial has come to define an entire culture.

BACK TO SCENE

JOE
The government is more beholden to oil companies, which is where its money comes from.

INSERT – IMAGES OF PROTESTERS AT ALBERTA LEGISLATURE

SUPER: *"WHITE WATER, BLACK GOLD* (LAVALLEE, 2011)" [OR OTHER]

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The government is not taxing its people responsibly, so there's a disconnect between the two. This is why it's exceptionally hard in Alberta. It's not just the caribou, but democracy that's in peril.

BACK TO SCENE

JOE
Lots of people are resigned to it and feel small next to it, though some make a hundred and seventy thousand dollars a year working in the tar sands. There's definitely a feeling of powerlessness.

WARREN
Given the oil companies' free rein for decades, the general population hasn't spoken up.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF ALBERTANS LIVIN' LA VIDA LOCA:

A. Big SUVs chewing up road.

B. McMansions foregrounding the Rockies outside of Canmore.

C. 'Power' shopping malls: WEM, South Edmonton Common and Crossiron Mills.

WARREN (V.O.)
The only conclusion is that Albertans are mostly okay with the tar sands, or don't understand what's happening. Oil is tied into the economy for so many people that they can't step back and question it.

BACK TO SCENE

JOE
It pains me to say this because I like them, but Albertans are dupes. It's like you're in a relationship with someone who cheats on you, but they're nice to the kids and they pay some of the bills, so you turn a blind eye to it.

INSERT – STILLS OF ROCKY-MOUNTAIN SPLENDOUR

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Move along! Nothing to see here!

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF SCIENTISTS WORKING IN LAB

SUPER: "*ABOUT THE OIL SANDS* (ALBERTA, 2010)"

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Albertans are not stupid enough to believe these resource companies have their best interests at heart, but they figure, ahh, maybe the next generation will fix it.

INSERT – SHANNON IN VIEUX-MONTRÉAL, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SHANNON
There's a belief that science will prevail. It's like religious faith because the evidence is not there at all, for example, that we can reclaim muskeg. It's not so much, "The hell with it, we are ready to rip up the earth in the name of progress," but that "We can fix it, we are still working in our kids' best interest."

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF COMPANY OFFICIAL IN RECLAIMED MUSKEG

SUPER: "*CANADA'S OIL SANDS* (CAPP, 2010)"

SHANNON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That's not a unique characteristic of Alberta.
(MORE)

SHANNON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Around the world, there is a blind faith that we'll figure it out somehow, and that development will miraculously happen without any adverse effect on the environment.

BACK TO SCENE

The backdrop of reclaimed marshland MORPHS into a magnified, tarry, dead duck.

YVETTE
So has Alberta sold its collective soul for profit? Tarla?

TARLA
That's certainly an inference one could draw from all the documentaries. Questions of identity are highly complex and nuanced. There's more to Alberta than one project. But the oil sands has acquired a secondary, symbolic significance.

Tarla glances at the backdrop, gives a start and turns to the camera. The dead-duck backdrop MORPHS into an image of a beaming group of bitumen workers.

JOE
Which doesn't make it any less of an issue -- socially, politically, economically, culturally or environmentally.

YVETTE
But aren't symbols an important part of how we make sense of the world?

TOM
Right, but that's part of the problem. As filmmakers, as critical thinkers in a free society, we need to look deeper into what those symbols are connected to.

INSERT – ANIMATED MAP OF NORTH AMERICAN PIPELINE NETWORK

SUPER: "*H_2OIL* (WALSH, 2009)"

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The tar sands are part of a global flow of power that continues to colonize resources, sovereignty and a sense of place. Harold Innis was right. Alberta is leading Canada into the latest, and the ultimate, staple trap.

BACK TO SCENE

TARLA
But aren't symbols more subjective? If you ask most Albertans what the oil sands mean to them, it's not colonization. It's opportunity.

INSERT – WORKERS LEAVING BITUMEN PLANT

SUPER: "*PAY DIRT* (PALMER, 2005)"

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
An awesome opportunity to meet the world's demand for energy, to build a better life, and to build an even better Alberta. Why stigmatize them for that?

BACK TO SCENE

JOE
That's not subjective, that's myopic!

INSERT – TIME-LAPSE FOOTAGE OF RECEDING ATHABASCA GLACIER

SUPER: "*WHITE WATER, BLACK GOLD*" (LAVALLEE, 2011)"

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Recall John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."

BACK TO SCENE

JOE (CONT'D)
On the other hand, when you talk to Albertans face to face, they tend to be good people. And if others were in Albertans' shoes, many would probably do the same.

YVETTE
Are Albertans blinded by their own 'opportunity'? Billy?

BILLY
Frankly, some might say most of us are enjoying the benefits too much to want to pay much attention to that.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF SCIENTIST IN FOREST

SUPER: "*CANADA'S OIL SANDS* (CAPP, 2010)"

BILLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
There may be a bit of guilt somewhere back in the recesses. But you can't stop progress. If we don't provide the energy, others will. And hey, we're getting better at it all the time!

BACK TO SCENE

TOM
On emissions-per-barrel, maybe.

INSERT – ANIMATED GRAPHICS

Showing greenhouse-gas emissions per barrel and then total emissions.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But hardly on overall emissions...

INSERT – ANIMATED GRAPHIC

Showing freshwater use per barrel of oil and total use of water.

JOE (V.O.)
Or the industry's gluttonous use of precious freshwater...

INSERT – SLUDGE SPEWING FROM PIPE INTO TAILINGS LAKE

SUPER: "*WHITE WATER, BLACK GOLD* (LAVALLEE, 2011)"

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or the ongoing spread of toxic tailings lakes into an area already the size of the City of Vancouver.

BACK TO SCENE

TARLA
People would think the tailings ponds are all over Alberta. Really, though, if we're talking about an entire province -- an area almost as big as Texas -- that's not the whole story.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF UPBEAT, ALBERTAN SCENES

SUPER: "UNTITLED MARKETING VIDEO (ALBERTA, 2012)"

A. Northern Lights in big, open skies.

B. Yoga in the Rockies.

C. Bison, a moose and a black bear cub.

D. A distant, solitary climber on a sheer rock face.

E. The haunting badlands.

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Albertans value preservation. No province has more parks and green space than Alberta. Albertans believe that you don't have to sacrifice development for environmental protection, and vice-versa.

F. An ethnic drumming performance.

E. Cancer researcher around a big machine.

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
All will benefit from, and all want a share of, the province's economic prosperity.

F. Fireworks at crowded Commonwealth Stadium.

BACK TO SCENE

Joe glances at the camera. The backdrop of bitumen workers MORPHS into a rural graveyard, with feathers and other Aboriginal talismans visible on some headstones.

JOE
Most of the money in the tar sands is capital investment coming from outside Alberta and going outside. Our identity is being stolen along with it. It's corporate.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF FOREIGN INVESTORS AT THE SANDS

SUPER: "*TAR SANDS* (RADFORD, 2008)"

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Look who's there: Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell, British Petroleum, Statoil. They're not interested in local land, place or culture, but in making a fast buck and getting out.

TOM (V.O.)
I interviewed a geologist on a flight from the oil sands to BC that I expected to be empty, but was full of oilsands people who resided in Comox. We are back to the same colonialist model as the original Hudson's Bay Company.

BACK TO SCENE

JOE
This has got to play against our sense of self. We'll be left with a debt that will bankrupt our province. I didn't think of filming the Alberta landscape, but something foreign-owned. The tar sands are a part of Alberta that's not really Alberta anymore.

Tarla turns to the graveyard backdrop and arches an eyebrow. It MORPHS into an iconic image of a grain elevator foregrounding a spectacular prairie sunset.

TARLA
Really? Albertans perfected the process for separating bitumen from sand. Albertans are making the laws regulating the oil sands. And the last time I looked, Albertans still owned the resource.

TOM
If the people are getting their fair share, why has Alberta recorded the nation's largest gap between rich and poor? Why are we leading Canada in economic growth, while crippling our schools and refusing to care for those who need it most?

He glances at the camera. The backdrop MORPHS from the grain elevator to a Depression-era photo of an impoverished family begging on the street.

JOE
The tar-sands industry is a destroyer of culture and identity. It's also a people killer if you live downstream.

WARREN
What happens to the community? What is the effect on real people, average people, who are not apologizing for, or hugely benefiting from, the tar sands?

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF LANDSCAPE AND RESIDENTS OF FORT CHIP

SUPER: "*LAND OF OIL AND WATER* (McARTHUR & CARIOU, 2010)"

WARREN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
One of the councillors said, "It's not just resource extraction, but removing the culture. It's comparable to cultural genocide." I think he's right. One elder asked, "What will be left for the next generation?"

BACK TO SCENE

The backdrop has returned to the image of the Aboriginal graveyard.

WARREN (CONT'D)
These people are committed to place, unlike those who work there and live elsewhere or leave after five years. Place is not interchangeable for indigenous people.

BILLY
Industry has consulted extensively with Aboriginal people at every step of the process. And they do benefit from the oil sands.

INSERT – ABORIGINAL WORKERS AT PLANT

SUPER: "*CANADA'S OIL SANDS* (CAPP, 2010)"

BILLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Take Syncrude, among the largest employers of Aboriginal people in Canada. That company alone has spent over one-point-two billion dollars at local Aboriginal businesses since 1992.

INSERT – TWO YOUTHFUL ABORIGINAL EMPLOYEES

SUPER: "*LAND OF OIL AND WATER* (McARTHUR & CARIOU, 2010)"

BILLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Even Warren's documentary includes interviews with residents of Fort McKay speaking very positively about the benefits of the oil sands.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF VIBRANT ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY LIFE

TARLA (V.O.)
Alberta's First Nations Consultation Policy on Land Management and Resource Development helps ensure resource development is balanced with a respect for Treaty rights. And Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework has been guiding our government-wide approach to Aboriginal relations for more than ten years, ensuring Aboriginal perspectives and priorities are considered in provincial policy and programs.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
Can we hear from our guests by video link?

Yvette turns to the studio screen, which cuts to Shannon in Vieux-Montréal.

SHANNON
(onscreen)
The propaganda machine of the Government of Alberta is such a key part of the story. Often, we are using the same images that they are. It's really about framing.

YVETTE
For example?

The studio screen cuts to GEORGE standing in Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden.

SUPER: "GEORGE GALLANT, FILMMAKER, LETHBRIDGE"

GEORGE
(onscreen)
Showing visuals of the great big trucks, land-eating machines, looks like something out of the *Blade Runner* movie. The damage it does to a piece of land is amazing.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
So one producer's 'Progress' is another producer's 'Ecocide.' Same shot, different frame.

