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Editorial: Extractivism and Performance

by Kimberly Richards and
Heather Davis-Fisch

From petro-sponsorship of the arts to performative acts of resistance against megadams, pipelines, and other sites of extraction, performance practices in Canada are being shaped by the natural resources of the land and the corporate and political entities with vested interests in resource extraction. Consider, for example, the Grandstand Show that follows the chuckwagon races on each of the ten nights of the Calgary Stampede. In 2017, the show, entitled *Together: A Show 150 Years in the Making*, featured popular recording artist Jann Arden, an homage to Leonard Cohen by Alberta Ballet, and Inuit throat singers Cailyn DeGrandpre and Samantha Kigutaq. Set against the backdrop of Canada's sesquicentennial celebrations, it was hardly surprisingly that the evening entertainment reproduced narratives of benevolent multiculturalism that, as Helene Vosters has argued, create a "percepticidal blizzard" of white-settler nationalism (184). Nor was it particularly remarkable that the massive stage was framed by a neon sign emblazoned with "TransAlta," in reference to the energy giant. While icons of corporate sponsorship often fade into the background in museums and sports arenas, this sign—crowning the tip of a welded maple leaf—glowed luminously at dusk, transforming each choreographed act of the Young Canadians (a Calgary-based performing arts school) into a public relations performance. The tightly rehearsed spectacle of Canadian history and culture reinforced the strident rhetoric of "ethical oil" advanced by the likes of Ezra Levant to perpetuate notions of Canada's geopolitical moral exceptionalism that build the case for the continued development of Canada's fossil fuel infrastructure. Despite Alberta's energy sector framing the scene, it could not overwhelm the actors. As world-renowned hoop dancer Dallas Arcand and Irish dancer Ben Abelseth bobbed side by side on a raised platform, each labouring to adapt to the rhythm of the song, the unsynchronizable bounce in their bodies drew attention to the awkwardness of "inclusionary performance" premised on colonial strategies of accommodation.¹ By *not* blending into the mosaic of Canadianness, they demonstrated the potential for performance to crack the frame of the scaffolding designed to shield Canadian and international audiences from the colonial violence that continues to be perpetrated on Indigenous land and the need for performance scholars to pay attention to this architecture.²

This issue of *Canadian Theatre Review* investigates how performance practices in Canada are entangled with extractive

colonial agendas that are environmentally catastrophic and severely damage the material bases of Indigenous ways of life. As Naomi Klein suggests, the fact that Canada was a commercial extraction colony—overseen by the Hudson's Bay Company—before it was a country has "shaped us in ways we have yet to begin to confront" ("Canada's Founding Myths"). This issue attends to the cultural dimensions of a political economy that impedes Indigenous self-determination, land rights, and reconciliation and perpetuates extractive colonialism and imperialism. It considers how Canadian performance practices help extractive industries maximize profit and deflect focus from conservation or sustainable energy alternatives. It asks how Canadian plays and performances have worked to render visible the social and environmental costs of extractive practices. And it examines how they might serve as a catalyst to imagine alternative social and ecological relations.

Increasingly, artists and scholars are attending to the social, cultural, and political dynamics of resource extraction and the unique problems that emerge in resource-rich places.³ The staples thesis developed by Harold Innis and W. A. Mackintosh posits that Canada's economic reliance on the export of a staple commodity (like fish and fur) made the state dependent on the international market and vulnerable to booms and busts. It also explains why such intense regional dynamics exist: just think of the solidarity surrounding coal mining in the Maritimes or the power of the fossil fuel lobby in Alberta.⁴ When a state depends on one commodity, extractive industries gain inordinate political power, other industries that would diversify the economy are destroyed, and a highly concentrated private revenue stream unequally distributes wealth. Resource dependence exacerbates inequalities between the heartland and the hinterland, and between short-term developers and those who bear the burdens of resource extraction. Transitioning away from this political economy will require a transformation in social values and cultural narratives. If Canada's foundational myths are "holding us back from addressing climate change," as Klein suggests, we must stop telling stories that portray Indigenous peoples and their homelands as free resources to bolster development ("Canada's Founding Myths").

