Chapter 15

Beyond Bitumen

How Advertising Sells the Myth of Canada's Oil/Tar Sands

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Advertisements are political. While at first glance seemingly benign advertisements selling consumer products may seem apolitical, embedded in them is an ideology predicated on views of citizens as consumers and reinforcing capitalist relations (Schudson, 2013). Seen from a social-constructivist perspective, advertisements help construct the world around us, and this is particularly true in the case of the environment and environmental issues (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016). Recognizing this, the following chapter explores and critically reflects on the role of advertising in one of Canada's most controversial environmental issues—the Alberta oil/tar sands.

In this chapter, we examine a series of ads, produced by companies operating in the oil sands, which are essentially promoting extraction from the oil sands as a project. We begin by considering the role of gaze—the particular way we are encouraged to "look" at the world around us (in this case, the Alberta oil sands). Then we examine a selection of ads that compare oil sands to food and reveal such visual and verbal metaphors as a promotional strategy designed to play on the audience's emotional associations. An examination of these ads also raises the topic of advertising self-regulatory bodies and their effectiveness. It also raises the concept of greenwashing as a rhetorical strategy among industry players trying to make their activities seem environmentally benign, as well as culture jamming as an oppositional strategy. However, lifestyle advertising has emerged as a more recent strategy through which oil companies have tried to sidestep the environmental question. In so doing, they dragged Tim Hortons into the fray, and through examining that iconic Canadian brand we consider the role of mythology—packages of ideas that function as a metalanguage, at a level above regular (verbal, visual) language.

The Bitumen/Oil/Tar Sands

Alberta's bitumen sands, also referred to as oil sands or tar sands, are the third largest proven resource of oil in the world and currently produce 2.4 million barrels of oil per day (BPD), which is expected to grow to 4 million BPD by 2024 (CAPP, 2017). Bitumen is what is known as a "heavy crude oil" because of its thick, viscous nature, which makes it a resource that requires energy-intensive processes to extract, refine, and upgrade into

synthetic crude oil. Industrial-scale bitumen recovery and processing has taken place in Alberta since the 1960s. There are two main ways to extract bitumen. First is open-pit mining, which is like coal mining, where bitumen is removed from the surface by using massive machinery. Often, stakeholders looking to frame bitumen extract as "tar sands" operations draw on aerial images of vast, Mordor-like bitumen mines that have been scarred by and continue to be worked up by colossal, heavy equipment. The other general approach is in situ, or "in place," operations that use technologies such as steam assisted gravity drainage (SAGD) to melt and recover bitumen that cannot be reached by mining. Approximately 1.4 million BPD come from SAGD, and the majority of Alberta's oil sands are recoverable by in situ methods.

Oil sands companies operated in Alberta for decades with little attention from environmentalists. However, since 2007 Alberta's bitumen sands have been the focus of an ongoing national and international debate as to their fate. The political struggle over the future of the bitumen sands has seen industry, government, Indigenous, and environmental stakeholders engage in traditional tactics such as lobbying, petitions, protest, celebrity visits, as well as advertising campaigns (McCurdy, 2017a, 2017b). Many large oil sands companies, such as Shell, Imperial Oil, and Suncor, produced advertisements prior to 2007. However, this chapter focuses exclusively on advertising produced after the oil sands were made politically contentious because it is instructive to examine how industry responded to the controversy and how controversies arose from their advertisements.

The Romantic and Extractive Gazes of Oil Sands Advertising

Oil sands industry advertisements post-2007 can be divided into two clear periods. The first period runs from 2010 to 2013 and is characterized by industry attempts to establish their environmental bona fides through a "romantic gaze" of the environment. Takach (2013) defines the romantic gaze as a perspective that "[sanctifies] nature as sublime" (p. 12). This idealized gaze views nature as pure, wild, wholesome, unspoiled, and something to be restored and protected (Hansen, 2002, p. 505). Paradoxically, and as will be discussed below, this view is one used by energy companies. The romantic gaze is often contrasted against the extractive gaze, which views "nature as a resource to be exploited" by humans (Takach, 2013, p. 12). While the romantic and extractive gazes are often presented as a dichotomy, Takach, extending the work of past scholarship such as Hodgins and Thompson (2011), persuasively argues that the romantic and extractive gazes are, in fact, both underwritten by a logic of extractivism and consumption. The tensions and paradoxes surrounding this relationship become apparent through the careful critical analysis of environmental imagery and messaging (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016; Hansen & Machin, 2013; Takach, 2013). To this end, we now turn our attention toward a specific oil sands advertising campaign.

In 2010, amidst growing environmental protest, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) began its "Oil Sands Today" campaign across television, online, print-media, and billboards. While the ads varied slightly by medium, they all featured a single employee from a CAPP member company extolling the virtues of oil