INSERT – GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE IN RECLAIMED 'BISON PADDOCK'

SUPER: *"ABOUT THE OIL SANDS* (ALBERTA, 2010)"

GEORGE (V.O.)
Right. But then the industry did something brilliant. They made a buffalo paddock out of a filled-in tailings pond. It wasn't restored to its natural state -- that will take a thousand years, as it was originally a wetland. It's brilliant marketing, but not the visual truth.

INSERT – SHANNON IN VIEUX-MONTRÉAL (ON STUDIO SCREEN)

SHANNON
One thing I tried to show was that Alberta is so beautiful.
(MORE)

SHANNON (CONT'D)
Many in the East perceive that the oil patch is a desert. So I want to show the whole idea of what is muskeg, what is that land?

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF ATHABASCA RIVER DELTA

SUPER: *"H_2OIL* (WALSH, 2009)"

SHANNON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Alberta also has an image of ranching like the American Midwest, when in fact Alberta has one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world... this giant sponge holding water in a lush forest and then releasing it gradually into the atmosphere is impossible to replace. It's absolutely inane to imagine that people could re-create that landscape.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF BISON

SUPER: "*CANADA'S OIL SANDS* (CAPP, 2010)"

SHANNON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It's not just a field that you can put some sweetgrass and a fucking couple of buffalos on -- pardon my language -- as government and industry would have us believe.

INSERT – GEORGE IN JAPANESE GARDEN, ON STUDIO SCREEN

GEORGE
In order to eat steak, you have to deal with the manure. In order to drive a car, you have to deal with the tar sands. So we should quit demonizing companies involved in it and make it easier for them to change the ways that they do things and come up with new technologies. If a service is not important, it wouldn't be making a whole lot of money, like extraction is.

INSERT – MATT IN CALGARY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

MATT
It's easy to poke holes in oil-sands development, but what is the bigger picture? How do we stop people from being so intractable and sure that they are right? It doesn't help that the media has become so polarized and driven by anger, pundits, etc.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF ALBERTA SCENES

SUPER: *"PAY DIRT* (PALMER, 2005)"

A. Calgary skyline.

B. Teeming, sped-up traffic on freeway.

C. Roughnecks on a drilling platform.

D. Wind farms.

E. Fort McMurray community life.

MATT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It makes it challenging because there is a heightened state of conflict that's very entertaining for some people, and middle-of-the-road, rational discussions less so. All oil companies are not evil, and all environmentalists are not terrorists. Very few people wake up wanting to mess up the world today.

BACK TO SCENE

MATT (CONT'D)
(onscreen)
People do get spiritually lost pursuing money, and so on.

YVETTE
How much do you think we as media producers contribute to that heightened state of conflict?

INSERT – FORT MAC CASINOS AND BARS

SUPER: "*DOWNSTREAM* (IWERKS, 2008)"

YVETTE (V.O.)
For example, if you look at how Alberta is portrayed through images of Fort McMurray, you get everything from a lawless boomtown...

INSERT – PARKS AND REC IN FORT MAC

SUPER: "*ABOUT ALBERTA'S OIL SANDS* (ALBERTA, 2010)"

YVETTE (V.O.)
...to a model of community life and a fabulous place to raise a family.

JOE
People in Fort McMurray are hypersensitive about being portrayed as a lawless Wild West with drugs and prostitution. So some may see Alberta as pretty negative. I found this hard to answer because I was an Albertan.

INSERT: AERIAL FOOTAGE OF FORT MAC

SUPER: "*PEACE OUT* (WILKINSON, 2011)"

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In Fort McMurray, you'll find far more happiness in the suburbs than crack downtown. Yet the media report 'Fort Crack' despite what is clearly visible from the air as the hugeness of the suburbs and the relative smallness of the downtown core.

BACK TO SCENE

JOE (CONT'D)
So can we make a difference? Well, the tar sands have earned Alberta an international reputation, and these documentary films are probably part of earning that reputation because they have an international audience.

Billy points two fingers behind him to the graveyard backdrop, which MORPHS into a smiling, suburban couple brandishing a baby.

BILLY
Making a difference is why we do what we do.

TARLA
There's a lot at stake in the global marketplace, and we have to ensure the world sees Alberta positively. When films make us look bad, we have to respond. Albertans' values towards this place would not allow us to do what some are alleging we were doing.

INSERT – NIOBE, RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SUPER: "NIOBE THOMPSON, FILMMAKER/ANTHROPOLOGIST, EDMONTON"

NIOBE

It depends on how you view the extractive industries. It's a real mess because many people are connected to the industry. And many have no sense of what's going on as they try to form reasonable opinions based on messages from CAPP and Greenpeace. They recognize that Alberta is obscenely reliant on energy-royalty revenues.

BACK TO SCENE

BILLY

Alberta used to be known primarily for three things in the public imagination...

INSERT – RAPID-FIRE, CUMULATIVE MONTAGE OF STILLS:

A. Peyto Lake in the Rocky Mountains.

B. An iridescent canola field at midday.

C. Crowds watching rodeo at the Calgary Stampede.

ALL SWEPT ASIDE BY THE CAMERA'S SWISH-PAN AND REPLACED BY:

D. A small mound of bitumen cradled in a white-gloved pair of hands.

BILLY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

To the external world, Alberta is known for the oil sands now.

BACK TO SCENE

BILLY (CONT'D)

I bet that if you left Canada, you'd find the best-known images of Alberta would be of big oil-sands plants, and then the Rockies. I have no scientific basis for this and I could be wrong, but I believe there has been a shift in the imagery.

YVETTE

Do people beyond Alberta define the province by the oil sands?

INSERT – LESLIE IN LOS ANGELES, ON STUDIO SCREEN (PIXILATED)

Trying to speak and realizing that her sound has been muted, Leslie flashes a thumbs-up *yes*. The screen's vertical hold loses its grip.

INSERT – SHANNON IN VIEUX-MONTRÉAL, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SHANNON
I don't think Albertans are hundred percent down with the program, as perceived by others. But it is how Albertans are making their mark today.

INSERT – EMILY IN LONDON STREET, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SUPER: "EMILY COATS, UK TAR SANDS NETWORK, LONDON"

EMILY
Beyond my childhood visit to Alberta, I now associate the province with the tar sands. I can't think of Alberta and Canada without thinking of the tar sands.

INSERT – CARTOON, GHOULISH, ANNIHILATION OF ALBERTA LANDSCAPE

SUPER: "*VOTE BP FOR GREENWASH GOLD* (DICK, 2012)"

EMILY (V.O.)
Before, Canada was known as environmentally friendly, but now I call people on that when they say it. Knowledge of the tar sands is more widespread now.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
What caused that shift -- or at least the rising profile of the oil sands in the global visual imagination? Tarla?

TARLA
It wasn't just the video landscape, but the whole atmosphere of what was said about Alberta in 2009–2010. There were lots of demonstrations, activists, etc.

INSERT – *AVATAR* MOVIE POSTER

SUPER: "*AVATAR* (CAMERON, 2009)"

TARLA (CONT'D)
And it all came to a head when *Avatar* came out and all kinds of people said Mordor was like the oil sands.

MONTAGE: RAPID-FIRE STILLS OF PROTESTS AGAINST SANDS

A. Crowd protesting sands on Parliament Hill.

B. People protesting proposed Keystone pipeline at White House gates.

C. UK Tar Sands Network's "oil orgy" at Canada–Europe Energy Roundtable.

D. Protesters storming Canada House to protest at Canada–EU Energy Summit.

TARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Albertans tend to keep their heads down and do their own thing. But we realized that the whole world was watching us, and not liking what they saw. Then came the day the ducks died.

INSERT – PHOTO OF TWO DUCKS LYING DEAD IN TOXIC SLUDGE

JOE (V.O.)
Sixteen hundred and six ducks perished in a tailings lake. That changed everything in the public's perception. The company responsible, Syncrude, was fined three-point-three million dollars... about a half-day's profit.

TARLA (V.O.)
It was clear that this would impact business and immigration coming into Alberta. We wanted to explain how our values drive our decisions.

INSERT – RAPID-FIRE STILLS FROM ALBERTA'S REBRANDING CAMPAIGN

SUPER: "*AN OPEN DOOR* (ALBERTA, 2009)"

A. Mountain climber leaping on mountaintop.

B. Canoeist admiring Rocky-Mountain lake.

C. Father and son viewing a body of water.

BACK TO SCENE

The backdrop now depicts some cowboy-ish Albertans gathered around a pickup truck.

TARLA (CONT'D)
The bottom line is, Albertans care about their province. And they work smart, play hard and live large.

JOE
Sure, the cowboy, the Western 'heartland' glamorous image, is applied to oil and gas. But you can't compare the cowboy on the range to the guy waist-deep in a tailings pond!

YVETTE
So based on the images you've chosen for your films, how would the rest of you define Alberta? Let's start with Warren.

WARREN
It's a place where development is primary. Alberta puts the pedal to the metal on development, and is seen as a place of opportunity. But I thought it was selling out.

INSERT – BLAIR F. AND FELLOW RAPPER IN PARK, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SUPER: "REZZ DAWGZ, *LAND OF OIL AND WATER* (McARTHUR & CARIOU, 2010)"

BLAIR
They've pretty much stripped our land, and just fed everybody money to keep their mouths shut.

INSERT – STEVE C. IN FOREST, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SUPER: "STEVE C., MIKISEW CREE FIRST NATION"

STEVE
We're the first ones to really feel the impacts. I don't look at it as development. I look at it as destruction of our land.

INSERT – LIONEL L. IN FOREST, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SUPER: "LIONEL L., ATHABASCA CREE FIRST NATION"

LIONEL
We want the whole world to know that we've got a situation up here that needs to be addressed.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF PRISTINE PANORAMAS OF NORTHERN ALBERTA

A. Muskeg with trees, water, lily pads and insects.

B. Athabasca River surrounded by forest.

C. Sunset over the water.

WARREN (V.O.)
There's also another, prominent aspect of Alberta: a pristine beauty, a place to get something different than the tar sands.

INSERT – MONTAGE OF TAR-SANDS FALLOUT

A. Sunlight over tailings lake and tar-sands plant.

B. Aerial of scarred landscape.

C. Chalky, toxic residue from snow-melt on land.

WARREN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Canada is advertised internationally as a place where human rights are sacrosanct, and we have pristine nature. We wanted to show an image that most people don't know about, or want to think about.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
Joe, how do you envision Alberta through your films?

JOE
Both the incredible natural beauty, and the incredible exploitation and destruction, of the environment. Drama is conflict and contrast.