Many Canadian plays have dramatized how the natural resources of the land, and the industries developed around them, have shaped social values, labour practices, political alliances, and notions of citizenship. From *The Farm Show's* depiction of

agricultural practices in Clinton, Ontario, to Marie Clements's representation of the radiating effects of uranium mining in *Burning Vision*, to Annabel Soutar's investigation into the Harper administration's environmental policies in *The Watershed*, Canada's fish, minerals, lumber, coal, and oil are plentiful in recent Canadian theatre history. In addition to curating a slide show that features many of these plays, we are thrilled to publish *THE PIPELINE PROJECT* by Kevin Loring, Quelema Sparrow, and Sebastien Archibald. *THE PIPELINE PROJECT* transforms journalistic accounts of pipeline expansion on unceded territory into personal stories told by Kevin, an "Indigenous dude" from a logging family from the N'lakap'mux Nation; Quelema, an "urban Indigenous yoga instructor" from the Musqueam Nation; and Sebastien, an "affable, albeit ignorant, white Canadian" and environmentalist hipster. Kevin, Quelema, and Sebastien grapple with their own energy consumption and complicity within a fossil-fuelled economy and describe the effects of resource extraction in their communities, all the while interweaving information about Aboriginal rights and title, experiences with the Residential School system, and the history of Indigenous resistance in Canada. The second act of the play consists of a "Talk Forward" with an invited guest (in previous runs of the show, these guests ranged from water protectors to journalists for conservative news sources) to foster dialogue about pipeline projects that are more often debated anonymously online than vulnerably in public spaces.

Contributing to the theme of stories and performance practices that teach us to be better relatives and good ancestors, Jenn Cole recovers stories of the Kiji Sibi river by treating it as "a relative who remembers" rather than a resource to be used for hydroelectricity. In so doing, Cole amplifies Algonquin presence in the territory and reclaims Indigenous relationships to places and knowledges held by water bodies. Her "performance history of logging" examines Algonquin participation in logging performance culture, revealing that "extraction is not just a force that destroys Indigenous presence but also a fault line along which Indigenous presence upsurges."

As Indigenous land rights are barriers to the economic vision of the settler-colonial state, the perpetual disappearance of Indigenous bodies coincides with perpetual territorial acquisition.⁵ This is why the Indigenous body is inseparable from resistance to occupation and extraction. In her essay on the art of being seen and not eaten, Jill Carter comments, "Just as Indigenous lands continue to be targeted for resource extraction and blighted for development, the Indigenous body is targeted for extraction and consumption." She draws attention to somatic and dramaturgical strategies Indigenous artists are deploying to "refus[e] the colonial will to scopophilia," desirous of Indigenous content and objects, and to "combat extraction, obstruct penetration, and thwart satiation." Jessica Jacobson Konefall, Peter Kulchyski, and Ramona Neckoway's reflection on Kulchyski and Neckoway's tours of



Across the country, land and water protectors are deploying theatrical forms of protest to halt the development of new pipelines and prevent irreparable harm to Indigenous lands and water bodies. The Red Brigade, a performance/guerrilla-theatre arm of Extinction Rebellion, assembles outside a storage yard containing materials for the Trans Mountain Pipeline in Kamloops.

Photo courtesy of Bob Clark

Inine communities affected by hydroelectric development in northern Manitoba is not easily consumed. However, their sustained consideration of expressions of care through stories, gestures, and acts reveals deep relationships to the land and centrally positions performance and embodied practices within environmental activism and river rehabilitation.

