

Ecopoetic Interventions: Poets Critiquing Canadian Petrocultures and Pipelines

by

Gabrielle Mills

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## **Abstract**

This project examines how petrocultural narratives, and infrastructure, are created and sustained through official rhetoric. I explore how eco-poetic interventions can be leveraged to influence public policy, articulate political will for a transition towards low-carbon energy futures, and galvanize social movements by reading two collections of poetry, *The Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia*, to compare how language was created, deployed, and interpreted in defence of and opposition to Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline and Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain Pipeline. By comparing the eco-poetic interventions of Canadian poets and activists alongside state and corporate policy documents, I explore how petroculture has shaped the dominant narrative and material infrastructure of the Canadian state. I argue that eco-poetics offers modes to resist official rhetoric that obfuscates petroculture and forms of participatory public praxis that can be leveraged to transition Canadian energy systems, policy, and imagination towards a just low-carbon future.

## **List of Abbreviations Used**

JRP	Joint Review Panel
NEB	National Energy Board
NRCAN	Natural Resources Canada

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Certain climate realities are no longer wild imagining, they are happening, and they are coming. ... That is the context in which I enter this conversation. I don't have answers, but I am sitting with these questions: Change is coming—what do we need to imagine as we prepare for it? – adrienne maree brown (58)

It was always what was under the poetry that mattered – Stephen Collis (*Blockadia* 31)

Activist and critic adrienne maree brown notes in her foundational text, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, that through scholarly work “we hone our skills of naming and analysing the crises” and learn “how to *deconstruct*” (59). But brown also poses several critical questions that contextualize the challenges that contemporary scholarship about environment, activism, climate, and social justice must address. She asks: “how do we move beyond our beautiful deconstruction? Who teaches us to deconstruct? How do we cultivate the muscle of radical imagination needed to dream together beyond fear?” (brown 59). These questions are also critical to my exploration of how poetry, policy, and activism interact in the context of the two highly contested energy infrastructure projects in Canada. Following brown's assertions that deconstruction precedes reconstruction, and that imagination is a critical and necessary tool for creating and enacting alternative futures, in this work I use scholarly methods to deconstruct how official language and state rhetoric are used in support of fossil-fuel expansion, as demonstrated in the case of Enbridge's Northern Gateway and Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline proposals. Alongside these official documents, I analyze two collections of poetry created in opposition to the energy projects. The first, *The Enpipe Line: 70,000 km of Poetry Written in Resistance to Enbridge Northern Gateway Proposal* is a collaboratively written conceptual long poem that exemplifies the ways in which front-line communities can use poetry to galvanize and enact social movements and direct action that oppose the immediate construction of pipelines. The second, Stephen Collis's *Once in Blockadia*, also explores the consequences of direct action against pipeline infrastructure and details Collis's experience of being litigated

against for his participation in a blockade on Burnaby Mountain. Both texts exemplify reimaginings of the relationship between language and environment, and both texts enact alternative futures through their engagement with material energy projects and ecopoetics.

Since the 1990s, ecocritical research about Canadian literary and poetic production has evaluated how political, economic, and cultural projects—like the construction of coast-to-coast railway infrastructure, the development of social policy, and the edification of a national literature—have been influenced by the material expanse of land that comprises so-called Canada (Soper and Bradley xvii-xix). Similarly, energy resources and infrastructure projects are also key to shaping national projects, literatures, imaginaries and Canadian cultural production (Barney 79). Another way of imagining and analysing the relationship between the Canadian nation and the land it occupies explicitly recognizes that settler-colonialism and national identity in Canada are based on the aestheticization and commodification of environment and the extraction of natural resources (Hodgins and Thompson 394). Together, these forms of representation create a powerful social imaginary, with consequences for both social and climate justice. Furthermore, this imaginary and its attendant material and cultural production are replicated in Canada’s contemporary reliance on fossil-fuel based energy, which together have resulted in the emergence of what some scholars call a national petroculture. The term “petroculture” refers to how political agendas, programs, dominant social values, and forms of cultural production have developed in relation to and as a result of fossil-fuel energy use. Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman argue that the “very core of our political experience [and] political philosophy” has been “imagined against the backdrop of a world with ever-expanding energy resources” (Wilson, et al. 7); they conclude that “in a world in which energy will no longer be so abundant, we now have to revisit and reimagine our energy intensive freedoms” (Wilson, et al. 7). Reimagining, I argue, requires a careful deconstruction of how existing rhetoric and language uphold petroculture. However, reimagining has already begun and is being enacted by activists, communities, and poets—answering, in part, adrienne maree brown’s query about “who teaches us to reconstruct” (59). The emergent language of ecopoetics imagines forms of

cultural representation and modes of creation that do not perpetuate petroculture and offer both reimagination and resistance to modes of dominant language that do.

In this project I read corporate and state policy documents alongside eco-poetic interventions, by the Enpipe Line Collective and Stephen Collis in *Once in Blockadia*, to elucidate how petrocultural hegemony impedes the ability of citizens to imagine a justice-based transition to a low-carbon energy future in Canada. Climate crisis necessitates reimagining and immediately opposing fossil-fuel expansion in Canada. Further, the language used in imagination and opposition fundamentally shapes the forms of resistance that are possible. Collis, The Enpipe Line contributors, and the publics they engage through their work show how sustained political engagement through concomitant poetry and activism can resist petroculture, and how they attempt to enact alternative futures. While activism is rarely deemed a complete success or failure, the efficacy of poetic interventions in Canadian energy projects and policy, and engaged poetry's ability to enact a community-facing eco-poetic praxis that attempts to address the injustices of petroculture and climate change, can be understood and critiqued through these two case studies. I explore how poetic interventions and imagination might be leveraged to influence public policy, articulate public political will for a transition towards low-carbon energy futures, and galvanize social movements that disrupt and critique petroculture. Poetry, like that exemplified in *The Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia*, produced from the front-lines of fossil-fuel infrastructure development engages with public policy, enacts a form of eco-poetic resistance to the ongoing injustices of climate change, and imagines alternative futures without petroculture.



## Chapter 2: Petrocultures and Ecopoetics

beneath / the singularity of owning the multitude of needing ...

beneath the drill / platform the mountain ...

beneath graphed assessments / the particularity of soils – Stephen Collis (*Blockadia* 17)

Petroculture is a powerful, and often obfuscated, force that both directly and indirectly impacts public policy, material energy sources, the cultural imaginary, and by extension both the infrastructure and the poetry created about that infrastructure in Canada. TAs Wilson, Carlson, and Szeman claim, “we are finally beginning to realize the degree to which oil has made us moderns who and what we are, shaping our existence close at hand while narrating us into networks of power and commerce far, far away” (4). In other words, petroculture and modernity are mutually reinforcing systems, whereby the levels and forms of production enabled by fossil-fuel combustion fundamentally shift the material conditions of modernity in addition to shifting cultural values and social structures; these shifts continue to have real impacts on both climate crisis and cultural production that attempts to reckon with said crisis. Barry Lord argues that though “everyone knows that all life requires energy ... we rarely consider how dependent art and culture are on the energy that is needed to produce, practice, and sustain them” (viii). The “usually invisible sources of energy that make our art and culture(s) possible bring with them fundamental values that we are all constrained to live with (whether we approve of them or not),” and through these intersecting values and practices, our energy consumption creates a hegemonic narrative that shapes both material and cultural production (Lord viii). Energy, then, becomes part of a cycle wherein forms of culture are either enabled or prevented by the energy that is needed to produce them, and through their own proliferation (or absence) render that very same source of energy mundane enough that it becomes an unquestioned or invisible cultural and material power that perpetuates the status quo. While changes in energy have certainly led to transformational cultural and material practices, as Brent Ryan Bellamy puts it, “the climate crisis forces a cognitive transformation” too (“Science Fiction” 417). Thus, both the system of energy and consumption that has precipitated climate crisis, as well as the crisis itself, are

transformative forces that are currently in conflict with one another. Petrocultural hegemony obfuscates the presence of oil, and climate crisis demands that we recognize the impacts of our continued dependence on oil or reckon with the consequences of failure to do so.

What, then, can poetry and ecopoetics offer in any attempt to mitigate the impacts of petroculture, global capitalism, pipeline infrastructure, and climate injustice? Ecopoetic interventions in petrocultural hegemony can make petroculture visible, and therefore possible to resist, recontextualize official rhetoric and dominant narratives that are in service to petroculture, and thereby enable specific modes of direct action against petroculture both ideologically and materially. According to Bellamy, “The political challenge of overcoming the relentless drive of an ecologically and socially devastating fossil-fueled capitalism is just as much an imaginative project as it is a practical one” (“Science Fiction 418). Thus, we must strive to imagine futures that move beyond petroculture. Furthermore, petroculture—including the pipelines that facilitate the material perpetuation of petroculture itself—must also be actively resisted if climate crisis is to be avoided. Bellamy analyzes two modes of resistance to petroculture’s presumed futurity in an evaluation of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline; first, he notes “the legal struggle” against the project, and then he identifies a textual intervention “in the imaginary of energy infrastructure” through a “future history” written by Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway (“Inertia” n.p.). This dual approach is mirrored by the poets and activists who resisted the Northern Gateway and Trans Mountain Pipeline projects, too. Where much of petroculture research to date has focused on the qualities of science- or speculative-fiction (SF) that make these genres especially useful for imagining a world without oil, poetry is an as of yet less examined mode of intervention in petrocultural hegemony with the potential to foster both material and ideological resistance.

Poetry is particularly well suited for analyzing the prevalence of energy and petroculture within forms of dominant and oppositional languages because reading poetry demands an attention to the semiotic potential of language in a way that is very similar to SF. As Samuel Delany notes:

There is no sentence ... that could theoretically appear in a text of mundane fiction that could not also be worked into some text of science fiction – whereas

there are many, many sentences in science fiction that would be hard or impossible to work into a text of mundane fiction. SF discourse gives many sentences clear and literal meanings, sentences that in mundane fiction would be meaningless or at any rate very muzzily metaphorical (88).

Delany then uses the following example to demonstrate this potentiality in SF:

Then her world exploded. If such a string of word appeared in a mundane fiction text, more than likely we would respond to it as an emotionally muzzy metaphor about the inner aspects of some incident in a female character's life. In an SF text, however, we must retain the margin to read these words as meaning that a planet, belonging to a woman, blew up (88).

According to Delany, this intentional absence of unitary interpretation is crucial to SFs discourse with systems that exist outside of the text (92), and it is this absence of unitary interpretation that is useful for making often occluded systems visible. Because poetry also requires readers to eschew unitary interpretations, it creates discursive space to resist petroculture and imagine new energy systems and modes of cultural production that do not uphold petrocultural hegemony; this is especially true when eco poetic interventions engage with official texts and rhetoric, texts that purport to present objective content despite often operating to either directly uphold or obfuscate petroculture. Such official texts, rhetoric, and language often perniciously perpetuate dominant narratives, and eco poetic interventions rely on a writing and reading practice that resists unitary interpretation to expose the ways petroculture operates within these texts.

It is impossible to resist something that cannot be understood, and it is challenging to propose alternatives that cannot be imagined. Poetry and eco poetics that grapple with oil's invisibility and attempt to make alternatives to its ubiquity imaginable also create the potential for material transformation of broader systems. As Wilson, Carlson, and Szeman declare, "figuring energy in relation to historical developments opens up new insights into the forces of power and politics that have shaped modernity, and demands that we critically explore the surprising limitations of aesthetics and representation in relation to energy" (5). While petrocultural hegemony and obfuscation introduce aesthetic and representational limitations—limitations that are invoked and perpetuated in public

policy, other official discourses, media, and in cultural articulations of social values—poetry relies upon the figurative and semantic potential of language that resists a unitary interpretation to circumnavigate these shortcomings. Accordingly, the poets, activists, and communities that enact poetic and political resistance against pipelines and Canadian petroculture at the sites of the Northern Gateway and Trans Mountain Expansion proposed projects attempt to use eco-poetics and activism to strategically expose and oppose the dominant narratives that uphold petroculture and continued fossil-fuel use.