INSERT – FOOTAGE OF CANOEING ON RIVER, PLANT LOOMS INTO VIEW

SUPER: "*WHITE WATER, BLACK GOLD* (LAVALLEE 2011)"

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I wanted to compare the very destructive operation of mining with the open prairies, waving canola fields. To evoke strong sentiment over place, and remind people of how extraordinarily beautiful and fragile the environment is.

INSERT - NIOBE RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

NIOBE
The way we construct identity is a matter of change and progress over time. There are all kinds of contradictions around Alberta today.

INSERT – SHANNON IN VIEUX-MONTRÉAL, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SHANNON
This is what my film is all about: oil extraction versus water in stark opposition, water representing actual life and the world we live in -- the trees, animals and air -- versus something frivolous, greedy and expendable.

INSERT – PETER IN ART STUDIO, ON STUDIO SCREEN

PETER
I think the bottom line, so much of what drives all this stuff, is that it's not a story about oil. It's a story about greed and the economy, and the systems that we have in place to run the show.

INSERT – AERIAL FOOTAGE OF SCARRED EARTH AFTER OPEN-PIT MINING

SUPER: "*PETROPOLIS* (METTLER, 2009)"

PETER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I think we're all in the same boat as the human race in that we progress and try to make life better for ourselves through these various forms of inventions and technologies that we use, and we don't understand what their implications are going to be in the future.

INSERT – GEORGE IN JAPANESE GARDEN, ON STUDIO SCREEN

GEORGE
The fringe left says there should be no development at all, and the fringe right says development should be unrestricted. But the majority want conservation of our resources to support the next generation rather than going for the quick buck now.

George turns O.S. for a moment, nods affirmatively and waves the camera to our left. The camera PANS to pick up Leslie, brandishing an airline ticket and a flight bag.

LESLIE
There's a fine line between developing natural resources so that we can continue to survive, and extirpation without responsibility and harming other areas of life, like the caribou. People are not moved to make change until they are directly affected.
(to George, who's O.S.)
Thanks.

The camera PANS right, back to George.

GEORGE
It's all about the money. It always comes down to that.

BACK TO SCENE

The backdrop now features a happy group of government folks and foreign investors.

YVETTE
Tom?

TOM
Alberta is hitching its star to the oil sands and all it stands for. There is so much money, Alberta didn't have the chance to grow its own sense of place, its own identity. We are no longer building a culture as a place, and identity, but as an economic opportunity. The two don't work together, we must choose one.

YVETTE
Billy?

BILLY
Albertans understand that we have a world-class resource and that we can develop it -- but we can't destroy the landscape or pollute the Alberta brand.

YVETTE
And exactly what that is, is open to interpretation.

INSERT – RAPID-FIRE MONTAGE OF STILL IMAGES POSITIONING ALBERTA

A. CAPP ad: "Alberta Is Energy."

B. Native graveyard from *H_2Oil,* with SUPER: "Poisoner of downstream communities."

C. Rocky Mountain playground from *An Open Door,* with SUPER: "Alberta: Remember to breathe."

D. Protesters with signs protesting Alberta's 'dirty oil' from *Pipe Dreams,* with SUPER: "Rogue polluter."

E. Rural landowner at his water well from *Pipe Dreams,* with SUPER: "Corporate bully of innocent American farmers."

F. Alberta government ad in *New York Times,* "Keystone: The choice of reason," with SUPER: "Simpatico neighbour and friendly provider of secure energy."

BACK TO SCENE

TOM
The federal environment minister talks about 'ethical oil' rather than facing up to environmental and social issues. Appropriating language such as 'ethical' tells us that we've lost our culture, lost our history and lost a bigger view of the world, comparing ourselves to Latin American and Arabian dictatorships. We could have done it right in Alberta, but we didn't.

TARLA
That's such a negative view! It's not the whole story, and it's certainly not the Alberta I see today.

INSERT – SHANNON IN VIEUX-MONTRÉAL, ON STUDIO SCREEN

SHANNON
Of course our documentaries are not the whole story. There's a lot of detail in the tar sands. But the industry's story is being told with million-dollar budgets!

BACK TO SCENE

The backdrop now features a MONTAGE of previously seen backdrop images, each dissolving slowly into the next.

TOM
If there is a central question about the place, the oil sands is it, and there is endless spin.

TARLA
We need to get people to think, and there is no time for that anymore.

JOE
I wish intellectual, thoughtful Albertan views would prevail. Texans provoke this. The redneck cowpokes' view, underwritten by corporate interests, creates a tremendous wedge. It would be great if we can get out of that, and that's what I'm hoping to help bring about.

INSERT – GERRY IN INNER CITY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

GERRY, with camera, in Edmonton's Boyle-Street area.

SUPER: "GERRY POTTER, WRITER/FILMMAKER, EDMONTON"

GERRY
Both the oil-sands and tar-sands sides sometimes by necessity and sometimes by choice oversimplify the issues. These issues are clouded by emotions, fear, lack of transparency and hearing only from those with vested interests.

INSERT – STILLS OF THEATRE TROUPE (WITH DISABILITIES) AT WORK

SUPER: "RISING SUN THEATRE, EDMONTON"

GERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I would like to see more genuine public dialogue on oil-sands issues in Alberta -- dialogue not shaped by somebody with an agenda -- because I think all Albertans want to make the right choices for themselves and future generations. We should bring foreword choices to be made and their consequences.

INSERT – GERRY IN INNER CITY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

GERRY (CONT'D)
In the end, film is better at showing people and creating emotional reaction then really clarifying complex issues.

INSERT – NIOBE RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

NIOBE
Television and film are so powerful and pervasive. It's a useful way to talk about science, but a difficult way to talk about all of the nuances of science.

BACK TO SCENE

JOE
As a filmmaker, I find film perceived as not as complex as, say, novels. As a mass medium, film is the second most expensive art form, after architecture. This tends to cause film to make sweeping generalizations, and go to drama whenever possible.

INSERT – GEORGE IN JAPANESE GARDEN, ON STUDIO SCREEN

GEORGE
We need to understand both the left and right of the spectrum and their extremes, and make decisions based on education as opposed to rhetoric.
(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)
People continually mess with statistics and information to get their point across. We see the world as black and white, like my nineteen-year-old son. As he gets older, he'll find a lot more grays. We're still going through that in Alberta.

INSERT – NIOBE RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

NIOBE
It's not dishonest to make a film seen as an attack on the tar sands. If you didn't know differently, it would be astonishing that Albertans would make such a Faustian pact. I have a sense of outrage as an Albertan, but I also have a more nuanced view because oil money funds our films!

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
You're talking about government tax credits for films made in the province.

INSERT – NIOBE IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

Taking a breather from his run, Niobe nods and directs the camera to our left. The camera PANS left to pick up Leslie, with *two* plane tickets now wedged into the sleeve of her flight bag.

LESLIE
The funding that Alberta's then-minister of culture threatened to pull when he found out my films were critical of the tar sands. After even critics in L.A. noticed, he backed off.

The picture starts to pixilate again.

LESLIE (CONT'D)
I said, <u>backed off</u>!

The picture stabilizes. She respectfully waves to our right. Camera PANS back to Niobe, who nods goodbye to Leslie (who's O.S.) and resumes his run.

NIOBE
Very few of these documentaries are made by filmmakers in Alberta. Only *Pay Dirt* from 2005, and the two from Tom and I, *Tar Sands* in 2008 and *Tipping Point* in 2011.

INSERT – NEWSPAPER COLUMN ATTACKING *TAR SANDS*

Highlighted text: "Thursday's airing of *Tar Sands: The Selling of Alberta,* on CBC Television's *Doc Zone,* was merely the latest in a string of sensationalist hatchet jobs on Alberta's key industry, courtesy of the national media."

SUPER: "*EDMONTON JOURNAL,* MARCH 15, 2008"

NIOBE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So of course I deeply resent when others portray us as silk-suited filmmakers from Toronto.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
Let's get some outside thinking on this.

INSERT – PROF. DEE AND PROF. DAUM ON CAMPUS, ON STUDIO SCREEN

The pair are now visibly weary from dodging ceaseless swarms of passing students, some carelessly sideswiping a prof as they pass.

PROF. DEE
Read critically, the discourse of Alberta and the sands represents a power struggle, spearheaded by a challenge to the hegemonic status quo by the CBC -- perhaps partly because both accelerated extraction and the discourse of place-identity go largely unchallenged in Alberta.

A particularly burly student accidentally elbows Prof. Dee, who tumbles out of the frame. Prof. Daum seamlessly steps up.

PROF. DAUM
For some, the fiercely neoliberal turn under the current federal administration -- dismantling decades of advances on environmental policy and regulation -- makes expressing ecological concerns around the sands more pressing and substantial than ever.

Prof. Daum artfully dodges another student's massive backpack and wipes a brow -- only to be smoked by another passing student and sent hurtling O.S. As that happens, Prof. Dee pops back into the frame.

PROF. DEE
So that and the scheduled tripling of production raise the stakes for the filmmakers.
(MORE)

PROF. DEE (CONT'D)
This leaves the apologists in largely reactive mode, although they have two vast advantages: the inertia of the status quo, and a mostly indifferent public, whose surface-level conservationism may well represent 'mainstream' thinking in Alberta. For environmentally concerned citizens, that's a present-minded addiction turning ecocidal.

We hear the approaching BEEP-BEEP of a reversing construction vehicle. The passing students scatter. Prof. Dee turns towards the beeping, then back to the camera in horror.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE
Thank you, Professors. Placing this broadcaster in the discussion raises interesting issues.

Billy turns to the continuing montage of prior backdrop images and nods his consent.

BILLY
If you think about it, a lot of the critical, professional filmmaking around the oil sands comes via the CBC. The 1977 docudrama that you mentioned at the top of the show. Those pieces on *The National* and *The Nature of Things.* One of Joe's films. And all three of those documentaries made in Alberta. Is Canada's public broadcaster truly objective on the oil sands?

JOE
What is objective? In post-screening Q&As, I like to show a paper covered with dots -- a plethora of black dots and one red one -- and point out the fallacy of 'objective' reporting. Providing an interview with a member of each of the two groups, that's not objective!

TOM
Without the CBC, there are no more films like *Tipping Point.* It's telling that Alberta shut down one of the best public television stations in the country -- ACCESS -- and Harper is dismembering the CBC now.

Yvette's hand darts to her earphone. She listens.

YVETTE
Someone is calling in...
(glancing O.S.)
Ahead of our program schedule.

