Perform and Transform the Settler Colonial City: Digital Infrastructure and Located Expression on Instagram

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Abstract

While opposition to the Trans Mountain pipeline extends far beyond British Columbia's southwest coast, Vancouver provides a specific site to explore the intersections of platform, place, and anti-pipeline sentiment in Instagrammed expression surrounding a controversy embedded in colonial extraction. A city located on Indigenous lands yet shaped by an elite settler imaginary of sustainability, outdoor recreation, and west coast lifestyles, Vancouver-based anti-pipeline resistance sees the uneven geographic intersection of the pipeline with various social, environmental, and climate concerns, including Canada's failure to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty on pipeline-affected lands. Through the patterns revealed by digital methods and visual methodologies centered on Instagram's location tag, this paper reveals how settler colonialism infuses the platformed and grounded components in place-based issue expression – and also how it is resisted, reconfiguring relations both on the land and in the digital realm.

Keywords

Instagram, pipeline, digital geography, settler colonialism, visual methodologies, decolonization

Introduction

On the territories of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish),* and *səlililw̓ətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh)* nations, sits the city of Vancouver, British Columbia (BC). As a port city, Vancouver has developed in part around the terminus of the Trans Mountain pipeline, where diluted bitumen arrives from the oil sands in northern Alberta and is loaded onto tankers at the Port of Burnaby on the Burrard Inlet for transport overseas. While the pipeline has been in action since the 1950s, a current expansion would more than double bitumen transport, increasing the risk of pipeline and tanker spills through the Vancouver area and surrounding waters.

Despite that pipeline development is already underway, ongoing resistance – both in person and over social media – seeks to halt pipeline construction, drawing attention to social, environmental, and climate concerns, along with Canada's failure to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty on pipeline-affected lands (Gobby and Gareau 2018; Karsgaard 2022; Karsgaard et al. 2020; Kraushaar-Friesen and Busch 2020; Spiegel 2021; Spiegel et al. 2020). As a former Vancouver resident and settler scholar, I have closely followed this resistance with an eye to how settler environmentalism interacts with the colonial city – and how it can be undermined towards decolonial aims. Due to the diversity within Vancouver as a cosmopolitan city, Mars (2015) asserts that where more remote sites of Indigenous land defense may be largely committed to land decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty, colonial forms of mainstream environmentalism and climate activism come to dominate opposition to the Trans Mountain pipeline in the greater Vancouver area, despite prominent Indigenous leadership among the local nations. Indeed, the industrial toxicity of the pipeline directly contests a civic imaginary named by Beasley (2019) as 'Vancouverism,' which is founded on principles of sustainability and livability (see also Simpson 2020) in what is construed as a pristine, natural, coastal city. In keeping with this imaginary, Vancouver residents may seek to preserve local beaches and waterways in order to protect elite, urban lifestyles that characterize the west coast. At the same time, Vancouver-based resistance is largely directed by Indigenous leaders and linked with anti-colonial politics, connected – including over social media – to larger movements against colonial extractive logics across the nation (Dafnos 2020; Gobby et al. 2021; Karsgaard 2022; Preston 2017; Proulx 2014).

Considering Instagram's ability to support location-based expression, not only via location tagging but also through the performative power of images and location-based hashtags, it provides a unique site to explore the intersection of geography and anti-pipeline resistance in Vancouver, including the influence of colonial geographic logics. As the prime locative affordance on Instagram, the location tag connects posts geographically, not only labeling individual posts but also by returning posts in location-based searches. The implications of geolocating posts are complex as social media data function dialectically with places, mediating the 'social production of space and the spatial production of society' (Sutko and de Souza e Silva 2010; qtd. in Ash et al. 2018, 14). Collectively, therefore, geolocated posts form place-based Instagram expressions that warrant their own examination, particularly in relation to the influence of settler colonialism on not only the platform but also civic performance of Vancouver through the pipeline issue.

Tracing the intersections of location and issue expression through the usage of location tags, hashtags, and imagery, this paper addresses the following question: shaped by Instagram's infrastructure, how does location-based expression around the Trans Mountain pipeline issue in Vancouver perform – or transform – the settler colonial city? Following anti-colonial critical geographers in efforts to 'make settler colonialism more fragile' (Proulx and Crane 2020, 63), this research aims to unpack the tangible construction and undermining of the settler colonial city through Instagram activism, focusing specifically on the location tag tool as a key component of Instagram's infrastructure. Drawing on location-tagged Instagram posts linked to the Trans Mountain pipeline controversy, therefore, this paper applies critical digital methods (Fuchs 2017; Rogers 2015, 2013) and visual methodologies (Hand 2017;

Niederer and Colombo 2019; Pearce et al. 2020; Rogers 2021; Rose 2016a) to map anti-pipeline resistance in Vancouver by following Instagram's infrastructure (Cowen 2020). Through a close reading (Bardzell 2009; Culler 2011; Gallop 2000, 2007) of networked hashtags and locations, along with composite images affiliated with key Vancouver-oriented location tags, we see activism both performing and contesting settler colonialism at the intersections of place, platform, and anti-pipeline sentiment.

Vancouver as a Settler Colonial City

Vancouver is structured as a logistical hub for oil export according to a broader colonial architecture of Indigenous dispossession for resource extraction (Cowen 2020; LaDuke and Cowen 2020; Spice 2018), which results in a 'settler colonial urbanism' (Dorries et al. 2022) that favors settler interests and futurity within the city (Barry and Agyeman 2020). Often referred to more broadly as Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver and its surrounding waters have been and remain home to the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, and Musqueam nations, who have never ceded the area to the state, yet whose alimentary Indigenous infrastructures (LaDuke and Cowen 2020) have been carved up and covered over by urban infrastructures supporting colonial and capitalist aims. Since the Trans Mountain pipeline was first built in 1953, the area has developed around oil export, which has contributed to Vancouver's industrialization and urbanization, ordered 'by dynamics of colonial dispossession, racial and gender-based violence, the exploitation of land and labor, environmental injustices, class conflict, and ongoing forms of resistance' (Simpson 2020, 7).