The process of attentive selection and interpretation of language deployed in eco-poetic interventions means that the tendency in narrative and official rhetoric to exclude and occlude oil is less likely to go unnoticed. For example, In “Coda: Blockade Chant,” Stephen Collis attempts to make the scale of petroculture visible, from the intimate and domestic to the state and global, by juxtaposing scenes of daily life with the repeated, bold-type face refrain “smash the petro state” (56). The poem dominates an entire page, presented in a singular almost block of text that forms a heavy and imposing rectangle between wide margins. While the visual mass of this poem on the page communicates the monolithic qualities of petroculture and the petrostate, and is best interpreted in its full form, the following excerpt from the opening of the poem provide a representative sample of the poem’s form:

Wake up in the morning **smash the petro state** get out of bed  
**smash the petro state** lover still asleep **smash the petro state**  
jump on the bus **smash the petro state** everyone’s got phones  
**smash the petro state** on Facebook and Twitter **smash the petro**  
**state** moving through the city **smash the petro state** biking  
businessman **smash the petro state** kid with a frying pan **smash**  
**the petro state** grandma in the crosswalk **smash the petro state**  
hours of nothing but talk **smash the petro state** down by the  
harbour **smash the petro state** up on the mountain **smash the**  
**petro state** over by the river **smash the petro state** in the sun  
in the park **smash the petro state** going home after dark **smash**  
**the petro state** going to school or to court **smash the petro state**  
(Collis, *Blockadia* 56)

Collis's attention to land and place becomes even more evident in the latter half of the poem, which further reifies the connection between petroculture and the Canadian state's occupation of and exploitation of land:

**smash the petro state** whatever you do **smash the petro state**  
on unceded land **smash the petro state** every way that you can  
**smash the petro state** at the city hall **smash the petro state** at the  
house of parliament **smash the petro state** this is what we meant  
**smash the petro state** at the oil terminal **smash the petro state**  
at the corner gas station **smash the petro state** all up and down  
the line **smash the petro state** do it every time **smash the petro**  
**state** in the burning tar sands **smash the petro state** all over  
the land **smash the petro state** in the east and the west **smash**  
**the petro state** when you're naked when you're dressed **smash**  
**the petro state** (Collis, *Blockadia* 56)

Collis's interstitials include a range of characters, technologies, and, importantly, places, all of which the text represents as being complicit in the replication of the petrostate, as demonstrated by the phrase's repetition and omnipresence in the text. However, rather than simply illustrating their complicity, Collis positions these actors and settings as potential sites of intervention through their proximity to the repeated call to action to smash the very system they are imbricated within. While the petrostate may be dominant, as evidenced by its bolded type face and heavy presence on the page in the poem, it is also fractured and interrupted; each interstitial operates as an opportunity for intervention or opposition. While this pattern of phrases illustrates the potential cracks in the petrostate's monolith, the piece functions as a discrete whole that is positioned as the conclusion to a chapter titled "Subversal." By figuring the poem as a chant, Collis emphasizes the musical connotations of a "coda" which serves not only to conclude a movement, but also to do so in a manner that is pleasing or satisfactory. Collis's final act of subversion, then, encourages both material resistance (signified by the verb's imperative mood, "smash") against the ideological and cultural structure of the petrostate, and suggests that only a complete blockade and dismantling of the petrostate is a

sufficient and satisfactory conclusion to the activist movements that resist petroculture in Canada.

While no single text can capture both petroculture's ubiquity and subsequent invisibility, Collis attempts to reckon with this phenomenon and use poetry to make it visible and political. The opening interstitial scene begins "Wake up in the morning smash the petro state get out of bed / smash the petro state lover still asleep smash the petro state" (*Blockadia*, 56). This scene, in the Canadian context, evokes Pierre Trudeau's well-known 1967 statement "there is no place for the state in the bedroom of the nation" ("There is No Place" n.p.). Though the contexts are undeniably different—Trudeau was speaking specifically about the decriminalization of homosexual acts and morality politics—Collis's intimation problematizes the belief that the domestic and the political realms are separate. By situating the "lover still asleep" within a line of poetry that begins and ends with the refrain, Collis attempts to show the level of petroculture's penetration into day-to-day life in Canada. It is not just "at the blockade ... at corporate HQ ... on unceded land ... at the city hall" and "at the oil terminal" (Collis, *Blockadia* 56) that action against petroculture must be taken, but also in the most intimate spaces of home and community. When Collis writes "all up and down / the line smash the petro state" he invokes both the lines of poetry he is using as his own mode of intervention, and the shape of the pipeline infrastructure that enables the continued extraction of fossil-fuels on which petroculture is dependent. Collis's attempt to interrupt both the language and the infrastructure of petroculture through poetry in "Coda: Blockade Chant" models one form of poetic intervention in petroculture's ubiquity. What's more, Collis' poem is not simply a representation of petroculture; rather, through its call to action and its position as a successful and subversive conclusion, the poem invites the reconceptualization of cultural values and state-level apparatuses that do not centre fossil-fuel extraction. Through poetry, Collis articulates a political will that is actionable and a fossil-free future that is imaginable.

Petroculture's hegemony, from the private scenes depicted in Collis's "Coda: Blockade Chant" to the level of national states and international politics, is linked to a dominant narrative that positions resource extraction and commodification as necessary preconditions of progress. In contemporary Canadian petroculture, this elision of

extraction, progress, and social well-being into a single narrative—and the omnipresence of oil—impacts nearly every interaction and imaginary in contemporary society, including Canadian cultural production and the public policy cycle. In the Canadian context, the dominant narrative claims that providing government social services depends on continued extraction, suggesting that natural resource revenues, such as those gained by oil and fossil-fuel development, are crucial for collective well-being and social progress (Gordon 1-2). Therefore, poetic interventions in dominant narrative are crucial because, though the contemporary exploitation of petro-energy under capitalism has resulted in myriad forms of intersecting injustices culminating in the inequitably distributed risks of climate crisis, the proposed solutions to climate crisis and injustice are routinely couched in the same language of progress and exploitation that precipitated the crises in the first place. In other words, the impacts of producing and exploiting energy are ubiquitous, present in both narrative, social discourse, and language itself.

Petroculture and fossil-fuel extraction, refinement, and displacement infrastructure are rendered largely invisible by complex and interlocking material and social systems. To address this nearly ubiquitous elision in public consciousness and the social imaginary, petrocultural criticism attempts to make visible the inextricability of “the power of energy source (fossil fuel) and the power of social system (capitalism)” (Malm qtd. in Bellamy et al. 5). Sonnet L’Abbé attends to the need to use eco-poetic strategies to make the political and infrastructural dimensions of the Northern Gateway proposal visible in her poem “Pipeline to Harper.” Using apostrophe to direct her poetic commentary towards a political figure, L’Abbé writes:

I’ve been  
thinking  
about the  
li  
li  
li  
line

I’ve been

thinking  
about all yer  
line

that one  
yer thinkin  
a puttin  
cross the border

(L'Abbé 118)

This use of apostrophe signals that the poem is engaging in the public discourse around energy politics and infrastructure, but it is also refusing the rhetoric of politics in favour of an ecopoetics that is attuned to both material structures and space. In this stanza, L'Abbé plays with form and homophones to create a connection between Harper's political rhetoric (one L'Abbé suggests is founded on lies) and the physical form of the pipeline, signified by the thrice enjambed, aligned, and repeated syllable "li." L'Abbé's poem emphasizes the role of the pipeline as a political concept, supported by rhetoric, and as a piece of transnational infrastructure that supports the global fossil-fuel regime.

Poetry created in opposition to petroculture, like L'Abbé's, manipulates language to make the interlocking systems of energy and society, of fossil fuel hegemony and late capitalism, visible, and it thereby resists political, official, and dominant rhetoric that supports the perpetuation of petroculture. Poetry intended to be used in tandem with activism strives to interrupt the obfuscating logic and language of petroculture because failure to do so has contributed to, and will perpetuate, the uncritical dependence on fossil-fuel based energy that threatens both the environment and its many inhabitants, human and more-than-human alike. Petroculture is exemplified by dominant social values and narratives that declare the necessity of "perpetual growth [and] ceaseless mobility" (Wilson et al. 4). The consequences of these values and narratives manifest materially through climate change, environmental degradation, and social injustice. These negative impacts, which are detailed at length in environmental science and climate change



research,<sup>1</sup> are inseparable from the continued exploitation of fossil-fuels which is justified through petrocultural narratives that permeate official language and public discourses. But these narratives are susceptible to disruption through poetic and activist interventions that question the assumed logic and language of petrocultural thinking. As Gordon details, one consequences of petrocultural thinking is “a rhetoric that understands our relationship to the world as one between human freedom and natural raw material[,] [and] the consequences of this view are that human and non-human nature can be, and is, sacrificed within the logic of the market” (10). The social and ecological consequences of petroculture, and the systemic cultural and infrastructural apparatuses that uphold it, are justified within a petrocultural rhetoric and belief system that claims “humans will manage the resource in our best interests” while positioning the subjects “our” and “best interests” as debateable (Gordon 13). In other words, the dominant narrative that has established fossil-fuel expansion as both necessary and desirable persists, even though this expansion comes at the direct expense of vulnerable populations and ecosystems. This narrative is deeply rooted in petroculture, and it is innately connected to political rhetoric and debate that suggests the worst impacts of climate change can be avoided, even though scientific research contradicts this assertion. Continued fossil-fuel use and the expansion of energy infrastructure are supported and justified as in “our” best interests, as demonstrated by the Canadian government’s commitment to the Kinder Morgan pipeline proposal, for example, even though the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that “current nationally stated mitigation ambitions as submitted under the Paris Agreement ... would not limit global warming to 1.5°C” (20). As Gordon argues, “these debates [about resource management] remain caught within a liberal, rational, technological, humanist narrative of progress founded on a premise of autonomy over a future in which the productivity of nature will be guaranteed through increasingly efficient systems of management” (13). This petrocultural belief in progress and unfettered access to future energy fails to conceptualize either ecological or social limits.

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<sup>1</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s special report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C* found that it is likely warming will reach 1.5°C by 2030, which will result in “climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth” which will disproportionately impact “disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, some indigenous peoples, and local communities dependent on agriculture or coastal livelihoods” (11).

Thus, petroculture—and specifically the infrastructure and imaginaries that uphold it—is linked to a series of material, ecological, and cultural threats to front-line communities and environments, while presenting an existential threat to any future with a liveable climate itself.

Though the consequences of petroculture are often occluded to individuals who are not proximate to front-line communities, an emerging public awareness of and concern for the impacts of unmitigated climate change are beginning to challenge petroculture's hegemonic material and imaginative force. Public discourses that present a counter-narrative of ecological limits destabilize petrocultural logics and values that depend upon environmental and social exploitation. As Szeman notes, petroculture's hegemony is threatened by the material conditions of a steadily degrading and diminished environment which manifests the material evidence of the capitalist extractivism that is enabled by, and simultaneously dependent upon, fossil-fuel consumption. This results in a visibility through degradation, and as growing concern over the impacts of climate change becomes a popular public issue, this effect is intensified. Szeman writes:

The environment is the terrain on which the confrontation with the practices and discourses of globalization and neoliberalism will be played out over this century. After being insensate to our connections to and dependence on the non-human world over the course of modernity, the environment will now always, necessarily and unavoidably be an aspect of our political reckonings and social imaginaries ("Politics" 441).

