



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (St. Thomas University, 2009)

**“Imagining Alternative in the Emerald City: The Climate Change
Discourse of Transnational Fossil Fuel Corporations”**

Department of Sociology

September 7, 2017

1:00 P.M.

Cornett Building

Room A317

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. William Carroll, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Martha McMahon, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Kara Shaw, School of Environmental Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Laura Parisi, Department of Gender Studies, UVic

Abstract

Discourse has the power to organize thought—and therefore, to limit imagination. The purpose of this project is to trace the contours of climate change discourse constructed by transnational fossil fuel corporations, to make visible the ideological barriers it creates to imagining post-capitalist alternatives. It is undertaken in the context of a well-established urgency for global collaboration to halt, mitigate, and adapt to the social, economic, and ecological impacts of climate change, and takes as its point of departure the fundamental link between ecological degradation and the capitalist mode of production (with its accompanying imperatives of accumulation and profit), as well as the necessity of counter-hegemonic praxis to pursuing system-transformative change on the scale required for humanity to negotiate the looming crisis in a just and ecologically viable way.

Conceptualizing popular media as a discursive battleground in which the voices of corporations (through the evolving mediums of advertisement) are privileged, I employ critical discourse analysis to explore the framing of climate change messages by five major transnational oil and gas corporations, toward developing an analytical framework for the burgeoning climate change movement grounded at the intersection of global corporate capitalism and ecological degradation.

Climate change messages included images, videos, and narratives intended for public consumption which spoke to the source, resolution, and/or future of human-induced and climate-related ecological problems. These were drawn from corporate websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter feeds, and YouTube channels over the course of 2016.

As action research, I have undertaken this project with the explicit aim of empowering climate movements – of which I count myself a part – to imagine alternative futures. To contribute to this aim, I have created a media literacy toolkit that links corporate climate change messages with the interests they represent to make visible the dynamics of power that mobilize those interests.