This colonial 'spatial reordering would impose massive new social and ecological risks upon the Burrard Inlet' (Simpson 2020, 13) and across a city where the movement of oil takes priority over local communities and their lifeways. Over the years, frequent oil spills have poisoned the surrounding waters and exposed the city to hazardous airborne toxins, harming plant and animal sea life, and impacting the sovereign food systems of the local Indigenous nations who remain marginal to pipeline decision-making (Jonasson et al. 2019; Simpson 2020; Spiegel et al. 2020). Both local Indigenous nations and the City of Vancouver have actively resisted the pipeline, but their concerns have been regularly overwritten by national economic priorities. Due to its embeddedness in colonial resource extraction and its reconfiguring of relations in the Vancouver area, 'the Trans Mountain Pipeline should thus be considered not only an infrastructure of fossil fuel circulation, but also an infrastructure that belongs to a larger colonial architecture' (Simpson 2020, 10). This architecture, named by LaDuke and Cowen for its profoundly destructive elements as 'Wiindigo' after the legendary Anishinaabe monster, functions cannibalistically to destroy and devour its own lands, human and more-than-human relations, and planetary survival, sustaining violence through its naturalization.

In cities like Vancouver, therefore, we see how 'settler colonial systems of value are literally, physically enabled by infrastructure' (LaDuke and Cowen 2020, 264), so that 'feelings, ideas, and attitudes that produce racism and white supremacy are also material systems of social reproduction that sanction the extension of the means of life to some, often through their withdrawal from others' (LaDuke and Cowen 2020, 264). Cities therefore contribute with other elements of settler colonialism to the 'logic of elimination' (Wolfe 2006, 388) that ensures settler access to territory. Settler colonial cities are recognized for the material (Hugill 2017), governmental (Barker 2012; Stanger-Ross 2008; Tomiak 2017), and symbolic (Baloy 2016) means by which they establish settler presence and futurity (Barry and Agyeman 2020) through racial violence that 'naturalize[s] racialized accumulations of property and advantage' (Dorries et al. 2022, 268). Despite increasing urban incorporation of land acknowledgments, Indigenous art and iconography, and traditional place names, 'contemporary settler-colonial cities continue to be constructed as distinctly non-Indigenous places, ones that are completely void of Indigenous presence and rights: a phenomenon that Indigenous political theorist, Coulthard has referred to as *urbs nullius* (Coulthard 2014)' (Barry and Agyeman 2020, 29). Even when Indigeneity is ubiquitous in the urban environment, Baloy (2016) asserts that it becomes both *spectacular* – for passive observance

– and *spectral* – haunting settlers through the colonial injustices that remain beneath view. Relatedly, decolonial movements such as 'Land Back' (Pasternak and King 2019) are often restricted in urban spaces dominated by deeply entrenched property regimes. In these ways, the 'city as a distinctly and exclusively settler-colonial space, has the potential to marginalize and render invisible ongoing acts of Indigenous defiance and resurgence' (Barry and Agyeman 2020, 29). At the same time, Indigenous reoccupation of unceded territories in urban spaces, such as the occupation of 1492 Land Back Lane in Caledonia, Ontario, along with the radical enactment of 'Indigenous [and Black] practices that normalise cities as land and that centre care across multiple scales' (Tomiak 2022, 2; see also Ramírez 2020), offers profound resistance to settler urbanism. Through movements like Land Back, ongoing resistance and resurgent placemaking practices by Indigenous peoples in settler colonial cities 'exist in stark contrast to settler colonialism's politics of erasure and replacement, and associated efforts to recuperate and preserve settler futurity' (Barry and Agyeman 2020, 33).

Relevant to an examination of how cities are performed over Instagram, Cowen (2020) traces how infrastructural systems that are at once both 'imperial and intimate' (479) shape cities through a process she calls 'infrastructural urbanism.' Cowen follows colonial railway infrastructures as they materially link cities like Vancouver across Canada and to transnational flows of goods and labour, materially inscribing racial hierarchies within and among cities even as rail lines destroy diverse ecologies. As machinations of colonial domination, rail and civic infrastructures are also sites of resistance and refusal, as blockades and expressions of sovereignty by Indigenous land protectors indicate the possibility of 'infrastructure otherwise' (480). While the railway is a material infrastructure, Instagram is a colonial and corporate digital infrastructure (Constantinides et al. 2018) that shapes user expression according to the rules established by the platform – and to its benefit – maintaining a gatekeeping effect on online expression and interactions (van Dijck et al. 2019). As such, the platform infrastructure impacts the ways the city is performed, in both restrictive and liberating ways. So, just as Cowen points out that railway infrastructure 'is not only a vehicle of domination – it is also a means of transformation' (Cowen 2020, 483), Instagram may similarly offer insight into the ways the settler colonial city is contested through uptake, resisting, or bypassing of its infrastructural qualities.

Location on Instagram

Spatial components of Instagram have been central to the platform's infrastructure since it originated as a location-based check-in app called Burbn (Leaver et al. 2020, 9). While the functionality of location tagging has changed over time (Hinchliffe 2016), Instagram's search field continues to host a tab for 'places,' and searches return both hashtagged and location-tagged places. When posting, users can select from an assortment of location types, including cities, neighborhoods, landmarks, business, and political entities such as provinces and states. In keeping with the use of location-based hashtags for a variety of connective and rhetorical purposes (Bastos et al. 2014; Utekhin 2017), user selection from a diversity of location tags may be explored as a component of the infrastructure shaping the performance of the city.