Szeman's emphasis on confrontation with both practices and discourse is representative of the levels at which ecopoetic and activist interventions in petroculture necessarily engage. While ecological collapse threatens petrocultural hegemony, and will perhaps be ultimately responsible for its end, the poets and activists that resist petroculture attempt to do so in order to mitigate the material impacts of this ongoing and future environmental degradation. Both activist and poetic strategies that disrupt petroculture aim to do so in order to prevent the immediate threats of petroculture in local and global environments, such as the high risk of environmental contamination through pipeline failures, or the anticipated future effects of uninterrupted petroculture that poses an existential threat for both the environment and future generations. In other words, while climate crisis and

collapse may be the forces that instigate energy transition, there is a level of optimism in eco-poetic interventions that attempt to use ideological and cultural forces to disrupt petrocultural hegemony before the worst of these environmental consequences are realized. Thus, eco-poetics and activism that foreground the degraded and degrading natural environment also provide the context for alternative forms of meaning making and knowing that expose and oppose the dominant narratives of petroculture and assumptions about progress. Counter-narratives, or counter-factuals, can be operationalized to either reinforce petrocultural hegemony—say, by presenting an upward or positive counterfactual narrative that oil extraction in the Albertan tar sands is ethical, necessary, and sustainable—or to intervene in petroculture’s dominant narrative by destabilizing that narrative (Gordon i.i). While the destabilization of dominant narratives is especially challenging when accounting for the representational limitations of language to elucidate petroculture’s hegemony, poetry—especially when accompanied by sustained activism and participation in public policy decision making structures—can enact disruptive interventions in meaning-making and reproduction of both the material and immaterial manifestations of petroculture.

Poetry, and eco-poetics more specifically, make petroculture visible to a wider community, who can then mobilize against a force that was previously occluded. Poetry can do this work by making the presence and detrimental effects of petroculture apparent through figurative language, and in so doing poetry enables acts of literal and direct resistance against the petroculture it elucidates. While eco-poetics can also inspire social movements and activist demonstrations, it is by making petroculture visible that it can be specifically resisted through forms of community-oriented praxis. By disrupting dominant narratives, poetry can create disruptions that enable counter-narratives of ecological limits and climate justice that exceed the limitations of petrocultural imagination. Poetry that is ecological, in both its subject matter and composition, foregrounds the material conditions of a steadily degraded environment.

Eco-poetics, then, is inherently political and particularly suited to this destabilizing work because, as Imre Szeman argues, “the environment will now always, necessarily and unavoidably be an aspect of our political reckonings and social imaginaries” (“Politics” 441). Contemporary eco-poetic interventions, such as those modelled in *The*

*Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia*, attempt to reckon with the political and social imaginaries that enable petrocultures and environmental exploitation so that they may contribute to the prevention of environmental degradation. These eco-poetic and activist attempts to embed the environment into poetry and social imagination, and prevent environmental degradation as a result, correlate with contemporary poetry's turn towards politically and socially-engaged poetic praxis. As Lynn Keller explains, the:

purview of environmentally engaged poetry and poetry criticism, like that of environmentalism itself, has been expanding dramatically in recent years. No longer limited to nature poetry, twenty-first-century eco-poetry treats a diversity of places, including urban and degraded landscapes, while it attends increasingly to issues of environmental justice and of broadly conceived environmental health affecting human and non-human beings (47).

The shifting foci of environmentally engaged poetry towards praxis is a necessarily political poetic project that presents a potential to disrupt petrocultural discourse and logic, especially, as Keller notes, because as “environmental scientists have not been successful in generating appropriate behaviour and policy changes, artists and scholars in the environmental humanities are challenged to more effectively advance environmentally sound agendas” (47). Using poetry to advance environmentally sound agendas, which in turn support the justice-based transition and ensuring a liveable climate, is a poetic and political project that is taken up by poets, scholars, and community activists who participate in direct and arts-based interventions in petroculture. Eco-poetic interventions in the material and cultural structures that uphold petroculture enable alternative forms of imagining that expose and oppose the dominant narratives of petroculture, and they can also be leveraged to incite activism that prevents further environmental destruction. Thus, the work of engaged poets who use eco-poetics and direct action as a method of community-oriented praxis offers a poetic and political mode of intervention in the dominant narrative and official discourses that are used by state and corporate actors to uphold petroculture.

Furthermore, eco-poetic interventions challenge assumptions that “position the subject as somehow discrete and separate from her environment” (Milne 93), necessitating an engagement with the idea of responsibility and reciprocity to one's

environment. Subjectivity is itself political, and eco-poetics extends this to make the environment political, too. By intervening in petroculture through language and activism, poetry can be used to mobilize civil society and exert pressure on public-policy processes to enact new forms of energy governance and production. The cyclical process of energy sustaining art, art self-reflexively exposing the structures of the energy used to create it, and then creating new representational modes in order to influence governmental action, offers a potential strategy for a poetic community-oriented praxis that supports and enables the justice-based transition to a low carbon energy future. This method of engaged eco-poetic intervention, which attempts to foster community-based transformative praxis, is a process that is localized within specific places and ecologies, and accordingly it demands a poetics that is equally attuned to these environmental and social factors of place—despite its simultaneous intervention in international petroculture and the globalized system of fossil-fuel extraction and dependence.

Though poetry, and eco-poetics specifically, may not be the language used in international politics or shareholder meetings, contemporary poets are increasingly turning to these other sites of language and recontextualizing them. Engaged poets, those who according to Gray and Kenniston write “about concerns beyond the personal, epiphanic, or aesthetic” (1), are able to employ and exploit instances of shared language between poetry and policy. Activists like the Enpipe Line contributors and Stephen Collis actively participate in the “trend toward social engagement” identified by Jeffrey Gray and Ann Keniston (2) and repurpose language used in support of petroculture in order to collectively resist petroculture itself. Using poetry to articulate political concerns, and precipitate environmental activism, is effective as a mode of collective engagement and political action that can disrupt petroculture because, as ecomposition theorists argue, writing is a social activity that is both reliant upon the material environment and simultaneously a force on that same environment (Dobrin and Weisser 568;). Contemporary engaged eco-poetry uses official language strategically—despite its aesthetic and representational limitations for exposing petroculture, and its political deployment that often intentionally obfuscates petroculture—in order to create critical points of intervention in the cycle of energy delimiting art, and art normalizing the forms of energy needed to produce it. This is a potentially risky manoeuvre, because as Kate

Fagan, John Kinsella, and Peter Minter caution “if we constrain our thinking to the architectures in which modernity was built, then we are bound to re-enact the superstructures and scales of modernity's failures, and perhaps its terrible successes, rather than seizing and envisaging a very different kind of world” (1). Central to their warning is the question of responding to climate change and environmental degradation, and “whether our current languages and cognitive forms can prepare us for the task of acting on a radically non-human scale” (Fagan et al. 1) to address these intersecting crises. While any political or ideological strategy has its limitations, the eco-poetic interventions and attendant activist demonstrations against the Trans Mountain and Northern Gateway pipelines are two examples of how eco-poetics can be used to foster engagement and community-oriented praxis.

The eco-poetic interventions created and leveraged in *The Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia* represent a poetry of engagement, or what might also be thought of as “public poetry, with poets of all types writing about concerns beyond the personal” in order to break down the “distinctions between the private and the public or political” (Gray and Keniston 2; 5). Crucially, this method of eco-poetic intervention relies on the reproduction, manipulation, and re-presentation of official source documents to articulate critique and expose petrocultural hegemony. As Jeffrey Gray writes, poetry that makes use of found texts and transcription is motivated by an understanding, and suspicion, of discourse—especially the “official, corporate, or bureaucratic discourse, the language circulating around us and in which we are embedded” (Gray 87). Gray argues that this poetic practice emerges from the public’s “growing awareness of language as shared, that is, as by definition unoriginal and recycled” (84). While originality may not be of concern for eco-poetic petrocultural critique, suspicion of official language, and of the ways that language attempts to distance itself from the material ecosystems it is used to disrupt or degrade, is a necessary component of poetic and political intervention in state-sanctioned fossil-fuel development; this is especially the case when the language in which we are embedded includes and reproduces assumptions about growth, progress, and energy that are occluded through repetition and ubiquity. Kate Siklosi argues that at their most effective, eco-poetic interventions can leverage “found’ poetic material to combat dominant scripts of his-story and enact sociopolitical change ... [and] shock’ people out

of their day-to-day lives by extracting different possibilities from aesthetic experiences outside the sanctions of law and state” (Siklosi n.p.). Siklosi gestures towards the potentiality of poetics to elicit both an affective and material-political response that counter-acts the state (both in action and rhetoric) is, according to Milne, “political precisely through its fusing of ‘social activism and aesthetic praxis’” (243). By using found official documents such as reports issued by state or corporate actors, coupled with eco-poetic procedures and political engagements, the poets of The Enpipe Line collective and Stephen Collis both work to “submit official language to scrutiny” (Gray 88) in order to challenge the petrocultural assumptions and logics that are inherent in state and corporate registers that support, approve, and endorse continued fossil-fuel extraction and combustion.

While official language is often portrayed as neutral or objective, poetry destabilizes any assumption of neutrality by recontextualizing official language within artistic works. Gray examines “the role of official, corporate, or bureaucratic language in poetry—whether this language is ironized, critiqued, or (on the face of it) unexamined” (88). Using and manipulating official language in poetry, or in targeted eco-poetic intervention, works to engage readers in critique of the official language. Gray argues that “the reader’s implication becomes more consequential where shared discourse, especially hegemonic or institutional language, is concerned” (88) because destabilizing official discourse creates space for public and political engagement with the source material, without the assumption of neutrality. Hegemonic, official, and institutional language commandeered, interpreted, or transcribed by engaged poets is necessary in eco-poetic interventions because these shared discourses are “characterized by a purported erasure of subjectivity, a projection of neutrality, and an unproblematic authority” that poets trouble through their engagement with these forms of language (88). Engaged eco-poetics offers a linguistic and conceptual mode of intervention in petroculture’s narratives that can incite both critical reflection and direct action because it is a form that problematizes and requires the reader’s implication in official discourse and situates that discourse within the interconnections of human and nonhuman ecological places and relations.

### Chapter 3: Enpipe

beneath the review process other possible futures – Stephen Collis (*Blockadia* 17)

The first example of an eco poetic intervention in petroculture's imaginative and infrastructural hegemony is the collaboratively written conceptual poetry collection: *The Enpipe Line: 70,000 km of poetry written in resistance to the Northern Gateway pipeline proposal*. As Christine Leclerc explains in the introduction, the text, which was presented digitally in addition to being published as a print collection, comprises a collectively written conceptual "long poem" which would span over 70,000 kilometres of poetry if the text height were increased to 1000 metres (to match the width of the right-of-way proposed for the Northern Gateway pipeline) (Leclerc 16). In earlier digital representations of the text, which grew over time through a series of public online submissions, the scale and length of the emergent series of poems were presented via a scrolling line of text on the project's webpage with the call to action "Resist / Create. Document. Submit" (Dennis Unrau). By using asyndeton to relate the concepts of "resist" and "create," The Enpipe Line Collective insists that acts of poetic imagining, alongside acts of documentation and public participation via submission, are acts of political intervention that were collected in "resistance to the proposed pipelines, [and also] stands in solidarity with similar projects that resist social or environmental destruction" (Leclerc 16). As Christine Leclerc explains, *The Enpipe Line* was conceptualized while she was chained to the front doors of Enbridge's head office, as she was struck by "the image of a poetry-jammed pipeline" where immaterial poetry, and the public-will demonstrated by its collective creation, was as powerful a force as the bitumen designed to be transported through the pipeline (16). Leclerc accompanies this visual with a neologism that opens the collection: "*Enpipe, v. To block up and/or fill a pipe to bursting*" is presented as the active verb that contextualizes the entire collection's concept (15) Thus, at both the level of language and praxis, the collection is instantiated from conception as both a work of poetics and of activism, and accordingly its poetry has been used in various other protests since its publication, which thereby extends its impact from the imaginative into the political and material (Leclerc 17). *The Enpipe Line* enacts eco poetic resistance against



petroculture through its collaborative and public poetic production and through the sustained activism of its many contributors.

