

Visions of Consent: Nunavummiut Against the Exploitation of “Resource Frontiers”

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Despite a long history of colonial, military, and extractive industry imposition on the land, waters, and people of Inuit Nunangat, resistance to such efforts is thriving.¹ As fossil fuel and mineral prospectors eagerly await any opportunity to explore this “resource frontier,” Inuit and their allies put forward alternative visions of land and sea stewardship through visual media.² On the impact of Indigenous media Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart note, “Contemporary Indigenous media demonstrate the extent to which the hallmarks of an earlier regime of empire—colonization, forced assimilation, genocide, and diaspora—are being challenged and displaced by new constellations of global power. Indigenous media often directly address the politics of identity and representation by engaging and challenging the dominant political forms at both the national and international level. In this landscape, control of media representation and of cultural self-definition asserts and signifies cultural and political sovereignty itself.”³ Through highlighting the work of two women-led initiatives, I show how *Nunavummiut* (the people living in Nunavut) employ visual media to publicly wage their place-based knowledge as a mode of creative intervention against state-supported military and extractive forces—reminding us that that “the world is larger than the market.”⁴ These visual media also resist the ways in which such forces have permeated Inuit bodies, lands, and waters. So successful are these visual acts of resistance that they compel southerners to reevaluate their approaches to northern development so drastically that projects are abandoned or no longer seen as viable.⁵ In putting these strategies into practice, Inuit engage with state-sanctioned systems of law and governance, but ultimately reshape these structures to better suit their own needs and the needs of the Arctic land and sea.

I begin by considering material impacts emerging from the way in which national narratives and systems of signification dually portray the Arctic as an untouched utopia and as a wasteland, drawing on Voyles's notion of *wastelanding* as a framework for analyzing this phenomenon.⁶ I then discuss two projects, the Cold War era DEW Line and the recent seismic testing proposal in Clyde River, both of which played a role in shaping dominant representational tropes of the North. Finally, I consider two initiatives that resist these dominant patterns of representation and land use. The Place Names Program, administrated by the Inuit Heritage Trust in Iqaluit, plays a key role in the rematriation of Inuit place-names to maps of Nunavut.⁷ Arnait Video Productions, a women-led film collective based in Igloolik, puts forward myriad autonomous visions of the North that prominently feature the voices and visions of women, youth, and elders. Through interviews with those involved with these organizations as well as analysis of media, I show how the maps produced by the Place Names Program and films produced by Arnait Video Productions resist visions of the Arctic as a wasteland, and of Inuit bodies as pollutable. These maps and films directly respond to legacies of misrepresentation and are in themselves forms of counter-mapping. Both organizations are notable for their dual attention to both inward-facing and outward-facing work—efforts strategically intended for the eyes of Nunavummiut as well as for southerners. Ultimately, I argue that seeing the Arctic in ways that challenge military and extractive representations and center Inuit epistemologies and voices, plays a significant role in halting the continued molecular and chemical colonization of Inuit lands and bodies. In other words, visual media is a tool for resisting unwanted extractive and military bodily intimacies and insisting on consent before entry of these toxic presences. These media put forward visions of consent and reciprocity, strategically undermining visions of invasion.

Settler Colonial Wastelanding in the North

In *Wastelanding*, Voyles explains that within the system of settler colonialism, settlers either claim Indigenous lands as their utopic rightful territory, or see these lands as barren and undesirable.⁸ She states, “The ‘wasteland’ is a racial and spatial signifier that renders an environment and the bodies that inhabit it pollutable.”⁹ Voyles illuminates the ways in which particular discourses—not particular features of the land—surrounding Diné territory (and many other parts of the American West), for example, led to its formation as a “wasteland.”¹⁰ Although deserts are commonly subjected to the practice of wastelanding, Voyles makes clear that the wasteland is in fact a “floating signifier”: “it does not always have a specific somatic or material referent, but rather it flexibly (floatingly) marks different objects, landscapes, and bodies Just as race is a discursive technology with often deadly material effects, so too is wastelanding the process by which pollutability is materialized.”¹¹ The way in

which Nunavut has often been represented, as well as the history of extractive projects in the region, make it an apt case study of how this process has manifested in the North.¹²

One of four Inuit regions in what is now often known as Canada, the territory of Nunavut was established after almost thirty years of persistent campaigning by the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (an advocacy organization, since renamed Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) and the broader Inuit community. Similar to the ways in which the American West was storied as a sublime frontier, integral to the formation of a sovereign US American identity during the period of westward expansion, the Canadian Arctic was and is commonly framed as a place of uncharted wilderness and opportunity, by both the United States and Canada. For instance, asserting Arctic sovereignty in order to ensure security during the Cold War was put forward as a necessary measure, without any apparent consideration of how such measures would affect Inuit or effort to acquire their consent. This theme continues in contemporary conversations around access to the now melting Northwest Passage.¹³ When one delves deeper into these narratives, it becomes clear that these initiatives are not solely about the defense or political sovereignty of settler nation-states; they are also linked to continued global fossil fuel and mineral dependence, and to the objective of acquiring access to these natural resources—regardless of consent.

As temperatures along the Northwest Passage and elsewhere in the Arctic rise, the South is envisioning the region as a prime opportunity to continue business as usual under fossil fuel culture. This is a characteristic of late capitalism's expanse toward increasingly prohibitive points of extraction. As Colin Mooers states, "Mature capitalism is inevitably imperialist; the outward push of capital, its search for new geographical sources of accumulation, is an inbuilt feature of the system."¹⁴ The further expansion of the extractive industries into the Arctic represents the possibility of additional environmental injustices in a region already disproportionately impacted by destructive industries. This imbalanced relationship, which often lacks the free, prior, and informed consent of those most affected, has already made itself legible through the presence of contaminants in country foods, Inuit bodies, and Arctic lands and waters.¹⁵ According to Inuk activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier, "80 percent of the pollutants found in the Canadian Arctic come from outside of Canada."¹⁶ Watt-Cloutier cites a study, explaining that "Nunavut itself could have, at most, contributed 32 percent of the total toxins found in Nunavut, while sources outside North America contributed only between 2 and 20 percent."¹⁷ This shows that "almost all the dioxins and furans found in the Nunavut environment were a result of North American sources outside of Nunavut," a clear example of the slow violence of toxic colonialism.¹⁸ Water, in its characteristic promiscuity (as noted by MacLeod), carries toxicity into the bodies it sustains, becoming a conduit for unwanted toxic intimacies.¹⁹

Scholars Sarah Deer and Elizabeth Ann Kronk Warner have shown the connection between extractive industries and violence against women in Indigenous communities.²⁰ However, not only the workers in these industries, but also their chemical

byproducts invade Indigenous bodies without consent. As Leanne Simpson, citing Katsi Cook, notes: “[F]or indigenous Peoples, sovereignty means not only the freedom to make decisions about our land but also the freedom to make decisions about our bodies. Sovereignty is the ability to keep our bodies safe from violence It means the freedom to decide if we want to give birth and when and how. *It means we must have the support to breastfeed and that our breast milk is free of contamination, which means that our land and water must also be free of contamination*” (emphasis added).²¹ The material connection between the land and the body is made clear through the evidence of contaminants in breast/chest milk, blood, soil, and waterways.²² Building on Simpson and Cook’s words, I offer an expanded view of how we think about and practice consent, and point toward the power of visual media in demanding that communities’ right to consent (as well as to refuse) be respected.