The studio sound system SQUEALS. Yvette pulls out her earphone, cringes and gingerly replaces it. As CALLER #1 speaks, the camera slowly PANS to capture impassive reactions to the caller from Yvette and her studio guests.

CALLER #1 (V.O.)
The CBC is biased, no question! You fostered unwarranted hatred against the oil sands by airing *Tipping Point.* And I question the science cited in the film, connecting toxins in the oil sands to cancers in downstream communities. Dubious!

INSERT – NIOBE RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

NIOBE
There were many positive letters in newspapers and online in response to the film on the CBC's website. But I suspect the Public Affairs Bureau, CAPP and the PR departments of the oil companies marshalled the campaign of aggrieved Albertans against the CBC for broadcasting two hours of fabricated lies. I say this because the letter-writing was so prolific and the arguments unchanging, consistent and the same as those made by the oilcos, CAPP and the PAB.

BACK TO SCENE

CALLER #1 (V.O.)
The CBC's lefty leanings are notorious. We're all aware of it in Alberta.

YVETTE
Even if an independent research report in 2010, done in response to federal government MPs alleging such an orientation, studied almost sixteen thousand radio, TV and online news reports broadcast over six months -- and found no inherent bias in CBC's news coverage.

Yvette winces and reaches for her earphone again, but leaves it in place.

BILLY
There is perception and there is reality. Each is important, and each shapes the other. As with images of Alberta.

INSERT – NIOBE RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

NIOBE

There was a complaint to the CBC's Ombudsman over bias in *Tipping Point*. That led to a rigorous review of our film's research. We got a glowing review, but it consumed vast amounts of time. I'm sure that was a victory for our critics --

BACK TO SCENE

The studio sound system CRACKLES, startling everyone. CALLER #2 speaks in a computer-garbled voice.

CALLER #2 (V.O.)

If you check the record, you may discover the complainant's ties to an outfit that published a piece apparently denying the notion that human-made CO^2 emissions are harming the environment. What the --

Another loudspeaker CRACKLE cuts off Caller #2. Yvette looks O.S., bewildered.

INSERT – NIOBE RUNNING IN RIVER VALLEY, ON STUDIO SCREEN

Niobe stops running.

NIOBE

Then came the latest, three-year, ten-percent funding cut to the CBC. I can't imagine that a film like *Tipping Point* didn't play a role in that.

BACK TO SCENE

YVETTE

Before we hear from viewers in our <u>scheduled</u> closing segment, let's get some final thoughts from our guests on films and videos on Alberta and the oil sands. Joe?

Joe turns to the rotating, slo-mo montage of backdrops and shrugs his acquiescence.

JOE

Alberta, and Canada, have never been faced with an industry forcing us to redefine ourselves. The critical question is, do we want to be defined by dirty oil, bitumen?

TARLA

Yvette, I think one of our scientists at Alberta Environment, Preston McEachern, put it best in our video, *About the Oil Sands*. He said this...

She glances at the montage, shrugs her acquiescence, produces a sheet and reads it.

TARLA (CONT'D)
"Is there room for improvement? Do we need critiques from people throughout Canada and around the world? Yes, of course, it's what keeps us on our toes and what keeps us constantly reevaluating for better ways to do our business. I think it's because Albertans are so ready to take the stage and say, 'Here's our plan, throw rocks at us if you will. It's what makes us better.'"

She folds the note.

TARLA (CONT'D)
That's the Albertan way. On the oil sands and everything else.

YVETTE
So what's the bottom line on all these duelling images?

JOE
Those with the most to lose by stopping resource extraction have all the money. That drives independent filmmakers -- through outlets like the NFB and CBC -- to make as powerful a counter-statement as they can, forcing the two sides to miss nuances. What purpose does it serve to polarize debate?

Tom turns to the rotating, slo-mo montage and sighs.

TOM
If current patterns hold, this 'debate' will be won when the apocalyptic images of the tar sands become reality for us all. But that's a pyrrhic victory.

Yvette pauses to let all of this sink in.

YVETTE
Now let's turn to you, the audience part of *Film Rap.* We'll talk to callers --
(glancing O.S. to our right)
-- additional callers -- and share some of your text messages and online postings on the air.

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
Ten seconds.

Yvette checks her watch and glares O.S. to our right.

YVETTE
We have twelve minutes left!

FILTERED VOICE (V.O.)
Not any more.

The backdrop montage SPEEDS UP into a senseless barrage of images. Each now-abrupt transition is accompanied by a CRACKLE on the studio sound system. The picture from the studio begins to pixilate.

YVETTE
Now just a --

Yvette's hand shoots to her earphone. She listens stoically. The camera PANS to her left, revealing her guests' reactions. Tom shows grave concern. Joe seethes. Warren remains solemn. Tarla arches an eyebrow and glances at Billy, who nods fleetingly.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
(sighing)
Yes, Prime Minister.

The backdrop goes BLANK. Tom rises from his seat and turns directly to the camera.

TOM
We hope to make another film. The most dangerous thing is silence.

The studio lights CLICK off as the screen goes BLACK and we

FADE OUT.

Chapter 9: Reflections

At its core, this study grapples with communications around the rising tensions between the need for continuous economic development mandated by forces of globalized, extractive capitalism and its increasingly unsustainable ecological costs. This work illustrates how place-identity in a resource-based economy is navigated and negotiated by professional filmmakers and video producers in five steps: using a critical approach and extending the thought of Innis into environmental communication; interviewing the directing minds of specific, professionally produced and/or exhibited films and videos; contextualizing that work as a discourse and conducting a critical visual framing analysis of that discourse; and finally, integrating my findings in a script for a hybridized documentary film presented in the format of a TV program. In addressing how Alberta is positioned and contested in documentary film and advocacy video in the context of environmental issues around the bituminous sands, my case study connects that discursive activity to larger cultural, social political and economic forces in a world enmeshed in global flows of capital and pervaded by the power of pictures. This final chapter reviews my research objectives and findings, and concludes with observations on limitations of this study, its potential contributions and suggestions for further research.

9.1 Research objectives and findings

Revisiting my three research goals (Part 1.5 above) grounds a few reflective notes on the content and processes of this study.

This study examines a disparate body of film and video work by independent film producers from Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, the lower mainland of BC, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal, Los Angeles and London (UK), as well as senior, Alberta-based

public-affairs professionals from the Government of Alberta, the oil industry and a private PR firm. Situating their creations in a discourse from 2005, the year after the US recognized that extracting the sands was economically feasible (Humphries 2008), to 2012 reveals significant links among representations of Alberta and flows of power advancing or contesting forces of Neoliberalism, globalization and consumerism. In the latter case, this particularly covers not only oil and its ubiquitous by-products (which include film-camera parts), but also tourist landscapes. In considering the discourse of place-identity in Alberta as it unfolds against the backdrop of resource extraction and the rising tide of related environmental and other concerns, what stands out is the rising profile of the sands during the period under study, not merely as a massive physical and economic enterprise, but as an emerging symbol of the costs of human development in a world run—indeed, *overrun*—by neoliberal imperatives and fuelled largely and literally by their flagship manifestation, extractive capitalism.

Positioned visually (and otherwise) as a frontier for economic advancement since European contact during the fur-trade epoch, Alberta has evolved through the economic—and in the public mind, visual—dominance of ranching, wheat farming and conventional oil, always buttressed by tourism due to its spectacular landscapes. In 2013, *unconventional oil from the sands seems to have overtaken cowboys and the Rocky Mountains as the primary symbol of the province in the global public's imagination* (Calder 2012; Coats 2012).[26] This accords nicely with conflations of Alberta and its principal economic sector by its elites, as in the provincial government's showcasing the

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[26] Citing the energy industry's coopting of the visual and verbal rhetorical power of Alberta's ranching heritage, Wolf (2012) observes, "The cowboy, the Western 'heartland' glamorous image in language is applied to oil and gas. But you can't compare the cowboy on the range to the guy waist-deep in a tailings pond."

industry and its technology at a supposedly cultural exhibition at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC in 2005 (Gauthier 2008); in one of Canada's largest—and in my assessment, greatest—museums, celebrating the role of oil and gas in "creating the Alberta identity" (Glenbow Museum 2006); and in the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' recent campaign declaring that "Alberta Is Energy" (2010b).

However, from a critical perspective, this study supports Glynn's (2009) claim that construing a place as an apparently cohesive whole in accord with dominant images of that place opens that constructed totality to contestation and disruption by counterpublics, who may have more legitimacy and may better reflect public discourse than traditional actors like the state and industry. That a singularly prominent, emerging forum for dissent against Alberta's (mis)management of the sands is documentary films created by participants in this study speaks to not only the allure of the visual in an arguably ocularcentric world (Jay 1988), but also to the ability of documentary film to evoke strong emotions aimed at inspiring corrective social action (Rabiger 2004; Aufderheide 2007), or at least dialogue and debate. Greenpeace's advocacy/art film, *Petropolis* (Mettler 2009), often cited by participants in this study, and the battery of online postings by viewers of the CBC's broadcasts of *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008) and *Tipping Point* (Radford and Thompson 2011) evince the power of the eco-documentary to meet those ends—and express the critical researcher's ethic. Conversely, the Alberta government's ignoring the province's economic foundation and initially co-opting a Scottish beach in its rebranding video, *An Open Door* (2009), testify to the far-flung public derision that can answer less successful efforts to depict place-identity in an age of unprecedented global competition for tourism, trade and investment cash, in which place

branding plays a critical role (Govers and Go 2009). *An Open Door* grounded my pursuit of my second research goal, to provide a critical case study in place branding centred on the sands as an emerging flashpoint and bellwether among the mounting tensions in seeking to accommodate economic, ecological and other aims in resource-based economies.

A few overarching points emerge from this study in working towards my first two research goals, relating to its content.

First, I found that a significant part of positioning and contesting place in Alberta's resource-based economy has been driven by events and representations of the province well beyond its borders. Indeed, relatively high-profile, international replies to traditional, touristic images of Alberta—the Rocky Mountains, golden fields of grain and cowboys on horseback, all under open, azure skies—have come from video work such as a deliberate visual corruption of that imagery by an American-based organization (Corporate Ethics International 2010); a gruesome, satirical cartoon by a British activist group mocking Alberta's environmental stewardship and its ecological injustices to Aboriginal people (Dick 2012); and exposés by an established Hollywood documentarian of Alberta's indifference to the sands' devastating effects on downstream Aboriginal communities (Iwerks 2008, 2010). Iwerks' work is particularly notable because as a Hollywood insider positioning Alberta as a corporate bully state for a primarily American audience, particularly in *Pipe Dreams* (2011), she is indirectly urging the province's largest energy customer—and a formative contributor to first developing the sands, through Sun Oil—to help to save the province from its own greed and present-mindedness.

