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Low Class Oil Trash and the Politico-Aesthetics of the Fossilized Proletariat

Low Class Oil Trash (LCOT) was an Alberta-based clothing and lifestyle company from 2017 to 2020, owned and operated by Caitlin Lindsay, the wife of an oilfield worker. The website is now barren, and prospective customers can no longer purchase T-shirts that say "Wine 'Em, Dine 'Em, Pipeline 'Em" or hoodies that say "Come West Trudeau" and depict a noose hanging from a tree, but the website's homepage is still up. On it, the words *Take Pride* are superimposed over a picture of a heavily tattooed woman with her back turned to the camera as she looks out at a row of pumpjacks spreading into the horizon. She wears a black tank top and black booty shorts with the company name on them, and she holds a dirty white hard hat in her left hand, with a Trump/Pence sticker prominently placed on its front. Scrolling down, the brand's mission statement appears:

> We believe in the power of oil.
> We believe in the oilfield; the adventure, the thrill, the sacrifice and reward.
> We believe in the guys busting their asses in one of the most rugged industries still alive.
> We believe in supporting local Albertan suppliers.
> We believe in the oil trash lifestyle. Big money, big trucks, big dreams.
> Most of all, we believe this: fuck the liberals and keep makin' hole. (*Low Class Oil Trash*)

Introduction

Low Class Oil Trash is best understood as one of many pro-oil and gas groups that have emerged in Canada since 2010 as a reactionary response to Indigenous and environmentalist opposition to fossil capitalism, of which the Alberta tar sands have been a focal point (Kinder 3, 95). In "'Our Oil': Extractive Populism in Canadian Social Media," Shane Gunster,

Robert Neubauer, John Bermingham, and Alicia Massie use the term *extractive populism* to describe these groups, which frame themselves as "grassroots" despite often being funded directly by oil and gas companies, and which seek to discursively position the oil and gas industry as "under attack from elites" and in need of "popular mobilization to defend" (Gunster et al. 198). While the oil and gas industry has long employed public relations techniques to secure popular consent, or "social licence," for its activities, extractive populism describes a new phase of stakeholder mobilization in which industry encourages supporters to move from passive to active support by employing social movement protest tactics (Ian Thompson and Robert G. Boutilier qtd. in Carroll, Introduction 20; Gunster et al. 200-03). Scholars have understood the extractive populist groups, therefore, as attempting to manufacture a "subsidized public" by using industry resources to lower the barriers to entry of political advocacy (Wood 76-78).[1] Such scholars prefer the term *subsidized public* over terms like *front group* or *astroturf* because, whereas the latter terms tend to frame the participants in such groups as "shams, dupes, or hired guns," or even as puppets controlled by "corporate ventriloquism" (Wood 78),[2] the concept of a subsidized public creates analytical room for exploring the political agency not just of the companies who finance these activities, but also of the citizens who take up the companies' calls to action (Gunster et al. 199). Using the term *subsidized public* thus prompts scholars to adopt a two-way model of agency, attending to both the top-down and bottom-up facets of the extractive populist movement.

Although it is a relatively marginal group when compared with those studied by other scholars of extractive populism, Low Class Oil Trash is nonetheless an important case study for both quantitative and qualitative reasons. Despite having a small following compared to other extractive populist groups, at its height Low Class Oil Trash nonetheless had a disproportionately large social media reach, rivalling and even surpassing some of the more well-resourced groups.[3] Low Class Oil Trash also advances our understanding of the bottom-up or "public" side of extractive populism's subsidized public. While most of the literature on extractive populism has tended to focus on the top-down side—that is, the discourse of industry-funded social media groups (see, for example, Gunster et al; Neubauer and Graham; Massie

and Jackson)—a case study of Low Class Oil Trash draws our attention to how the extractive populist discourse is interpellated and adapted by "the public." More plainly put, unlike most other groups studied in the literature, Low Class Oil Trash is not directly funded by industry, and therefore raises novel research questions. For example, are there differences between the discourse of official, top-down extractive populist groups, and unofficial, bottom-up ones like LCOT? Why would segments of the "fossilized proletariat"—a term I adapt from Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective and use here to refer to blue-collar workers directly involved in the extraction of fossil fuels—take up the reactionary politics of extractive populism (450-59)? Should the term *subsidized public* apply to groups who do not receive direct financial subsidization? This study seeks to answer these questions through an analysis of Low Class Oil Trash's social media output.