Extractive Infrastructures

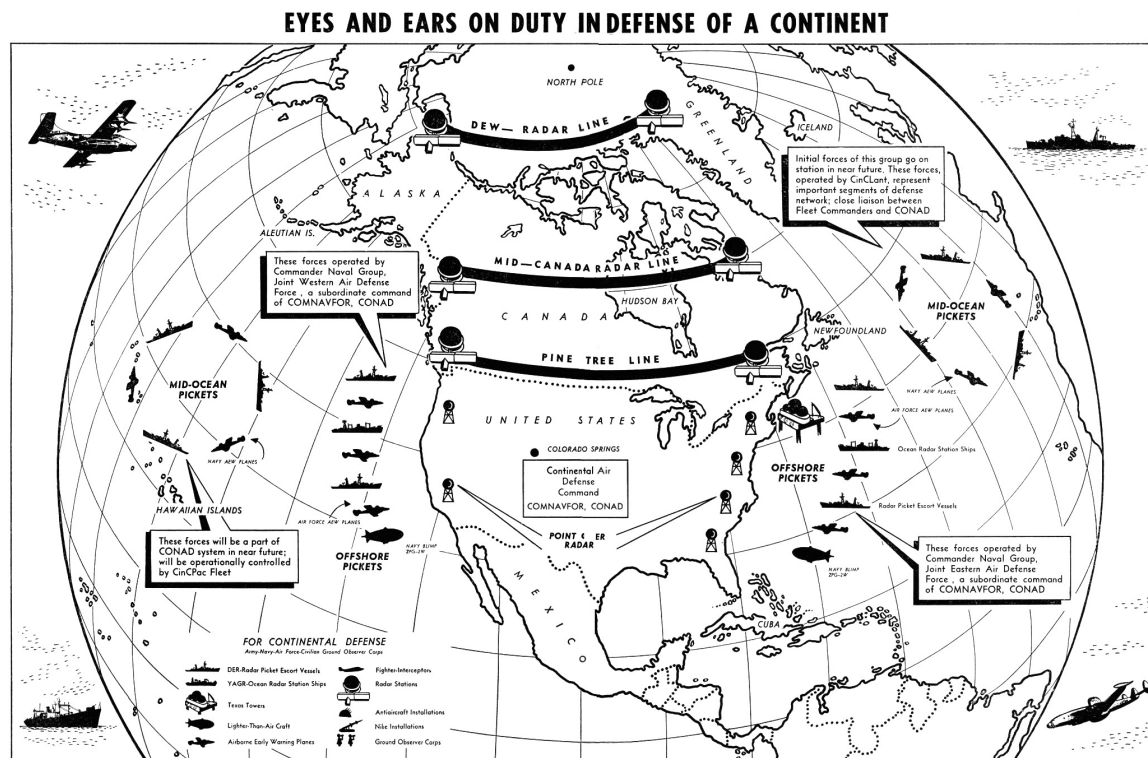


Figure 1. The United States Department of Defense, diagram showing the assets of the US North American Air Defense Command in 1956, U.S. Navy *All Hands Magazine*, September 1956, pp. 32–33.

The Distant Early Warning Line

Before the mid-twentieth century, the Canadian and US military presence in the Arctic was limited.²³ In the mid-twentieth century, the region became an important node of Cold War defense operations. As Soviet Union military power became a threat, the US saw the Arctic as a point of vulnerability, and therefore a place of necessary development. Plans for the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, a strand of advanced weapons

surveillance systems, were quickly put into place (see Figure 1). The US initiated and paid for the project, and Canada ambivalently supported it. Like numerous other key locations of military development during the Cold War, many DEW Line locations were on unceded Indigenous land.

The network of notification systems was intended to prevent Soviet attacks through sensing aeronautic disruptions along the curve of the Arctic from Alaska to Iceland. The construction of this combined defense and surveillance system required military infrastructures that had never before existed at this scale in the North. Materials for roads and runways, power lines, and workers were shipped north. Food, housing, heating systems, and a steady stream of petrochemicals were necessary in order to sustain the system during its thirty-six years in operation, and “POL (petroleum, oil, and lubricants)” were “the lifeblood of existence” in this context.²⁴

Propaganda films produced by the United States Air Force and defense contractor Western Electric during and after the line’s construction were rife with references to the power of increased visual abilities across the Arctic. The sixty-three DEW Line sites were declared to be “the eyes of the North” and “a fence of electronic eyes.”²⁵ As the 1965 film *Eyes of the North*, produced by the United States Air Force, states, the “unblinking eyes of northern defense are always alert.”²⁶ These films also framed the Arctic as a “desolate, savage, remote” place, not suitable for human habitation, ignoring the longstanding presence of Inuit and further instilling the notion that the DEW Line bolstered the “civilization” of the North.²⁷ The idea that the Arctic was “wild,” “desolate,” and “uncultivated” is flawed. It was simply stewarded in ways unrecognizable to the settler state.

The *DEW Line Story* (Western Electric Company, 1959) script contains countless mentions of the word “wasteland.” This language is also present in the notes regarding shots. For instance, the first page of the script contains a note reading “superimposed over desolate Arctic wasteland” (see Figure 2).²⁸ This way of seeing the North is consistent with other representations that minimize the fact that Inuit have continuously inhabited the land since time immemorial. The notion of subduing the Arctic landscape accompanies the propagation of white supremacist ideologies, for instance—the idea that military personnel are a “civilizing” force.²⁹ The final two pages of the script are particularly revealing:

The building of the Dew Line has done more than provide a vital warning system. It has conquered the far northern wilderness.

This remote part of the world may now be put to whatever purpose men wish. ... But perhaps the true historical role of the ... Dew Line will prove to be the opening up, for peaceful and productive purposes of a vast new ... frontier above the Arctic Circle, the untapped resources of which we have as yet barely glimpsed. That would be the finest reward of all for ... the men who built the Dew Line.³⁰ (emphasis added)