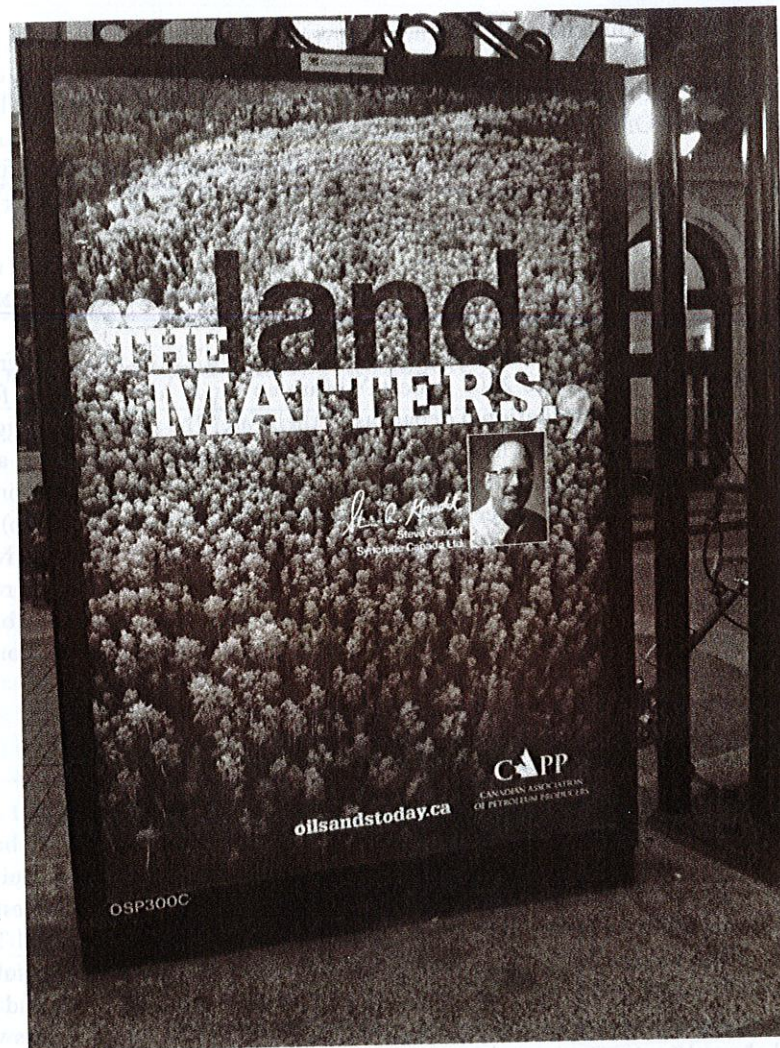


Photo 15.1 CAPP, "The land matters" ad

sands extraction. Through video testaments made on camera or selective quotations in still ads, the oil sands employee makes a personal commitment to protect and respect the environment. For example, a bus shelter advertisement featuring Steve Gaudet of Syncrude Canada uses the words "The land matters" in large font, which occupies the upper third of the ad (see Photo 15.1). It is worth noting that in other static versions of Gaudet's ad a longer quote is attributed to him. For example, the newspaper version of Gaudet's ad keeps the bold statement "The land matters" but underneath it adds the following, also from Gaudet: "A forest should look like a forest. Thirty years ago, reclamation meant planting trees. Today, we create a much more diverse and natural landscape, including wetlands and a variety of trees, shrubs, and plants. We want to leave restored

land that makes everyone proud" (CAPP, 2010b). The other ad features are also used in the newspaper version.

Returning to the billboard ad (Photo 15.1), under the quote and toward the right of the frame is a head and shoulders portrait of Gaudet. A smiling, moustache-sporting Gaudet is shown wearing a collared dress shirt—part of the standard uniform of any office worker—with the collar open and the top button undone, signifying ease and approachability. Immediately to the left of this photograph is Gaudet's signature. Directly underneath it Gaudet is identified, in plain white text, by name and place of employment. The photograph, signature, name, and place of employment work together to personalize and humanize the oil sands industry by giving a real name and face to the multibillion dollar energy industry.

The use of Gaudet's signature in the advertisement is worth briefly discussing. Without the signature, the quote, photograph, name, and title could have provided adequate information to personalize the advertisement and connect Gaudet as an employee with the energy industry. However, signatures have a particular symbolic currency within our culture, which is drawn upon by the "Oil Sands Today" advertisement series in at least two ways. First, signatures are unique to and extensions of an individual. Signatures are often used as proof of an individual's identity. Therefore, Gaudet's signature is meant to strengthen the viewer's personal connection with him and, in so doing, lead viewers to accept him and his message as representative of energy industry values. Second, within our culture signatures are used as a form of personal guarantee or attestation to a statement or document. Consequently, Gaudet's statement that "The land matters" is not simply a pithy piece of advertising copy but a public commitment, uttered by Gaudet himself and attested to by his personal signature. It is Gaudet's level of individual commitment, and indeed that of other employees who are featured in the series, which personalizes and humanizes the oil sands industry's environmental commitment.

Gaudet's quote, portrait, and signature are tied together by the advertisement's background picture, which occupies the entire frame: a visually striking aerial photograph of Alberta's boreal forest. This picture epitomizes the *romantic* view of nature. Through the use of a restricted pallet primarily consisting of vivid and deep shades of green, the boreal forest is presented as vast, healthy, and wild. Coniferous tress shoot up toward the sky from the forest floor like blades of grass right to all four edges of the frame. Even Steve Gaudet's portrait is somewhat dwarfed by the subliminal immensity of the pristine and undisturbed nature that surrounds it. "The land," as Steve Gaudet states, "matters."

The fact that the environment is important is conveyed in both words and image. The romantic gaze of the boreal forest establishes it as an object of natural beauty deserving of protection. However, this romantic gaze offered by CAPP has a twist. The top-right corner of both the bus and newsprint advertisements contain geolocation coordinates identifying the exact location where the photograph was taken. The coordinates (56.999031, –111.605086) lead to a forested area in Wood Buffalo, Alberta, located approximately 5 kilometres from Syncrude's mining operation. If you enter the coordinates into Google Earth, you see both the spot where the photo was taken and the oil sands operations that surround it, which are anything but pristine (see Photo 15.2). Yet this contrast is intentional. Both the video and newspaper version of Gaudet's ad make it clear that the forest pictured is one that has been reclaimed from a mining operation. Thus, while GPS

Photo 15.2 Google Earth view of Syncrude's mining operation

coordinates may indeed offer an extractive and realistic view of the expansive oil sands operations in northern Alberta, they are simultaneously used to offer proof that such sites may be successfully remediated.