While users hold some agency to select location tags, Instagram's economy profoundly shapes location selection on the platform. Personal geodata is particularly sensitive, holding applications for corporations, law, security, and intelligence (Mitchell and Highfield 2017, 5), which activists may account for when choosing to tag – or not to tag – a post, especially considering the digital surveillance and criminalization of anti-pipeline resistance (Ceric 2020; Crosby 2021; Dafnos 2019; Monaghan and Walby 2017; Proulx 2014). The value of location data is growing exponentially, estimated in 2017 by Geospatial Media to be a sector worth $500 billion (qtd. in Mitchell and Highfield 2017, 3). Harnessing location data is in Instagram's economic interests, resulting in platform infrastructures that shape user participation. At the time of writing, Instagram automatically draws upon a fixed database to suggest location tags, according to the user's location when originally taking a picture. Such suggestions,

algorithmically organized, potentially impact user selection and may result in the clustering of posts into locative patterns, particularly around common toponyms and names of businesses. Instagram users can create new locations via workarounds available through Facebook; however, this process is opaque, inaccessible to users without Facebook accounts, and difficult for those desiring to post live and in the moment. Instagram's limited naming practices may hold particular significance in relation to a colonial issue like the Trans Mountain, where activists may seek to undermine colonial authority and approaches to the land and city by applying Indigenous place names and land acknowledgments (Karsgaard et al. 2021). Considering the influence of the platform's algorithms, privacy policies, and data gathering practices, Instagram's infrastructure warrants exploration of the intersection of the platform in the settler colonial performance of the city of Vancouver.

Recognising that digital platforms unevenly shape geographical knowledge production, this study remains open to the ways that 'digital media [can] be appropriated and repurposed to produce spatial knowledges that are situated, reflexive, non-masculinist, emotional/affected, inclusive and polyvocal' (Ash et al. 2018, 7) – in other words, to take up and contest the settler colonial city. Following research into 'geographies produced by the digital' (Ash et al. 2018), an examination of Vancouver-based anti-pipeline activism in relation to Instagram as an infrastructure attends to key 'questions around the ways in which big data economies, algorithms, digital technology design, and utopian narratives are informed by the persistence of colonialism and masculinism' (25) – as well as the extent to which activist Instagram users can open up alternative means for mediating civic social life by appropriating digital infrastructures.

Issue Mapping Location through Digital Methods and Visual Methodologies

This study maps Instagrammed Trans Mountain pipeline activism in Vancouver by operationalizing issue mapping through critical digital methods (Fuchs 2017; Rogers 2015, 2013) and visual methodologies (Niederer and Colombo 2019; Pearce et al. 2020; Rogers 2021; Rose 2016a, 2016b), which use web-based data to map social issues as they are performed online. Digital methods are complemented with close reading practices (Bardzell 2009; Culler 2011; Gallop 2007, 2000) in order to come to a contextual understanding of how Instagram locations interact in the performance of the settler colonial city. Collectively, these methods support investigation into large-scale yet nuanced 'spatial patterns and processes' (Ash et al. 2018, 9) by following Instagram's infrastructure (Cowen 2020).

Grounded in an understanding of the social world as performative (Latour 2005), issue mapping (Marres and Moats 2015; Marres and Weltevrede 2013; Rogers et al. 2015) asserts that social inequalities must be constantly performed through practical means as actors engage with specific issues, such as the Trans Mountain pipeline controversy. This is not to say that social facts are never materialized but that 'it is only through actors' coordinated work that collective phenomena can emerge and last' (Venturini and Latour 2009, 4). Issue mapping, therefore, enables a tracing of the ways that settler colonialism is reinforced and contested through the actions of various actors engaged with the pipeline issue, where the work is to '"follow the actors themselves," that is try to catch up with their often-wild innovations to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands' (Latour 2005, 12). Through issue mapping, it is possible to trace movements, connections, oppositions, and power relations as actors connect across cultural, temporal, and geographical borders.

The large-scale analysis available via digital methods operationalizes issue mapping using digital data, enabling exploration of the patterns by which location and issuefication of the Trans Mountain pipeline via hashtags intersect. Digital methods work with the tools embedded in platforms such as Instagram, including location tags, hashtags, images, and time stamps, to trace the geographies, hierarchies, and discursive patterns that emerge in complex issues. Established digital methods elaborate the strategic and connective use of hashtags in rendering posts searchable and connecting them to the issue community (Bruns and Burgess 2015; Highfield and Leaver 2015; Marres and Moats 2015),

whereby co-hashtag network graphs may be read as discourse (Sánchez-Querubín, N. et al. 2017). This paper extends co-hashtag analysis by integrating location tag analysis to make visible the ways that issue discourses are geographically linked through Instagram's infrastructure, providing the basis for a close reading. Further, digital methods are applied to Instagram images through visual methodologies that enable analysis of the dominant visual discourses associated with Vancouver, according to engagement metrics (specifically, 'likes'). These computational analyses are complemented by close reading of the resultant network graph and composite images in order to reach a more nuanced understanding of how settler colonialism is reinforced and contested through located expression on Instagram.