Meanwhile, video work from those with the greatest vested interest in maintaining the status quo and even accelerating it—the Canadian (read Albertan) petroleum industry and its greatest cheerleader, the Alberta government—has tended to be reactive to both that body of independent documentary film work and to domestic and globally broadcast developments such as the demise of 1,606 ducks in an unguarded tailings lake. That Alberta's stewardship of the sands is unfolding largely as a discourse in place branding, essentially a high-stakes, international PR battle to convince the world that the province is a worthy supplier of oil, must be ironic for filmmakers like Radford, who believes that "Albertans are paid very well to forget about the discourse" on who we are as a province and what it stands for (2012, 3). He adds:

> There so much money, Alberta didn't have the chance to grow its own sense of place, its own identity. We are no longer building a culture as a place, and identity, but as an economic opportunity. The two don't work together, we must choose one. (1)

Citing Innis, Radford sees the sands precipitating a re-colonization of the province by foreign economic interests with little interest in Alberta's social, cultural or ecological well-being. Tellingly, Radford stands almost alone in creating documentary work questioning Alberta's stewardship of the sands *from inside the province.* Except for his two films (Radford 2008; Radford and Thompson 2011) and the first film studied here, *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005a, 2005b),[27] all of the documentaries analyzed here come from filmmakers who live outside of the province. This testifies to the view of Radford and

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[27] *Pay Dirt* consciously attempts a balanced approach, but is seen by Thompson (2012a, 1) as "positively depicting the engineering challenges of the tar sands." In my own reading, *Pay Dirt* is less critical of Alberta's handling of the sands than any other documentary film studied here.

other participants (e.g. Cariou 2012; Lavallee 2012) of the discourse of identity in Alberta being a casualty of indifference born of affluence—or, as Wolf (2012) suggests, a casualty of fear. In the latter light, Radford and Thompson's work is particularly courageous in the face of the economic and political might of oil interests in Alberta. This study shows clearly that recent discourse on the sands has been driven not by local sources, but by external forces, be they documentary films or events unfolding internationally, such as American debates over TransCanada's proposed Keystone pipeline and the European Union's Fuel Quality Directive penalizing Alberta's 'dirty' oil.

Another key finding from this research relates to participants' practices of framing Alberta as the host of the sands. Producers of the films and videos studied here use a wide gamut of frames. I have identified 15, ranging from more anthropocentric to more ecocentric, or 'instrumentalist' to 'transformative' as situated on Corbett's (2006) spectrum of environmental ideologies. My findings suggest that as the sands' global profile rises, the discourse has shifted from mainly more anthropocentric frames (e.g. *money, progress)* to begin to account for more ecocentric frames (e.g. *eco-justice, present-minded).* As my participants (e.g. Radford 2012; Iwerks 2012; S. Walsh 2012) and others point out, the public was much less aware of the sands in the mid-2000s than today. This suggests that raising ecological, social and other concerns around Alberta's bituminous bonanza has affected the discourse, although of course any remedial effects on policy and more importantly, on the Earth's ecosystems, remain to be seen.

In positioning Alberta, the provincial government and the oil industry have relied on more instrumentalist frames, typically *money, progress* and especially *status quo.* This troika may be the most potent, appealing as these frames respectively do to the basic

human need for security, the time-honoured rationality of science as a panacea for problems (like climate change), and the formidable weight of inertia and its contemporary obverses, overscheduling and/or apathy. More recently, pro-development interests have added the *ethical oil* and *green* frames to their arsenal of communication tools, perplexing ethicists as well as environmentalists. Documentary filmmakers in this study have used more preservationist, moralist and transformational types of frames, most commonly adopting moralist frames *(rogue, greed, eco-justice)* and the *present-minded* frame. Although I have not studied it empirically, my sense in conducting this research is that the Canadian popular media's coverage of the discourse around the sands gravitates toward instrumentalist and conservationist views through the *status quo* and *compromise* frames, perhaps reflecting 'mainstream' environmental thinking in this country—or at least that of such media's corporate-owned, advertiser-sensitive masters.

The Alberta government's rebranding video, *An Open Door* (2009), is particularly instructive. Beyond its laudable attempt to define Alberta to itself and the world—albeit falling back on a bevy of traditional tourist imagery while virtually ignoring the oil industry—the video teaches that visual omissions or denials can be as significant in environmental discourse as explicit representations. However, the failure of that video and the campaign of which it became the flagship seem to have less to do with the government's use of what I term the *green* frame (though critics might call it *greenwash*), and more to do with its producers' inability to remedy its unfortunate inclusion of a photo of a *Scottish* beach, which immediately went viral via social media. Inaccuracy and irrelevance may be twin killers in communication, but as this study shows, the framing of a message can be as important as its content: imagery that resonates with audiences in a

tourism video can rankle them in another context. As one filmmaker-participant observes, "I think that the propaganda machine of the Government of Alberta is such an important part of the story. Often, we are using the same images that they are. It's really about framing; that's an important part of the story and will be ongoing" (S. Walsh 2012, 6).

A further finding from this research relates to participants' use of visual communication strategies in their work. In representing the detrimental effects of extracting the sands—and by inference at least, negative attributes of the citizens who ultimately own and are responsible for developing the resource—using moralist frames such as *rogue, greed* and *health,* documentary filmmakers have tended to focus on both the *macro* and the *micro*. On the macro side, in availing themselves of the latest, stabilized, high-definition camera equipment—which in one case required special permission from American authorities to remove from their country (Thompson 2012a)—they have shown us the massive scale of sands operations by flying high above them in rented helicopters. *Petropolis* (Mettler 2009) epitomizes this approach, with its conspicuously lengthy shots of the landscape before, during and after open-pit mining, leaving us to witness the transformation—critics might say rape—of pristine boreal forest into denuded, scarred wasteland. The immensity of the extraction and processing apparatus, trumpeted earlier in the discourse in *Pay Dirt* (Palmer 2005a, 2005b) and the *60 Minutes* segment (Schorn 2006), becomes a point of attack in critical documentary films such as *Tar Sands* (Radford 2008). In counterpoint to the macro approach, the documentary filmmakers also strive to bring home the impacts of sands operations at ground-level on citizens living in downstream communities, particularly Aboriginal people in Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay. Scenes set in the home of the whistleblower

on the federal and provincial government's inadequate water-monitoring, Dr. O'Connor (Iwerks 2008, 2010), in a community hall in which citizens eviscerate representatives of Suncor for polluting their water (Lavallee 2011), and in the living room of a family grieving the deaths of several members due to rare cancers (Radford and Thompson 2011) offer indelible images of tragic casualties of Alberta's stewardship of the sands. *Land of Oil and Water* (McArthur and Cariou 2010) and *On the Line* (Wolf 2011) extend the microscopic view with memorable, metaphorical images of a spider clinging to its web, and a bee being blown violently off the shoulder of a highway by a gargantuan truck, respectively.

In contrast, video productions by the Alberta government (2010a, 2010b, 2012) and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) (2010a) have uniformly adopted a markedly micro focus in the latter stages of the period under study. Beyond more obvious tactics like using tightly framed shots of sands operations and including trees in actual and simulated backgrounds—the *green* frame minimizing the ecological impact of the sands—these productions have taken a softer approach. These videos are "less about place and more about the people working there" (Davies 2012, 3), featuring industry employees talking about what they do with calm confidence, "a lot of highly educated, highly competent people working in the oil sands, not a faceless, big, black thing with machines all over it" (Anonymous 2012, 4). Appreciating that prior efforts to "fight emotion with fact" did not succeed, CAPP videos now depict "real people, focusing on increasing the base of understanding and instilling a sense of pride in developing our natural resources and a sense of values around the production of resources" (Davies 2012, 5). This reference to values echoes the Alberta government's

stated aim to show the world "how our values drive our decisions" (Benoit 2012, 2). Collectively, this recent video work draws on a scaled-down version of the *pride* frame, which, at its fullest, conflates Albertans with oil, as in CAPP's "Alberta Is Energy" campaign (2010b); the *compromise* and *progress* frames, positioning Albertans as reasonably mitigating the environmental challenges of the sands through wisdom and technology; and the *status quo* frame, suggesting that the sands are in good hands and by inference, that concerns raised by dissenters are unwarranted.[28]

A final key point relating to the content of this study questions the ultimate utility of using film and video as media in the discourse of Alberta and the sands. The perceived need to appeal to audiences' emotions certainly makes moving images an attractive option to communicators in a society that shares meaning increasingly through visuals (Mirzoeff 2009; Banks 2007); each participant in this study expressly or impliedly acknowledges the persuasive force of film. Yet one wonders, as does Thompson (2012a), whether film and television—and by media extension, online videos—despite their power and pervasiveness, are the best formats for raising debates over not merely scientific issues, but also questions of environmental ethics and positioning place-identity. As Wilkinson suggests, the significant costs of producing professional documentary films impel filmmakers to "make sweeping generalizations and go to drama whenever possible" (2012, 1–2) rather than dwell on nuanced details in tackling complex issues like

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[28] This turn to a softer approach in both government and industry videos on the sands contrasts with the more aggressive tone (perhaps rooted in defensiveness) underlying efforts like the government's $30,000 ad in the *New York Times,* which calls on the Obama administration to approve TransCanada's proposed Keystone XL pipeline as "the choice of reason" and declares Albertans' values to mirror those of Americans in terms of balancing "strong environmental policy, clean technology development, energy security and plentiful job opportunities for the middle class and returning war veterans" (Bennett 2013). This reference to values and the appeal to emotion (most apparent in the conspicuous reference to war veterans) seem consistent with CAPP's stated strategies, whether by coincidence or coordination.

environmental concerns about resource development. Drama clearly helps to sell documentaries to film festivals and TV broadcasters, and of course to attract audiences. An advocacy video like *Rethink Alberta* (Corporate Ethics International 2010), with its dead-duck imagery, ominous music and biting satire of Alberta's tourism campaigns, draws significantly more viewers on YouTube than a less visceral rebranding campaign like *An Open Door* (2009).