I utilize *CrowdTangle* data and discourse analysis to employ a quantitative cultural studies method. In the three years that Low Class Oil Trash was active on *Facebook*, they posted a total of 486 times. For this study, all 486 posts were screenshot and then coded in *NVivo* into four types: advertisements, oilfield, memes, and street politics. Advertisements of LCOT products accounted for 33 posts, oilfield photos and videos accounted for 329 posts, original memes—that is, pre-existing memes to which LCOT added an original caption—accounted for 113 posts, and street politics accounted for 11 posts. After this initial round of coding based on type, the next pass of the data involved identifying patterns within each post type. At this stage, I discovered that, while oilfield photos and videos were by far the most common post type, they often had relatively few interactions. Thus, while this post type appeared to be the most analytically important based on recurrence, I determined that, instead of a third and final pass of the entire data set, a closer look at the most popular posts was needed. More specifically, I determined that the focus of the analysis should be on LCOT posts that did particularly well relative to the rest of the extractive populist sample.[4]

To that end, this study narrows its scope to examine what I call LCOT's *breakthrough posts*—that is, any posts that performed better than the average extractive populist post within the sample time period (see note 3).

A post was considered a breakthrough if one or both of the following conditions were met: if it exceeded 1100 interactions, the average number of interactions per post across the entire sample; or, in the case of videos, if it exceeded 33,400 views, the average views per video across the entire sample. After accounting for duplicates, this method found that LCOT produced a total of 13 breakthrough posts: 8 images and 5 videos. These posts anchor the following analysis. I begin with a treatment of "Gassed Up," arguably LCOT's most popular post, and certainly its most creatively ambitious. The remainder of the analysis is divided into sections based on post type, in which a focus on breakthrough posts is supplemented by a broad-strokes summary of patterns found within each type.

Throughout the analysis, I reveal that Low Class Oil Trash's posts are more consistently extreme than those of other extractive populist groups—more consistently vulgar, racist, misogynistic, and violent—which I attribute to the discursive affordances associated with having autonomy from institutional actors, unlike the other extractive populist groups. Given that I read LCOT posts as authentic working-class cultural production, I search for evidence of "hegemonic community economic identity," a type of "psychological identification" with industry in which the interests of the community and the oil and gas industry are seen as "indistinguishable" (Eaton and Enoch 311-15). While I find some evidence of resistance to hegemonic identification, I ultimately uncover a stronger pattern of what I call *reactionary hyper-identification* with hegemonic community identity rooted in a willingness to resort to extreme rhetoric to defend fossil capitalism from its perceived enemies. While I argue that LCOT's content is more extreme than that of the mainstream extractive populist groups, the analysis also reveals several commonalities between them, which leads me to the conclusion that, despite not receiving direct financial support from industry or other elite institutions, LCOT's extreme, reactionary politico-aesthetics should be understood as having received "permission" from extractive populism's subsidized public strategy (Perry and Scrivens 11-14).[5] Thus, the analysis strikes a balance between top-down and bottom-up explanations, positing that Low Class Oil Trash is *both* a subsidized public *and* an authentic expression of the fossilized proletariat's reactionary hyper-identification with fossil capitalist hegemony and its

hierarchical gender, race, and class relations, which together constitute this class fraction's structural rationale for participating in the politics of extractive populism.

Although I read LCOT as providing a window into the politico-aesthetics of the fossilized proletariat, I should add the caveat that this class fraction is not homogenous, and certainly not entirely represented by either the demographics—white and male—or the reactionary politico-aesthetics foregrounded in LCOT's posts. While there are both Indigenous and other racialized people and women in the industry, however, the sociology of the sector finds that the vast majority of workers are, indeed, white men, and that women and racialized people often face systemic barriers to employment and/or discrimination and harassment on the job (Alook et al. 339-42; O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 287-89).[6] Furthermore, many racialized people and women tend to be kept out of the high-paying production jobs, and often take up paid and unpaid social *reproduction* instead (O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 264; Dorow and Mandizadza 1242). Thus, the highly paid workers directly involved in fossil fuel extraction tend to be, though are not exclusively, skilled white men—precisely the demographic that Low Class Oil Trash existed to venerate.

It is hardly unusual that LCOT was founded and operated by a working-class woman who, as such, would theoretically stand to benefit from the disruption of hegemonic gender and class relations. Cara Daggett, recalling that a majority of white American women voted for blatant misogynist Donald Trump in 2016, observes that "some [women] may also find security in the *status quo*, and therefore resent threats to fossil fuel systems and/or hegemonic white masculinities" (33). Low Class Oil Trash, then, reveals how some working-class white women "at the 'coalface' of extractive practices" actively promote "breadwinner masculinities" and form an important component of extractive populism's subsidized public (Pulé and Hultman 91); after all, they are as dependent on their husbands as their husbands are on resource extraction. Rather than challenge such dependencies, though, LCOT is premised on a reactionary defence of the political and economic structures that reproduce them. Thus, rather than view LCOT primarily as a woman-owned business, which

might imply a liberal feminism that venerates the female entrepreneur, we should instead understand LCOT primarily as a form of social reproduction undertaken in support of the male breadwinner, the white male fossilized proletariat in general, and, indeed, the hierarchical race, gender, and class relations inherent within fossil capitalism as a whole.