Data Set and Methods

Data were collected using the "-tag" function on instagram-scraper, a Python-based software tool available on GitHub (arc298 2018). Instagram was queried for the following pro-pipeline, anti-pipeline, and neutral terms to capture the scope of the issue: stopkm, buildkm, notmx, protecttheinlet, stopkindermorgan, kindermorgan, stoptmx, tinyhousewarriors, transmountainpipeline. These terms were selected through a snowball method over a period of years, ensuring minimal issue bleed and adjusting over time as hashtags evolved. Of the full set of 13879 posts, this paper focuses on a Vancouver-centric subset of 907 posts. This subset was derived from the 4979 posts that contained location tags by filtering for locations in Vancouver that were linked with 10 or more posts. It is key at the outset to note that most pipeline-related posts – 8900 – do not contain location tags. Potential reasons for not tagging are many, including desires to preserve privacy, reduce one's digital footprint, or avoid police or industry surveillance in relation to pipeline resistance. Other users may prefer to story their locations using hashtags (Utekhin 2017); alternatively, some users may find location tags redundant, assuming that their followers already know where they are. While only users themselves can describe why they *may not* tag their locations, it is possible to explore the locations they do tag. To this end, my analysis is twofold.

First, extending the practice of co-hashtag analysis, which maps associations between hashtags frequently used in conjunction (Bruns and Burgess 2015; Highfield and Leaver 2015), I used the visualization software Gephi (Bastian et al. 2009) to plot location tags in conjunction with hashtags in a bipartite network graph, making visible trends, hierarchies, and centrality within the issue network in relation to Vancouver-oriented locations available on the platform. In Figure 1, the size of each node indicates the number of occurrences of that location tag (pink) or hashtag (green), and the size of the text indicates the number of connections to that tag. The proximity of tags indicates the frequency with which they are used in conjunction. Hashtags that occur with a frequency of less than four and Vancouver-oriented location tags that occur with a frequency of less than 10 have been removed from the graph for ease of reading and to identify trends. As a result, this network graph provides exploration not of the full issue network but of dominant patterns in how location and hashtags function together, in order to consider the ways that anti-pipeline activism on Instagram connects issues contextually and geographically within this specific city.

Considering the importance of imagery on Instagram, the second component of my analysis compares dominant image discourses associated with four location tags affiliated with Vancouver, according to engagement metrics (specifically, 'likes'). While a focus on dominance does not address the full spectrum of visuals or draw attention to more marginal perspectives, it does reveal prevalent visual and textual discourses that arise within Instagram's culture, economy, and network of relations. In relation to digital activism, popularity, visibility, and influence cannot be ignored; while a wide range of discourses may be afforded on Instagram, it is only some that rise to prominence within the platform, with greater potential to shape public thought. These four locations were chosen for the purposes of comparison, according to a composite image of the top ten most liked images affiliated with each location
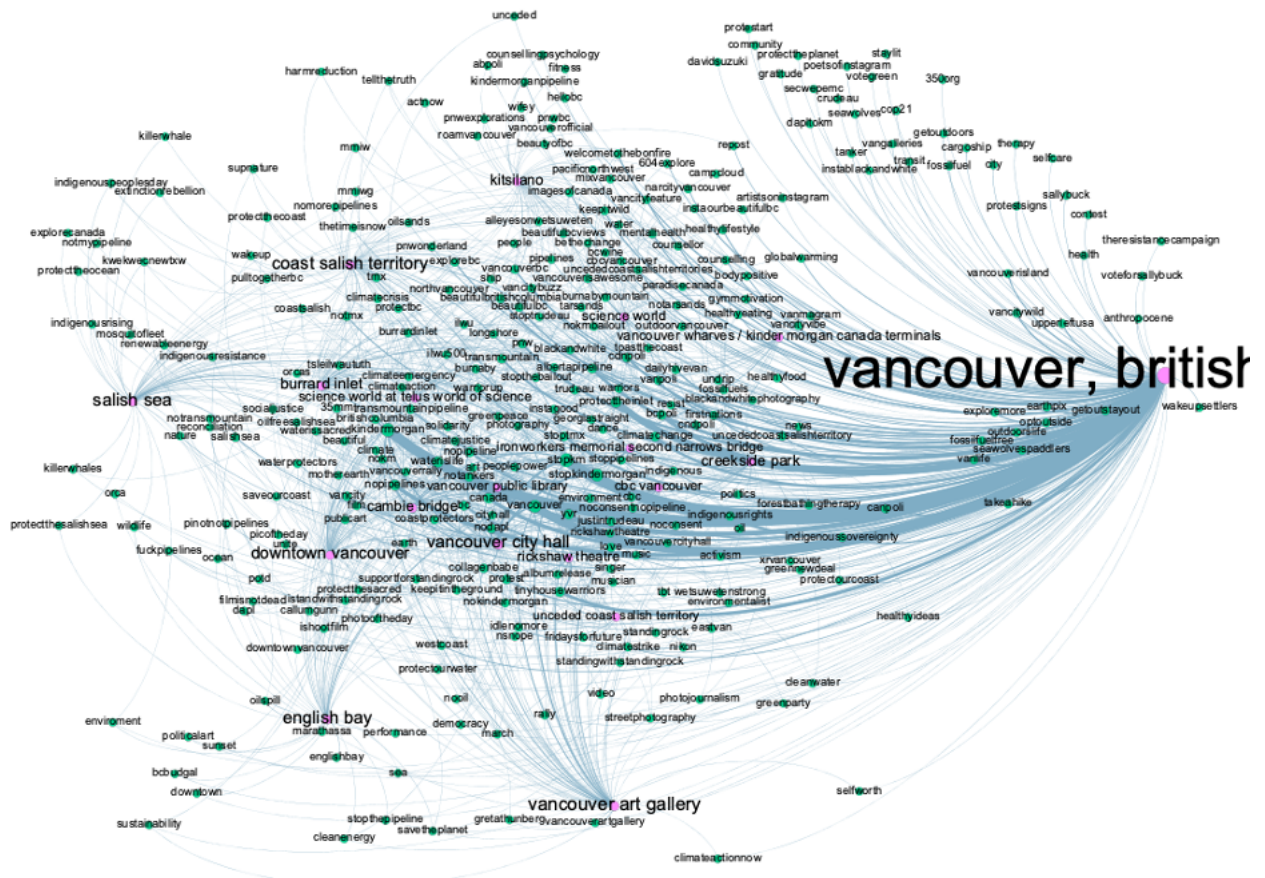
Figure 1. Bipartite hashtag-location tag network featuring prominent Vancouver-oriented location tags.