While my participants' musings on the limitations of visual media are thoughtful and well-taken, one could probably find shortcomings in any medium deployed to debate public issues of profound complexity and consequence. For example, even if text does admit a depth and complexity of argument beyond the capacity of images as some may contend, can it be made widely accessible to people and hold their attention? Performance art may be unforgettable, but can it attract an audience large enough to match the communicator's aims? Perhaps the answer lies in transmedia, the idea of telling a story across multiple platforms systematically to create a unified and coordinated experience for the audience (H. Jenkins 2010). The graveness and urgency of ecological issues suggest that environmental communicators and others should avail themselves of every channel available to them, within the limits of reason, logistics and budget. Ultimately, I am compelled by Wilkinson's Griersonian call for documentary films to "rally the troops" when "something is desperately wrong" and "the system is out of balance" (2012, 2) and particularly by Radford's (2012) assertion that in such circumstances, the most dangerous response is remaining silent. Although it seems too soon to assess the full impact of the last eight formative years of filmic, public discourse on Alberta and the sands, even its relatively limited dissemination compared to say, your

average Hollywood summer blockbuster, stands to engage and move people, one audience member at a time. Most of us do not change the world in a fell swoop; rather, when we do make a difference, it happens more incrementally, as Gould puts it, "people taking care of each other in small ways of enduring significance" ([1989] 1994, 246).

My third and last main research goal relates to process, aimed at developing an arts-based model of public engagement in environmental issues which seeks to provide scholarly insight, critique and analysis to a polarized, emotion-laden public issue, with a view to inviting reflection (and perhaps even action) on responsive and responsible environmental policy in Alberta and beyond. This model draws on the forms of documentary film, ethnodrama, creative non-fiction and the nascent genre of eco-comedy in an effort to make the work accessible and engaging to audiences. Interviewing filmmakers and video producers yielded insights into diverse approaches to positioning and contesting Alberta onscreen. Situating their approaches and experiences in a discourse involving the province's place-identity grounded the culmination of this work, a script, the writing of which revealed three benefits to this inquiry.

First, casting my participants as characters in a lifelike setting, a televised talk-show format, allowed me to build on my respect for each of them, to engage their perspectives as deeply as possible and to present them as faithfully and as positively as they would act in a mass-media setting. Aiming to present their voices authentically and empathetically was helpful in negotiating my own biases, informed by my experiences working with superb professional communicators and filmmakers alike, but also by a critical researcher's distaste for manipulative communications practices designed to preserve privilege by silencing contrary views. Representing participants as themselves,

composites or purposive creations, and speaking in participants' own words and voices, invite engagement from audiences with the work, and hopefully, empathy, dialogue and action on ecological and other issues around the sands (among other endeavours) within one's spheres of influence. As Cariou observes of the power of film to move people in addressing, in his case, the threat of the sands to Aboriginal communities downstream, "It's important for people to respond emotionally, not just intellectually" (2012, 5).

A second benefit of this arts-based approach is its fictively enabling proponents of different perspectives to interact with each other directly, in advancing and defending their own positions and in challenging those of others. Again, this is what they would have to do in the actual public dialogue on the sands that both participants (e.g. Radford 2012; S. Walsh 2012; Potter 2012) and I feel is necessary to alleviate the substantial ecological, social, economic, political, cultural and other tolls exacted by the sands on the province. Broadening and depolarizing the conversation on the sands seem particularly vital in a province that paradoxically valorizes independence (van Herk 2001, 2007) but, as participants point out, muzzles dissent from the dominant economic and political agenda of largely untrammelled extractive capitalism (Radford 2012; Lavallee 2012; S. Walsh 2012; Wolf 2012; Potter 2012). From a communications perspective, such dialogue could also address the immense *symbolic* value of the resource, spawning discussion on Alberta's place-identity and place branding towards improving its tarred reputation abroad under the current provincial and federal government regimes.

Third, my arts-based approach offered a broader view of how accomplished communicators navigate the murky sea of gray that can link sharply drawn polarities of black and white. Many participants (e.g. Calder 2012; Gallant 2012; Palmer 2012; Potter

2012; Wilkinson 2012) expressed a keen understanding of multiple perspectives on Alberta and the sands beyond their own. This gave me a stronger appreciation of the complexities of the discourse and debate that I suspected existed, and was wary of oversimplifying into a reductionist binary. Also, having examined the discourse in terms of identifying, naming and then plotting 15 frames in the discourse on Corbett's (2006) spectrum of ideologies, and then embodying some of those frames in dialogue scripted for filmmakers and professional communicators who use them, I gained further appreciation for the key role of nuance and shading in communications.

9.2 Limitations of study

The mandate of all dissertations to plumb the depths of an issue may necessarily circumscribe their application to other circumstances. This attempt is limited by the specific circumstances of its case study, focusing on representations of a place, Alberta, in documentary films and advocacy videos produced in light of environmental concerns around extracting bitumen. That the site of extraction has been called the world's largest industrial project (Leahy 2006) and even the largest industrial project in history (Davidson and Gismondi 2011) suggests that the sands have important symbolic value in the rising global tensions between human economic development and its increasingly unsustainable costs. However, the extraction project's transcendent, symbolic value collides with several potential limits on abstracting its results to other cases.

First, the visual productions studied here were produced over a short period, primarily from 2005 to 2012, in the wake of the rising international profile of the sands that preceded those films and videos. As such, their production schedules overlapped, reducing the potential for dialogue between their producers in terms of discursive

responses that audiences can see onscreen, even if some of the directors conferred privately during the making of their work (e.g. Thompson 2012a) and some commented on other works studied here (e.g. Lavallee 2012; Wilkinson 2012; Wolf 2012). A related limitation is the currency of these productions, which does not permit the longitudinal reflection that can benefit scholarship. Because the discursive struggle over Alberta's place-identity in light of the sands in documentary film and advocacy video is compacted, current and still unfolding, this study, like a documentary film itself, can only present a snapshot that is frozen in time at its point of completion. The passage of time would permit a deeper, historical assessment of the films and their effects.

A second key constraint is that my visual sample involves the work of a relatively small body of professionally produced and/or exhibited work only. It excludes grassroots, do-it-yourself documentary films and advocacy videos that, while lacking the formers' status, are unhindered by fiscal, temporal, technical, cultural and other realities of professional production and distribution.

Third, this study focuses on film and video productions, even if they are contextualized within a broader discourse and sequence of events. It does not examine other forms such as literary, dramatic, musical, purely visual or other texts, or the relationships among them.

Another limit on this study is its grounding in a single and unique resource project that involves what is called 'unconventional' oil to distinguish its enormously elaborate, expensive and resource-intensive extraction and separation processes from conventional oil plays. My findings may well differ from those in studies of projects producing other sources of energy, be they renewable or not.

Related to the latter limit is this study's centering on one place. As a case can be made for Alberta's exceptionality, at least in Canada, owing to its hefty reliance on resource revenues, ossified electoral tradition and other factors (Takach 2012a), findings from a study of the province may not be readily portable to other places, although they can certainly serve as an informative basis for comparison—if not alarm.

A final limit noted here and perhaps a hazard of scholarship generally is the reductionist tendency to lose complexities and nuances of data in service of representing individual positions and broader themes in an orderly report. This is among the perils that arts-based research seeks to mitigate with its emphasis on voice, acceptance of ambiguity, acknowledgment of subjectivity, and creative opportunities to engage and challenge diverse positions through techniques such as documentary and dramatic personification. In bringing together proponents of different perspectives in a script, I have also come to better understand limitations of film and video in environmental communication—particularly in their tendency to dramatize in the interests of storytelling and advocacy—despite their tremendous visual and affective power. For example, while immensely affective, dramatization can also elicit deeper polarizations among different sides of the economic-environmental divide; it can also obscure nuances that might help to bridge that divide. Presented in a one-hour televised format, my script, *Tarred and Feathered,* barely scratches the surface in addressing the positioning of Alberta around the sands in a globalized, visual society. The tangled maze of interests, emotions, intricacies, shadings and avenues of scholarly inquiry involved are hardly reducible to a single creative work. I have tried to address this challenge in my script through its hybridity, combining elements of documentary (to present important facts and opinions), drama (to emphasize

character and conviction), creative non-fiction (to use rich and evocative language) and comedy (to balance the severity of the stakes around the sands). However, each of these aspects necessarily competes with the others in the limited time afforded in a one-hour script; spending too much time on one reduces the potential impact of the others on the audience. Ultimately, one is left with Iwerks' apt reflection: "The reality as a filmmaker is that you wish you could change the world and stop everything. But everyone takes small steps towards a bigger goal" (2012, 3).

9.3 Contribution

This study stands to add small steps to the bigger literature in five overlapping avenues of inquiry: environmental communication, arts-based research, critical research, place studies and media studies.

In the emerging field of visual environmental communication, this study responds to Hansen and Machin's call to look beyond icons and abstractions to link visualizations of the environment to "concrete processes like global capitalism and consumerism" (2008, 779). This study does so by situating visualizations of Alberta in a discourse which is tied contextually to, and responds to, events in the international arena. More broadly, this study provides insights into visual communicative processes around the environment in a resource-based economy, and specifically into how place is framed in film and video, in reflecting diverse perspectives relating to the rising tensions between the imperatives of economic development and its ecological costs, focusing on Alberta's bituminous sands. In doing so, this work also takes up analogous calls by visual-studies scholars (e.g. Bal 2003, Pink 2003, Dikovitskaya 2005, Rose 2012) for critical visual analyses to challenge naturalized master narratives—in this case, the master visual

narrative of a resource-based jurisdiction as pristine and environmentally responsible. Moreover, in taking an arts-based approach through a hybridized script which personifies polarized perspectives and calls for a more open, wide-ranging and democratic discourse on the sands, this inquiry also advances Finley's 'ecoaesthetic' (2011b, 2012). The latter is a call for critical research using artistic practices to create spaces for public dialogue aimed at achieving more responsible ecological citizenship in the face of a consumerist society characterized critically by widespread apathy and ignorance about environmental concerns. This accords with my reading of the subfield of environmental communication, which, reflecting its inherent connection to matters of science and media studies, has tended to concentrate on traditional quantitative, and to a lesser extent, qualitative, research methods more than arts-based methods in its relatively recent history. Given the need to reassess and reconfigure our relationship with the Earth based on our rampant consumption of its precious resources—notably ozone, fresh air and water—my choice of a script (albeit unproduced as yet) aims ultimately to show the affective and depolarizing potential of arts-based work on audiences beyond only the academy, and thereby advance even a modest methodological tilt in the subfield of environmental communication.