By re-conceptualizing, re-scaling, and digitizing the proposed pipeline into a site of online engagement, The Enpipe Line Collective insisted on a community-oriented poetic praxis that created space for both immaterial and material resistance to the pipeline. Acts of re-conceptualization, according to Graeme Macdonald, are necessary modes of petrocultural critique because “it is not enough to simply bring [energy] infrastructure into wider visibility” (39). Rather, it is “*seeing* pipelines as cultural objects” that enables resistance to both petroculture’s paradoxical invisibility and ubiquity (Macdonald 39). Pipelines and petroculture are pernicious precisely because of their omnipresence—there are over 84,000 km of pipelines that traverse Canada (Reeves and Ryan)—and in their aesthetic ordinariness. Macdonald writes, “As a rule, pipelines are dull. They are neither transparent nor particularly distinctive. Many are buried. Those running about ground are often located in remote and/or private terrain” (42). The normalization and resulting invisibility of infrastructure, and the language of progress that is used to justify its creation, is a side effect of the limited ability of aesthetic and representational strategies to engage with energy as a simultaneous cultural and material phenomenon; this difficulty is further intensified by the “often-torturous complexity of a pipeline’s infrastructural financing, legal and safety regulation, and maintenance program” (Macdonald 43). While poetry does not wholly remedy the aesthetic and representational limitations highlighted by Macdonald, it works to expose the linguistic and imaginative constructions that are used to obfuscate the material and cultural impacts of complex energy systems.

*The Enipe Line* does not erase or minimize this complexity. Instead, the poetry attempts to grapple with the complexity by including poems that illuminate the intersecting factors that prop up and validate the Northern Gateway pipeline proposal. By allocating each poem a length measured in kilometres “designed to go dream vs. dream with Enbridge’s proposed pipeline[,]” the poetry collection destabilizes the notion that the pipeline is a neutral object by reframing the infrastructure as an ideological object, that is vulnerable to opposition both at both the level of imagination and infrastructure (Leclerc 16). The form of the collective long poem, which imitates and resists the pipeline itself,

enables an engagement with pipeline as cultural object, and this re-conceptualization is concretized as resistance to Canadian petroculture through the individual poet's engagement with shared official discourses and state rhetoric used in support of the pipeline itself. This resistance at the level of imagination and language is modelled in the introduction of *The Enpipe Line*, which uses only conditional tense to describe the pipelines construction—"were the Enbridge pipelines built, tar sands crude oil *would* run from Bruderheim, Alberta to a port near Kitimat, British Columbia" (emphasis added, Leclerc 15)—and in the individual poems that comprise the collection.

In addition to manipulating the grammar of petroculture's presumed futurity by positioning the pipeline as a potential outcome instead of an anticipated one, *The Enpipe Line* co-opts the language of Canadian petroculture—especially in the found-text poems that cite official email correspondences with government and industry, corporate and state rhetoric documented through the media, ecosystem descriptions, and quotes from political representative—to critique the pipeline proposal and propose alternative methods of engaging with land, community, and energy. Even the organizing structure of the text, into five discrete sections each marked with a chapter head and accompanying piece of state or corporate rhetoric, engage with official discourses and the policy cycle. The chapters entitled "Survey," "Joint Review," "Excavation," "Manufacture," and finally "Community," are arranged in a continuum that reflects the proposed pipeline's progress through ecological planning phases, into a public policy process, and into construction before considering the impact on communities (human, or otherwise). The collection names the Joint Review Panel (JRP) explicitly, and it is in this section that the highest frequency of found-text poems occurs.

According to Natural Resources Canada's official web page for the Northern Gateway Pipeline Project, the "three-member Joint Review Panel was established by the Minister of the Environment and the Chair of the NEB [National Energy Board] in January 2010. The panel was responsible for the environmental assessment and regulatory review of the project, and in December 2013 it submitted its report to the Government. On June 30, 2016, the Federal Court of Appeal quashed the 2014 decision by the previous government and sent the Joint Review Panel's recommendation back to the current government for reconsideration" ("Northern Gateway Pipeline Project" n.p.). This official

rhetoric omits several critical factors in the series of events including the JRP's recommendation to approve the project on December 9, 2013, which was supported by the federal government on June 17, 2014 ("National Energy Board" n.p.), and that the appeal that ultimately led to the pipeline proposal's rejection was filed by the Gitxaala Nation against Canada (Bergner n.p.). What this official language obfuscates, and *The Enpipe Line* calls into question, is the influence of petrocultural hegemony evident throughout the JRP's public engagement, their findings and recommendation, and public policy decision making. While poetry is often assumed to recount the personal or aesthetic meditations of the speaker, *The Enpipe Line* contributors co-opt public and political rhetoric and transform their source texts into engaged eco-poetic interventions that challenge petroculture's dominant narratives, and they attempt to introduce new forms of language into the public policy process and cultural imaginary.

Petroculture, and by extension state rhetoric and official documents, necessarily represent ecology and environment as sites of resource extraction, whereas eco-poetics resists this tendency through form and subject that attempt to model ecological inter-relationality without defaulting to the subjective poetic feeling expected from the lyric or Romantic nature poetry. Milne notes that by "extracting the human from the nature poem [it is possible to] foster new epistemological and ontological relations to the natural world that do not revolve around the human as either a consumer of resources or as an environmental steward" (113). This eco-poetic manoeuvre resists anthropocentrism and engages with environment outside of the framework of commodified resources, and as such is an effective intervention in petrocultural hegemony that presents environment as something to be commodified and managed. Elena E. Johnson's contributions to *The Enpipe Line* model this eco-poetic approach of resisting commodification, ecological estrangement, and continued extraction by manipulating official rhetorical representation of environment as resource. Her poems "Frequently Asked Questions" and "Water Crossing" specifically resist the commodified vision of nature represented in the JRP's official rhetoric. In "Water Crossing" Johnson removes the human speaker from the environment of her poetry, choosing instead to juxtapose "one of Enbridge's official answers to an 'FAQ' on its Northern Gateway website with a description of a wetland ecosystem in the Sub-Boreal Spruce zone" (Leclerc et al. 162). Similarly, in "Frequently

Asked Questions” Johnson “worked from a map of forest regions of British Columbia, listing forest types in the order in which the pipeline would cut across them, traveling from Bruderheim to Kitimat” (Leclerc et al. 162) and chose to foreground the forest ecosystems themselves, rather than the human settlements that are prioritized in most official documentation of the pipeline’s proposed route.

In both instances, Johnson uses ecopoetics to contend with a question that is also posed by the JRP: “What is the environment?” (*Connections* 45). Though the title of Volume 1 of the JRP’s findings is entitled *Connections: Report of the Joint Review Panel for the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project*, little attention is paid to the role of connection, interconnection, and relationality in shaping understanding of the environment. The JRP offers a scant thirteen pages to their “Environment” chapter and relies primarily on visuals and state rhetoric to respond to their own ontological question. The chapter features several shots of a verdant mountain forest with a thin lighter-green band of clear cut disappearing into the background, suggesting a minimal and nearly invisible impact on the landscape (*Connections* 44); this image is contrasted sharply by one of the only photos in the chapter that depicts human activity, a shot of the construction site that highlights a dry, sandy-coloured, gravel road in the foreground with labourers and machinery appearing in the middle of the shot, though at a mid-range distance (*Connections* 50). These photos are complemented by a series of landscape shots that erase any anthropogenic impact on the environment by showcasing a wetland ecosystem at midday, featuring a clear blue sky reflected in the water evoking suggestions of uncontaminated water and air with the emphasis on clarity and the unmarred reflection of white clouds (*Connections* 46), and a river with no evidence of human infrastructure, again relying on a palette of dark green sandwiched between bands of clear blue (*Connections* 48). In each instance, the JRP’s visual rhetoric reinforces the simplistic answer they showcase when attempting to define the environment, namely that:

According to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012*, “environment” means the components of the Earth, and includes (a) land, water, and air, including all layers of the atmosphere; (b) all organic and inorganic matter and living organisms, and (c) the interacting natural systems that include these components (*Connections* 45).

This definition, though arguably complete from a technical or ecological science perspective, acknowledges that interacting “natural” systems are part of the environment, but it is limited insofar as there is no specificity within the definition, official state rhetoric, or accompanying visualizations that articulates environment and relationality as a complex, socio-cultural, and ecologically site-specific system of interconnection and responsibility. This definition of the environment eschews specificity in favour of a totalizing rhetoric of environment as a series of resource components with an implied human use-value instead of any inherent ecological or socio-cultural value.

Both of Johnson’s poems resist this elision of specificity by articulating specific ecologies and species. “Water Crossings,” which uses found-text descriptions of Sub-Boreal wetland ecosystems, contains references to beavers, sedge, horsetail, cattail, bulrush, spikerush, and willow; the JRP does not contain a single reference to any of these species by name. In the state documents, the flora and fauna are amalgamated, anonymized, and extirpated from the JRP’s conceptualization of environment and ecosystem, which includes the phrases “wetland” three times and the term “marsh” only once throughout the entire body of the 81-page-long first volume of findings. While Volume Two, *Considerations: Report of the Joint Review Panel for the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project* contains more detailed technical information about the project’s environmental assessment, the volume similarly occludes species specificity and does not feature the names of a single species named by Johnson’s poetry. The JRP notes that “The Enbridge Northern Gateway Project passes through six major types of ecosystems from prairie to mountain to coast” (*Connections*, 45), but offers few additional details about these ecosystems’ make-up or vulnerability. This absence of specificity is suspect precisely because the JRP claims that its recommendation to approve the pipeline proposal, despite its significant ecological risks, was “based on technical and scientific analysis rather than on the number of participants sharing common views either for or against the pipeline” (qtd. in Gordon 122). This rhetoric suggests, as Gordon points out, that the JRP made “a ‘technical’ and ‘scientific’ decision rather than a cultural one, as if technology and science are acultural” (122); however, despite this insistence on the importance of science to the review process, the JRP’s rhetoric and representation of ecological science is communicated without specific

attention to the ecologies their decision will impact. Poetry refocuses the language and official rhetoric within the JRP because poetry, by design, demands not only that attention be paid to the text and context of language—but that it be paid carefully.

In “Frequently Asked Questions” Johnson counteracts this effacing of scientific specificity, engaging in what Gordon posits is one of the roles of literature in petrocultural intervention, namely disrupting the tendency to “view scientific knowledge as separate from cultural knowledge, as non-ideological” (123). Johnson names each of the forest ecosystems that will be traversed by the proposed pipeline, including the Boreal, Engelmann Spruce-Subalpine Fir, Sub-Boreal Spruce, Interior Cedar-Hemlock, Montane Spruce, Interior Douglas-fir, Mountain Hemlock, Coastal Western Hemlock, and Coastal forest types (“Frequently” 67-8). Notably, neither volume of the JRP findings includes a single reference to these ecosystem types whose specificity is once again reduced to generalized signifiers like “forest” separate from the species and interactions that make up the ecosystem in reference<sup>2</sup>. Johnson’s poetry elucidates the pre-existing but often unacknowledged relationality between the reader and their environment. Though petroculture and official rhetoric aim to minimize this sense of intimacy in order to enable uncritical exploitation and extraction of resources, Johnson’s poetry makes visible and palpable the extant and inextricable intimacy between the reader and the ecosystems she names by including a series of incomplete clauses that punctuate the vertical dotted line that connects each line of the poem to the next, signified by a steadily decreasing scalar markers of distance:

The proposed Enbridge pipelines would be built less than  
0.5 km south of this location.