"Gassed Up" for Petro-Masculinity

"Gassed Up" was LCOT's most-viewed video and tenth most interacted-with post, making it one of LCOT's single biggest breakthroughs. Because of this, and because it was also difficult to decide which post type it belonged to, I treat "Gassed Up" in a separate section. The post also deserves special attention because it is seemingly the only original song and music video to come out of the extractive populist movement, a foray into creative cultural production ripe for petrocultural analysis. Indeed, the form itself advances my argument about the discursive affordances that come with autonomy from the upper echelons of fossil capital; simply put, it is difficult to imagine Canada's Energy Citizens or Canada Action, two of the largest extractive populist groups, producing a video like this. The video was first posted on December 2, 2017, but it didn't gain traction until it was reposted on July 13, 2018, with the caption, "It's the summer re-release of Gassed Up, the song that got the snowflakes in BC real upset. Keep it trashy and enjoy what a senior editor for Vice Canada called 'the horniest pipeline propaganda on earth'" (Low Class Oil Trash).

It opens with scantily clad women dancing in black LCOT tank tops, cowboy boots, and jean short shorts that say *Low Class Oil Trash* across the buttocks. A white man in an LCOT tank top pulls up in a large blue pickup truck, gets out, and walks past the women, who all turn their heads to watch. The most common shot throughout the video features the man front and centre rapping, while in the background the women dance in front of a pumpjack (see Figure 1). Throughout the video, the women touch each other's breasts and make sultry faces at the camera, intermittently dancing with the star, who at one point opens a can of beer and sprays it on them. Every shot includes either a pumpjack, a pickup truck, a barrel of oil with the LCOT logo on it, or some combination thereof. In a couple of shots, we see a welder working, with sparks flying.

Figure 1. Still from Low Class Oil Trash, "Gassed Up" (0:27).

The visuals of "Gassed Up" can be situated within the recent history of what Sean Parson and Emily Ray call "sexualizing women to sell oil" (260). As an example of this practice, they analyze the infamous "hot lesbians" post from Canadian Oil Sands Community, the precursor to Oil Sands Action, and argue that, far from being queer-friendly, the post "eroticizes and produces [the women's] relationship for male consumption" (261). Unlike the Canadian Oil Sands Community, though, Low Class Oil Trash was never forced to apologize for "Gassed Up"; without the institutional connections to fossil capital, LCOT was also without the disciplinary mechanisms associated with fossil capital's public relations priorities, thus enabling them to take the practice of sexualizing women to sell oil to new heights. As in many rap and other music videos, it seems fairly obvious that the presence of scantily clad women in "Gassed Up" is, following Parson and Ray, "for [heterosexual] male consumption." The rapper, visually coded as an oil worker by his blue work coveralls, stands in for and creates a symbolic connection with the video's target audience: blue-collar, heterosexual, male oil and gas workers.

The visual dynamics of the video thus embody what Daggett terms *petro-masculinity*, referring to the ways in which a misogynist, exaggerated masculinity goes hand-in-hand with a climate-denialist, exaggerated love of fossil fuels within contemporary right-wing populist

politics (28). "Gassed Up" visually reproduces petro-masculinity by combining a celebration of oil with a misogynist view of women as merely present for the veneration and sexual pleasure of the fossilized proletariat's men, thereby echoing one of the pillars of LCOT's philosophy: "We believe in the *guys* busting their asses in one of the most rugged industries still alive" (my emphasis). In this way, the dancing women of "Gassed Up" combine the two archetypical representations of frontier women: the *helpmates*, defined by "their ability to fulfill their duties which enable their men to succeed" (Stoeltje 32),[7] and the *bad women*, who are "portrayed as whores or racialized 'others' who fulfilled the exotic sexual fantasies of frontier men" (O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 270). While subversive insofar as these two roles are usually considered antitheses (O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 270), "Gassed Up" nevertheless reduces the dancing women to being no more than hyper-sexualized cheerleaders for roughnecks, rooting for their "rugged" oil men to prevail against their enemies.