Given CAPP's romantic gaze toward its remediated site in the Gaudet advertisement, a simple reading of the ad suggests that CAPP shares the dominant sublime and romantic view of nature and is committed to reducing environmental impact and remediating disturbed land to its "natural" state. However, a more critical, and we believe more accurate, reading offers further support to Takach's (2013) argument that the romantic and extractive views are both underwritten by an extractivist logic. In the case of CAPP's Gaudet advertisement, the romantic view is not used to protect nature but to encourage its development. It is precisely because oil sands sites can be remediated to a state that satisfies our socially constructed sublime view of nature that extraction can be justified. Seen from this perspective, the romantic view of Syncrude's remediated forest offered in the Gaudet ad is firmly and inescapably embedded in a logic of extraction.

While this section offered our own critical reading of an oil sands advertisement, the next section traces a controversy that made news across Canada revolving around another CAPP "Oil Sands Today" commercial. In what follows we discuss the controversy, the role of advertising regulators, and also make reference to related cases of interest.

Yogurt, Greenwashing, and Industry Self-Regulation

What does it mean to compare two things? This may seem a simple enough question, but it became the core issue of a fight between the Sierra Club of Canada, an environmental nongovernmental organization (eNGO), and oil industry lobby group CAPP. The skirmish was over a 2010 video advertisement released by CAPP in which an executive of the extraction company Suncor is pictured on an outdoor worksite explaining the company's process of treating oil sands tailings, a by-product left over from bitumen extraction. At one point the executive compares the liquid tailings to yogurt (CAPP, 2010a). The industry group argued it was merely trying to explain the consistency of the by-product, but the environmentalists argued that the comparison was an attempt to "greenwash the tar sands" (Sierra Club of Canada, 2010). The case raises questions about the actual intent of claims making in advertising, as well as the role and effectiveness of self-regulation in the ad industry.

The advertisement in question was produced by CAPP as part of its "Oil Sands Today" campaign. The ad in question features Shelley Powell, vice-president of extraction at oil sands behemoth Suncor. In the video Powell, who is seemingly at a Suncor worksite, is shown out of doors sporting safety glasses, a hard hat, and an orange safety vest—certainly not the everyday attire of a vice-president. All of this lends a sense of industry to the ad and a direct association with the extraction process. The video discusses Suncor's work in remediating tailings ponds. Oil sands tailings are a liquid mixture of water, sand, leftover bitumen, and the chemical solvents used to separate the oil from the sands. Tailings are a problem because there is no simple way to dispose of them, so they are accumulating in enormous, toxic lakes. In the advertisement, Powell says that tailings are "essentially like yogurt," but that Suncor is developing a new technology that can turn them into a dry, solid substance. The end of the ad shows Powell picking up a large piece of something like clay and saying they can turn tailings "into this type of solid, dry material" (CAPP, 2010a).

The Sierra Club of Canada complained about this ad to Advertising Standards Canada (commonly known as Ad Standards), the body that rules on public complaints related to advertising in Canadian media. Ad Standards is a self-governing body made up of professionals in the advertising industry. The Sierra Club argued that CAPP's comparison of tailings to yogurt "misleads the public by downplaying the toxicity of tailings ponds that contain numerous chemicals like arsenic, mercury and poly aromatic hydrocarbons produced by the tar sands operations" (Sierra Club of Canada, 2010). Ad Standards ruled in CAPP's favour on November 29, 2010, finding that CAPP's ad was not, in fact, misleading. In a letter released by the Sierra Club, Ad Standards vice-president Janet Feasby explains that "Ms. Powell's reference to yogurt referred only to the apparent physical consistency of the tailings and did not humanize or soft pedal the more controversial aspects surrounding tailings" (as cited by Sierra Club of Canada, 2010). Despite the Ad Standards ruling, CAPP opted to remove the reference from the English version of the ad for subsequent airings; then Vice-President of Communications Janet Annesley stated in a CBC interview that "We have modified the ad to omit the reference to yogurt. We want no distraction to the important environmental performance story being told" (*CBC News*, 2010). Interestingly, the French version, containing a similar reference to yogurt, continued to run unchanged.

At least, it did for a while. The ads eventually stopped running on television, but until 2015 they remained available on YouTube and on CAPP's website. However, in 2015 CAPP

removed both the English and French versions of the ads from the Internet entirely, along with many, but not all, of the other video ads in the "Oil Sands Today" campaign. A CAPP spokesperson explained this as a design decision: "Moving forward we will likely only have the ads on our website that are current, and will archive everything else" (C. Houston, personal communication, February 13, 2015). While this certainly seems reasonable from a business perspective, it raises questions about ephemerality and public discourse. These advertisements circulate in the public sphere and have impacts on those exposed to them; the fact that the communicators are able to make them disappear when they deem the ads are no longer suitable for circulation gives these communicators a great deal of control over the public's ability to discuss and examine their messages. This becomes particularly salient in controversial cases such as CAPP's "Oil Sands Today" campaign, when the advertising content comes under scrutiny. This is part of the reason the authors of this chapter launched the Mediatoil research project, the centrepiece of which is a database of communications produced by key stakeholders on all sides of the oil sands debate. One of the project's goals was to ensure that ads such as the one featuring Shelley Powell, and the others discussed in this chapter, remain in the public domain and available for scrutiny. These ads, along with other advertising and campaign material, can be found at the project's website, mediatoil.ca.