tag. Specifically, (a) Vancouver, British Columbia was selected for being the most prominent tag in the set; (b) Vancouver City Hall was selected as an example site of urban resistance; (c) Kitsilano as a Vancouver neighborhood without organized resistance; and (d) Coast Salish Territory as the Indigenous territorial name for Vancouver available on Instagram. For these four sites, composites enable analysis of images within their networks of relations, while still maintaining the privacy of users by making it impossible to reverse search individual images – a concern where activists may be under state or industry surveillance. Following the work of Niederer and Colombo (2019), each composite is composed of a stack of the top ten most liked images associated with the listed location. With the editing tools available in Photoshop ("Photoshop apps - desktop, mobile, and tablet," n.d.), these images are layered on top of one another in a ranked order, with the image featuring the most 'likes' on top. Finally, the opacity of each image is lowered to 40% so that each of the ten images is visible in the composite. Intended as a research tool rather than a visual summary, composite images provide means to analyze and compare patterns in format, style, and content, and they are intended to be closely read in conjunction with other platform components.
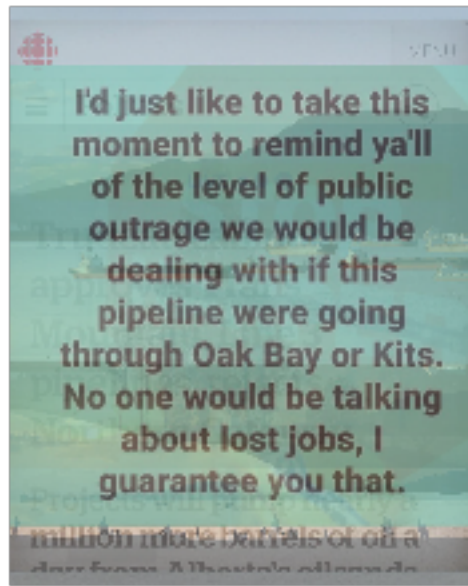
Anti-pipeline Expression in Vancouver

Reading the network graph in relation to the composites, we begin to see the nuances of location-based anti-pipeline activism afforded by Instagram's infrastructure, including the ways it performs and transforms the settler colonial city.
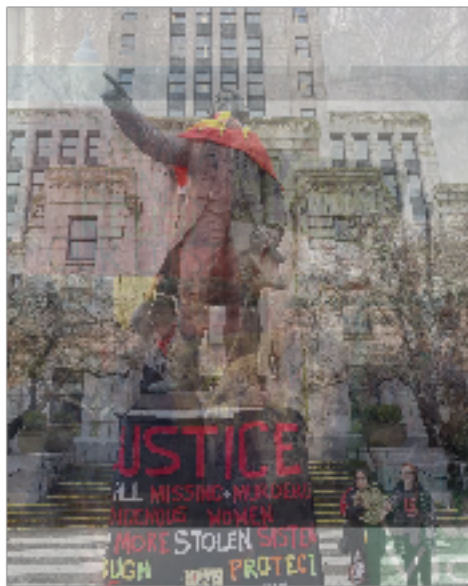
A. Vancouver

B. Kitsilano

C. Vancouver City Hall

D. Coast Salish Territory

Figure 2. Image stacks of top 10 most liked images at key sample locations.

Tag: Vancouver, British Columbia

The location tag for Vancouver, British Columbia, dominates the network graph (Figure 1), connected to a heterogeneous range of hashtags. Instagram users have opted to locate themselves in Vancouver while addressing an assortment of pipeline-related issues ranging from climate change to Indigenous sovereignty, orca whales to critiques of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. This heterogeneity reveals the capacity of this cosmopolitan city to host a variety of issue expressions. Most

notable, however, are those hashtags that are either primarily or uniquely used in conjunction with Vancouver, rather than being linked with other locations. Reading such hashtags across the top right-hand corner of the network and through the small cluster below the word 'Vancouver,' we see interspersed with protest and anti-pipeline hashtags a series of hashtags relating to health and self-care, along with those promoting outdoor lifestyles, such as #takeahike, #outdoorslife, #exploremore, and #optoutside. These hashtags are in keeping with Vancouver's local wilderness culture and 'Vancouverism,' which is predicated on a colonial conception of the land as separate from human life. As a recreational commodity, the 'outdoors' is not understood as a permanent home but a place outside civilization, to be used for elite escape from city life through outdoor recreation (Braun 2002). So, while anti-pipeline expression in Vancouver is heterogenous, it contains elements of local west coast culture that reinforce colonial understandings of the land through pipeline opposition predicated on the maintenance of wild recreation spaces – a local imaginary that is activated through application of the location tag and augmented by the economy of Instagram. Encouraging circulation of posts through promotional hashtags like #outdoorslife, platform economies, metrics, and cultures inevitably perpetuate settler colonialism, while simultaneously supporting Instagram's exploitative, capitalist aims.