Before describing these "enemies," though, the lyrics of the song begin with a sympathy-inducing depiction of the rapper's struggles with work-life balance, which serves to establish his belonging in the political category of the "good, innocent, and hard-working" people at the core of populism (Wodak 28): "I've been gone too long / Just missed my girl's birthday / Family is the reason / that I'm here in the first place" (Low Class Oil Trash 00:11-17). He's been working long shifts in the oilfield and has missed an important family moment, caught in a sort of paradox: he works so hard because he wishes to provide for his family, and yet, in doing so, he is kept apart from them, subject to fossil capital's gruelling demands on a worker's time.

These opening lyrics are therefore an expression of what Dorow and Mandizadza call "mobile masculine care," which they describe as being "imagined and enacted through material provision for family" as part of the "[e]motional endurance" strategies oil workers adopt when away at work camps on long rotations that can last up to three weeks (1249). Indeed, these workers have been shown to have worse mental health and stress levels than the general population, largely attributable to "distance and time away from home and family" (Dorow et al. 14). Thus, the opening lines of "Gassed Up" give expression to the fossilized proletariat's alienating work conditions.

These opening lines, then, could perhaps be read as expressing frustration with the working conditions in the oil and gas industry, and therefore as signs of possibility for building resistance to hegemonic community economic identity. Certainly, as Sara Dorow et al. suggest, immediate changes in the industry *are* required, and it is imaginable that the narrator of "Gassed Up" could get behind their recommendations for fairer scheduling and improvements to camp life, such as better food, more privacy, and additional mental health supports (8). However, the ambivalence of these opening lines fades away as the song continues, making it clear that such depictions of hard work are, in fact, *hyper-identifications* with fossil capitalist extractivism as a way of life.

Having established his belonging to the category of the hard-working people, the narrator moves on to conjure an enemy "Other," a necessary third category for right-wing populism, in addition to "the people" and "the elite" (Albertazzi and McDonnell 3). He raps,

> Fuck, fight, trip pipe
> You couldn't last in this life
> . . . . . .
> Little guys criticize
> Protest and pick a side
> Then they fill their cars with gas
> Let the middle finger fly. (Low Class Oil Trash 00:17-29)

The anti-environmentalist message is driven home in the chorus:

> So step it back, step it back
> Before you shit on my name
> And don't be acting like a bitch
> Cos you ain't getting your way
> Yeah I'm gassed up [x 4]
> Some view me as a hero
> But to others I'm trash
> So shout out to the people
> Truly busting their ass
> Yeah I'm gassed up [x 4]. (00:50-01:13)

While Gunster and colleagues find that attacks on opponents, and especially environmentalists, are a central component of the discourse employed by mainstream extractive populist groups (217), Low Class

Oil Trash reveals how such a frame resonates with and is adapted by the fossilized proletariat. The working-class narrator of "Gassed Up" is not just alienated from the environmental movement, though there are many valid reasons for him to be (Bell 73-138; Huber 109-75); he has moved past the alienation stage and into performing a symbolic, reactionary violence against it. While elite extractive populists certainly stir up such resentment, they stop short of calling environmentalists "bitches" in their public-facing media, and rarely if ever "let the middle finger fly"; this more extreme and aggressive response is a unique feature of LCOT, whose music video "Gassed Up" reveals a reactionary hyper-identification with petro-masculinist subjectivity that works to establish a right-wing populist division between the masculine, hard-working people and the lazy, feminized environmentalist Other.

Fossilized Whiteness in LCOT's Advertisements

The first post type to be analyzed is the product advertisement. LCOT sold T-shirts, hoodies, sweatpants, truck decals, hard hat stickers, and sunglasses. The most common design for this merchandise features the LCOT logo, a barrel of oil with a crown on top. Other products include a sweater that says "Alberta loyalty," with a picture of an oil derrick and the Rocky Mountains, or shirts that say "fuck, fight, trip pipe" or "fuck, fight, weld pipe," describing a hyper-masculine lifestyle of sexual conquest, physical violence, and hard, manual labour in the oil patch. In one post, a man in the aforementioned "Wine 'Em, Dine 'Em, Pipeline 'Em" hoodie turns his back to the camera and holds a large gun on his shoulder, displaying a blend of pro-gun and pro-oil politics echoed in several other posts.

The most memorable posts of this type show LCOT products being modelled by oil and gas workers themselves. In one, a crew of workers showcases their custom shirts and hoodies, which include their rig number, position, and company name. In several others, workers model LCOT products while on the job. For example, in one, a white man in an LCOT hoodie welds one-handed while sticking out his tongue and raising his middle finger. In another, a white man in a hard hat and coveralls shows off his LCOT truck decal while making the *okay* sign with his crude-covered hand.