The French version of the Powell ad uses the phrase "consistants comme du yogourt." Directly translated, that would be "consistent like yogurt," but English does not use the adjective "consistent" that way, so "with a consistency like yogurt" would be more accurate. After having won the Ad Standards ruling, Annesley explained her company's position, and the lack of alteration to the French version, in an interview with the *Globe and Mail*: "The French translator clearly understood the consistency simile, Advertising Standards Canada clearly understands the consistency simile. If some members of the activist community believe we are suggesting tailings are good to eat, that is not our intent" (Vanderklippe, 2010). In drawing the comparison, CAPP was not merely providing a comprehension aid. Instead, it could be argued that it was attempting to depoliticize the oil sands project. A core semiotic principle is that by comparing two items, a communicator is able to transmit the meanings and associations popularly attached to one onto the other (Barthes, 1964/1977; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Thus, by comparing tailings to yogurt, CAPP is bringing some of the positive associations attached to yogurt—such as wholesomeness, nature, nourishment, simplicity—onto tailings. As CAPP's vice-president of communications suggested above, the idea that anyone is saying tailings are good to eat is ridiculous; however, saying that they are "like" something that is good to eat is still a powerful claim.

Indeed, it seems to be powerful enough that it has been repeated numerous times in other industry communications. Another CAPP ad—remarkably similar in many ways to the yogurt ad, but featuring Shell executive Eddie Lui—claims that "heavy oil is like peanut butter" (CAPP, 2012). Elsewhere, messages produced by other oil sands players, such as Cenovus (an extraction company), Enbridge (a home energy and pipeline company), the Canadian Energy Pipelines Association (CEPA), and Suncor, have visually compared oil sands bitumen and by-products to coffee (Cenovus, 2014; CEPA, 2014), cupcakes (Enbridge, 2014a), and other foods (Suncor, 2013a, 2014a). And, as will be discussed below, Enbridge also tried to associate its products and services with what is arguably Canada's most iconic food brand: Tim Hortons.

Advertising self-regulatory bodies outside Canada have ruled on similar eNGO-versus-industry skirmishes, but the bodies have not always taken the industry's side. In 2008, Britain's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ruled in favour of a complaint by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) against Shell, an Anglo-Dutch oil company with operations in Canada's oil sands (Sweney, 2008). An ad released by Shell earlier that year described the company's oil sands operations as "sustainable":

> The challenge of the 21st century is to meet the growing need for energy in ways that are not only profitable but sustainable. As our 2007 results show, we are investing heavily in new technology and assets to safeguard the interests of our shareholders and future generations. In Canada, we're harnessing our global network of technical and financial expertise to unlock the potential of the vast Canadian oil sands deposit. In the USA we're helping to build what will be the nation's largest refinery. And we're exploring a new generation of biofuels made from non-food sources. Difficult, yes. Impossible, no. (Shell, 2008)

The WWF described this claim as "greenwashing," and the ASA agreed.[2]

Greenwashing is a key concept within this phenomenon. Companies can, and do, make sincere attempts to be environmentally benign in their operations and are justified in communicating these efforts; however, many merely claim to do so, or otherwise attempt to associate themselves and their products with the cause of environmentalism, to improve their public image. The essential element in greenwashing is deception (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013; Greer & Bruno, 1997; Laufer, 2003)—communicators are engaging in greenwashing when they make a false claim or try to associate themselves or their products with the environment or environmentalism to draw attention away from a negative aspect of their operations.

In 2009, Greenpeace successfully complained to the UK's ASA about an advertisement that downplayed the pollution that would be produced by a new runway at Heathrow Airport. Though it won the Heathrow ruling, Greenpeace said of the case "While this is immensely satisfying, I do feel that it's akin to a horse/stable door timing problem. More people will have seen the advert than will become aware of the ASA's ruling" (Greenpeace UK, 2009). Lord Borrie of the ASA defended his organization, saying that, rather than being too slow, as per Greenpeace's accusation, it actually provides a faster address than statutory regulation: "The self-regulatory model provides a faster and more cost-effective means of control than continual resort to the Courts" (Borrie, 2005, p. 64).

The fact remains, however, that these doors *are* being closed after the horses leave the stable. Advertising time on television is expensive because it reaches huge audiences instantly—a spot during prime time in an average week in Canada can reach up to 3.9 million viewers (Numeris, 2016). Removing an ad from circulation after even one airing means millions will have already received the message as originally intended. Even with the yogurt ad in Canada, though CAPP won the decision with Ad Standards, it altered and later pulled the advertisement anyway, apparently deciding it had served its purpose.

It is interesting to note that the mission statement of Ad Standards Canada says it is "committed to fostering community confidence in advertising and to ensuring the integrity and viability of advertising in Canada" (Ad Standards, 2016). Its primary object of

concern, then, is "advertising." This may follow logically from the fact that it is populated and paid for by the advertising industry, but it is still significant considering the role it is allowed/expected to fill. In the United Kingdom, Lord Borrie defends such self-regulatory agencies as a faster, cheaper alternative to government regulation, as if they perform the same function, even though they cannot—government regulations would theoretically be made on behalf of the public, not the advertisers (Borrie, 2005). This situation may result in no net benefit to either side in the oil sands debate, since both produce advertisements and both have been the subject of complaints to such agencies. However, it does raise the question: Who is defending the interests of the public? Moreover, it also problematizes the role of advertising within public debate.