Vancouver's image stack (Figure 2A) also highlights a heterogeneity of pipeline resistance in the city, while revealing the interaction of celebrity in environmental activism on Instagram. Intermingled in the image stack and hashtag list are various images of political resistance, collective action, local pride, and anti-colonial expression. Holding a bottle of organic wine from BC, popular environmentalist David Suzuki makes a visual statement against Alberta Premier Rachel Notley's 2018 boycott of BC wine as a means to push the pipeline through the neighboring province. While Suzuki's polished image appears as official messaging from his foundation, in-the-moment images of protest signs and people on stage evidence collective resistance, which has been ongoing in Vancouver. Indigenous clothing and symbols emphasize Indigenous anti-pipeline leadership in collective resistance, and the statement – faintly visible – that the Trans Mountain is an 'ugly symbol of the ongoing legacy of colonialism in North America' reiterates that the pipeline is not, in fact an *Indigenous* problem but one of colonial violence. The protest poster, 'Kill the pipeline, save the land,' reiterates Indigenous understandings of the land as inherent to Indigenous life and relations, in contrast with a depoliticized and pristine 'environment,' removed from human life. Indigenous leaders and activists are present within the stack, including Will George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation; singer and activist, Ta'kaiya Blaney from the TlaA'min Nation; and Secwepemc leader of the Tiny House Warriors, Kanahus Manuel. Also prominent are the faces of David Suzuki and Swedish climate activist, Greta Thunberg. While the prominence of Indigenous figures reveals their leadership in anti-extractive action (see Simpson and Klein 2017), the presence of public figures and celebrity environmentalists also points to Vancouver as a large, urban center that attracts prominent figures and out-of-town guests. Further, their presence in the dominant image stack speaks to platformed activism on Instagram, where celebrity and influence are inherent to the culture and economy of the platform. Vancouver-tagged posts therefore demonstrate the ways that Instagram's platform economy and cultures intersect with a particular urban location to take on a celebrity-oriented activism infused by local culture in ways that reinscribe settler colonial power relations in the city and conceptions of the land, even as the platform enables grassroots and Indigenous resistance that contest colonial urbanism.

Downtown Vancouver Sites and Tag: Vancouver City Hall

By contrast, a central core of specific locations within Vancouver's city center dominates anti-pipeline activism in a densely connected network (Figure 1) linked to sites such as the Vancouver City Hall, Science World, Cambie Bridge, and Vancouver Public Library, where various anti-pipeline and climate protests have recurred since 2014. Via hashtags also connected to Vancouver, British Columbia, the pipeline is issuefied in this cluster in relation to diverse concerns, including climate change (#climateemergency, #climatejustice, #climate), fossil fuels (#fossilfuels, #notankers, #nopipelines),

critiques of the national pipeline bailout by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (#stopthebailout, #stoptrudeau), environmental concerns (#motherearth), and Indigenous sovereignty (#firstnations, #warriorup), including in reference to the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (#undrip). Hashtags also reference Indigenous-led resistance via campaigns, such as the Coast Salish campaign to #protecttheinlet. Similarly, the hashtags #waterprotectors and #coastprotectors refuse framing of water protection as militant 'protest' and instead evoke Indigenous understandings of care for land.

An image stack from one of these central locations, Vancouver City Hall (Figure 2C), emphasizes this heterogeneous anti-pipeline sentiment, though it also captures explicitly anti-colonial components of resistance. Layered throughout the stack are many images taken during strikes and protests on location at City Hall. Rather than celebrities, images feature everyday citizens holding their protest posters. By tagging a local landmark rather than the city more generally, protest participants no longer activate Vancouver's civic imaginary but instead locate their resistance in the moment and re-story their City Hall through their images and posts, constructing it as a place of anti-pipeline activism. The dominant (most liked) image in the stack speaks back to the power represented by City Hall by capturing a moment of decolonial resistance: the statue of Captain George Vancouver wearing a flag known as a 'Warrior' or 'Unity' flag and fronted with a poster decrying ongoing violence towards Indigenous women and girls. Gendered violence towards Indigenous women is inherent to the Trans Mountain pipeline issue, as the temporary worker camps associated with pipeline construction, also known as 'man camps,' are known for increasing sexual violence, rape, disappearance, and murder of Indigenous women in proximal communities (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019; Sweet, 2013; Whyte, 2017). Overlaid on multiple protest images, this defaced statue captures a strong anti-colonial thread in anti-pipeline resistance on Vancouver's city streets, which persists even among mainstream environmental and climate activism. It also links anti-pipeline activism to anti-colonial movements more broadly, which have in recent years been removing statues and other signs of colonial violence from public spaces. Unlike the more celebrity-oriented images affiliated with the city of Vancouver location tag, the dominant images from City Hall evidence people on the streets speaking back to power, including colonial power, as they re-story this civic site through location-tagged posts.