Although there were no breakthrough posts of this type, this hand gesture is worth contemplating further, because it reappears in another LCOT advertisement, this time with a model advertising the aforementioned "Come West Trudeau" hoodie while making the *okay* hand gesture with both hands. While "the design of the hoodie stems from a hat worn by some angry Albertans in the early 1980s, when then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau created the National Energy Program" (MacVicar), today, death threats directed at Justin Trudeau are a staple of the Canadian far right (Blanchfield and Alhmidi). It seems likely that the hand gesture, too, can be considered evidence of far-right sympathies.

In a 2018 article for the Southern Poverty Law Center, David Neiwert observes that the gesture's original meaning—roughly, "all is well"—is still the most common usage, but that it is increasingly being used in one of two controversial ways associated with the far right, either as "an ironic attempt to troll liberals with a symbol chosen to 'trigger' their inner 'SJWs' [social justice warriors]" or as "a surreptitious way of signaling your presence to other white supremacists." Given the hand gesture's recurrence in the data set, as well as the wider virality of this hand gesture in 2018, and, furthermore, given Low Class Oil Trash's stated philosophy, which, as shown above, has "fuck the liberals and keep makin' hole" as its highest principle, it seems unlikely that LCOT's worker-models are using the hand gesture for its original, innocuous meaning. Based on LCOT's obsession with "triggering libs," it seems most likely that the second, trolling use of the gesture is being employed in the merch shots. At best, as Neiwert argues, the second meaning is a "wink-and-nudge interaction with the racist right" that serves to normalize it. At worst, as Neiwert further elaborates, the ironic, trolling subculture behind the second meaning can be a gateway to a full embrace of far-right politics. After all, there is a thin line between the anti-antiracist politics of the trolls and simple, straight-ahead racism.

Ultimately, the image of a crude-covered white hand is a powerful symbol of what Malm and the Zetkin Collective call *fossilized whiteness*, a term they use to describe the ways in which white supremacy is and has historically been linked to the combustion of fossil fuels (322). While the scholarship on extractive populism is clear that it is a

reactionary movement intended to combat environmentalist and Indigenous opposition to fossil fuel extractivism, less attention has been paid to the white supremacist undertones of extractive populism, which, in the hands of Low Class Oil Trash's worker-models, become explicit.

(Counter-)Hegemonic Community Economic Identity in LCOT's Oilfield Posts and Memes

For a chance to win free products, followers of Low Class Oil Trash were frequently encouraged to direct-message pictures and videos of the oilfield to LCOT on *Facebook*, with LCOT then posting these media to their main feed. While not original content, these posts were the most numerous and provide further insight into the politico-aesthetics of the fossilized proletariat. In this section, I analyze both oilfield posts and LCOT's original memes. I argue that LCOT's oilfield posts and memes both challenge and reinforce hegemonic community economic identity in ways that stylistically and substantively differ from the content of mainsteam extractive populist groups.

In addition to repeating the theme of hard work, which I discuss above as an example of hyper-identification in "Gassed Up," many oilfield posts and memes evince class resentment towards occupations that require higher education. In a corollary to LCOT's veneration of blue-collar workers, many memes demonstrate a strong dislike or distrust of white-collar workers such as engineers, geologists, consultants, and safety inspectors. A couple of posts take aim at drillers, who sit atop the oil rig hierarchy, showing class resentment can occur even within the blue-collar segment of the industry, while several others take aim at management and company executives. One post even expresses support for collective bargaining, invoking the labour slogan "United we bargain, divided we beg." While these posts had very few interactions and only one breakthrough (a post making fun of safety inspectors), class resentment was nonetheless a distinctive pattern in LCOT's oilfield posts and memes. Whereas hegemonic economic identities tend to flatten class differences within oil and gas communities and depict them as sharing a homogenous set of interests perfectly aligned with those of industry (Eaton and Enoch 314-15), LCOT's oilfield posts and memes embody a variety of class resentments that,

based on the existing literature on extractive populism, are seemingly absent within mainstream extractive populist groups.

LCOT's oilfield posts and memes also depict a *work hard, play hard* lifestyle that, once again, is seemingly absent from mainstream extractive populist groups. There are many such posts, including two breakthroughs. The first depicts a pair of hands covered in crude oil with the caption "My hands look like this," underneath which is a picture of a stripper with bills in her underwear and the caption "so her G-string can look like this" (Low Class Oil Trash). This picks up on the well-known though empirically under-studied connections between extractive work and sex work, by which sex workers "follow the money" and solicit resource-worker clientele (Landry 102). It also rounds out our picture of the "low class" lifestyle as encompassing the patronage of strip clubs, which is made reference to in many other memes, along with cocaine use, excessive alcohol consumption, and a love of expensive trucks.