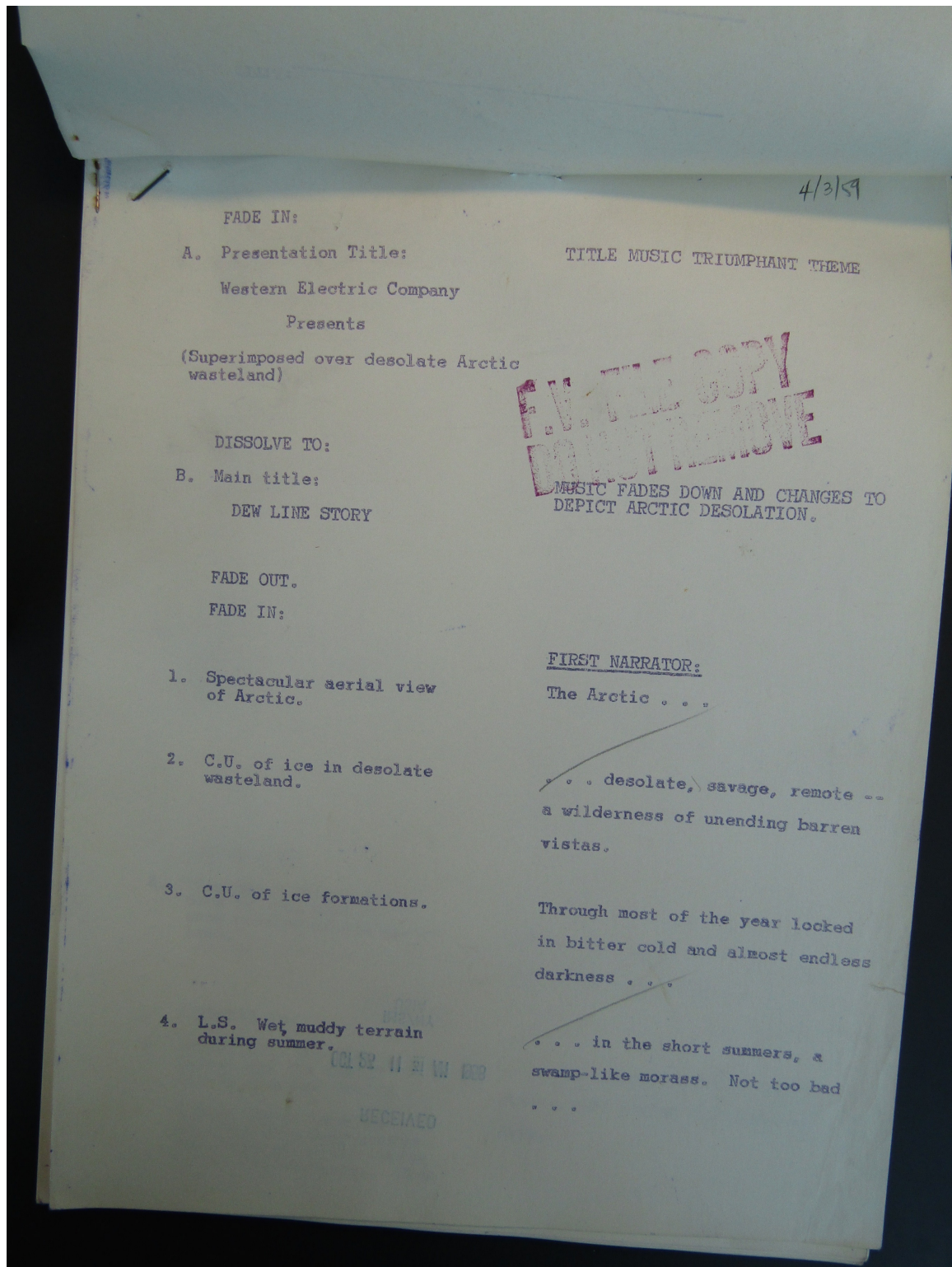


Figure 2. Transcript, The Dew Line Story, p.1, NAID 1149225; Movie Scripts, 1942–1965; Records of the US Information Agency, 1900–2003, Record Group 306; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Clearly the US envisioned the DEW Line not only as a necessity for Cold War defense, but also an entry point into this “vast new frontier”—the first step toward transforming the north into an extractive zone.³¹

The creation of the DEW Line was a massive effort. Military infrastructure of this breadth had never before been built in comparable environmental conditions. Rather than working with the environment to devise architectural solutions that were sensitive to the surroundings, the military attempted to “conquer that unknown frozen wasteland.”³² As a result of the construction of the DEW Line, the topography of the Arctic was imprinted with the aggressive stamp of the military infrastructure. One can trace this area of the Arctic circle by following the large radomes which now mark its curve.³³ In addition to the radomes and station buildings, the project also penetrated the landscape with roads and landing strips that would ease access to the Arctic’s natural resources in the future. However, the DEW Line technology quickly became redundant, and “half of the radar stations were decommissioned in 1964.”³⁴

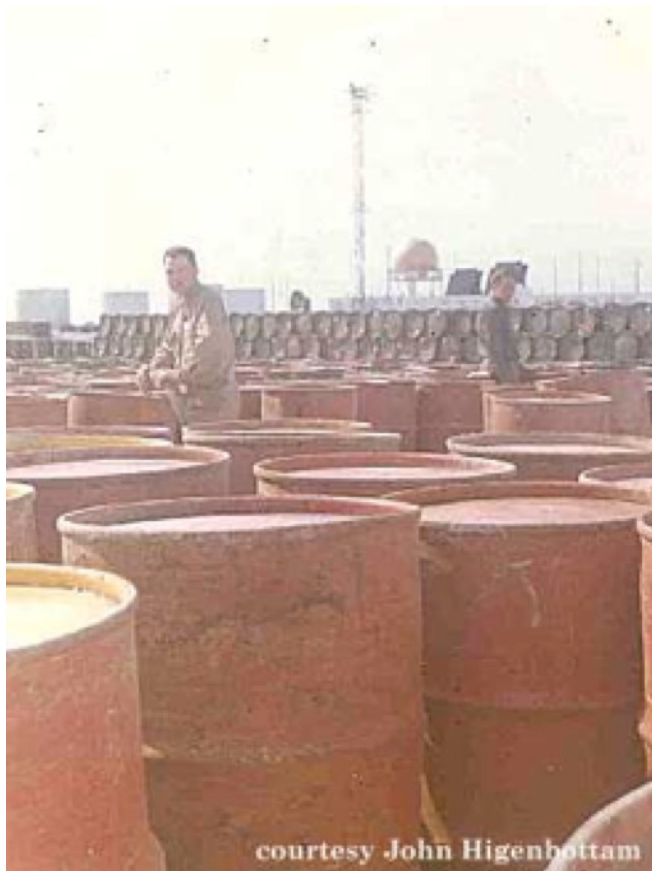


Figure 3. Alan McMillan (left), Alex Puritch (right) unloading fuel drums at the FOX-Main DEW Line site. Hall Beach, Nunavut. Courtesy John Higenbottam. Used with permission.

As Cold War fears calmed, the DEW Line left a virtually immeasurable amount of contamination—from lead to petroleum to PCBs, showing that “garbage itself might be a colonizing force” (see Figure 3).³⁵ To avoid a fast seepage of these contaminants into the land and sea in close proximity to the DEW Line’s path, large-

scale clean-up efforts were initiated.³⁶ The clean-up of the forty-two DEW Line locations in Canadian territory was finally completed in 2014, at a cost of five hundred and seventy-five million dollars (CAD).³⁷ Today's generation of Inuit community members have been shaped by memories of the DEW Line legacy—from the relocation of many families that came along with the initiation of military camps, to the extensive clean up with which many of them were involved. These memories inform how Inuit respond to contemporary development proposals.

Seismic Testing in Clyde River

As formerly icy seascapes melt, interest in seismic testing is quickly growing.³⁸ This practice is used to map underwater topographies, to identify the most profitable locations for oil drilling. The process requires the use of airguns, which can reach noise levels of two hundred fifty decibels, far above a level bearable for sea life.³⁹ While resistance to extractive projects and testing that occur above water is significant, seismic testing was not given as much attention until very recently. This is likely due in part to its relative invisibility, as well as the challenges in visualizing the widespread effects of this practice. Furthermore, without understanding sea creatures, which are the most immediately affected by the loud sonic shocks sent through the ocean during seismic testing, it is relatively easy to overlook the outcomes. Seismic testing has the potential to drastically interfere with the ability of Arctic sea life to communicate, reproduce, and orient themselves. In other words, seismic testing creates a sense of sensory impairment and disorientation for sea life while expanding the extractive industries' capabilities of sensing.

In "Sounding a Sea-Change: Acoustic Ecology and Arctic Ocean Governance," Shirley Roburn encourages readers to consider the ocean "as an acoustic space," therefore opening frames of analysis that attend to the specific sonic harms enacted on sea life through seismic testing.⁴⁰ Roburn echoes the arguments of many Inuit hunters and fisherfolk, who have attested to the violence of seismic testing against sea life—and therefore against their communities' lifeways.