Tag: Kistilano

In another corner of the city, a collection of anti-pipeline posts emerges from the beachfront neighborhood of Kitsilano (or 'Kits,' as it is popularly known). Famous for its beaches and outdoor fitness – including beach volleyball, seafront running paths, and a 137-meter outdoor pool – Kitsilano is not a site of street activism. Yet users located in Kitsilano post on Instagram against the Trans Mountain pipeline, tagging not only anti-pipeline hashtags linked to the central cluster, but also a unique assortment of lifestyle hashtags affiliated with the Pacific northwest (#pnw) and BC tourism, such as #pnwexplorations, #pnwbc, #fitness, #hellobc, and #beautyofbc. Echoing the outdoor-oriented hashtags affiliated with the city of Vancouver, these BC-oriented hashtags harmonize with Kitsilano's image stack (Figure 2B), which consists primarily of balmy daytime and sunset images of Kits Beach, with ominous tankers looming in English Bay. While tankers are a familiar sight from Kits Beach, the CBC news article in the image stack speaks to local fears of increased tanker traffic through the Burrard Inlet, which could lead to further oil spills, ruining the beach lifestyles that are the love of locals and tourists alike. The combination of lifestyle hashtags and beach images captures a NIMBY ('not in my backyard') attitude among Kitsilano locals. Local NIMBYism is called out by the green card overlaying the image stack; public outrage over the pipeline in Kitsilano would not be concerned with lost jobs but with harm to local lifestyles that come with the high price tag of rent or home ownership in the neighborhood. While protection of homes and livelihoods is indeed an expected and worthwhile reason for resisting large-scale extractive projects, the entitlement and pride of place evident at Kitsilano reflects colonial

homemaking practices by settlers who lay claim to Indigenous lands, erasing the histories that produced it as such and ignoring the violences required to maintain settler privileges (Whyte 2016). The fact that home-making is linked with beach imagery is significant. Recognized as a space of colonial boundary-making that protects elite settler lifestyles and privileges, the beach recurs as a site of denial of Indigenous ownership and sovereignty – and of white settler possession, 'wherein the hypocrisy and incoherency of "us" is laid out on full display' (Kelly 2021, 237). Applying the Kitsilano location tag on Instagram, users are able to invoke their positions as Kitsilano residents, whether to further lay claim to their entitlements, or, in the case of the green information card, to critique local cultures of entitlement in support of anti-pipeline resistance. In this way, the neighborhood and local culture is brought into contestation via platform affordances, even among those sharing anti-pipeline sentiment.

Tag: Coast Salish Territory

In direct contrast with Kitsilano is a collection of expressly anti-colonial posts affiliated with the location tag for Coast Salish Territory. While this location tag indicates a large piece of land stretching from Oregon in the United States into the interior of BC, I included it in the set as it is the only non-colonial location tag available for the Vancouver region, aside from the less-used 'Unceded Coast Salish Territory' and 'Tsleil-Waututh Nation,' the second of which refers more specifically to land in the area known as North Vancouver. The difficulties in selecting Indigenous place names on Instagram, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations on whose lands Vancouver has been built, indicates the coloniality of the platform infrastructure as it disciplines place-naming practices into set patterns. However, users have added Coast Salish Territory as a location tag and are using it in relation to pipeline-resistant posts in anti-colonial ways. Proximal to the center of the network graph where pipeline opposition is located in downtown Vancouver, posts linked with Coast Salish Territory similarly apply heterogeneous anti-pipeline hashtags. However, Coast Salish posts also notably link to #mmiw and #mmwig for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, connecting the pipeline to gendered colonial violence. The image stack (Figure 2D) also exhibits anti-colonial pipeline resistance, revealing images of Indigenous women with fists raised in solidarity, posters speaking to the sacredness of water, and protestors encountering the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The photographic documentation and sharing of images of police intervention is the work of activists who openly question state authority through practices common to social media, whereby the policing of racialized bodies (Bonilla and Rosa 2015) and the use of state force to stifle political dissent (Poell and Borra 2012) is made public. Further, the Indigenous land acknowledgement provided through the Coast Salish Territory tag may signify an anti-colonial understanding of police intervention by publics who '[understand] state institutions, in any form, as sites of further colonial oppression' (Mars 2015, 115) and white supremacy. Publics gather around the Coast Salish Territory tag, circulating subversive and anti-colonial expression in relation to place and undoing the colonial city by appropriating Instagram's affordances.

'**Intimate Imperialism' on Instagram – and its Resistance and Refusal**

Through infrastructures, cities are 'constituted as spaces of intimate imperialism' (Cowen 2020, 480); however, following Instagram's infrastructure, similar to how Cowen (2020) follows the rail, 'opens space for the distinct subjects and spaces of refusal and survivance and for the possibility of infrastructure otherwise' (480). Instagram's economy and commodity-oriented culture, infrastructured through its selection of location tags and algorithmic processes, intersects geographically to intimately impact expression, where an intermixing of colonial and anti-colonial pipeline resistance both reinforce and contest the settler colonial city. While large urban areas like Vancouver produce diffuse, heterogenous issue expressions, variance within the network graph evidences how together, location tags and hashtags issuefy the Trans Mountain in geographically located and very pointed ways. While located issue expression indicates the situatedness of activism across the city, it also points to how Instagram enables publics to leverage local cultures and imaginaries (like Vancouver and Kistilano) to perform

colonial urbanism, while compounding coloniality through limited toponymic selection that favors businesses and official, colonial place names, serving the platform's data gathering and corporate agenda. At the same time, publics resist, appropriate, or bypass restrictive platform infrastructures by applying Indigenous place names (like Coast Salish Territory) to subversively reconfigure both the issue and the land altogether, also taking up the platform to restory local sites (like City Hall) in anti-colonial ways.