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... less than 10 km north of this location.

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<sup>2</sup> N.B. The term “forest” appears only seventeen times in *Volume I*, and 111 times in *Volume 2*; despite the prevalence of the generalized word forest there is only one instance between the two texts that names tree-species explicitly—and not a single reference to the specific forest ecosystem types.

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(Mountain Hemlock)

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... less than 5 km from this location.

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(Coastal Western Hemlock)

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How do you respond

to those who say it's not a question of

if a vessel spill will occur, but

when?

.

.

.

.

... less than 1 km

from this location. (Johnson, "Frequently" 68-9)

The declining integers in Johnson's poem convey the proximity of the pipeline to both the reader, and to the ecosystems she names and includes offset and alongside the continuous line of punctuation that connects the poem. This representation of the pipeline maps a relationship of intimacy, proximity, and questioning between the communities and

ecosystems that would be impacted by its construction. While the decreasing integers mark a relationship of proximity, their steadily decreasing value also counts an ominous countdown and suggests an affective response to this increasing proximity that is marked by both anticipation and anxiety as the movement of the pipeline moves closer to each location. This spatial and affective relationality is not modelled in the JRP report, which contains two maps within the “What is the environment?” chapter, including one that (like Johnson’s poetry) traces the route from Bruderheim to Kitimat. This map is interrupted with six dotted dark green lines that demarcate the six major watersheds the route would cross, but with no other ecological markers or signifiers present the ecology is flattened into monochromatic shades of green offset by a cheery yellow of the abstracted pipeline (*Connections* 49). Johnson resists this reductive interpretation of both the environment the pipeline will traverse, by her attention to specificity and insistence on naming the species and ecosystems threatened by the infrastructure and their decreasing distance from the effects of the line. Furthermore, Johnson represents the infrastructure of the pipeline itself as a fractured line, signifying its construction as an act of ecological fracturing with material impact on the surrounding ecosystems and the interrelations of the species that inhabit them.

Johnson describes the procedural elements of her work as “carving” the poem from the source text (Leclerc et al. 162), and by linking her eco-poetic process to the materiality signified by the verb carving attempts to reconnect the subjects of the poem—the ecosystem and the pipeline—to the environment that supports them both. In “Water Crossings,” Johnson’s eco-poetic procedure of carving is a testimony to how the proposed pipeline would carve a fracture into the very land it traverses, which she signifies with the negative space between the parenthetically contained text and the adjacent description of the ecosystem. Johnson’s use of parentheses to contain the source material from Enbridge’s website is significant not only for its visual reference to the curvature of the proposed pipeline, but also because it destabilizes the notion of containment itself. Macdonald notes that because energy is “*always* fundamentally global, set within a predominant and world-systemic form of political economy and material infrastructure dependent on flowing petroleum” that the very concept of containment is locked with an “interpretive tension” that signifies both an interest in the ‘secure’ storage, ‘assured’



directional flow, and ‘safe’ onward movement of oil” in addition to a counter-discourse that uses containment to signify “the sign of a radical planetary environmental, explicitly acknowledging oil’s (and, admittedly, petroculture’s) finitude and proffering emergent ecological arguments for oil’s arrest and (geological) enclosure, for ‘keeping it in the ground’ (37). Despite these opposing significations of containment, Macdonald argues that by comparing these “crucial entities of oil’s *containing* infrastructure as cultural-ecological objects [it] allows re-evaluation of the temporal, spatial, and environmental limits of the petrolic culture their transnationally transported product sustains” (38). Language is central to this re-evaluation, presenting both the site of inquiry as official language is critiqued and moments of interruption as ecopoetic strategies are used to disrupt the function of language itself by demanding sustained attention to the very vocabulary, syntax, and signification of rhetoric deployed in defence of energy infrastructure and culture.

Johnson’s poetry is most concerned with disrupting assumptions about the possibility of any so-called secure flow of oil and the notion of containment in itself; though in so doing, her poetry signals the necessity of containing (as in, delimiting) oil’s proliferation culturally and materially. Proponents of pipelines often assert that there is minimal risk of contamination or leakage, but Johnson’s ecopoetics, themselves representative of the work of the *Enpipe Line collective*, question this assertion. While the parenthetical text is marginally separated from the description of the ecosystem it abuts, it is only partially contained by its surrounding punctuation, which does not prevent it from being fully implicated in the ecosystem of the poem. The repetition of the word “crossing” which appears in the title, and twice in the parenthetical text, challenges Enbridge’s ability to prevent cross-contamination between pipeline and ecosystem. The words “water” and “pipeline” are the only words that appear in both columns of text, emphasizing the risk to water when the pipeline’s contents inevitably become uncontainable. Thus, crossing becomes a dual signifier that demonstrates both the fallibility of boundaries in a vulnerable ecosystem and the attendant risk of environmental contamination, while simultaneously calling attention to the idiomatic repercussions of ‘crossing the line.’ In her multiple evocations of the verb to cross, Johnson questions whose boundaries have been, or will be, crossed by the proposed pipeline. For Johnson,

containment is an impossibility and the inevitability of cross-contamination is a risk to the life and ecosystems adjacent to the proposed pipeline. When Johnson concludes the first stanza by stating:

The only exceptions will be  
(select) water  
  
(crossings) where it is safer  
(to run the pipeline) above  
(the water crossing) .

(“Water” 56).

The poet’s use of the word “safer” demands that the reader question, “safer for whom?” Johnson’s ecopoetic intervention insists that the risk of cross-contamination between pipeline and ecosystem be considered in light of the waters and wildlife threatened by Enbridge’s proposal and the JRP’s dismissal of ecological concerns as oxymoronic both negligible and justifiable in the pursuit of projects that ostensibly forward the public interest.

The JRP’s chapter on the environment is immediately followed by a chapter entitled “Safety and Risk.” While the preceding section oriented the reader with an ontological question—what is the environment?—and attempted to define the scope of their considerations, the discussion of safety and risk circumnavigates questions of safer for who and risk to who or what. For example, in the framing text of the chapter the JRP writes:

Much of our hearing process focused on the risks of the project. Many people and groups said that something was likely to go wrong and the consequences could be unacceptably large. Northern Gateway said it evaluated risks carefully and proposed measures to reduce or eliminate risks wherever possible. The company said it would continue a process of adaptive management to reduce risks during detailed design, engineering, construction, and operations. A major concern of hearing participants was how pipeline leaks and marine spills could affect the environment. Northern Gateway proposed measures to reduce the likelihood and consequences of leaks and spills (*Connections* 63).

Not until the final two sentences are such risks as “leaks and spills” identified as threatening “the environment” specifically; up to this point, risk and consequence are framed only as abstractions. Like the official state rhetoric which flattens the environment into material resources to be managed and exploited, the abstraction of risk and its narrow delimitation into the threat of containment minimizes and occludes the complex relationality between infrastructure and environment that Johnson interrogates in “Water Crossings.” Furthermore, by positioning only the environment at risk, the JRP effaces the project’s attendant social and cultural risks which would disproportionately impact front-line communities and Indigenous nations.

Because of the Canadian state’s foundational construction as a colonial resource depot and its ongoing dependence on fossil-fuel extraction, official language necessarily reproduces petroculture’s dominant narratives that equate extraction and consumption with progress and the public good; this tendency is enshrined in various NEB and Supreme Court of Canada rulings that deem energy infrastructure projects as either in the public interest, or not. To support this narrative of extraction as public interest, the state must reframe the negative effects of petroculture. The JRP engages in this official and petrocultural reframing when they respond to the organizing question “What would be the risks of the project?” in Section 5.1 by stating “Northern Gateway said it would build and operate the project in a safe, responsible, economically sound, and socially beneficial manner” (*Connections* 59). Rather than elucidating and delimiting the various risks of the proposed pipeline project, the syntax presented in the JRP report pivots away from a discussion of specific risks towards a declaration of universal social benefit and effective risk management. This assumption not only signals the panel’s support of the project and their assumption of a single unified public, but it also works like petroculture itself to redirect and redeploy language to obfuscate the threats and consequence of fossil-fuel extractions.

Rhetoric and official language, then, are crucial components of the preconditions that ultimately put inter-related environments and communities at risk. Though this process of minimizing and justifying risk through language is an immaterial consequence of petroculture, front-line communities are often most vulnerable to the material ecological and social risks of climate change and fossil-fuel infrastructure development

that are attendant to petroculture's immaterial impacts. For example, in the case of Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline proposal the JRP found that:

even considering Northern Gateway's proposed mitigation measures and our conditions, the project would cause adverse environmental effects, after mitigation, on a number of valued ecosystem components. These include the atmospheric environment, rare plants, rare ecological communities, old-growth forests, soils, wetlands, woodland caribou, grizzly bear, terrestrial birds, amphibians, freshwater fish and fish habitat, surface and groundwater resources, marine mammals, marine fish and fish habitat, marine water and sediment quality, marine vegetation, and marine birds (*Connections* 57)

This ecological analysis of acceptable risk and vulnerability fails to address the ways in which the proposed pipeline would impact relationship to the ecosystem, despite the fact that the JRP acknowledged that:

Aboriginal people told us that in their cultures there is no distinction among the biological, physical, economic, social, and spiritual aspects of the environment. Many non-Aboriginal people shared similar views of environmental unity and interconnectedness. (*Connections* 45)

This failure to think ecologically and relationally compounds and precipitates the social risks posed by petroculture and fossil-fuel development. This failure is communicated and reified through the ideological state apparatuses, as evidenced in the JRP's rhetoric and rationalization of risk, that are used to approve fossil-fuel projects that result in so-called justifiable environmental degradation and attendant social injustices in front-line communities. These risks include: "increased health problems for residents [as a result of] industrial growth in the oil sands" (Gordon 12); denial of Indigenous rights through "development that jeopardizes treaty guarantees 'to continue hunting, trapping, and fishing'" (Stolte qtd. in Gordon 11); and increases in gendered and domestic violence, as evidenced in the 2009 findings that the "tar sands region had the countries' highest rate of domestic violence" (Zuckerman qtd. in *Violence on the Land* 18). By framing the question of risk as a primarily environmental concern, and one that can be managed and mitigated entirely by the pipeline proponents, the JRP's official language reinforces the obfuscation of petroculture's real material and immaterial impacts with little regard for

the urgency and severity of addressing the ongoing and potential consequences of continued fossil-fuel exploitation. Poetics and activism emerge, then, as correlated methods of intervention in the very language of the state's official framing that aim to make palpable the localized and systemic consequences of petroculture.