After first experiencing the effects of seismic testing in the seventies, the Nunavut community of Clyde River was recently confronted with the issue for the second time. Many hunters reported horrific sights following the initial testing—beached seals with bleeding ears, and a reduction in whale populations, among other issues. In communities like Clyde River, where hunting and fishing is an important part of subsistence and culture, seismic testing also had a significant impact on locals.⁴¹ Inuit epistemologies in this region emphasize the relationship between sea mammals and humans.⁴² Further, it was increasingly difficult to acquire food following the negative impacts on sea life. When confronted with a new seismic testing initiative in 2014, which was approved by the National Energy Board of Canada without the consent of the Clyde River community, many residents were concerned that history might repeat itself.⁴³ Of the recurring struggle, Clyde River Mayor Jerry Natanine states, "We cannot

wait year in and year out with an axe over our heads wondering if we will be able to feed our families and maintain our way of life. Our community and all Indigenous communities deserve certainty that our rights are truly protected.”⁴⁴

When I spoke with Jerry, he shared how he initially thought the project would benefit his community but changed his mind after he spoke with his father:

After the public meeting, my father was elderly at the time, and I talked to him about what they wanted to do. I thought he would be more supportive, seeing this dream of a better future with all this money. To my surprise, he gave me a face, looked seriously at me, and told me that this is gonna harm wildlife. It harmed wildlife in the past when they were using dynamite out there and it's gonna harm wildlife, and you have to fight it. Amazingly, right then and there my heart changed. I was towards being against this because of the damage it's gonna create to sea animals and our way of life.⁴⁵

Jerry then decided to see if he could find similar stories about seismic testing in the seventies and build community support around resisting the return of this practice. However, significant financial support is required to combat the extractive industries. After a lot of reflection and an emotional reading of Greenpeace's 2014 apology to Inuit, Jerry decided that it might be a good idea to ask Greenpeace for support.⁴⁶ Although many community members were not pleased with this idea at first, the process of discussing this decision ultimately led to significant community healing, and a subsequent collective willingness to approach Greenpeace.

This partnership, between a harmed party and the organization responsible for harm, resulted in surprising and impressive results.⁴⁷ The residents of Clyde River eventually brought their case to the Supreme Court of Canada. Greenpeace helped with legal fees and grew support through social media campaigns, in part to earn the trust of the community following the devastating effects of past anti-sealing campaigns.⁴⁸ Communication was key throughout. Greenpeace, Clyde River's lawyer Nader Hasan, Jerry, and the broader community, built structures of communication that allowed space for all community members to be fully informed and have a voice in decisions. This model, manifested through practice, was drastically different than the model of entry without consent practiced by so many extractive companies in Nunavut.⁴⁹

In late 2017 the Canadian Supreme Court ruled in favor of Clyde River, and therefore also in favor of the rights of sea mammals and their *sonic sovereignty*. The case can now be used as precedent in future lawsuits brought by Indigenous communities advocating for their right to full consultation. Currently, Nunavummiut living in communities adjacent to the Mary River Iron Mine, in the Qikiqtaaluk Region of Nunavut, are fighting the proposed expansion of the mine. Jerry has made it clear that he would

be willing to take the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation to court⁵⁰: “We see again that a that company coming in, has all the right words, all the right-sounding words of caring about Inuit way, caring about hunting and our culture, but in the meantime destroying it. [...] We’re prepared to go to court, and we’ve been talking about it. As time goes on, there are even more organizations that we could sue.”⁵¹

The community of Clyde River managed to use the settler-colonial judicial system to their advantage. In doing this, they contested the enforced invisibility and inaudibility of humans, sea mammals, lands, and waters that would all have been impacted by seismic testing. Although this case began as an example of extractive assault, community members and their allies successfully transformed this challenging situation into a tool for future resistance.

Landscapes of Consent and Reciprocity



Figure 4. Inuit Heritage Trust, Nunavut: Where We Live and Travel, 2014.

Despite ongoing affronts to Inuit land, water, and bodies, many media makers continue to put forward dynamic, autonomous visions of their communities—from maps to films to artwork (see Figure 4). In her crucial text on visual sovereignty, Tuscarora artist, curator, and scholar Jolene Rickard states, “As part of an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of

sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics.”⁵² On the potential of Indigenous media, with an emphasis on film, Seneca scholar Michelle Raheja notes, “Transnational Indigenous media production rethinks Audre Lorde’s dictum that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ by insisting that the very foundations on which the master’s house is built are Indigenous and should be reterritorialized or repatriated. Moreover, Indigenous filmmakers working within the framework of decolonization have found ways of appropriating some of the ‘master’s tools,’ such as some forms of media technology, to Indigenous ends in order to rebuild their own houses.”⁵³ The Place Names Program and Arnait Video Productions show that visual sovereignty is deeply connected to the right of Indigenous communities to grant or withhold consent *before* extractive industries and military enter their lands, and before the material manifestations of these forces enter Indigenous bodies. Although these initiatives make toxic molecular intimacies more legible, they also make other kinds of intimacy legible—intimacies based on consent and care, rather than assault and harm. The aforementioned Inuit media are acts of visual sovereignty, but they also exemplify the power of visual media as a tool for insisting on communities’ right to consent or refuse (see Figure 5).

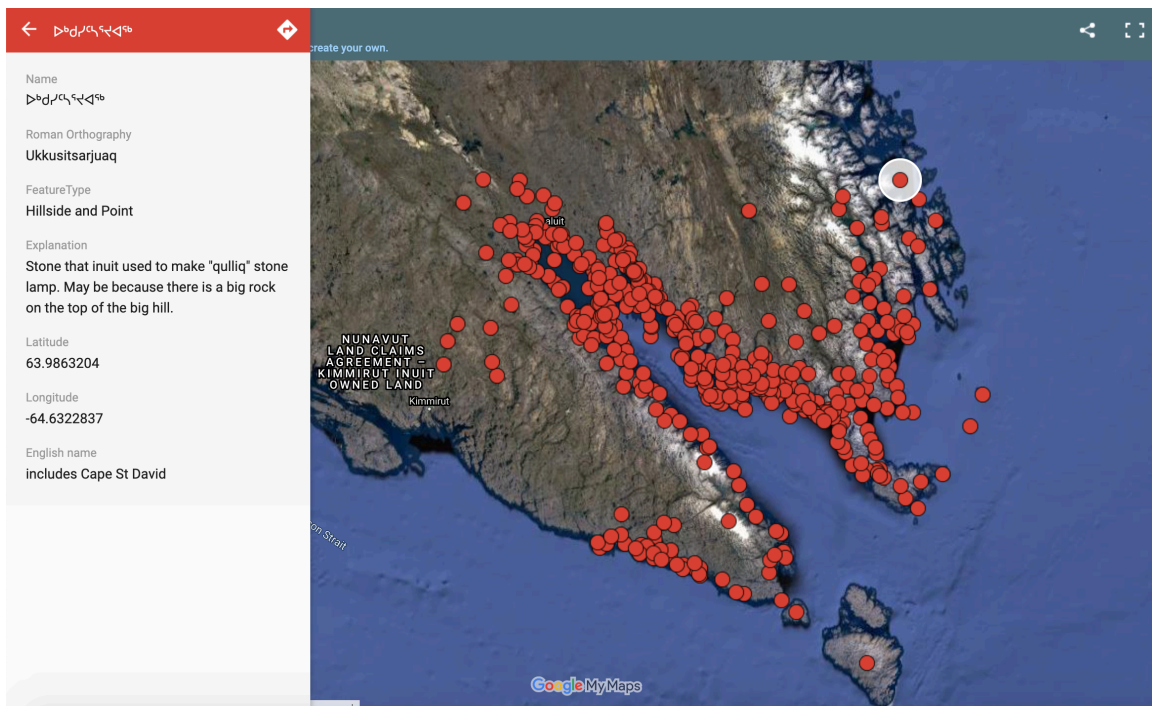


Figure 5. The Place Names Program, screen shot.