In the area of arts-based research itself, my script builds on Denzin's (2011) remarkable ethnodrama that deconstructs visual representations of the Native military victory over Custer at Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn, extending Denzin's method to represent my research in the medium in which most of my participants practice (film and television) and in which the visual part of my data exists. Thus, beyond following the practice in ethnodrama of dramatizing selected parts of interview transcripts (Saldaña 2011), *Tarred and Feathered* consciously applies some of the actual filmmaking

techniques that it analyzes and synthesizes in deconstructing filmmakers' and communicators' visual representations of Alberta and the sands. Further, this study departs from the common practice in ethnodrama scripts to 'study down' in the social sense, i.e. focus on voices for subaltern, disenfranchised communities participating in the research. Rather, this work involves key contributors to a discourse that can, in a sense, be seen as being led by elites. Even if the independent documentary filmmakers participating here are challenging a vastly more powerful hegemonic discourse advanced by professional communicators serving the interests of the oil industry and government in Alberta, the formers' professionalism and credentials, and/or ability to marshal resources to get their films exhibited professionally and thus relatively widely, contrast with amateur film and video producers, and most members of the general public, who lack the skills, resources and network required to produce work for more widespread and widely credible dissemination onscreen. As such, this work analogously follows Nader's (1974) call to 'study up' in the social sense, i.e. to look at the more powerful in society, those with more dominant voices and visibility in public discourse, to determine how they affect our lives. Nader's work addresses anthropology, but her concerns apply equally to communications studies as far as critical research is concerned.

In the area of critical research generally, this study takes up two challenges posed by leading scholars in their respective fields. Methodologically, blending narrative research with visual framing and discourse analysis, plus arts-based research employing techniques of documentary film, drama, creative non-fiction and comedy, reflects the bricolage called for by Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011) and Finley (2011b). This involves deploying complementary, but not necessarily traditionally juxtaposed,

methods in service of engaging and activating people towards alleviating social, economic and other injustices. Moreover, this study helps to extend framing analysis from its traditional base in social-science research to a more humanities-focused approach drawing on qualitative ways of knowing the world that Kuypers (2010) calls critical and rhetorical. Such an approach explores not only what is being framed, but how, why and in what discursive context—and as extended here, also focuses on those doing the framing, which Borah's (2001) longitudinal survey concludes has been significantly understudied.

As for critical communication theory, this work responds particularly to Babe's (2008) extensions of Innis' thought on political economy, and Innis' anticipation of postcolonialism, into environmental communication. Innis' notions of space- and time-biased societies ([1950] 2007, 2008, [1952] 2004) are echoed and advanced in my situating 15 frames used in the discourse of Alberta and the sands on Corbett's (2006) anthropocentric-to-ecocentric continuum of environmental ideologies. Also, Innis' "plea for time" (2008, 61) and his call for homeostasis, a healthy balance, are reflected in the documentary filmmakers' ecocentric-oriented framing, and its dramatization in my script. As well, Innis' staples thesis of Canadian economic development ([1930] 1999, [1940] 1978)—extended in Berland's (2009) situating Canada at the margins of globalized power both as a natural-resource producer and as a commoditized, visual and communicational landscape—finds eerie resonance in postcolonial views of the sands. As Radford (2012) and Lavallee (2012) observe, the greatest beneficiaries of extraction live far away from the sands, with little reason to care about its substantial impacts on Alberta and Albertans, or on the project's powerful symbolic value in terms of global

environmental concerns. In sum, this study builds on the aforementioned and other extensions of Innis, even if he was not a critical theorist per se, in connecting visual representations of place to international flows of power in the Age of Oil. This work suggests that the discourse on Alberta and the sands is influenced strongly by international economic and political forces, and could do with more reflection, dialogue, depolarization and especially remedial action on the sands here at home.

In the broadly categorized area of place studies, this work responds to Broto et al's (2010) citing a relative lack of studies of place-identity in industrially despoiled environments. An interesting aspect of this case study is that Alberta, a province almost as large as Texas and remarkable for its biodiversity (Takach 2010), is positioned in terms of either or both of its *extreme* landscapes—pristine and toxic—depending on the source and the goal of the positioning; this reinforces Wilkinson's (2012a) point about losing nuances in going to drama in documentary. In including Alberta's provincial rebranding effort and other framings of the province in a visual PR clash aimed at influencing audiences at home and particularly abroad, this work also addresses Mayes' (2008) call to examine the impact of place branding on the broader social field, which is part of wider calls for more critical work in marketing discourse. In doing so, this study steps beyond relatively uncritical case studies which serve the need to promote economic development, tourism and investment in the global marketplace.

Finally, in media studies, this work offers insights into visual communication practices in the production of documentary films and online advocacy videos aimed at representing place in resource-based economies. As such it departs from what I read as the natural tendency in ecocinema to focus mostly on the site of the image, i.e. the films

themselves, and to a lesser extent, on their relationship with the broader culture and even on their reception, but least of all on their creators. I find a particular paucity of primary scholarly work exploring creators' motivations, their experiences and their reflections on their own work and to films presented on related themes by others.[29] This accords with Hansen and Machin's (2013) observation that the site of production is the least studied in visual communication research as a whole, as well as Borah's (2011) conclusion that in research on framing, the creators of the frames are significantly understudied. Given the direct link between how we communicate about the natural world and how we relate to it, use it and solve environmental problems (Cox 2013), studies of those actually doing the communicating, particularly in powerful, pervasive media like film and video, stand to contribute to film studies generally and to ecocinema in particular. This seems especially important to the critical research investigating how filmmakers negotiate their positions relative to political, economic and other forces, be they dominant or subaltern.

9.4 Further research

Research building on this study could take up at least five avenues of inquiry.

From a comparative perspective, there is ample room to consider whether results peculiar to Alberta and the sands apply to case studies based on creative work addressing place-identity in the light of environmental issues that is, for example: (a) produced over a longer timespan than the eight years observed here; (b) produced by *non*-professionals practising what Miles (2010, 47) calls "dissident-vernacular cultural production" to disrupt dominant discourses of place-identity; (c) focused on the extraction of

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[29] This tendency is apparent in a recent edited collection, *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (Rust, Monani and Cubitt 2013), as well as in landmarks of the subfield such as *Green Screen* (Ingram 2000) and *Hollywood Utopia* (Brereton 2005).

conventional oil or other natural resources, be they renewable or not; and/or (d) located in other places in Canada or beyond.

From a film-studies perspective, this study could be extended by exploring how films and videos considering the sands fit within the wider context of documentary and/or advocacy films generally, and the Canadian documentary tradition in particular. Canadian contributions to the form have been significant and influential, starting with the founding of the National Film Board (NFB) under John Grierson, who saw the documentary film as an active expression of humane, democratic values, or positive propaganda, and under whose leadership the NFB became an instrument of building national identity (Hardy 1966; Babe 2000b; Druick 2007). Also, one could extend this study by situating the films and videos in relation to other works of eco-cinema or 'film vert' from Canada (including French-language work from Québec) and other nations.

From a broader, media-studies perspective, one could further explore several issues around creative work within environmental communication and place-identity. This study's focus on documentary films and advocacy videos raises issues of intersections and differences rising out of the production, use, distribution and impact of each form in contrast to the other. For example, documentary films benefit from the credibility of popular media forms (theatre and television) and cachet in the film industry and the art world, while online advocacy videos benefit from greater accessibility to creators, quicker production and release times, lower costs and the potential to go viral. We need more studies to show various impacts of using different media for different types of positioning (e.g. place branding, risk management), as well as using transmedia—content flowing across multiple media platforms (H. Jenkins 2010)—in

negotiating place-identity. It would be interesting to learn more about, for example, the extent to which the choice of media or distribution channel for a creative work (e.g. television broadcast, film-festival screening or dissemination on an online channel such as Vimeo or YouTube) affects the potential for audience engagement in issues of social or environmental justice in response to positive or negative portrayals of a place. Further fruitful insights into the negotiation of place-identity might be gleaned from conducting, for example, a study of environmental filmmakers and video producers and their culture of production as it influences the content and dissemination of their oeuvre. Also, this study's focus on the producers of creative work rather than their audiences could be advanced by research addressing the reception of media work by viewers, be they from the general public, or more specific segments such as politicians or media pundits. Also, one could investigate the role and effect of media coverage of environmental-themed films and other forms on the discourse of place-identity in places portrayed in that work.

Staying with the reception of environmental communication, from a place-branding perspective, further qualitative and quantitative research could study the effect of critical, environmentally-themed imagery or other creative work on its target jurisdiction's trade, tourism or investment opportunities. Examples such as the *Rethink Alberta* video (Corporate Ethics International 2010) offer potentially productive ground to address environmental communication as counter-hegemonic discourse in an age in which projecting visually appealing representations through place branding is vital to the fortunes of jurisdictions competing in a globalized market (van Ham 2010a, 2010b). In addition, dark tourism, occupied with sites of morbidity and the macabre (Sharpley and Stone 2009), and more particularly toxic tourism, concerned with sites of ecological

devastation (Pezzullo 2007), offer intriguing possibilities for further scholarly investigation, in counterpoint to traditionally sunny representations of place that, when juxtaposed with critical documentary films such as those studied here, may seem ironic.

A final suggestion for further research relates to methods. This study adds to a growing body of arts-based research that could clearly do with further development in the subfield of environmental communication. This is particularly important given that the health of the Earth affects us not only as individual hiccups in history, but as a species, along with every other known resident form of life that we have purported to master. Although green art is well-established (Carruthers 2006a), further scholarly work through more publicly accessible, artistic forms could help not only to advance the stock of knowledge around environmental concerns and potential actions to ameliorate them, but also to engage people, boost their sense of agency and perhaps even inspire them to take a few steps in Gould's "small ways of enduring significance" ([1989] 1994, 246). On a planet that apparently has, in the hands of its dominant species, passed its ecological best-before date alarmingly ahead of prior forecasts, is this too much to ask?

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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear *[name of participant]*:

My study
As a student in the PhD program in Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary, I seek to explain how the identity of a place—perceptions of the essential, collective beliefs, priorities and characteristics of its people—in a resource-based economy can be shaped by images. Here, "images" means documentary films, TV and online ads, and other work involving moving pictures. I have identified you as someone who has been involved in the production of material contributing to that visual dialogue in Alberta. I believe this research is important because Alberta, through its development of the tar/oil sands, the world's largest industrial project, has become a focal point in the growing discussion around the needs of economic growth and environmental protection in an increasingly global and visual society.

Your participation
I invite you to take part in my dissertation project. I would interview you for about an hour. Broadly, my questions would cover two areas:

(1) your take on the context in which your (organization's) work was produced, and the communication goals and strategies adopted, and the editorial choices made, in that production; and
(2) your sense of where that work fits in the ongoing visual depiction of Alberta's identity.

There are no right or wrong answers; I seek to get your account of the creation of that film or video, and your sense of its place in the visual dialogue on the collective beliefs, priorities and character of Alberta and Albertans. You may refuse to answer any question and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without question or reason.

