The traditional narrative of petroleum and the companies that build pipelines, oil rigs, and other ecological disasters waiting to happen is one that proclaims technological progress. It highlights a need to drill, not just for resources, but for the continued exploration of both our world and technological abilities. The petroleum narrative is embedded within our culture, we use oil-based products regularly and our consent for the drilling is cultivated and manufactured by corporate sponsored adverts. We are so deep within this society of petroleum consumption and its narrative that fighting back is pre-assumed to be impossible. The poem, Dear Enbridge, by Andrea Macdonald fights back against this narrative. Macdonald’s poem points to the ecological consequences of Enbridge’s actions, calling attention to the violence big oil is committing. Dear Enbridge engages readers and brings their attention to those working with the oil companies while constantly demonstrating that there are ways to push back against the oppressive narrative of oil consumption.

Macdonald presents the notion that oil companies are in league with the government and are thus able to override pro-environmental legislation when she writes “the protection of the Great Bear Rainforest seems/ to mean nothing to you”. These lines address Enbridge and their pipeline, which, if built, would cut through virginal forest that is currently protected. Macdonald makes the reader aware that the government is a supporter of the pipeline with the lines “my government supports your wishes over the people who live here”. The people refer to the First Nations who are the immediate victims of Enbridge’s plans for the area. The petroleum narrative is fraught with governmental support. The oil companies, however, are just as prone to use the government for their own gain as they are to exploit its citizenry.

Further reference to how effective oil corporations are at using governments for their benefit is made in the line “I’m angry that the police are on your side”. The police are there for the protection of citizens. This line hammers home the idea that the citizens who speak out against oil companies are labeled as villains. This is a deeply troubling insight as it affirms the
notion that we are embedded in a society built around and blindly supportive of oil companies, headless of the risks associated with such support.

Macdonald is not simply criticizing the government, she is also elaborating on Buell’s idea of a risk society. Buell proposed the idea that we live within a risk society, that risk is no longer solely applied to developing nations but now applies to developed nations. Macdonald’s lines “I’m angry that you targeted an area because mostly First / Nations live there and you thought people wouldn’t fight back/ or care” highlight Buell’s concept of a risk society. First Nations have often been marginalized, however they remain citizens of a developed country and are therefore part of the new risk society. This ‘targeting’ directly speaks to the statement put forth by Heise that “risk [has] invaded the lives of even those citizens who might earlier have had reason to believe themselves safe from their most dire consequences” (753). The area targeted by Enbridge may not have been affluent, but it was deep within the developed world and far from the developing world, which, in the past, has had all of the risk off-loaded onto it.

Risk to those directly involved in the harvesting of oil can be mitigated and Macdonald recognizes this in her lines “I’m angry that a spill you COULD HAVE AVOIDED is/ permanently poisoning a community in the United States”. These lines demonstrate that not only are many of the disasters akin to the Ocean Ranger, in that they could have been avoided, but that they are affecting places in the world it had left previously untouched. By explicitly naming the United States Macdonald is pointing out how we now exist in a risk society and that being from a developed nation no longer makes one safe.

The ability oil companies have for avoiding blame once a disaster occurs is criticized by Macdonald, as are their methods for “fixing” any wrong they have committed. According to Dear Enbridge the company set out to claim the success of cleaning up 15% of a spill. The lines “I’m angry that you consider 15% clean up a success- / especially when it has NEVER been achieved” calls Enbridge out on its claims as well as expressing the outrage that is felt when 85% of the spill is left to further corrode the environment.

Andrea Macdonald's poem points out the flaws in our oil-obsessed culture by highlighting the damages that corporations are causing by feeding our addiction. In the lines “winter- one of Canada's/ most famous and dwindling seasons” she touches on the slow violence that causes climate change. The trouble with slow-violence is that it is too often unseen and, by stating that winter in Canada is fading away, it becomes visible. This line specifically makes slow-violence visible to Canadians and in doing so personalizes it. By doing this Macdonald is able to assert a feeling of national presence
as well as demonstrate how that presence is affected by the actions of Enbridge.

Each stanza in the first half of the poem starts with “I’m angry” followed by a reason for that anger. Each reason is one that directly points out a negligent or detrimental action taken by Enbridge. The result is that by the time Macdonald switches to “I’m inspired” the reader is ready to fight for change too. In this way Macdonald brings the reader into the fight mentally if not physically. She pulls the reader out of their acceptance of the petroleum narrative and pushes the reader to want to see change. Macdonald takes aspects of slow-violence and makes them real by recalling the damage Enbridge has done and still attempts to do. In these ways Dear Enbridge engages the narrative put in place by big oil and uncovers the story of the other side. The reader is able to understand why change must occur and is able to appreciate, if not actively support, the eco-critics who have already answered the call to action.

Works Cited


The Media of Societal Discourse

Isaac Bordignon

Many of our psychologists, sociologists, economists and other latter-day cabalists will have numbers to tell them the truth or they will have nothing. . . We must remember that Galileo merely said that the language of nature is written in mathematics. He did not say that everything is. And even the truth about nature need not be expressed in mathematics (p. 23)

- Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

The observations made in both of Danzinger’s (Dzinas, 1997; 2009) articles seem to parallel the arguments asserted by media communication theorist Neil Postman, in his work entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985). Personally, it has become increasingly imperative to highlight and acknowledge