The Place Names Program⁵⁴

Figure 6. With an elder-expert and a couple of younger hunter-experts reviewing maps in the Naujaat (formerly Repulse Bay) area for the purpose of documenting the place names, producing maps, and following the process through to the names being made official. (Photograph: Lynn Peplinski)



Like many of the areas in what are now commonly known as the United States and Canada, the map of Nunavut was from the time of contact until very recently populated with English place names.⁵⁵ In *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, Tonawanda Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman states, “As ‘a spatial embodiment of knowledge,’ maps can reveal much about the processes of producing settler colonial nations.”⁵⁶ Goeman argues that Indigenous women’s literature is a platform for decolonial re-imaginings of space. Goeman terms this work “(re)mapping”: “(Re)mapping [...] is the labor Native authors and the communities they write within and about undertake, in the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making, to generate new possibilities.”⁵⁷

Though her book is focused on the decolonial potential of literature, it also has significant resonance in discussions of Indigenous mapping more broadly. As Goeman notes, “[...] (re)mapping is not just about regaining that which was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures.”⁵⁸ Maps created by and for Indigenous communities are important tools of destabilizing settler-colonial understandings of land, and of affirming the lifeways that have long been oppressed by settler nation-states (see Figure 6). In the introduction to their Special Issue of *American Indian Culture & Research Journal*, cartographers Margaret Wickens Pearce (Potawatomi) and Renee Pualani Louis (Kanaka ‘Ōiwi) point out that “Indigenous mapping has emerged since the 1970s as a movement that utilizes the power of maps for visually explaining and defending issues that arise from cultural use of territory, including land claims, natural resources, and sovereignty. Maps are now fundamental to Indigenous self-determination and perceived to be essential tools for portraying Indigenous environmental, political, cultural, and socioeconomic landscapes.”⁵⁹ The work of the Place Names Program is an apt example of how maps can

bolster movements for self-determination and the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge.

After a long struggle for autonomy from the settler government of Canada, the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement was finalized in 1993, and Nunavut officially became a territory in 1999. Though Nunavut must still contend with the structures of the Canadian nation-state, its status as a territory has resulted in important moves toward self-government. The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement contained a mandate to rematriate Inuit place names to territorial maps, and the Place Names program was then initiated by the Science Institute in Iqaluit (now called the Nunavut Research Institute).⁶⁰ The project was later taken on by the Inuit Heritage Trust, also in Iqaluit. This was not the first or only project of its kind but it has been one of the longest sustained. Lynn Peplinski and Zipporah Ungalaq of the Inuit Heritage Trust work side by side in an effort to slowly return Inuit place names, in Inuktitut, to their rightful places on the map.



Figure 7. With elder-experts in Kimmirut, reviewing an early version of a map that was produced featuring their traditional place names. (Photograph: Lynn Peplinski)

The two travel to the small communities across Nunavut, learn the place names from elders and hunters in each community, document them, and make them official through an arduous governmental process. Once the names are officially corrected, maps are printed and shared. The outcomes of this initiative are myriad. Young hunters are able to find hunting locations that they might not otherwise know, rescue operations are assisted through the detailed documentation of places across Nunavut, and there is a mental health benefit elicited through seeing Inuktitut place names on an official map (see Figure 7). Furthermore, the maps are evidence of the longstanding sovereignty of Inuit across Nunavut and can be used as storytelling tools to learn more about the land and its history. Zipporah states:

[W]hat I have also found is what I've heard from the elders as well talking about the younger youth not having an access

out there anymore, because of either going to school or jobs. And they have only a weekend to go a certain distance, like it's not a full year seasonal going places anymore. It's a very limited time, so a lot of the times it will be just like for my Igloodik Island friends, they have so many names on this little island. And most of the people who live there and travel around that little island know most of the areas and place names. But if you go further inland to Melville Peninsula, or further towards Repulse Bay or Pond Inlet or Arctic Bay, it's not a regular route anymore. It used to be. A lot of the times, they'll be just using the main targets or main places they have to stop at. But not necessarily knowing those Inuktitut place names along the way.⁶¹

In other words, knowledge of longstanding place names is fading in communities due in part to the abbreviated time available for hunting. The Place Names Program ensures these names and the knowledge attached to them is available to future generations, despite the temporal squeeze that capitalism places on communities. As Pearce and Louis note, knowledge is spatialized: "Indigenous cultural knowledge is processual, situated, and incorporated into the landscape through place names and stories expressed in the meanings, connections, and interrelationships of those place names."⁶² This makes it all the more important to ensure that the spatial manifestation of this knowledge continues, through providing youth with an entry point to put it into practice.

The work Lynn and Zipporah do may not immediately be understood as a highly political act. When one thinks of movements for self-determination, one may envision people marching in the streets, making themselves visible; or one may think of heated debates in a courthouse, or building a longstanding protest camp. Zipporah and Lynn show that although the work of decolonization is at times quiet and slow, that does not make it any less important.

Zipporah and Lynn repeatedly return to the material they have gathered to ensure the utmost precision, out of respect for the histories that are entwined within the names, as well as their potential for future use by hunters, rescuers, and other community members. Zipporah points out that it can be difficult to ensure the spelling, pronunciation, and coordinates of each place are recorded correctly—especially considering the nuances of different dialects across Inuit Nunangat. The two researchers therefore often take multiple trips to communities to double check the information. When they cannot return to a community right away, Zipporah makes phone calls to elders to ensure all the details of each place are recorded with care and accuracy.

Importantly, the maps produced are populated with their rightful place names, as well as with stories from those who know the places most intimately. The Place

Names Program aims not only to return customary names to the map, but also to make visible the longstanding stewardship of the land, and the histories embedded in that stewardship. As Lynn stated during our conversation, “I’ve always had this image in my mind... when you look at maps of the North, it’s all the footprints of explorers. You can sort of see them walking all over the place. Their footprints are everywhere, because the names are there. And the Inuit footprints have been invisible. So that’s what we’re changing, we’re making [...] these names visible when they’ve been invisible.”⁶³ The maps produced by the Place Names Program, in collaboration with community members across Nunavut, tell a different story than maps produced by colonial explorers, the military, and resource prospectors. Rather than erasing the longstanding history of Inuit living and thriving on the land and sea to make room for the names of military bases, explorers, and mines (and putting forward the idea that the land was “empty” and that they are therefore excused from the responsibility of asking for consent), these maps tell the stories of those who have an intimate familiarity with the land and sea as sources of intergenerational knowledge and sustenance. They reveal landscapes of consent and reciprocity, rather than landscapes of extractive imposition.