Activated through both imagery and the location tags for Kitsilano specifically and the city more generally is Vancouver's local pride in a west coast lifestyle, which infuses anti-pipeline activism in these particular locations, supported by Instagram's economy and cultures. While love for local wilderness and oceanic landscapes provides strong motivation for environmental preservation and protection against pipeline developments, the image of Vancouver as a pristine site for outdoor recreation and beach repose follows what Whyte (2016) calls the 'homeland-inscription process of settlement' (15), normalizing settler presence and colonial framing of the land. Through homeland-inscription, settlers displace Indigenous self-determination and instead naturalize 'cultural and economic values associated with [settler] expectations for a certain quality of life' (Whyte 2016, 17) – a racial process that becomes infrastructured through civic planning, legal architectures, and property regimes that legitimize white settler presence in spaces such as Kits beach (Dorries et al. 2019). In accordance with these expectations for ongoing outdoor lifestyles, colonial systems remain unquestioned as the underlying basis for elite privilege in Vancouver. Instagram's location tool contributes to homeland inscription, favoring colonial and capitalist naming practices, and concomitantly limiting Indigenous naming practices and references to specific Indigenous territories. Further, Instagram's culture of sharing positive and promotional imagery, circulated with touristic and campaign hashtags for maximum reach, means that these colonial and corporate performances reach greater audiences than more subversive posts. Anti-colonial resistance to the pipeline, which calls for Indigenous sovereignty, is therefore undermined through layered home-making in both grounded and platformed spheres.

The infrequent presence of Indigenous place names in the set evidences how narrow toponymic selection available on Instagram limits activist expression and aligns with colonial impulses to claim, map, categorize, and surveil. While they may appear neutral and natural, naming practices on Instagram via location tags follow colonial naming practices by subtly communicating hegemonic narratives and functioning as mechanisms of classification, data gathering, and control (Murphyao and Black 2015; Rose-Redwood et al. 2010; Wideman 2015). They also support the commodity orientation of the platform; the prominence of the Rickshaw Theatre in the network graph (Figure 1), for instance, reminds us of how simple it is to add a business name as a location tag in Instagram and how much more common it is to signal boost businesses – rather than activist messages – on the platform. Surrounding the Rickshaw Theatre in the network graph are not only anti-pipeline hashtags but also hashtags linking to #musician, #music, and #singer, revealing how Instagram activism is enmeshed in the colonial-capitalist structure of the platform, where protest and local business promotion become interlocked.

While these cross purposes may seem benign, toponyms are used in colonial contexts to erase Indigenous nations (Nash 1990, 460) by eliminating Indigenous languages in public spaces and rupturing relationships between Indigenous cultures and the land, which are often reflected in Indigenous place names (Carbaugh and Rudnick, 2006). The banality of naming practices on Instagram through a mere click in a pre-selected list shrouds the dispossessive nature of settler colonialism for capital gain, which is played out through multiple extractive means, from pipeline infrastructures to platformed data gathering. Through repetition in Instagram, colonial toponymy may function both semiotically and materially, as 'textual inscriptions [are] physically embedded in the landscape, and… everyday speech acts reinforce the 'common sense' of the neocolonial geographical imagination' (Rose-Redwood 2016, 198; see also Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). Along with material geolocational regimes such as street names and building numbers, virtual locative technologies such as Instagram's limited location field function

similarly to what Rose-Redwood et al. (2010) term 'calculable spaces,' which are used to regulate representation and communication, as well as to serve data gathering and surveillance. The impacts of location selection (or lack of selection) are not merely representational, therefore; they may also hold significant grounded effects. As a result, one of the first rules of posting on social media from a protest or demonstration is to minimize digital traces by removing metadata such as location tags, and users may consider these effects when posting. Further, we see how activists not only evade data surveillance but also subvert colonial naming practices by sharing expressly anti-colonial posts along with the location tag for Coast Salish Territory, which cannot be pinpointed to a specific location. Here we see how activists may resist, appropriate, or counteract Instagram's geolocative affordances through 'more-than-visual acts' (Kelly 2021) that counteract the colonial platform even as they also resist the pipeline expansion on the ground in the city.

While evading colonial surveillance through the Coast Salish Territory tag, anti-pipeline activism is also made even more expressly anti-colonial by reinforcing the ontological reality of Indigenous relations to the territory. Posts located in Coast Salish Territory also powerfully represent Indigenous leadership, question state authority, and link the pipeline to gendered colonial violence. The use of Coast Salish Territory for expressly anti-colonial purposes reveals how activists are also actively undermining naturalized settler relations – both in Vancouver and within the platform itself – in ways that '[speak] to the agentic quality of place, a sense of place that is always resisting imperial representations that obscure Indigeneity' (Kelly 2021, 237). In doing so, they question and indeed bypass the racialized and corporatized hierarchies built into both the city and Instagram's platform infrastructure.

Anti-colonial resistance is further evident within the collective actions in downtown Vancouver as publics critique seats of power and restory city hall through resistant imagery that links anti-pipeline activism through Instagram's infrastructure to broader anti-colonial movements. Part of a larger flow of Instagram imagery documenting the removal of colonial statues, and publicly visible over the platform to viewers both within the city and further afield, photos of Captain George Vancouver's defaced statue imply that the Trans Mountain pipeline is not only a Vancouver-based issue but is connected with state-sponsored colonial violence in diverse contexts globally. Following the infrastructure of Instagram, therefore, we can see how cities like Vancouver are constituted in relation to 'a set of racialized and racializing commitments that overflow their territorial boundaries' (Dorries et al. 2022, 267) – but also that resistance is linked across territorial boundaries, including over social media.

While Trans Mountain anti-pipeline activism extends far beyond BC's southwest coast, Vancouver provides a specific site to explore the intersections of platform, place, and anti-pipeline sentiment in activist expression. By following Instagram's infrastructure using digital methods and visual methodologies, we see how location-based expression around the Trans Mountain pipeline issue both performs Vancouver as a settler colonial city and transforms it, as activists reconfigure relations both on the land and in the digital realm. As an infrastructure not only of intimate imperialism but also of resistance and refusal, Instagram reveals how coloniality interacts in the digital production of urban space, pointing to a need for digital platforms that work against colonial and corporate aims and enable instead the creation of cities otherwise.

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