Acknowledgement or confidentiality
I will collect your name and your description of your role in the production of visual work concerning Alberta. I will be free to acknowledge your participation and to quote from your comments unless you specifically request anonymity. In the latter case, all of your personal information will remain confidential; your name will not appear in any raw or analyzed data; and all references identifying you will be removed. Subject to any such duty of confidentiality, I may use the data in publications, productions, presentations and instructional material.

Research approved by university ethics board
This study has been reviewed and approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary. If you have questions on participants' rights and the ethical conduct of research, please contact Russell Burrows, that board's Senior Ethics Resource Officer, at [phone number and e-mail address].

Other questions
If you have any questions beyond ethical issues, please contact me [phone number and e-mail address] or my supervisor, Dr. Brian Rusted [phone number and e-mail address]

Consent form
If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the enclosed consent form and return it to me either in person, as a file attached to a message by e-mail, or by regular post (c/o Dept. of Communication and Culture, University of Calgary, 320 Social Sciences Building, 2500 University Drive, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4).

With many thanks for your time and consideration,

Geo Takach
PhD Candidate, Department of Communication and Culture
University of Calgary

Appendix B: Ad Seeking Participants for Group Mail-Out

Members invited to take part in study
If you have worked on a visual production depicting Alberta – a documentary film, an advocacy campaign, an ad or other work involving moving images – then one of our *members [if sent by an organization in which I am a member; otherwise, "an independent, student researcher"]* would love to talk with you.

Continuing the exploration of Alberta's identity in his one-hour documentary film for television, *Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?* (City TV, 2009) and his award-winning book of the same name (University of Alberta Press, 2010), Geo Takach is researching how Alberta's identity is being shaped by its imagery in the context of its resource-based economy. This research is a key part of a PhD study at the University of Calgary, and has been approved by that school's research ethics board.

If you have worked on, or been involved in, the production of material contributing to that visual dialogue, then you are heartily invited to contact Geo. He'll send you some background and a form for you to give your consent to be interviewed. The interview should take about an hour, held at a place and time at your convenience.

If you'd like to take part, please contact Geo at [phone number and e-mail address]. Thank you!

Appendix C: Consent Form

Name of researcher, faculty, department, telephone & email
Geo Takach, Dept. of Communication & Culture, Faculty of Arts, University of Calgary
[phone number and e-mail address]

Supervisor
Dr. Brian Rusted, Dept. of Communication & Culture, Faculty of Arts, University of Calgary
[phone number and e-mail address]

Title of project
Visually Reimagining Alberta: Place, Identity and Bituminous Sands
This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the study
I seek to explain how the identity of a place—perceptions of the essential, collective beliefs, priorities and characteristics of its people—in a resource-based economy can be shaped by images. Here, "images" means documentary films, TV and online ads, and other work involving moving pictures. I have identified you as someone who has been involved in the production of material contributing to that visual dialogue in Alberta. I heartily invite your participation in my study!

What will I be asked to do?
I would interview you for about an hour. My questions would cover your take on the context in which your (organization's) work was produced; the communication goals and strategies adopted and the editorial choices made in that production; and your sense of the ongoing visual representation and construction of Alberta's identity, that is, which imagery informed or otherwise influenced your own work.

There are no right or wrong answers; my interest is in learning about your experiences, observations and opinions. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question; we can go off the record at any point in the interview; and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without question or reason. You will not be required nor invited to review my notes after the interview.

What type of personal information will be collected?
I will collect your name and your description of your role in the production of visual work concerning Alberta. I will be free to acknowledge your participation and to quote from your comments unless you specifically request anonymity, as provided below.

There are several options to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants or denies me your permission in each case:

1. I grant permission to be audiotaped: Yes: ___ No: ___
2. I grant permission to have my organization's name used: Yes: ___ No: ___
3. I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: ___ No: ___
4. I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___
5. (If applicable) The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____
6. You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ___ No: ___

Are there risks or benefits if I participate?
There are no risks to you that the researcher can identify.

As for potential benefits, this research offers you an opportunity to reflect on your contributions to the visual dialogue around Alberta's identity. This would add to our understanding of not only the factors, values and processes that guide your work in motion pictures, but also of the effect and importance of that work in expressing our beliefs, priorities and characteristics as Albertans.

What happens to the information I provide?
Restricted access
No one except myself as the researcher (and possibly my supervisor) will be allowed to see or hear any of the recording, my notes or any transcript of the interview.

Confidentiality
If you request confidentiality by checking "yes" in response to Items 4 above, all of your personal information will remain confidential; your name will not appear in any transcripts; and all references identifying you will be removed from my notes. I will assign a code number to you and keep your name on a separate list for my exclusive and confidential use only. Each interview file and transcript will be given a code number, which I will link to your name on a list, kept apart from the file and transcript.

Subject to that duty of confidentiality, I may use the interview data in publications, productions, presentations and instructional material; in such cases, that data could be adapted, and/or woven into, a group of composite situations or characters that I would create.

If you withdraw from this study during our interview, then the interview and your participation end immediately, although I will retain the right to keep and use data collected until that point, subject always to any duty of confidentiality to you.

Security of data
I will keep all data (and separately, the coded list of interviewees) in secure cabinets in my home office.

I plan to archive all data indefinitely, at least for the foreseeable future. When I do dispose of it, I will ensure that all requested anonymity and confidentiality are maintained by destroying the list linking your name to your assigned code number.

If I hire any assistants or transcribers, I will require them to sign a declaration of their present and future compliance with my overriding duty of confidentiality to you.

No profit-sharing
If I produce work from this research project that ultimately results in any profits, then you will not share in any such profits.

Signatures (written consent)
Your signature on this form indicates that you (1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and (2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's name: _____
Participant's signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____
Researcher's signature: _____
Date:_____

Questions/concerns
If you have any further questions or want clarification about this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Geo Takach, PhD Candidate (researcher)
Department of Communication and Culture, Faculty of Arts
[phone number and e-mail address]
and
Dr. Brian Rusted, Associate Professor (supervisor)
Department of Communication and Culture, Faculty of Arts
[phone number and e-mail address]

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Russell Burrows, the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at [phone number and e-mail address]

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

My semi-structured interview questions will explore the relationship between visual constructions of a place and the (re)production of its identity, and specifically, how place-identity is (trans)formed through contested visual representations of place in a resource-based economy. I will emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, and that my research interest is in sharing participants' stories, experiences, observations, points of view and values in the production of their work. My inquiry is grounded in the following questions:

1. What film and video productions depicting Alberta or other places with resource-based economies had you seen before becoming involved in your film/video depicting Alberta?

2. Which audience(s) do you suppose those productions were aiming to reach?

3. How do you feel those productions depicted the identity or collective character of people in such place(s)?

4. If you watched the productions depicting Alberta without any prior knowledge of, or experience with, the province, how would you describe Albertans' essential characteristics and core beliefs (a) generally and (b) in relation to developing the province's natural resources, particularly the oil/tar sands?

5. What is your sense of how those productions – taken individually and/or collectively – have been received in the media? By the public?

6. What is you sense of the most successful of those productions? The most unsuccessful ones? What do you suppose made them (un)successful?

7. All of those productions aside, what is your own sense of Albertans' identity or character, the attributes that define them colectively?

8. What core beliefs or values do <u>you</u> think Albertans have in relation to developing the province's natural resources, particularly the oil/tar sands?

9. How much time have you spent in Alberta? Have you ever lived in Alberta, and if so, when, where and for approximately how long?

10. How did you become involved in the production of film or video on the subject of Alberta?

11. Which Alberta-related projects have you worked on?

[If multiple projects are named, ask the following Questions 12–23 for each project]

12. In what capacity(ies) and role(s) did you work on that production?

13. What was the occasion or reason for making that film/video? What was/were its goal(s)?

14. In which media was it presented?

15. Which audience(s) were you trying to reach?

16. What image(s) of Alberta did you seek to share?

17. What key message(s) about Alberta did you seek to share in presenting that/those image(s)?

18. How did you seek to weave that messaging into your production?

19. What specific narrative, filming and editing techniques did you choose to support that messaging?

20. What editorial guidelines governed the production? Were there required or prohibited subjects/choices?

21. How was your production received *[as applicable]* by critics or media commentators? By broadcasters? By film festival audiences? By the public? By online viewers?

22. Do you feel that your production achieved its goal(s)? Why (not)?

23. Would you do anything differently if you made that production today, and if so, what?

24. If you were making a new film or video about Alberta today on the subject, or in the context of, the oil/tar sands, what theme would you explore? What key message(s) would you seek to share?

25. Do you have anything else to add that you feel would benefit this research?

Appendix E: Films and Videos Studied

The following list of films and videos includes URLs linking to capsule summaries of each production, except for two cases where the producer is the Government of Alberta and for which no official links are available.

Pay Dirt (Palmer 2005)
www.worldcat.org/title/pay-dirt-making-the-unconventional-conventional/oclc/797128543?referer=br&ht=edition

Tar Sands: The Selling of Alberta (Radford 2008)
www.cbc.ca/documentaries/discussion/2008/03/tar-sands-the-selling-of-alberta-1.html

Downstream (Iwerks 2008)
www.downstreamdoc.com

Petropolis (Mettler 2009)
www.petropolis-film.com

H_2Oil (S. Walsh 2009)
h2oildoc.com/home/about-the-film

An Open Door (Alberta 2009)

Land of Oil and Water: Aboriginal Voices on Life in the Oil Sands and *Overburden* (McArthur and Cariou 2010)
landofoil.com/Home.html

Dirty Oil (Iwerks 2010)
thoughtmaybe.com/dirty-oil

Canada's Oil Sands: Come See for Yourself (CAPP 2010)
www.capp.ca/canadaIndustry/oilSands/Dialogue-Resources/oil-sands-videos/Pages/Oil-Sands-Tour.aspx

Alberta: Tell It Like It Is AKA *About the Oil Sands* (Alberta 2010)
www.oilsands.alberta.ca/about.html

Tipping Point (Radford & Thompson 2011)
www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/episode/tipping-point.html

White Water, Black Gold (Lavallee 2011)
www.whitewaterblackgold.com/about

Pipe Dreams (Iwerks 2011)
pipedreamsdoc.com

On the Line (Wolf 2011)
www.onthelinemovie.com/p/route-map-film-one-hour-aired.html

Peace Out (Wilkinson 2011)
aff.cowichan.net/?peace-out-br-charles-wilkinson,243

Vote BP for Greenwash Gold (UK Tar Sands Network, 2012)
www.greenwashgold.org/index.php/bp

Untitled marketing video *(A Day in Alberta)* (Alberta 2012)