Johnson's contributions to *The Enpipe Line* are motivated by the urgency of immediate resistance to a specific pipeline in a specific environment at a specific point in time; however, *The Enpipe Line*'s modes of ecopoetic intervention and activism are not limited to a single site or mode of intervention. *The Enpipe Line* is fittingly dedicated "to the resistance" and, in the foreword, Rex Weyler asks a question that is central to my own research: "Can poetry stop the ecocide?" (11). This is a query that Gordon questions in his rhetorical analysis of *The Enpipe Line* and *Poems for an Oil-Free Coast*, "two poetry collections created in direct opposition to the [Northern Gateway] project," and the representation of the bitumen extracting industry in "a Northern Gateway advertisement, by the National Energy Board's Joint Review Panel report, and in the poetry collections" (117). Gordon reflects that "the efficacy of engaging large political questions through poetry ... but perhaps especially poetry published in a limited edition, is always open to question. When faced with multibillion-dollar projects backed by transnational corporations, what can poetry do?" (120). Gordon borrows a phrase from Rita Wong and asserts that, at its most effective literature and poetry create the "'pause for thought' in which individuals can question the self-deception into which we are lulled by the cultural hegemony" (Gordon 120); however, what Gordon fails to address here is the possibility for poetry to engage with and mobilize social movements through a community-oriented poetic praxis. Though the collection has not (yet) stopped the ecocide, *The Enpipe Line* contributors attempted, and succeeded by some measure, to foster a social movement through ecopoetics in order to disrupt the hegemony of petroculture and to articulate an alternative relationship between subject, energy, and environment. Several contributors mobilized their ecopoetic language in order to participate in, and disrupt, dominant narratives within the public policy process—either through civil disobedience, demonstration, or testimony with the JRP hearings themselves (Collis, "Poetry vs. Oil" n.p.)—and complete digital copies of text itself were also sent directly to "Northern Gateway proposal president John Carruthers, as well as Natural Resources Minister Joe

Oliver, Enbridge CEO Patrick Daniel, and Enbridge contractor Patrick Moore—all of whom are quoted in the text” (Stoymenoff, n.p.). By melding direct action with an engaged ecopoetics, which cites the same official language it opposes, *The Enpipe Line* co-opts language in order to destabilize public belief in the neutrality of state and corporate rhetoric which is implicated in histories of settler-colonialism, resource extractivism, and the ongoing perpetuation of petroculture. *The Enpipe Line*’s impact is multi-faceted: it was used to first garner, and then demonstrate, collective resistance to the Northern Gateway pipeline proposal; it was used as a text around which to organize public acts of civil disobedience and artistic protest; it was used as an intervention in the official language and official processes of state and corporate actors; and perhaps most importantly, it was used to articulate a counter-narrative that challenges the petrocultural assertion that an extractive energy project is ever in the public interest.

Enpipe Line contributors use poetry to enact their politics and to coalesce a counter-public that actively opposes petroculture both materially and culturally. Ultimately, though, it was not Enpipe Line activism or linguistic intervention that led to the eventual cancellation of the Northern Gateway proposal. Despite public opposition, acknowledged within the JRP report, the JRP recommended approval of the project (with 209 conditions) on December 19, 2013, and on June 17, 2014 the Federal government conditionally approved the pipeline (The Canadian Press, n.p.). According to Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN), it was the incoming federal Government who deemed that the project was not in the public-interest two years later:

On June 30, 2016, the Federal Court of Appeal quashed the 2014 decision by the previous government and sent the Joint Review Panel’s recommendation back to the current government for reconsideration. In making its decision, the Government considered the Joint Review Panel Report, the views of Indigenous communities and those of other Canadians, as represented to the panel, as well as the orders of the Federal Court of Appeal. The Government determined the project is likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects that are not justified in the circumstances (“Northern Gateway Pipelines Project” n.p.).

However, the official narrative presented by NRCAN is opaque as the “circumstances” in question are not defined, nor is the fact that under the Federal Court of Appeal ruling the

Government was found to have failed in their duty to consult with Indigenous nations (Bergner n.p.). Though neither *The Enpipe Line*'s text nor its contributors directly led to the reversal of the project approval, engaged eco-poetic interventions draw attention to the very language used by the state in service of so-called consultation and highlights the inadequacies of official rhetoric which cannot be separated from its settler-colonial and petrocultural foundations. Poetry and activism, then, remain essential modes of intervention and critique when confronting ongoing energy infrastructure projects and policies, such as the Kinder Morgan TransMountain pipeline expansion which was approved (for the first time) on November 26, 2016 as “part of a sweeping announcement that also saw approval of Enbridge’s Line 3 pipeline replacement, but the end of its Northern Gateway project” (The Canadian Press n.p.). Like the JRP report, Justin Trudeau’s November 26 announcement is replete with references to safety, the environment, and the public—enacting an official rhetoric that is deployed simultaneously in support of two energy projects while being used to dismiss a third, despite few differences between the projects themselves or the language used to describe their specifications and environments (“Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s” n.p.). Unsurprisingly, given the similarities between the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Expansion and the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline proposals, the approval of the Kinder Morgan pipeline galvanized further resistance, and several of *The Enpipe Line* contributors, including poet-activist Stephen Collis, continued to use eco-poetic interventions to analyse and critique the official state and corporate rhetoric, used to support the pipeline, and to mobilize counter-publics in opposition to the proposal.

## Chapter 4: Blockadia

beneath the trial an error ...

beneath litigants lovers – Stephen Collis (*Blockadia* 31)

At the launch of *The Enpipe Line*, Stephen Collis declared, “A poem is not going to stop the pipeline. But a poem is not, not going to stop the pipelines. I think in this situation, anything we can throw in the path of the pipeline is something. And words have an important role to play in obviously winning people’s hearts and minds. So we do what we can, even weird shit like this,” as he began a performance of a poem on the front steps of Enbridge’s head office (Stoymenoff n.p.). In his introduction, Collis illustrates both the necessity of using language to create an affective response in publics and the ways in which a poem can be performed to elicit a material function; if a poem can be “thrown in the path of the pipeline,” then it can enact a form of cultural and immaterial opposition to the material structures that represent and uphold petroculture. In *Once in Blockadia*, Collis extends and concretizes the metaphor of a poem blocking the path of a pipeline, as he concurrently blockaded a Trans Mountain worksite alongside several other activists on Burnaby Mountain. Like Enbridge’s Northern Gateway project, Kinder Morgan’s Trans Mountain pipeline proposal has been contested, approved, challenged, and approved again.

In 2012, Kinder Morgan announced its intentions to expand the pipeline, and this announcement was accompanied by a formal application to the NEB on December 16, 2013 to begin two years of construction in 2017. Beginning in 2014, intermittent public protests and encampments began on Burnaby Mountain and continue in various forms into the present. The NEB officially recommended approval of the proposal on May 29, 2016 which was formally adopted by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in the same November 29, 2016 announcement in which he announced the termination of the Northern Gateway project. In the intervening two years, the project was consistently challenged by activists, First Nations, and the Province of British Columbia, before the federal Government announced a deal to purchase the pipeline and expansion project for \$4.5 billion dollars (The Canadian Press n.p.). Throughout the highly contested events,



seven Indigenous nations (of the 120 First Nations located along the pipeline's path) filed judicial reviews to overturn the project's approval (Markusoff n.p.) and land- and water-protectors have consistently resisted the pipeline's development. Such poets as Stephen Collis, Fred Wah, and Rita Wong, have actively participated in this ongoing resistance; notably, Wong was arrested on August 16, 2018 and sentenced to 28 days in jail (Patterson n.p.). Wong asserts "that everyone who lives on unceded Coast Salish lands has a responsibility to uphold Coast Salish laws, which entail respecting and protecting the land that gives us life" (Wong n.p.); for Wong, her love of land leads her to "lovingly assert that there are at least two things more important than oil: water, and life itself" and to assert herself through both direct action and poetry (Wong n.p.). Wong drafted the poem '*prison candy*' while incarcerated and, in response to a poem by Collis,<sup>3</sup> drafted an 18-day long poem (via Twitter) that documented the days of her incarceration and reflections on water and the climate crisis. Wong and Collis' ecopoetic production and activist interventions are both situated within the larger resistance to the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, but their work also explores the necessity of a justice based transition to a fossil-free future and Indigenous land sovereignty, while directly opposing the pernicious threat of petroculture as a political, material, and imaginative force.

Resisting both the immediate threat of pipeline developments and petroculture's futurity is central to Stephen Collis' collection *Once in Blockadia*. In 2014, while working on *Once in Blockadia*, Collis was served a court injunction and a \$5.6 million-dollar lawsuit for conspiring against the interests of Kinder Morgan and writing poetry that, allegedly, incorporated instructions for the construction of a barricade within a TransMountain pipeline worksite; in court, Collis' poetry was used as evidence against him (Collis "Poetry Against"; Staff). Like *The Enpipe Line*, *Once in Blockadia* co-opts the language of petroculture and uses found-texts to critique energy projects that perpetuate and exacerbate the injustices of climate change (Smith n.p.). Collis admits that, though poetry is not the best choice for reaching a wide audience, "poetry is best at digging into motivations, into the feelings driving us to act and resist" (Collis, "Poetry

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<sup>3</sup> Poets Kate Siklosi, Rob McLennan, and Isabella Wang, also wrote poems for Wong and circulated them via Twitter.

Against”). For Collis, then, poetry is both a mode of direct intervention and a mode of relationship building between communities and ecosystems that sustains resistance.

Collis refers to the collection as “something of a poetic documentary of the struggle against the pipeline on Burnaby Mountain,” and he reflects that “Kinder Morgan’s lawyer told the court that underneath the poetry is a description of how the barricade was constructed’ which formed the bulk of their complaint against Collis and his co-defendants (Collis, “Poetry Against”). Collis recontextualizes this phrase, “underneath the poetry is a description of how the barricade was constructed,” as he uses it to conclude the first poem of *Once Blockadia* and to introduce the main conceit of the text: a poem is in fact something that can be placed in the pathway of a pipeline or proposal. In ‘The Court Transcript,’ the piece that opens the collection, Collis uses the text of the “*BC Supreme Court Transcripts, November 5, 2014*” as a poem that details both Kinder Morgan’s claims against him and the validity of eco-poetic intervention as effective activism and praxis. The poem, and by extension Kinder Morgan’s allegations, begin with a description of the blockade site, which took the form of an “encampment [that] had been put in place at borehole number 2” (Collis, *Blockadia* 5). The transcript continues, “By 11:00 p.m. there were four to six people at borehole number 2, but more significantly there was a tent and cars surround the tent and the location of borehole number 2” (Collis, *Blockadia* 5). This description of what is most important, in the view of the Kinder Morgan lawyer, is in direct opposition to the eco-poetics Collis practices: the use of language to explore ecosystems as relational and connected spaces wherein environment, human, and non-human species are co-dependent entities—each vulnerable to the risks of petroculture and fossil-fuel extraction. While it is the physical infrastructure of the barricade that the lawyer deems important, and dangerous to the interests of Kinder Morgan, Collis’ eco-poetic language (which was used as evidence against him) prioritizes community and stewardship as the most important aspects of protest, not simply the barricade itself.

Throughout the found-text poem, which also cites text Kinder Morgan’s lawyer selected from Collis’ website, Collis identifies the group of protestors as “the caretakers,” and “his band of citizen rangers” (*Blockadia* 7). In so titling the protestors, Collis signifies a form of community-oriented activism that relies on collective action and taking

care (of each other, and of the environment). Collis returns to this notion of care in the “About” page of his website, which is again cited as evidence against him by the Kinder Morgan lawyer and then is featured in the poem. He writes:

I don't care right now about the National Energy Board of Canada, merely a corporate tool for shoe horning global energy projects into other people's territories, a funnel for money from the public to the private sector. I don't care about this or that court of law, appeals and constitutional change ... // And then flip over the page: // I care about the people who have come together to stand in the forest on a mountain in the path of a pipeline. // And he describes why he cared about them // ... // He describes his views about protecting the local environment, (Collis, *Blockadia* 8-9).