Arnait Video Productions

Arnait Video Productions is a women-run, women-centered film production organization based in Igloolik and Montreal. It was initiated by Madeline Ivalu, Mary Kunuk, and Marie-Hélène Cousineau in 1991, after Cousineau was asked to start a video arts center in Igloolik.⁶⁴ Cousineau began meeting with local women, and they would then “discuss stories, then we would go in someone’s house and we would record, and we would go in our little studio and edit.”⁶⁵ This collaborative structure has allowed them to remain sensitive to current local debates. Arnait created work primarily for their own community until 2008, when they released their first full-length feature, intended for a broader audience.⁶⁶ Arnait’s work is a quintessential example of what Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay has termed Fourth Cinema, simply defined as Indigenous Cinema.⁶⁷ As Jennifer Gauthier has noted, Fourth Cinema often moves beyond challenging the legacy of misrepresentation, and into addressing significant political struggles: “This act is what he [Barclay] calls ‘doing justice,’ referring not only to getting the depiction of a people right—to do justice to their image on screen—but also to tackling head-on questions of justice in land rights, civil rights, and cultural representation in the dominant society.”⁶⁸

Since its founding, Arnait Video Productions has released a formidable collection of films, all of which foreground the voices of Inuit. In situations when community members are not given the chance to meaningfully communicate their concerns, many of Arnait Video Productions’ projects offer them a platform from which to share their perspectives. Several of Arnait Video Productions’ projects focus on the impact of resource extraction and climate breakdown on their communities, seamlessly relating

these concerns to broader colonial legacies. Documenting and supporting the sharing of Inuit epistemologies is also a central theme in Arnait Video Productions' oeuvre. Unembellished shots of the Arctic landscape are often juxtaposed with personal, no-frills interviews—often taking place in domestic spaces such as living rooms. Alongside spectacular, fast-paced, high production value films featuring romanticized visions of the Arctic, the work of Arnait Video Productions stands out as remarkably intimate, and therefore compelling.

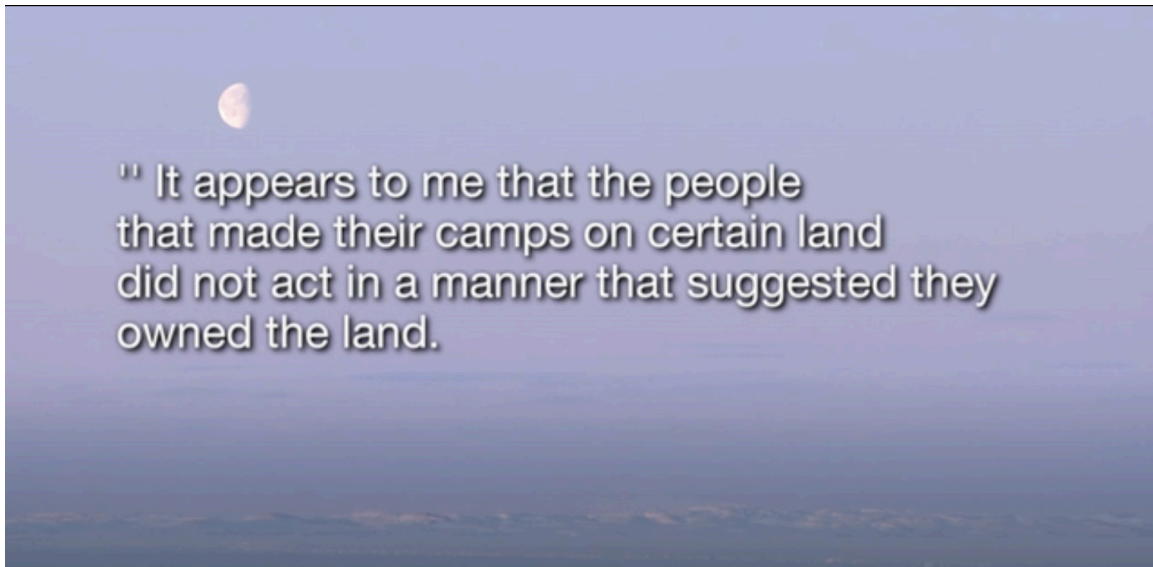


Figure 8. Video still from *A Changing World*, 2010 (dir. Marie-Hélène Cousineau in collaboration with Carol Kunnuk, Arnait Video Productions).

A Changing World (2010) is part of a two-part series called “Show Me on the Map.” The series arose when the Arnait team realized that although mining affects many Inuit, debates regarding mining were still largely kept within communities. Further, the positions of community members themselves were often overlooked when mining projects were announced. Arnait wanted to create a public platform for these important debates, and explore topics such as “the impact of industrialization and mining on local mythology and legends, how people make choices for their future, the coexistence of tradition and economical development, [and] the power of communities in negotiating with mining companies.”⁶⁹ They achieved this through creating this two-part documentary series, as well as an online platform and installation.

A Changing World begins with striking shots of the Arctic land and seascape, which serve to situate viewers in the place around which the debate centers. The opening image is paired with a quote by Pauloosie Ataguttaalukuttuk: “It appears to me that the people that made their camps on certain land did not act in a manner that suggested they owned the land. The only thing that we were discouraged from doing was to take in excess of what we needed. Sometimes we were told to catch only in

numbers that we could take back with us” (see Figure 8).⁷⁰ The entire film is framed by this initial challenge to Western conventions regarding land and ownership. The camera then follows several boats of hunters as they travel across the sea, approaching a group of walrus. This is a vision of the North that centers communities human and nonhuman, rather than the region’s potential as a lucrative site for mining.

The film was created in Igloolik, during a period of intense community debate regarding a proposed open pit iron mine at Mary River (owned by the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation). The proposed site of the mine was directly in the way of at least five communities in Nunavut: Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Igloolik, Hall Beach, and Clyde River. The filmmakers unobtrusively follow elders, youth, and representatives of the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation, and at points feature their own members in front of the camera, as they discuss the potential impacts the mine would have on their community. Explaining the context of the film, Arnait cofounder Marie-Hélène Cousineau states:

If a big company comes and says “well you cannot cross this land anymore, you cannot go there anymore, this is our land now, we’re gonna put a train, we’re gonna put a boat,” they are really also breaking up the land and changing the way you and your future generations will access it. And this is done just like that. I’m sure there is discussion with the government [...] and then you question the whole Nunavut Land Claims Agreement which—was it made to really give the land to companies, because they already knew there was all this richness, things that are transferrable in money underground, because they [Inuit] don’t own the ...

[I interrupt and say “the subsurface mineral rights”]

— Yeah, they just own the land on top. So that’s how it [the film series] came about.⁷¹

Similar criticisms of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement are relatively common. As Marie-Hélène seems to suggest, one begins to wonder if ostensible recognition of Inuit sovereignty by the Canadian government is in fact a formality that has resulted in clearer pathways for the extractive industries to access Nunavut’s subsurface minerals.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the film is how vividly clear it is that Inuit and mining representatives see the land differently. Sitting on a soft beige sofa with what looks to be a child’s mitten casually placed on the back cushion, elder Arsene Ivalu states, he is not against the mine, but against the proposed shipping path—it

intersects with a key walrus migration route. Rather than seeing the project solely at a superficial level, Arsene Ivalu sees the layers of impact that would ripple deep into the sea. Although the mining representative featured in the film states that maintaining open communication about the mine and its impacts is important to the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation, it does not seem that community members have seen evidence of any follow through. Their concerns, while listened to in formal community meetings, are not substantively addressed. According to musician Terry Uyarak, although all members of the community voted against the mine, construction is still moving forward.⁷² Madeline Ivalu, a member of Arnait Video Productions who also often features in front of the camera, speaks of the connection between destroying wildlife and destroying Inuit (as part of the mining process and effects of the infrastructure), and notes that such destruction may be part of the company's plan: "there will [then] be freedom to extract minerals with total abandonment."⁷³ Ivalu adds, "They [mining representatives] seem to try and make Inuit look bad because of what we eat."⁷⁴

Ivalu's words ring true alongside the long history of government hunting and fishing regulations, many of which have disproportionately affected Inuit. Although she seems to be mainly alluding to her community's walrus hunting tradition, the history of suppression of walrus hunting is similar to that of seal hunting. Southerners, many of whom have always had the privilege of choosing whether or not to consume certain foods, criticize the hunting of walrus, seals, and polar bears, and often put into place government regulations against the hunting and sale of these animals and their skins.⁷⁵ Such uninformed criticism reaffirms structures of white supremacy, which see southerners as superior to or more "civilized" than Inuit. The customary foods Inuit consume are therefore instrumentalized by these corporate mining representatives (and other southerners), in the service of their own objectives. According to this narrative, mining will bring "civilization" to the north. But many Inuit elders are aware of the risks of allowing mining on their land. Elder Atuut Akkitirq, who experienced the initial years of the Nanisivik Mine, mentions the negative impacts of mining, particularly on young people. Nanisivik is the site of the first mine in the Arctic, which left behind a legacy of substance use and domestic violence that is common in mining communities.