The *work hard, play hard* pattern is further captured by LCOT's most interacted-with meme, which depicts far-right conspiracist Alex Jones from *InfoWars* with a vacant, confused look on his face. The caption reads: "When someone asks how you make 100k a year and are always broke." The subtitle on the Jones screencap reads, as implicit reply, "I'm gonna be honest, I'm kind of retarded" (Low Class Oil Trash). The presentation of a far-right conspiracy theorist on LCOT social media is not surprising—indeed, several other far-right figures appear in LCOT memes, including Trump and Jordan Peterson—nor is the lack of political correctness. What makes this post interesting, along with the broader *work hard, play hard* pattern, is its subversion of the conservative ideal of a responsible, rational economic actor who, according to neoclassical economic theory, should sacrifice present reward for future gain, ideally in order to save enough money to become a small capitalist.

Part of what makes LCOT unique among the extractive populist groups is precisely this ostensibly low-class, playful rejection of bourgeois aspirations and a humorous celebration of spendthriftiness. Rather than merely a picture of oil workers struggling to manage the vicissitudes of a boom-and-bust industry, toiling selflessly for their families and country, LCOT depicts a lifestyle that is largely incompatible with the

"traditional family values" that capitalists typically inculcate as a means to stabilize the lives of workers and thereby secure a more stable labour force (O'Shaughnessy and Doğu 271-74). In LCOT's depiction, one that is largely unimaginable coming from mainstream extractive populist groups, oil workers revel in the consumption of alcohol, expensive diesel trucks, cocaine, guns, and women's bodies. Though there is something refreshingly subversive and un-bourgeois about this celebration of the "oil trash" lifestyle, which strikes back at a predominantly middle-class environmental movement based on "carbon guilt" and a critique of capitalist consumerism as opposed to capitalist production (Huber 143-48), it should be clear by now that LCOT is resolutely committed to both the *consumption* patterns associated with work under fossil capitalism, *and the fossil capitalist mode of production itself*. That is, while the above patterns serve to disrupt hegemonic community economic identity and subvert bourgeois morality, LCOT's breakthrough oilfield posts and memes move in the opposite direction, offering instead a reactionary hyper-identification with fossil capitalist hegemony.

By far the most popular oilfield post, and LCOT's most interacted-with post ever, demonstrates that LCOT's class resentment is misdirected away from the Albertan bourgeoisie. The post went up on November 26, 2018, and it shows three oil and gas workers—one in regular clothes, two in full work gear—posing outside an oil facility and giving the camera the middle finger. It is captioned, "Drilling our last well thanks to the Liberal voters & of course last & always last in our books Mr. Trudeau . . . For that we salute you" (Low Class Oil Trash). It would seem that these workers are about to get laid off and attribute this directly to Liberal voters and to Trudeau himself. Several other posts of this type echo this sentiment. For example, the words *Fuck Trudeau* appear in several posts, a sort of prelude to the same, ubiquitous slogan of the 2022 Freedom Convoy.

Despite their well-documented support for the oil and gas industry (Potkins; Chase et al.), Trudeau's Liberals are nevertheless loathed by many Albertans for not being pro-oil enough, a view at once informed by and exacerbating the Liberals' historically low electoral appeal in the province. The middle fingers raised by these workers are directed at Trudeau, but also Liberal voters and, by extension, the 68.09% of Canadians who in 2015 voted for parties with more robust environmental platforms than the

implicit preference of these workers, the Conservative Party of Canada. These workers blame non-Conservative voters for their economic woes, never mind that the booms and busts of the Albertan oil and gas industry are largely attributable to fluctuations in the global price of oil, which in November 2018 was falling. The image therefore taps into a sense of Western alienation, a long-standing political sentiment in Western Canada, especially Alberta, that has grown to new heights in the era of Justin Trudeau and has come to be synonymous with a right-wing populist, fossil-fuel boosterism that blames the federal Liberals for anything that goes wrong in the oilpatch (see Finkel). The above post makes it clear that Western alienation serves to deflect criticism away from the Albertan bourgeoisie and towards external, Eastern-based enemies in Québec and Ontario, thus serving as a powerful tool in the construction and maintenance of a hegemonic Albertan community economic identity.

LCOT's Subsidized Street Politics

The final post type depicts LCOT's owner, Caitlin Lindsay, engaging in street-based politics, translating her online brand of pro-pipeline rhetoric into direct action. On April 10, 2018, for example, Lindsay attended a pro-oil and gas rally in Calgary organized by Rally 4 Resources and Canada Action, a direct response to Kinder Morgan having just pulled out of the Trans Mountain Pipeline project as a result of BC's legal challenges (Hudes). LCOT's breakthrough post from the event shows Lindsay standing in front of a partially visible Canada Action banner that reads, "I love Canadian pipelines" (Low Class Oil Trash). She wears an LCOT hoodie and has two signs: one at her feet and one held above her head. The former reads, "Hey BC NDP, lay back and take the pipeline," and the latter, "suck my drill pipe Horgan," further demonstrating the practice of sexualizing fossil fuel infrastructure, and happily framing the laying of pipeline as a form of sexual violence.