Collis describes care for his fellow activists as central to his intervention, but he also describes it as relational, as a relationship that exists between humans and non-humans that is linked to the specific ecological space of the “forest on a mountain in the path of a pipeline” (*Blockadia*, 8). Thus, Collis's eco-poetics position the subject “I” as part of an ecological resistance, while the voice of the speaker (signalled by the pronoun shift from I to he) is detached from both community and ecology, capable only of describing events in isolation as opposed to enacting them collectively and materially. Though the implication by the Kinder Morgan lawyer is that Collis' poetry included instructions for how to create a barricade, contrary to the interests of Kinder Morgan, Collis in turn co-opts the language of the court documents themselves in order to enact additional and subsequent forms of eco-poetic intervention in both the proposed pipeline's path and in petroculture itself. Rather than refuting the claims of the lawyer, Collis re-presents the found-text of the court transcripts in order to demonstrate the immediate and ongoing impact of eco-poetics written and enacted materially in opposition to petroculture.

By refashioning found texts into poems, Collis replicates the procedural elements of creating a barricade from found objects. Kinder Morgan's lawyer describes, at length, “what's occurred” at the blockaded borehole number 2:

Erected a tent over the spot where borehole number 2 is supposed to be drilled onto the mountain. It's surrounded by a hodgepodge assembly of tree branches, discarded building materials, like boards, a sheet of plexiglas, even an old mattress, computer keyboard and plastic Polaroid camera. It's decorated with

bright orange safety vests as well as a couple of jack-o-lanterns with “Stop Kinder Morgan.”// ... And Mr. Collis describes this as: // This is visual. This is an obstacle. (Collis, *Blockadia* 7-8).

Collis poetry uses found texts to imitate the process of blockade and insists on the power of that which is visual to exist equally as an obstacle. The repeated simple syntax of “This is” reinforces the ways in which poetry, which is as inherently visual as it is ecological when arranged on the page, can manifest itself materially as well. Collis continues this technique of using language in the same manner as material objects to create visual blocks throughout the collection. Take, for example, Collis’ long poem *Blockadia* which opens with the referential line “Beneath the poetry the barricade” (17) before using asyndeton to present a series of cascading dependent clauses that catalogue the material and imagined structures that underlie petroculture itself. Collis writes “beneath the review process other possible futures ... beneath the singularity of owning the multitude of needing ... beneath government real abstractions” (17). This continued reference to the foundations of each subject destabilizes the assumptions that are foundational to petroculture, namely that review processes, private ownership, and government are absolute powers when interacting with ecosystems threatened by pipeline developments.

However, Collis’s poetry does not simply make visible the structures that prop up petroculture; he uses poetry to resist them. Like Johnson in *The Enpipe Line*, Collis’ work relies on an eco poetic composition that is attentive to material and ecological space. Collis’s poetry is made material through its evocation of infrastructure’s form; where Johnson exposes the curvature and fallibility of the pipeline through the juxtaposition of parenthetical text which cannot be wholly contained, Collis’s poem is presented in densely packed, rigid, concrete blocks that imitate the barricade that, allegedly, lies beneath the poetry. Collis’s poem is not only a nod to the direct action he mounted against Kinder Morgan’s proposed pipeline, but a testament to future resistance against petroculture as well. In addition to co-opting the language of the court injunction filed against him, Collis co-opts one of petroculture’s dominant metaphors for progress: the combustion engine. He writes:

We are engines of change ... The engines behind the blockade were / carved  
cedar, raven-winged, and reached as militant flesh across / the metabolic rifts we

were – back in time and forward in time, / lifting material from the forest to be a barrier to human stupidity (*Blockadia* 18).

By insisting that the engines are not fuelled by petroleum, and instead by both collective action—signified by the “we” in “we are engines of change”—and human and non-human relationality. This passage marks an ecopoetic resistance that imbues the non-human carved cedar and raven-winged with subjectivity and action that supersede the engine’s presumed function as a metaphorical vehicle of petrocultural dominance. This ability to disrupt petroculture’s dominant metaphor and reposition an ecological relationality in its place is consistent with what Bloomfield refers to as Collis’ ability to create “‘eco-ception’ [which] is a form of heightened political alertness to what Stacy Alaimo has influentially called ‘transcorporeality,’ which emphasizes how human bodily being is ‘always intermeshed with the more-than-human world’” (509). Bloomfield claims that Collis’ ability to generate these “eco-ceptions” results in the traversal of “varying scales of space, time, and bodily being ... [and] thus makes tangible capitalism’s yoking together of human and morethan-human life” (509). More than simply making the connection between petroculture, capitalism, and ecological relationality cogent—Collis’s poetry positions the ecosystem (with all its attendant relationships and responsibilities) as the site of resistance and engaged ecopoetics as the mode of resistance against anthropocentric destruction and “human stupidity” (Collis, *Blockadia* 18). Bloomfield claims that the relational and ecological “bonds” that Collis invokes in his poetry “enact networks of exploitation and appropriation, [but] Collis hopes that they might also catalyse ‘a new and necessary solidarity’” (509). The necessity of ecopoetic and community-oriented praxis rooted in solidarity and resistance is especially crucial as the effects of unmitigated climate change result in both ecological collapse in the present and the potential for increasingly serious risks to both human and more than-human ecologies in the future.

Because of the existential threats of climate change, which are created and sustained through petroculture, interventions in both cultural production and state-led public processes are necessary at what Milne describes as this “historical juncture when ... capitalism, climate change, and globalization necessitate a politicized, ethical, and critical rethinking of the relationship between humans and the material world” (Milne 94)

across both local and trans-national scales. By focusing on the pipeline as a cultural object, and treating the official discourses and rhetoric that are used to propose, justify, and construct petrocultural infrastructure, ecopoetics is capable of engaging with the ramifications of “locally exclusive forms of petroculture,” which are, as Macdonald explains “always already extra-national” because of the pipeline’s connection to the “toxic social relations and carbonizing effects of oil and the oil system on both planetary and localized levels” (36-7). Thus, petroculture operates at both the transnational and the local, ecological and land-based level simultaneously; poetry, too, can act this way.

Both *The Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia* reckon with this relationship between engaging in translation and local ecologies and politics simultaneously. As Hickman argues when comparing *The Enpipe Line* and Stephen Collis’s “work’s increasingly direct connections to actual political movements and events, opens up space for thinking about poetry’s instrumentalisms (84). But, Hickman continues, “Christine Leclerc’s extraordinary editorial collaboration, *The Enpipe Line*, constitutes a poetics of place as (communal) organizational as it is aesthetic, and even more interested than Collis’ work in poetry as localized direct action” (Hickman 84). While Hickman’s quantification of “even more interested” feels incomplete, his analysis accurately identifies how both poetic projects attempt to use poetry in place in order to effect change. Where these projects differ significantly is in their attention to temporality. While ecopoetic interventions, like those of *The Enpipe Line* collective, are often motivated by localized threats in the present moment (such as the pending decision of the JRP and subsequent construction of pipeline infrastructure, in the Northern Gateway Case), ecopoetics and direct action against fossil-fuel infrastructure can also be used to resist petroculture’s presumed global futurity; this notion of futurity is something that Collis’ work engages, even as it is concurrently implicated in and informed by the ongoing, localized, and community-oriented praxis of direct action and blockading. Collis signals the scale and scope of this resistance in *Once in Blockadia*’s epigraph which quotes Naomi Klein: “*Blockadia is not a specific location on a map but rather a roving transnational conflict zone that is creeping up with increasing frequency and intensity wherever extractive projects are attempting to dig and drill...*” Just as Collis’ work

reckons with the pipeline as a cultural and transnational object, his work also partakes in a resistance that is at once local, transnational, and also temporal.

Ecopoetic texts like *Once in Blockadia* must address both present crises and futurity in order to resist the ongoing effects of climate change, environmental degradation, settler-colonialism, and petroculture. This navigation of multiple time scales is crucial because as Catriona Sandilands discusses, ecocritical investigations into time “hold the potential to bring literary insights to bear on pressing political questions of ecological sustainability, both within and outside Canada” (287). Sandilands claims that the “pipelines (including the regulatory processes that surround them)” are examples of the “complex temporal politics of things” in contemporary environmental literatures and politics in Canada. She continues, quoting Huebner, to argue that the controversies of pipeline development in Canada have revealed that it is not enough to “criticize the social processes of acceleration and to advocate for ‘slowness,’” (287). For Sandilands, it is crucial to recognize that because “ecosystems include multiple, overlapping temporalities ... in intersection with a range of more anthropogenic temporalities, a ‘timely’ ecocriticism can attend to the ways in which literary texts ... highlight the knots of temporal complexity that characterize the present, political— ecological moment” (287). Collis’s ecopoetic resistance and interventions attempt to reckon with the complex ecological temporality, and work to challenge petroculture in both the present and presumed future, across local and transnational spaces, thereby insisting that alternative futures can be both imagined and enacted through ecopoetic resistance in both material ecologies and through ecopoetics.

When Collis proclaims via his blog, during the construction of the barricade on Burnaby Mountain that “The last barrel of oil on Burnaby Mountain” has been found and used in the construction of the very barricade that will prevent the Kinder Morgan expansion, Collis makes a pronouncement on the future of oil—namely, that he refuses it (“The Last Barrel” n.p.). It is this declaration that the Kinder Morgan lawyers found particularly dangerous, and pieces of this blog post appear in “The Court Transcript.” In this poem, Collis writes “an old rusted oil barrel was uncovered and rolled up the hill. It’s a / talisman, a symbol of the old world we are trying to resist and change. It is, we hope, the last oil barrel that will have anything to do with this mountain forest” (*Blockadia* 9).

But more than announcing a collective desire for an end to oil, and by detailing the direct action that will prevent it in the immediate present, Collis's work definitively imagines a future where "the last" is a finite and true statement. If through language communities insists that this is the last barrel, and that this is a true and assured future, then official language that declares otherwise is no longer simply the product of a panel's ruling or a politician's rhetoric of commitment—it becomes the articulation of a competing vision of the future. In "Blockadia," Collis's remarks that "'Kinder Morgan' might be translated from approximate German as 'tomorrow's children'" (*Blockadia* 31), and this invocation of future children effectively parodies the language of sustainable development popularized in the Bruntland Commission's claim that "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (16). This official language, and Collis's parody of it, betray the incompatibility between the rhetoric of "tomorrow's children" and the decisions upheld by the Canadian state and oil-extracting corporations to build pipelines and continue to export fossil-fuel. Collis, then, uses the local example of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain expansion to elucidate the impossibility of accepting official visions of the future that claim sustainable development, settler-Canadian extractivism, and petroculture as co-existent. Collis's eco-poetic interventions mock the impossibility of these cultural apparatuses to reckon with the reality of a future directly impacted by climate change.

Collis further challenges the conceptualization of futurity and oil by poetically recontextualizing Shell Oil's publicly available future scenario reports. "Futurists are investors" writes Collis in the prose poem "Blockadia," which includes several sections that exemplify and narrate Shell's history of using scenario planning. He writes:

Shell Oil has been using scenario planning *to explore the future* / since the early 1970s. What future what exploration unknown. / Shell's *futurists* develop *what if* scenarios of *plausible futures* in / order to make their business plans more – socially palatable. *What / if* more of the same is no plan is stuck system. These plans have / increasingly come to accept climate change as a *plausible* future / factor. Apparently, a future without the market's dripping black / wings is not – plausible. ... *Help Shell change the world* the gas pump / LED crawls menace



force menace distraction. What world and / what change unknown ungraphable  
and a pause in the plausible as we warm to no ideas. (*Blockadia* 28)

While Collis's description of this history in playful and cynical language is reasonably accurate—Peter Cornelius, the Group Chief Economist of Royal Dutch Shell, reflects in a retrospective that Shell has been using scenario planning since the 1970s, and is responsible for the “pioneering of scenarios” through an intentional plan to for Shell to “capitali[ze] on uncertainties” (99)—Collis challenges the assertion that Shell uses scenarios to “explore the future” by using *anesis* in his concluding sentence to diminish the effect of the narrative he presents earlier. Indeed, it is the concluding sentence of Collis' stanza that opens up a necessary critique of Shell's futurist exploits; by asking “what world and what change” and concluding with “a pause in the plausible as we warm to no ideas” (*Blockadia* 28), Collis destabilizes the notion that Shell's scenario planning attempts to reflect “the” future, demonstrating instead that it simply denotes *a* future. And a future that is both warming and vacuous at that. This final sentence highlights the ways in which petroculture, and Shell's methodology of imagining uncertain futures only in which oil still exists and is capitalized upon, limit the imaginative potential inherent in these corporate and official narratives of the future.