If we view our media environment as an arena for public debate and understanding, advertising may be seen as part of the problem of contemporary politics. We are living in an age of constant campaigning and are assaulted daily by advertisements online; on our phones, tablets, and computers; on the radio; on television; and out in public. Advertising has become a form of public discourse by proxy. Advertising campaigns and the mediated arena in which they exist have become sites of political struggle between those who support and those who oppose oil sands development. To be sure, the struggle over how the oil sands are presented in the media is an uneven one. Industry clearly possesses far greater financial and symbolic resources at their disposal, as evidenced by their massive and slickly produced advertising campaigns. However, in an effort to resist and challenge the symbolic dominance of corporate oil sands, advertising groups have developed and deployed a number of tactics, including *culture jamming*, a practice that is worth briefly unpacking.

The idea of culture jamming encompasses a collection of activist tactics which are used to expose and counter consumer and corporate culture (Carducci, 2006; DeLaure, Fink, & Dery, 2017). In practice, culture jamming involves augmenting, often through parody, corporate communications from logos to print or video advertisements as a means to subvert the original message or brand. The act of culture jamming may be as simple as modifying an ad on a billboard or may involve a more detailed strategy to mimic an entire communications campaign or even organization (Lasn, 1999). Culture jamming's roots can be traced back to the Situationsists of the 1960s, but its uptick in popularity came with the rise of the global justice movement of the 1990s (Boyd & Mitchell, 2013). Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* also helped popularize and encourage the practice of culture jamming through its biting "spoof ads." The magazine took popular culture advertisements from tobacco, alcohol, fashion, and consumer culture more generally and augmented them to make explicit the insecurities, excesses, and injustices consumer culture preys upon (*Adbusters*, 2017). For example, Calvin Klein's original advertising campaign for its cologne Obsession featured a naked, emaciated, and sexually available Kate Moss sprawled on a couch and staring directly at the viewer. The advertisement raises multiple issues around healthy body image and the objectification of women. *Adbusters* published a series of spoof Obsession ads that copied the aesthetic of Klein's Obsession ads but turned the obsession from a focus on supermodel Kate Moss to a focus on ourselves and the consequences of consumer culture. For example, one spoof ad shows the bony and naked torso of a female figure bent over and throwing up in a toilet. The obsession implied in the image revolves around the consequences of consumer culture's infatuation with unrealistic and unattainable body images.

Culture jamming's allure is that while it may take millions of dollars to dream up and implement an advertising campaign, the costs to "jam" such a campaign are far less and may even be done using the simple tools available to us online, on our phones, or on our computers. Moreover, with the rise of networked communications, culture-jammed material—whether it is a digital poster or a digital photo of a culture jam done in the real world—can be shared around the world instantly with little cost but the potential for big impact. Consequently, the practice of culture jamming has become particularly attractive to under-resourced groups who may not have the same budget as a large government or corporation.

Environmental activists in particular have used the practice to culture jam the communications of oil companies in an effort to bring public attention to perceived unethical or harmful practices. One example of culture jamming related directly to the oil sands may be seen in the reworking and jamming of a recent Suncor advertisement. In 2013 Suncor, one of the oil sands largest operators, created the "See What Yes Can Do" advertising campaign to relay the challenge it faces generating energy demanded by the modern world but doing so in a way that is efficient, collaborative, reflexive, and respectful of nature (Suncor, 2013b, 2014b). In a direct response to the promotional campaign, Canadian eNGO Sum of Us reworked Suncor's two-minute video "See What Yes Can Do" to produce their own culture-jammed version called "See What Yes Is Doing" (Sum of Us, 2014). The video employs a narrator with a similar voice to Suncor's narrator, but the script is augmented and the visuals are spliced in an effort to frame and expose the original Suncor campaign as greenwashing. The desired effect is to show that Suncor is a company driven only by profit at the expense of community and the environment. More recently Sum of Us was involved in a mediated tussle with energy company Enbridge when it petitioned Canadian coffee chain Tim Hortons to withdraw an Enbridge ad from its stores. The controversial ad, the Sum of Us campaign, and the public's response are the focus of the chapter's next section.

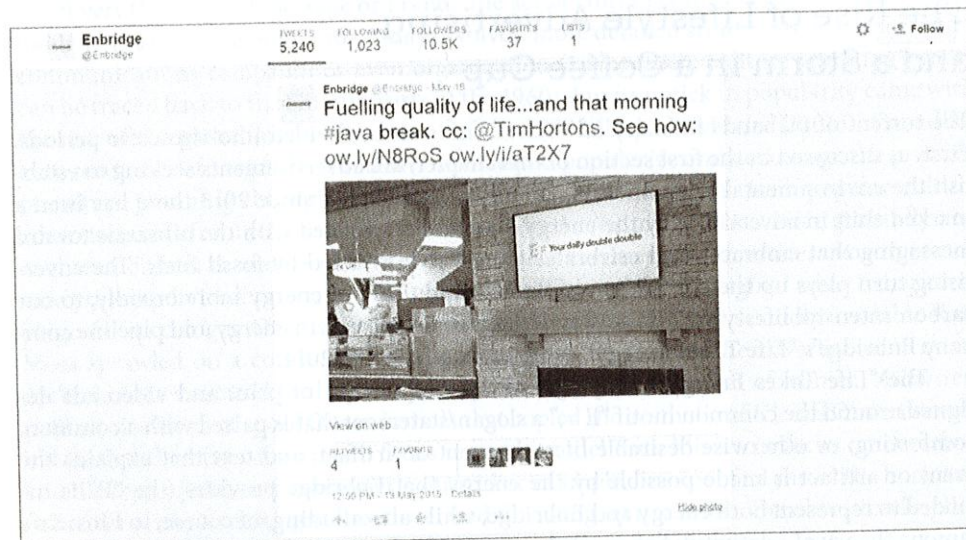
The Rise of Lifestyle Advertising and a Storm in a Coffee Cup

The torrent of oil sands industry advertisements can be divided into two clear periods. First, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, are advertisements seeking to establish the environmental bona fides of the industry. However, since 2013 there has been a marked shift in advertising by the energy companies affiliated with the oil sands toward messaging that embraces and celebrates the lifestyle enabled by fossil fuels. The advertising turn plays up the connection of the oil sands, and of energy more broadly, to our carbon-intensive lifestyles. This shift is perhaps best captured in energy and pipeline company Enbridge's "Life Takes Energy" campaign launched in 2014.