Apparently energized by this action, on April 23, 2018, Lindsay drove to Kamloops, BC, to deliver drinks, snacks, and LCOT swag to Trans Mountain Pipeline workers; she carried a sign saying, "Ignore the hippies we support you" (Low Class Oil Trash, "Showed some gratitude"). She then travelled on to visit Camp Cloud, a long-standing protest occupation outside the Kinder Morgan tank farm in Burnaby,

BC, where activists opposed to the Trans Mountain Pipeline camped for over nine months from late 2017 to August 2018, when they were removed by police (Ghoussoub). There she recorded a breakthrough video in which she identifies petroleum products being used by the activists, like tents and porta-potties, as a way of underlining their supposed hypocrisy (Low Class Oil Trash, "Visited the pipeline"). Gunster and colleagues call this the "energy lifeworld" argument, which holds that fossil fuels are a necessary and ubiquitous part of everyday life, and that it is therefore irrational to oppose them (219). The energy lifeworld framing, pioneered by mainstream extractive populist groups, had clearly been adopted by LCOT, suggesting a direct influence.

In an original meme, LCOT took further aim at Camp Cloud with a fake Kim Jong-un tweet: "Lmao got my first intercontinental ballistic missile working, where should I send my first nuke?" The image shows a poll, with the respective options being the US, Japan, Camp Cloud, or Pyongyang. Camp Cloud wins with sixty-eight per cent. The threat of physical violence against environmental protesters at Camp Cloud was not just rhetoric. A separate group, the Citizens Committee to Evict Camp Cloud, based in Calgary, vowed to travel to Burnaby in buses—an eleven-hour drive—to intimidate and confront the environmental activists, and to cover their protest signs and graffiti with white paint. One of the committee's organizers said, "[I]f there's 50 roughnecks painting barriers, they [the campers] might scream and shout, but I would hope they wouldn't be foolish enough to get in the way": an obvious threat that these roughnecks—i.e., oil workers and their supporters—would be willing to use physical violence (Doherty). The police eventually evicted Camp Cloud, making the vigilante threats redundant, but the formation of such a group demonstrates the growing street-level force of the extractive populist movement and the willingness of some fossilized proletarians to participate in it.

Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, experts on the Canadian far right, document the ways in which mainstream conservative politics provide a "permission to hate," which filters down through society and, in the wrong hands, results in violence against various "Others" (89-119). From the above analysis, it is clear that Low Class Oil Trash's street politics were subsidized by the mainstream extractive populist groups, though not financially. Rather, they were subsidized

organizationally, by coordinating several of the protests and rallies that LCOT's Caitlin Lindsay attended, and *discursively*, by providing Lindsay with pro-oil and gas talking points and fomenting the image of environmentalists as an "enemy of the people," which structured her motivation and rhetorical approach in confronting Camp Cloud activists. Combining these two concepts, I argue that the mainstream extractive populist groups create a *subsidized public* whom they give *permission to hate*. That is, the traditional industry elites who run the mainstream extractive populist groups provide a permission structure for reactionaries within the fossilized proletariat to engage in extreme forms of discourse and behaviour against their perceived enemies, especially environmentalists. All the while, though, the traditional elites maintain enough distance from the militant wing of the movement so as to be able to deny collaboration.

Conclusion: The Fossilized Proletariat as a Reactionary Class Fraction?

Throughout this analysis, I have read Low Class Oil Trash's *Facebook* posts as authentic working-class cultural production, and while I have found moments of class resentment that push against the hegemonic economic identity associated with oil and gas communities, as well as an at-times refreshing subversion of bourgeois morality, these are all outweighed by my analysis' primary finding that LCOT offers a more extreme version of extractive populism that is more consistently and unapologetically misogynistic, racist, and violent than what is offered by the mainstream groups, and which ultimately evinces a reactionary hyper-identification with fossil capitalist hegemonic identities. Death threats directed at the Prime Minister; alt-right hand gestures; the grotesque sexualization of resource extraction; and an aggressive, violent hostility to environmental activists and perceived opponents of the oil and gas industry: these are the stock-in-trade of LCOT, a qualitatively different approach than that of mainstream extractive populist groups, whose institutional connections to fossil capital make such extreme discourse more reputationally risky and therefore uncommon, if not altogether absent.