Collis's poetry demonstrates a suspiciousness towards Shell's use of, and history of, modelling futures that are implicated in and created for the perpetuation of petroculture. Collis's suspicion is not dissimilar from a trend that Richard Jean So identifies as being common amongst humanities researchers: “Literary scholars have long cast a suspicious and critical gaze toward modelling . . . : models run counter to the deep and intensive reading that literary critics take pride in, the exposing of nuance and singularity in texts, writers, and human beings” (668). While So's observations are useful reminders to be suspicious of models that fail to consider how “an individual exceeds socially constructed identity categories, [because] what does a model do besides reify such categories?” (668), Shell's use of future scenario planning and analysis are curious specifically because they rely on narrative forms. Indeed, Cornelius details a similar concern with modelling, writing that “Unfortunately, forecasts—which are usually constructed on the assumption that tomorrow's world will be much like today's—provide an inappropriate tool to anticipate shifts in the business environment. . . . In fact, forecasts

may even be dangerous, as they are typically wrong when they are needed most” (92-93). Thus, Royal Shell developed and introduced an alternative mode of investing in futures through the analysis of scenarios. As Cornelius states, “Scenarios are not projections, predictions, or preferences; rather, they are coherent and credible alternative stories about the future” (93). Yet, Shell’s interests as an enterprise that profits from extractivism and petroculture inherently limit the imaginative capacity of these scenarios. In “Blockadia,” Collis writes that “when it comes down to it: **Scramble** / and **Blueprint**. They map conceptually a suicidal free-for-all / fight for the sat remaining planetary resources, or a planned / and careful diversification of a varied fossil-fuel portfolio as a / response to civil-society pressure to curb carbon emissions” (*Blockadia* 29). Collis uses poetry to dramatize the petrocultural biases and resulting aesthetic and representational limitations of Shell’s narratives. He concludes the stanza with an uneasy and ambiguously directed second-person address: “We can do this the easy way, or the hard way – the choice is yours” (*Blockadia* 29). Whose choice is Collis referencing, and to what effect? This concluding line mirrors the prior stanza’s *anesis* and destabilizes the stanzas opening claim that there are “only two scenarios” (*Blockadia* 29). By using second-person and collective pronouns, Collis engages and imbues the reader with an agential responsibility.

The effect of this *anesis* is an empowering and sobering invitation into a position of agency and into a relationship with both the author and the eco-poetic intervention that undergirds the entire collection of *Once in Blockadia*. Collis carries this conceit further in the concluding stanzas of the poem which begin with the line “*Scenario planning is not prediction by a systemic way of / bracketing uncertainty*” before using a series of offset square brackets to contain and imaging alternative futures. He writes:

Hedge your bets. *Scenarios are possible plausible futures* // [we all die in fire  
and/or ice] // [we stroke the sleek backs of our / radioactive wolves calmly  
humming / calmly continue] // [we find another planet]. // Who are *we*? Are we //  
[plausible] [implausible] (*Blockadia* 41)

Here, Collis also questions the assumptions in the use of the collective pronoun “we.” Not only are Collis’ uncertain scenarios contradictory and imaginative, they are also poetically pragmatic in relation to the climate reality that will emerge as global temperatures reach the 1.5°C warming threshold. Rather than accepting either of Shell’s

scenarios of conflict fuelled resource allocation or planned-diversification of fossil-fuel investments, Collis injects the language of climate, relationality between human and non-human actors, and collective subjectivity into these uncertain futures. This eco-poetic intervention refutes Shell's imagined future, where the key actors are those who control access to petroleum and the ecology in question is the business environment, and instead he offers a series of undesirable but plausible/implausible alternatives through his poetry's engagement with the uncertain.

In refuting the narrow scope and petrocultural limitations of Shell's narratives, Collis uses eco-poetics to create semantic possibility about who is able to imagine futures. This destabilization of Shell's authority as a creator and enactor of narratives is necessary because, as Jenny Andersson argues, despite the scenario method's "purported projections of an 'open' and 'plural' future" it would be a mistake to believe that "Shell's [scenarios] were genuine attempts to engage with the plurality of world developments" because the technology was created in order to uphold "a status quo ... directly related to American hegemony in both international politics and global capitalism" (214). To expose this contradiction, Collis uses poetry to impart new semantic meaning to the titles of Shell's scenarios. He writes, "We had / our own **blueprints** had to **scramble** to avoid traffic at Duthie and / Hastings just beneath the university above the pipeline beneath / our feet territory beneath map the barricades still an imagined / possibility in the path of imagined new pipelines" (*Blockadia* 31). Here, Collis uses eco-poetics to locate "blueprints" and "scramble" in a land-based and collective resistance, signified by his use of the pronoun "we" and repeated references to the material land and territory that underlie these scenarios. Further, Collis positions barricades and the path of new pipelines as opposing imaginings, and refuses the certainty expressed by Kinder Morgan and the Canadian state this pipeline will ever be built. Thus, Collis's work creates new scenarios that exist outside of the implicit assumptions of petroculture's dominant narrative, in both state and corporate rhetoric.

Collis' penultimate poem in the chapter "Subversal" is titled "Shell Scenarios," and like the other eco-poetic interventions discussed it uses eco-poetics to recontextualize official rhetoric and elucidate the inherent assumptions, in this case petrocultural assumptions about futurity, that are inherent in the seemingly neutral language of

business environments and investments. In the backmatter, Collis notes that “‘Shell Scenarios’ is, in part, derived from an erasure of Shell Oil’s ‘Scenario Plans’ available on the company’s website. The grey text is my additions” (*Blockadia* 134). Collis uses this erasure strategically to undermine the assumption that direct action and social movement will only be a marginal force in these possible futures by manipulating Shell’s text to read: “Unfolding story // Bodies are feasible / and many / emerge to take action // common others / take hands and / create blue futures” (*Blockadia* 51). In this stanza, Collis positions collective action and embodied communities as an imaginative counter force that create futures from the very language Shell uses to plan for their own success and continued profitability. Collis’s work undermines Shell’s extractive activities by using their own stories as the resource material for imagining new futures. Collis accompanies this with strategic poetic interventions into these reconstituted narrative-based scenarios. It is one of these original poetic additions to the official text of Shell’s imagined futures that Collis alludes to poetry’s potential to disrupt petroculture’s dominant narrative. He writes: “signification hold / past negations / unimaginable difference / sways future sways form” (*Blockadia* 47). Collis’s invocation of form here calls attention to the specific role of poetry, which is more dependent on form than narrative or rhetoric, and by enjambling “unimaginable difference” with “sways future sways form[,]” Collis acknowledges petroculture’s hegemonic implications on official language while also asserting that language’s form has the power to change futures. Collis uses poetry to oppose the limitations that petroculture imposes on aesthetic, representational, and rhetorical language, and in so doing he creates the semantic possibility for future and present imaginings that exceed petroculture. Crucially, Collis’s deployment of ecopoetic and engaged poetry, though, is not purely concerned with abstraction and language—rather, Collis, and other politically motivated ecopoets like him, uses poetry strategically as one component of a diverse campaign to prevent the ongoing degradation of relationships, ecologies, and climates in both local and transnational spaces.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

But first we imagine. We are in an imagination battle. – adrienne maree brown (18)

beneath the / human voice the systemic response (*Blockadia* 17) – Stephen Collis

As Catriona Sandilands notes, “Collis’ lyric is, of course, only one among a proliferation of poems, stories, and other passionate artworks protesting the pipeline, insisting (again, and again) on First Nations sovereignty, mourning the past and future environmental damage caused by the oil industry in what is now Canada, and calling for both personal and political action to combat climate change and resist colonial, petro-state politics and economics” (284). It is also necessary to acknowledge that it is not *The Enpipe Line*’s poetry that stopped Enbridge’s Northern Gateway pipeline; the pipeline was blocked by the legal and direct action of the Indigenous nations along its proposed path. So, while it is tempting to conclude that ecopoetic interventions in petroculture’s dominant narratives result in material change through the realization of community-oriented poetic praxis, doing so risks minimizing the ongoing resistance of front-line communities, Indigenous land and water protectors, and other advocates and activists. Rather, the role of engaged poetry and poetic analysis cannot privilege the ecopoetics of settler-Canadians in resistance movements; instead, this work can inform an understanding of how engaged poetry, social movements, and community-oriented ecopoetic praxis can be used to support the ongoing resistance of front-line communities against petroculture, fossil-fuel infrastructure expansion, and ecological degradation that intensify the climate crisis. Both of the collections of poetry examined herein, *The Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia*, attempt to use ecopoetic interventions to disrupt petroculture both semantically and materially, in service of front-line communities and ecologies.

Both collections are necessitated (in part) by immediate resistance to an impending material infrastructure project, in this case Enbridge’s now defunct Northern Gateway pipeline proposal and the currently debated Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain expansion proposal. The poets in both collections co-opt official rhetoric from state and corporate actors—which is implicated both aesthetically and representationally in

reproducing petroculture's dominant narrative—and repurpose these found texts poetically as part of their ongoing opposition to the expansion of fossil-fuel infrastructure. As a result, these collections not only galvanize and support direct action through engaged poetry, but they also use eco-poetics to make petroculture's impact on material ecosystems and language itself visible. This resistance is necessarily contextualized by both the environment in which the resistance occurs and the present moment, but Collis's work differs from *The Enpipe Line's* in that his collection also rejects and opposes petroculture's presumed futurity in addition to detailing the poet's own resistance to the present threat of the pipeline expansion on Burnaby Mountain.

While poetry may not have been the primary reason Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline was rejected, poets certainly intervened in the public process that led to the proposal's dismissal. The importance and efficacy of eco-poetic interventions, like Collis's and that of the Enpipe Line contributors, are critical sites of inquiry in light of the federal government's recent purchase of the Trans Mountain pipeline and legacy of settler-colonialism, resource extraction, and continued development of fossil-fuel based infrastructure. By seeking instances of shared language between poetry and policy, this research demonstrates how eco-poetic cultural production repurposes language used in support of petroculture to actively resist petroculture both materially and semantically. By resisting the ubiquity of petroculture in dominant narratives and official languages, eco-poetic interventions create semantic possibilities for imagining futures beyond fossil-fuel use; this imagining is a critical process, and it is an essential precondition of any justice-based transition to a fossil-fuel free future. The urgency of climate crisis demands that we critique the petrocultures we inhabit, engage in new ways of imagining energy transition, and alter our material productions at a systems-level scale. By evaluating the successes and limitations of *The Enpipe Line* and *Once in Blockadia's* poetic and political projects, poets, activists, and policy influencers alike can adopt modes of eco-poetic resistance and petroculture critique that can be deployed to resist petrocultures while mitigating and adapting to the worst effects of climate change.

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