The "Life Takes Energy" campaign consists of a series of print and video ads designed around the common motif "E =," a slogan/statement that is paired with a common, comforting, or otherwise desirable lifestyle event or artifact, and text that explains the event or artifact is made possible by the energy that Enbridge provides (the "E" is intended to represent both energy and Enbridge, while also alluding, of course, to Einstein's famous theory of relativity). For example, one print ad featured the statement "E = guilty pleasures," showing a kitchen scene with a number of chocolate cupcakes arrayed on a

counter in the process of being frosted (Enbridge, 2014a). The accompanying text states that Enbridge's energy powered the oven that baked them. Another ad says "E = the great indoors," showing another domestic scene of an adult drawing pictures on construction paper with two young girls; the reader is told that Enbridge is responsible for this moment because its energy heated this family's house (Enbridge, 2014b). However, the campaign became controversial when Enbridge tied one of its advertisements, both in content and placement, with Canada's beloved Tim Hortons coffee chain; Tim Hortons became the site of a proxy war between oil sands supporters and critics.

In mid-May 2015, an ad with the slogan "E = your daily double double" (Enbridge, 2015) was set to appear on large-screen televisions at approximately 1,500 Tim Hortons coffee shops across Ontario and British Columbia on the company's TimsTV, which features news, weather reports, Tim Hortons promotional content, and paid advertisements such as Enbridge's (Ewart, 2015). For those unfamiliar with the coffee chain, a "double double" is Tim Hortons–speak for a coffee with two creams and two sugars. Enbridge used both social media and its company blog to promote the advertisement, using the headline "Fuelling quality of life . . . and that morning java break" (see Photo 15.3). A May 18, 2015, blog post—which Enbridge has since deleted—featured a photograph of a TimsTV screen with the "E = your daily double double" ad; the post's opening sentence read "This is more than a cuppa joe. This is, truly, a cup of Canada" (Enbridge, 2015). Following the format of past E = ads, the copy read "We didn't roast the coffee beans. We didn't stir the soup. We didn't parcel up a baker's dozen. But we did help produce that perfect Tim's percolation. When your energy meets ours, java joy happens" (Ewart, 2015). The close association between Canadian national identity and Tim Hortons is well known to Canadians and has even been studied by scholars (see Chapter 6 in this collection, as well as Buist, 2003; Cormack, 2008; Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011; Penfold, 2002). As will be



Enbridge Inc.

discussed in greater detail in the next section, the ad seeks to tie the myth of Tim Hortons and its positive associations with Canadian nationalism to the Enbridge brand.

Soon after launching the double double ad, activist group Sum of Us launched a publicity campaign and online petition calling on Tim Hortons to drop the Enbridge advertisement. Sum of Us argued that Enbridge was using the Tim Hortons brand as a cover to mask the grim environmental realities of bitumen production. Its petition made the following plea:

> Enbridge's ad campaign uses attractive actors, cute kids and high production values to hide the real truth—its tar sands project will put **ecosystems, salmon and wildlife in danger, create virtually no local jobs, and accelerate climate change.** And when oil spills happen, local communities won't simply be able to board a plane elsewhere.
>
> Tim Hortons might not be a Canadian company anymore—it was just bought by Burger King—but the company relies on its customers in Canada who are the main buyers of its products. And that's how we can stop them.
>
> A public outcry will let Timmies know that it can't get away with shilling tar sands without us coming together to stop it.
>
> **Sign the petition now to Tim Hortons—drop your tar sands ad campaign now.** (Sum of Us, 2015, emphasis in original).

The petition spread quickly over social media channels, gaining over 30,000 online signatures. The storm in a coffee cup over the Enbridge advertisement put the owners of Tim Hortons Inc. in an awkward position. While Tim Hortons is a Canadian brand, in late 2014 shareholders approved the takeover of Tim Hortons by Burger King; the two restaurants merged to form Restaurant Brands International, whose shares are owned by Brazilian investment firm 3G Capital (Bateman, 2015). Thus, from the outside a very Canadian controversy around Tim Hortons was emerging where it was caught in the middle of a proxy war over another controversial Canadian issue: the bitumen sands. Within 24 hours of the Sum of Us petition, Tim Hortons used its Twitter account to tell the petitioning public that it was dropping the Enbridge ads from the TimsTV rotation, stating "We value your feedback and the Enbridge advertisements are no longer airing on TimsTV" (Brownell, 2015). Sum of Us was quick to share the news online and even updated its online petition to claim victory, noting, "they listened and just pulled the ads!" (Sum of Us, 2015).