While mainstream extractive populist groups engage in top-down "meme labour" designed to popularize elite sources of information, like reports from right-wing think tanks and business councils (Gunster et al. 207; see also Neubauer and Graham), LCOT, on the other hand, engages in a horizontal meme labour, not by reframing elite information, but by mixing a wide variety of pop cultural references, from TV shows to viral memes, which are pulled from the discursive environment of and targeted at its own class fraction. While LCOT's institutional autonomy from fossil capital provides it discursive affordances that permit genuine expressions of class resentment not typically found in the other groups, its autonomy is also precisely what allows for its more extreme approach to extractive populism and enables it to push the discourse even further right, blurring the lines between extractive populism and what some scholars have called "fossil fascism."[8]

As I argue in a forthcoming chapter, if something so ominous as fossil fascism is to develop, it will require the participation of other class fractions besides the bourgeoisie, and I name small fossil capital, or what could also be called the *fossilized petite bourgeoisie*, as a likely suspect (McLean). My analysis of Low Class Oil Trash suggests that the fossilized proletariat may be another likely source of fossil fascist militants. Indeed, the majority of the fossilized proletariat would appear to fit into what Simon Bornschier and Hanspeter Kriesi call the "core clientele" of the contemporary far right: white, male, non-unionized,[9] non-university educated, skilled, and employed in traditionally masculine labour (12, 24). Further research on the Canadian fossilized proletariat should include: more empirical inquiries into the class composition of extractive populism's street-based wing; more research into the class composition of right-wing populist parties' electorate and activists, including those behind the rise of Danielle Smith; and further investigations into the relationship between top-down and bottom-up extractive populisms. More generally, scholars of extractive populism and Canadian fossil capitalism should come together with scholars of the Canadian far right to further interrogate the many overlaps between rising temperatures and the rising right, a global phenomenon whose Canadian dimensions have only just begun to be unravelled.

Notes

1. The term *subsidized public* was coined by sociologist Edward T. Walker in his book *Grassroots for Hire: Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy* to describe how public relations professionals foment public participation in corporate-backed political campaigns.
2. *Corporate ventriloquism* was coined by Jen Schneider and colleagues in their book *Under Pressure: Coal Industry Rhetoric and Neoliberalism* to describe how coal companies "transmit messages through other entities" in order to advance their interests (53).
3. Analyzing data collected from *CrowdTangle*—a social media monitoring tool owned by Meta—reveals that, for an eight-month period from April 1 to November 26, 2018, when LCOT was at its height in terms of post interactions and video views, it actually outperformed several other extractive populist groups. For example, despite being out-posted four-to-one by Resource Works, LCOT's posts accrued more total interactions. Furthermore, LCOT had more average interactions per post than did Oil Respect, which is particularly impressive given that Oil Respect had three times as many followers and the institutional backing of the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors. LCOT's average number of interactions per post (437) was not far off even from Canada Action's (571), a group that also receives direct funding from fossil capital (Linnitt).
4. The groups that comprised my sample, against which I compared the performance of LCOT, were taken from the literature on extractive populism: Oil Sands Action, Canada's Energy Citizens, Oil Sands Strong, Canada Action, Oil Respect, and Resource Works. I excluded the oil companies studied by Gunster and colleagues, and the multi-issue conservative group, Canada Proud, studied by Neubauer and Graham, because I wanted to focus specifically on groups concerned mainly with oil and gas, but who present themselves as grassroots and at least make some effort to cloak their corporate origins.
5. I use the term "politico-aesthetics" to refer to the political content of artistic and/or cultural production.
6. The most recent data available for Alberta shows that, in 2020, women made up 45.9% of the provincial labour force and men made up 54.1%, but within the oil and gas sector these figures were 23.8% and 76.2%, respectively (*Alberta Mining and Oil* 9). Similar data is not available for race, but the sociology suggests the majority are white.
7. Indeed, the entire project of LCOT, run as it is by Caitlin Lindsay, the wife of an oilfield worker, can be seen as the fulfilment of this "helpmate" archetype, and as an execution of Lindsay's "duties which enable [her man] to succeed."
8. The term "fossil fascism" was coined by Cara Daggett to describe the contemporary far right's climate denialist love of fossil fuels, perhaps best embodied by the Trump-led Republican Party (27). The term has been taken up as a theoretical framework for understanding global far right politics in Malm and the Zetkin Collective's *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Dangers of Fossil Fascism*.
9. The Albertan oil and gas industry has a very low union density: in 2020, only 10.6% of oil and gas workers were unionized, compared to the provincial average of 25.7% (*Alberta Mining and Oil* 6).

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