Many of the interviewees see through the marketing pitches of the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation. A young man bluntly states, "I don't believe when they say 'we have the most efficient, cleanest mining in modern days, because I don't think there is any clean mine.'" Igloodik elder Dominic Angutimarik notes that the mining company's process "is very fast," exhibiting again the very different approaches to temporality held by industrial developers and community members who would like to see many future generations live successfully on the land.⁷⁶ The film also acknowledges the diversity of opinions regarding the mine. For instance, we see Carol Kunnuk running her community radio show, during which she asks callers to voice their positions.⁷⁷ One caller states that the urgent need for jobs motivates some young people to support the mine. This is of course true. The urgency of climate breakdown

and the urgency of economic hardship are both real, and are often falsely framed in opposition.

One of the final scenes in the film features an art teacher, Mary Iyerak. She asks her students to visually respond to the question, “How will our land look like in 30-40 years?” As students create drawings and paintings in response, filmmaker Marie-Hélène Cousineau interviews one young student, Sarafina, about her artwork. Sarafina articulates her concern that Igloolik will be overcrowded with subpar access to quality food, and housing issues will be widespread. Cousineau asks, “What are you going to be doing then?” Sarafina responds, with a glint in her eye, “Crying.” Although the fourteen-year-old answers with a playful and self-effacing undertone, her honesty also rings uncomfortably true, eliciting nervous giggles from others in the classroom. Cousineau, however, makes a keen observation that “[t]he only thing that’s not broken [in Sarafina’s painting] is the inuksuk.” *Inuksuit* are small structures made of stones used to mark trails. They have been known to save lives during heavy storms, as hunters on the land can be guided to safety by following the paths marked by *Inuksuit*.

As I finish revising this article, the Mary River Mine has been in operation for about seven years (since 2014). The mining company’s website is a compelling case study in public image-making. If a website visitor did not know the history of Inuit resistance to the Mary River mine, they might be convinced by the images of smiling Inuit workers.⁷⁸ Of course, some Inuit are pleased with the mine, but the Mary River Iron Mine’s website shows only part of the picture. The website images exclude any trace of the widespread Inuit resistance to the mine. These images also obscure evidence of the environmental harm that is already occurring at the site, the impact on sea life—particularly walrus—and the lack of Inuit employed at the mine.⁷⁹ As mentioned earlier, the mine is currently seeking to expand—a move that many community members staunchly oppose. Recently launched Inuit television station, Uvagut TV (which translates to “Our TV”), has been live streaming hearings on the proposed expansion of the Mary River mine. They have also been hosting post-hearing reflections with full Inuktitut translation. Lucy Tulugarjuk, executive director of Uvagut TV and host of the post-hearing community reflections, is also a member of the Arnait Video Productions team. Lucy has long been involved in Nunavut’s film and media community, as have many of the other people behind Uvagut TV. Of the recent broadcasts, Lucy states, “Inuit have an opportunity to listen to what’s happening. If it was no Uvagut TV, only those at the meeting would have heard what happened I think the pressure might have been more on the decision makers because things were not behind closed doors, as normal.”⁸⁰ Uvagut TV is continuing the work of insisting on deep listening, transparency, and consent that Arnait began. Perhaps the immovability of the inuksuk in Sarafina’s painting functions as a symbol of the strength of Inuit customs, new and established, despite the attempted impositions on their lands, waters, and communities.

People Can Stand Up (2010), the second film in the “Show Me on the Map” series, features voices from the debate regarding uranium mining in Nunavut. We

begin inside a car in Iqaluit, the political center of Nunavut. Joan Scottie sits in the front seat and comments on how warm it is—“it’s like summer here.” When the film was created, Scottie was the Vice-Chairperson of *Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit* (Makita), which translates to “People can stand up.” She is in Iqaluit to give a talk about her community’s struggle against uranium mining, and to collect signatures in support of a petition to demand a full public inquiry into the potential impacts of uranium mining in Nunavut.⁸¹

Although the Arctic was declared a nuclear-free zone by the Inuit Circumpolar Council in 1983, interest in uranium mining increased following the establishment of the territory of Nunavut. The proposed mine featured in this film, Areva’s Kiggavik uranium mine, had the potential to open the floodgates to further uranium mining in the North—if it was approved. As Hicks mentions in the film (citing Scottie), it would have been extremely challenging to resist additional uranium projects if the Kiggavik project went through. The proposal was rejected in 2016 following an extensive report by the Nunavut Impact Review Board.⁸² *People Can Stand Up* features interviews with community members who were involved in the struggle to demand this review, including Sandra Inutiq, Joan Scottie, and Jack Hicks of Makita. Scottie, a resident of Baker Lake, which is fifty miles from the proposed mine, discusses the power and money mining companies have and how this influences the public proceedings. She notes that mining companies often distribute “prizes,” during these meetings, attempting to gain favor with the community. This is in direct conflict with the UN’s guidelines on free, prior, and informed consent.⁸³

A central source of anxiety expressed by Sandra Inutiq is the criticism waged against those who are critical of mining. According to Inutiq, concerns regarding mining and holding a position against economic development in Nunavut are often collapsed: “If you speak up, ask questions, then you’re against economic development in Nunavut.”⁸⁴ This lack of attentiveness to the nuances of each type of economic development and pressure to quickly improve the incredibly challenging economic conditions (which were created through colonial processes), compounds the difficulties already experienced by many living in Nunavut. Jack Hicks, also of Makita, points out the flaws in the argument that the Kiggavik uranium mine will offer economic benefits to Inuit. He argues that the Meadowbank Gold Mine, which has been in operation since 2010, already has to bring in workers from other communities. In other words, there are not enough workers in Baker Lake to benefit from additional work opportunities. As Inutiq bluntly states, “I see what is happening in Nunavut as a hangover from the colonial era.”⁸⁵ Instead, Inutiq proposes a knowledge-based local economy that supports the potential of young Inuit to move beyond the framework of blue-collar labor offered to them by the settler state.⁸⁶ This film not only offers insight into the variety of perspectives regarding this particular uranium mine proposal as well as the broader debate across Nunavut, but also attends to this nuanced situation by offering community members a platform to share their concerns—one that was sorely lacking in the initial planning processes for this mine.

Both films from the “Show Me on the Map” series resist the attempted silencing of Inuit voices by the extractive industries. The foregrounding of these voices asserts visions of close listening and an expansive culture of consent between southerners and Nunavummiut. The newly launched Inuktitut language TV station, Uvagut TV, is continuing the immensely challenging labor of increasing access to these important conversations—and therefore the ability to grant or refuse consent.