However, while anti–tar sands activists rejoiced, oil sands supporters took to the Internet to launch a counterattack. News articles have traced the boycott's roots to conservative strategist Stephen Taylor (Brownell, 2015). Emboldened by newspaper editorials that criticized Tim Hortons' decision, oil sands supporters took to various social media channels to condemn the company's decision and to call for a boycott of Tim Hortons, resulting in the Twitter hashtag #BoycottTims. Social media analysis of the #BoycottTims hashtag by Boston University professor Dr. Jacob Groshek revealed that the most influential Twitter accounts were held by Stephen Taylor, the boycott's initiator; Ezra Levant, a long-time political commentator and right-wing provocateur; Rebel Media, a media organization cofounded by Levant; and two pro-industry social media accounts, @OilSandAction and @CanadaAction (Prystupa, 2015). Together, these and other Twitter accounts ensured that the vociferous response of the #BoycottTims campaign received

a lot of attention, and even gained the public support of a number of provincial and national politicians (McLeod, 2015). One of those politicians was Michelle Rempel, a federal member of Parliament from Calgary and Minister of Western Economic Diversification. In an interview at the time, she suggested that part of the problem was a perception of betrayal by the beloved coffee chain: "It's just surprising . . . Tims is ubiquitous across Canada and certainly in Alberta, and it serves people who work in the energy industry" (McCarthy, 2015). Interestingly, the initial activist campaign expressed a similar sense of attachment and betrayal. The Sum of Us petition refers to the company as "Timmies" throughout, a popular nickname that generally expresses familiarity and affection (Sum of Us, 2015). Indeed, both "sides" of the bitumen debate used Tim Hortons as a proxy for the ongoing struggle over the future of the oil sands.

Enbridge sought a synergistic relationship with Tim Hortons as a means to connect coffee consumption with the reality of carbon-intensive lifestyles enjoyed by Canadians. However, Enbridge did not seek to problematize this lifestyle but instead reinforced it by projecting the close and positive associations that the Tim Hortons brand has with Canadian identity onto itself and its work. Despite the reality of our daily energy use, activists saw the advertising campaign as a form of greenwashing masking the environmental consequences of oil sands production. Meanwhile "BoycottTims" supporters framed the withdrawal of the Enbridge ad as a slight to Canadians who work in the energy industry. On a superficial level, the story of the bitumen brouhaha is about the decision of an energy company to target the customers of a coffee company through targeted in-store advertisements and the decision of the coffee company to cancel the advertising agreement. However, the role of myth and identity are paramount to the decision to launch, challenge, and cancel the advertisement. Indeed, it was the mythic power of the Tim Hortons brand that attracted all sides of this conflict. The use of myth is a prominent and well-studied component of advertising. It is also something frequently used in oil sands advertising. The final section of our chapter explores the use of myth in an advertising battle over bitumen.

Oil Sands Advertising and the Role of Myth

Tim Hortons is a myth. The "wholesomeness" of food is a myth. They are not myths in the common, dictionary definition sense of heroic or legendary stories—a term with connotations of untruth or exaggeration. Rather, they are myths as defined by the French philosopher Roland Barthes (1957/2012), who in his aptly named book *Mythologies* used the term to refer to "a type of speech," "a mode of signification," and a metalanguage that speaks about what we say (p. 217). Barthes was interested in language and how it comes to carry the meanings it does, which is why he discusses the idea in linguistic terms. "Tim Hortons" and "yogurt" are words; the packages of ideas that we associate with them—such as Canadianness and community in the case of Tim Hortons, wholesomeness and nature in the case of yogurt—are what make them into myths, so that when advertisers "speak" the words (language) "Tim Hortons," they are also speaking the associated Canadianness and community (a level above language—metalanguage). It should be noted here that although Barthes frames his idea in terms of language, he also stresses that "speech" does not need to take the form of words—images and gestures are equally capable of carrying these mythological associations. Myths are valuable for advertising because they offer a

sort of shorthand. To explain all that is meaningful about yogurt would take more than the 30 seconds allotted to CAPP's advertisement (it took us several hundred words above to just begin to describe it).

However, it is not only a matter of myths being more convenient for advertisers. The practice of advertising has progressed beyond simply extolling the virtues of a product and is now in the business of selling these packages of ideas via the product. Given the level of ad-supported media saturation in Canada, expanding consumerism, and the nature of economic competition, the marketplace has reached a point where describing a product is no longer sufficient. In the words of another influential philosopher and cultural theorist, Raymond Williams (1980), products must be "validated, if only in fantasy . . . by association with social and personal meanings" (p. 194).

The fact that these meanings are "social" and "personal" foregrounds the fact that the selection of specific myths is key. Barthes describes the associations or packages of ideas that constitute myths as "history" (1957/2012, p. 218)—they are made up of the audience's past experience with the mythical concept. Thus, a myth's use in advertising is only effective when the myth resonates with the audience, which is a question of culture. Many modern scholars of advertising practice currently grapple with this question (e.g., Holt, 2004; Manlow, 2011; Randazzo, 1995; Tomlinson, 1990)—practitioners want to know how to find the right myth to reach the desired audience. "Mythologies are the conduit by which advertising and marketing reaches its target audience. The basic message that any firm wants to get across will be infused with meaning situated in a cultural context" (Manlow, 2011). Thus, invoking Tim Hortons, an iconic Canadian brand with little to no recognition elsewhere, is only powerful in Canada, where it is very powerful indeed.