Contributors to this issue also illustrate how extractivism exceeds an economic vision and encapsulates an approach to nature, bodies, and ideas. Here, extractivism refers to large-scale operations to accumulate natural resources, as well as the attitudes that allow such resources to be commodified and consumed for profit. Reflecting on a mock memorial service mourning the future loss of sacred land and water at Muskrat Falls, Labrador, where a massive hydroelectric generating system is being constructed to revitalize the province's boom-and-bust economy, Olivia Heaney foregrounds the importance of collective mourning for that which has been, and is being, lost, destroyed, or damaged as a result of Western energy culture. Collective mourning, she argues, can nurture "renewable relations" between Indigenous land protectors and their settler allies. Chantal Bilodeau, organizer of the Climate Change Theatre Action and author of the Arctic Cycle of plays, similarly suggests ceremony may help us feel and express our grief, take stock of our wounds, and begin the healing process required for us to transition away from extractivism toward a more regenerative ideology. Like Bilodeau, Katrina Dunn considers the role aesthetic intervention can play in generating change, examining how "urban architecture, a major catalyst of environmental degradation, can participate, through aesthetic intervention, in an act of recovery of biotic life." Her analysis of Nettie Wild's *Uninterrupted: A Cinematic Spectacle*, in which digitally mapped images of migrating salmon were projected on Vancouver's Cambie Street Bridge, exemplifies the need for a more ecologically informed cultural materialist analysis—one in which "performance ecology" is not a metaphor.

Several articles by settler scholars are concerned with how to live gently on Indigenous land. Drawing on various disciplinary perspectives, these writers reflect on their responsibility to bodies of land and water as they craft performative modes of disrupting the settler-colonial project of Canada. As Ken Wilson describes his 250-kilometre walk from Regina to the village of Wood Mountain, he contemplates how walking generates possibilities for personal decolonization and non-extractive engagements with the land that allow settlers "to love the land and apprehend its beauty, despite the damage inflicted on it." Falling more deeply in love with the land not only helps to build a meaningful life outside consumerism and capitalism but is a precondition for being unwilling to allow it to be desecrated, as Rita Wong, another contributor to this issue, attests. When Wong and several co-resistors were charged with contempt of court for challenging an injunction and blockading the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion on Burnaby Mountain, they pleaded not guilty and invoked a "defence of necessity," arguing that the imminent disaster of climate change, and decades of government inaction, has left no alternative to civil disobedience. In her sentencing statement, published here, Wong remarks, "I acted with respect for the rule of law which includes the rule of natural law and the rule of Indigenous law and the rule of international law." Wong explains that her responsibility to her ancestors—and

as a citizen living on Coast Salish lands—requires her to protect Coast Salish lands and waters. Both Wong's and Wilson's descriptions of their resistance to extractivism echo the language Leanne Simpson uses to describe Idle No More as a "rebellion based on love"—love of the land, family, and nation, which "has always been the spirit of Indigenous resistance" (qtd. in Klein, "Dancing the World"; Simpson 9). The state's imprisonment of Wong, and its disciplining of many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous water, land, and mountain protectors, demonstrates the endurance of the colonial project of extraction, which attempts to maintain power by punishing those bodies that resist. Performance practices, rituals, and ceremonies not only nurture our relationship to the natural world but also are often the means through which to express resistance to extractivism, as the Hemi Encuentro Work Group on Resisting Extractivism, *Performing Opposition* makes clear.

Attending to extractivism in Canada requires artists, educators, and scholars to reflect on the deeply extractive nature of Western research. Non-Indigenous scholars increasingly appreciate that it is not by "happenstance or luck" that Indigenous people and their lands still exist after centuries of attack and that enduring coloniality is part of their "strategic brilliance" (Simpson 6). Yet, as we try to right colonial wrongs, the quest for sustainable alternatives to extractive colonialism can result in a "hunt for new knowledges, new materials, new cures" and bring new threats to Indigenous communities (Tuhivai Smith 24–25; see also Davis-Fisch). Extraction, as Simpson explains, goes hand in hand with assimilation:

Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. My body is a resource and my children are a resource because they are the potential to grow, maintain, and uphold the extraction-assimilation system. The act of extraction removes all of the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning. Extracting is taking. Actually, extracting is stealing—it is taking without consent, without thought, care or even knowledge of the impacts that extraction has on the other living things in that environment. That's always been a part of colonialism and conquest. Colonialism has always extracted the indigenous—extraction of indigenous knowledge, indigenous women, indigenous peoples. (qtd. in Klein)

Within performance research, teaching, and practice, Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson has argued that efforts by non-Indigenous scholars "to Indigenousize" often replicate extractive dynamics vis-à-vis the extraction of intellectual resources through the assimilation of "useful" Indigenous ideas for the field without regard for what those ideas and practices do for Indigenous politics:

I have come to feel that, more and more frequently, Indigenousization acts as a form of extraction that parallels resource extraction upon the lands and waters of Indigenous peoples across Canada. The knowledge economy we participate in is governed by extractivist principles where our knowledges, world views, languages, and cultural practices have become resources. This is not an Indigenous economy of trade, but rather a situation where we hear our words spoken through structures of grammar and settler logic. I am increasingly aware in this reconciliatory time and space that privileges forms of coming together that there is an increasing amount of work that shifts the terms just enough *not* to unsettle. (Carter et al. 209–10)

Carter et al. are not talking about practices of citation and referencing, but about settlers' "desire or hunger to know" (210). Rob-
inson is calling for non-Indigenous scholars to stop instrumental-
izing Indigenous world-views and stories, and to treat them as the
incommensurable language- and nation-specific things that they
are. His call is to stop (re-)enacting relations of domination that
disavow Indigenous sovereignty; it might be met with a deepened
commitment to champion the needs and the aspirations of the
artists and communities with which we work.

As you read the articles in this issue, we ask you to consider
how you can work toward radical, robust, ethical alternatives to
the extractive knowledge complex and the present hyper-extractive
economic and political structure of the Canada. Joining in this
"rebellion of love" requires us to create "constellations of co-
resistance" based in respect, relationship, and reciprocity without
any naïve understandings of the time, care, and commitment it
takes to build trust (Simpson 9). As Jill Carter attests, "The stories
we tell are the fruits of our engagement—of our commitment
to engage and to facilitate engagement. But engagement ... is,
in itself, not enough. It is the *process* we employ that shapes the
character of our engagement with Indigenous art workers and
their works" (qtd. in Carter, et al. 231). How we work together
determines the possibilities for resisting extractivism.

Notes

- 1 On "inclusionary performance," see Robinson, *Hungry Listening*.
- 2 In 2017, TransAlta Corporation, along with the Calgary Stampede
Foundation, opened the TransAlta Performing Arts Studios, a new
performance and training centre for youth in the community. The
campus, located on Stampede Park, includes a 13,000-square-foot
studio and seven rehearsal rooms and is a year-round home for the
Young Canadians and Stampede Showband. On the economic and
affective ties between Alberta's energy industry and the Calgary
Stampede, see Richards.
- 3 Key texts within this burgeoning area include Macarena Gómez-
Barris's *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial
Perspectives*; Nick Estes's *Our History Is the Future: Standing
Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of
Indigenous Resistance*; and Pierre Bélanger's edited volume
*Extraction Empire: Undermining the Systems, States, and Scales of
Canada's Global Resource Empire, 2017–2017*.
- 4 Key texts include Harold Innis's *The Fur Trade in Canada: An
Introduction to Canadian Economic History* and *The Cod Fisheries:
The History of an International Economy* (Toronto, 1940) and W.
A. Mackintosh's "Economic Factors in Canadian History."
- 5 The genocidal structure of settler colonialism popularized by Patrick
Wolfe is also articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
report, which clearly states that the Canadian government pursued
a policy of cultural genocide "because it wished to divest itself of its
legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control
over their land and resources" (3).

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