Conclusion

The continued imposition of government-supported extractive and military projects in Nunavut without consent must be recognized as a manifestation of colonialism. Entering Indigenous territory without full consent is another form of assault. The presence of the byproducts of extraction in breast/chest milk and blood is further evidence that the extractive industries are assaulting not only lands and waters, but human bodies. With the increased accessibility of visual and digital media, communicating and recording local perspectives and demands has become markedly more feasible.⁸⁷ The Place Names Program highlights the importance of knowledge rooted in place. It is one of many projects across the globe to reindigenize toponymy, therefore uplifting longstanding land and sea-based epistemologies. The work of Arnait Video Productions functions as a model for community-responsive filmmaking, while meeting some of the urgent needs of Nunavummiut: stories are recorded, and voices silenced by the extractive industries are amplified. The presence of these initiatives is even more important within the landscape of changing and contested visions of the future of Nunavut. These visual media show that Nunavut need not be shaped by acts of wastelanding, but that it instead can be shaped by practices of care, consent, and reciprocity.

Notes

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¹ Inuit Nunangat means “Inuit Homeland” in Inuktitut and includes the four Canadian Inuit regions of Inuvialuit, Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, and Nunavut. Importantly, this term “includes land, water, and ice” (“About Canadian Inuit,” Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, <https://www.itk.ca/about-canadian-inuit/>).

- ² For “resource frontiers,” see Paul Sabin, “Voices from the Hydrocarbon Frontier: Canada’s Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (1974–1977),” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 17, <https://doi-org.colby.idm.oclc.org/10.2307/3984772>.
- ³ Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart, “Introduction: Indigeneity and Indigenous Media on the Global Stage,” in *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics*, eds. Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.
- ⁴ Janine MacLeod, “Water and the Material Imagination: Reading the Sea of Memory against the Flows of Capital” in *Thinking with Water*, eds. Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), 55.
- ⁵ In Nunavut, those living in southern Canada and the United States are known as “southerners.” Southern Canada, and sometimes the United States, is known as “the South.”
- ⁶ Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 1.
- ⁷ For *rematriation*, see Eve Tuck, “Rematriating Curriculum Studies,” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 8, no. 1 (2011): 34–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2011.572521>. Rematriation describes the return and resurgence of many facets of Indigenous lifeways—from land to place names to customary foods. Like many others, I use this term, rather than “repatriation,” as a move to decenter heteropatriarchy.
- ⁸ Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 6.
- ⁹ Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 9.
- ¹⁰ Voyles, *Wastelanding*.
- ¹¹ Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 15.
- ¹² For some examples of the breadth of scholarship attending to these issues in the context of the American West, see W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); William H. Truettner et al., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Valerie L. Kuletz, “Geographies of Sacrifice—Nuclear Landscapes and Their Social Consequences: The U.S. Inter-Desert Region, 1940–1996” (PhD diss., University of California–Santa Cruz, 1996).
- ¹³ Andrea Charron, “The Northwest Passage: Is Canada’s Sovereignty Floating Away?,” *International Journal* 60, no. 3 (2005): 831–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40204066>
- ¹⁴ Colin Mooers, *Imperial Subjects: Citizenship in an Age of Crisis and Empire* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 74. Cited in Todd Gordon and Jeffery R. Webber, *Blood*

of *Extraction: Canadian Imperialism in Latin America* (Halifax: Fernwood Books, 2016), 5.

- ¹⁵ Subsistence foods, such as seal and caribou, are known as “country foods” in Nunavut.
- ¹⁶ Sheila Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman’s Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic and the Whole Planet* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Allen Lane, 2015), 134.
- ¹⁷ Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold*, 172.
- ¹⁸ Watt-Cloutier, 172; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁹ MacLeod, “Water and the Material Imagination,” 48.
- ²⁰ Sarah Deer and Elizabeth Ann Kronk Warner, “Raping Indian Country,” *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 38, no. 1 (2020): 31–95, <https://doi.org/10.7916/cjgl.v38i1.4603>
- ²¹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “The Place Where We All Live and Work Together: A Gendered Analysis of ‘Sovereignty’” in *Native Studies Keywords*, eds. Andrea Smith, Michelle H. Raheja, Stephanie Nohelani Teves (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 20.
- ²² Jennifer Gibson, Bryan Adlard, Kristin Olafsdottir, Torkjel Manning Sandanger and Jon Øyvind Odland, “Levels and trends of contaminants in humans of the Arctic,” *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 75, no. 1 (2016): <https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v75.33804>; Kavita Singh, Peter Bjerregaard, and Hing Man Chan, “Association between Environmental Contaminants and Health Outcomes in Indigenous Populations of the Circumpolar North,” *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* 73, no. 1 (2014): <https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v73.25808>; Government of Canada, Canadian Arctic Contaminants Assessment Report: Human Health Assessment 2017 (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2018).
- ²³ There were some previous projects, such as the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals’ Yukon Radio Station (P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Matthew Farish, “The Cold War on Canadian Soil: Militarizing a Northern Environment,” *Environmental History* 12, no. 4 [2007]: 925).
- ²⁴ P. Whitney Lackenbauer, review of *The Dew Line Years: Voices from the Coldest Cold War*, by Frances Jewel Dickson, *Arctic* 62, no. 2 (2009): 248–49.
- ²⁵ United States Air Force, “Eyes of the North,” 1965: <https://youtu.be/i-qYyIAeqXs>
- ²⁶ United States Air Force, “Eyes of the North.”
- ²⁷ AT&T–Western Electric, “The DEW Line Story,” 1958: <https://youtu.be/rSSrPCEosmo>

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- 29 DEW LINE Story, Western Electric Co., 4.
- 30 DEW LINE Story, Western Electric Co., 40–41.
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- 32 AT&T—Western Electric, “The DEW Line Story.”
- 33 Radomes, structures that cover radar antennae, are some of the most recognizable features of Cold War architecture.
- 34 Lackenbauer and Farish, “The Cold War on Canadian Soil,” 931.
- 35 Lackenbauer and Farish, “The Cold War on Canadian Soil,” 933–35; Hird and Zahara, “The Arctic Wastes,” in Richard Grusin, ed., *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 124.
- 36 Defense Environmental Clean-Up Agreement Between the United States of America and Canada Effected by Exchange of Notes Signed at Washington October 7 and 9, 1996: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/68039.pdf>.
- 37 “DND Announces DEW Line Clean-up Completed,” CBC News, last modified March 7, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dnd-announces-dew-line-clean-up-completed-1.2564735>.
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- 72 “A Changing World,” *Show Me on the Map: Part 1*
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- 74 “A Changing World,” *Show Me on the Map: Part 1* [translated].
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- 77 According to Marie-Hélène Cousineau, “the radio is often the way people talk to each other and question things in the community,” (Marie-Hélène Cousineau, interview with the author, June 12, 2018).
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- 84 “People Can Stand Up,” *Show Me on the Map: Part 2*
- 85 “People Can Stand Up,” *Show Me on the Map: Part 2*

- ⁸⁶ I do not wish to devalue blue collar labor, but rather to identify a frustration with oppressive limitations in professional pursuits imposed on Inuit that was articulated in multiple interviews with community members, conducted both by myself and others.
- ⁸⁷ Willow Scobie and Kathleen Rodgers, "Contestations of Resource Extraction Projects via Digital Media in Two Nunavut Communities," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 37, no. 2 (2013): 97.

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