Employing myths in advertising thus increases impact, but they offer another important advantage: Myths conjure up these images without saying them. The core of the Sierra Club's complaint about the yogurt ad was that CAPP could never get away with explicitly stating that tailings are healthy, so they employed yogurt as a mythical symbol to raise the idea implicitly. This is where the self-regulatory nature of Ad Standards becomes problematic. Ad Standards' response to Sierra Club's complaint dealt only with the explicit claims in the advertisement. In the context of the whole ad, CAPP's comparison to yogurt was indeed related to the consistency of the tailings. However, in the process of doing so, the ad also created an implicit connection to the positive associations attached to yogurt. Returning to Williams's (1980) argument that the use of mythology in advertising is simply now the nature of the business, a self-regulatory body consisting only of fellow advertising professionals will never condemn an ad for doing what ads are now expected to do. Ad Standards' mission is to foster confidence in advertising, and since deploying favourable myths to sell a product is within the standards expected of advertising in Canada, doing so could never appear (again, to fellow advertising professionals) to harm popular confidence in the practice. Concern with the practice can only come from outside the field.

Tim Hortons and yogurt are not the only myths that have been deployed in the struggle to define meaning in the oil sands debate. The jobs and the economy are mythical concepts that proponents of oil sands development work hard to associate with their cause. For example, campaigns by CAPP (CanadasOilSands.ca) and the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association (LetsKeepCanadaMoving.ca) feature testimonial-style

advertisements in which people employed in the oil sands (and in building pipelines to transport crude oil out of Alberta for export) explain why their jobs are important to themselves, their community, and the economy. The implication of these and other economy-related ads is that support for the oil sands is support for jobs and a strong economy (implying the inverse: opposition means rejecting a strong economy and jobs). Opponents of expanded oil sands development rely at least as heavily on the mythological image of unspoiled nature—it is what is at risk if the oil sands are developed. However, because they are in the negative position in the debate—they are opposing an act rather than proposing one—and because they are introducing the myth in terms of a risk, they often introduce the myth by its absence. Advertisements by Environmental Defence, Indigenous Environmental Network, West Coast Environmental Law, and various other opponent groups feature images of spoiled landscapes, or images of animals or landscapes with accompanying text that explains they are threatened. What these two myth-deployment strategies have in common is the idea of risk: both are invoked to show what already-beloved "social and personal meanings" (in Williams's terms) are at risk in the oil sands debate.

Canada and Canadianness, already discussed as being associated with Tim Hortons, are myths themselves and have been pushed heavily by both proponents and opponents of expanding oil sands development. This has been most visible in the work of proponents such as Canada Action and CAPP. Canada Action, a civil-society advocacy group (in that it has no direct ties to either industry or government and thus purports to be citizens representing citizens) ran a campaign titled "Stand Up for Canada's Oil Sands," the text of which focused on the impact of oil sands development on Canada's economy and social programs; the images it deployed frequently featured maple leaves and a red-and-white colour scheme, two very clear symbols of Canadianism. One of CAPP's larger campaigns was titled "Canada's Energy Citizens," whose name alone attempts to tie Canadian citizenship directly to support for the energy industry. Its TV ads feature the slogan "Think energy developed the Canadian way is good for Canada? Then raise your hand," spoken over images of people raising their hands, with maple leaves drawn around their hands' contours; text superimposed on these images says "Not actors. Real Canadians." The ads in this campaign directly refer to oil sands development as the "Canadian way" of energy production (the campaign has an official website, EnergyCitizens.ca, but the videos are available on its Facebook page, Facebook.com/CanadasEnergyCitizens).

However, opponents have attempted to inject such patriotism into their messaging as well. The civil-society group Council of Canadians released a video arguing against construction of a new oil sands pipeline and invoking various pieces of Canadiana to do so (Council of Canadians, 2014). The video says the groundwork for the pipeline was laid in 1974, a year when "Neil Young [a popular Canadian musician] was rocking Canada." It also uses a drawing of a moose to symbolize the oil sands region, without mentioning why or whether moose are particularly affected.

This example reveals an important aspect of myths: "The fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated" (Barthes, 1957/2012, p. 229). That is to say that a myth's meaning depends entirely on how it is used and to what end. As such, the discursive struggle playing out in oil sands ads is not only about deploying competing myths but about competing to capture the same myths. Both sides want to be patriotic and

Canadian, just as both sides want Tim Hortons on their team. There is nothing inherently Canadian about either supporting or opposing oil sands development, regardless of what their advertisements might say—Canadianness is up for grabs in the discursive struggle. Canadianness is an incredibly powerful myth within the culture, and so the pro- and anti-development camps fight to capture it for themselves.

Review Questions

1. Identify the two "periods" of post-2007 oil sands advertising. Describe the key themes, messages, and symbols each communicated.
2. Define "greenwashing." Explain how it relates to the oil industry ads described in this chapter.
3. Consider the controversial CAPP advertisement that compared tailings to yogurt. Defend the authors' argument that Ad Standards represents the industry's interests more than the public's.
4. Describe the act of culture jamming. Can you think of any contemporary examples? In your opinion, is culture jamming effective? Why or why not?
5. Consider how both sides of the bitumen debate use Tim Hortons as a site of struggle. Discuss what this says about our consumer society and about the concept of "myth."

Activity

Review the archive of advertisements on mediatoil.ca. Select one advertisement from an organization that supports oil sands development and one that opposes oil sands development. Consider how advertisements try to represent Alberta's bituminous sands—its risks and rewards—through images, symbols, and photographs. What claims does each ad make? What is the function of the various images in the ad? What role, if any, does the use of colour play in the ad? Do you find either ad convincing? Why or why not? Finally, if you were tasked with "culture jamming" this advertisement, what would you do and why?

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Notes

1. The authors contributed equally to this chapter; author names are presented alphabetically.
2. It should be noted that the eNGOs have not always been the complainants. In 2015, Britain's ASA ruled that a Greenpeace ad about fracking (harvesting oil and gas by fracturing underground rock formations) was misleading, though it later reversed the decision after it was contested by Greenpeace (Vaughan, 2016).

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