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**Denouncing the Tar Sands and Pronouncing the Virtues of Sustainability:  
Prospects for Breaking the Carbon Dead-lock by Bridging two Approaches to  
Social Change**

**Abstract**

Two major tar sands pipeline projects are slated for Quebec. A massive transition from conventional to more expensive and polluting unconventional fossil fuel sources is underway due to higher oil prices, improved technologies and diminished supply. Shale oil, shale gas and tar sands are the friendly new faces of a new energy economy, for which there is little public debate, especially considering high environmental risk due to higher GHG emissions, increased habitat destruction and water pollution. Beyond being about saying YES or NO to oil, it is about what kind of future we want -- there is more at stake here than just carbon and the environment; organizing society around consumption destroys minds and erodes the desire for the simpler trappings of a low-carbon way of living.

Therein, the city becomes a key strategic front in the fight for reparation, reconciliation, genuine restoration and transformation (Purcell, 2006). In Montreal, the buzz surrounding urban agriculture and sustainability is almost deafening. Citizens are experimenting with alternative food systems, students are pressuring their university food providers to buy local and organic, and public health administrators are funding community organizations to start up gardens to combat 'food deserts' and the 'heat island effect.' While pipeline politics is portrayed in the media as being angry and confrontational, my research project will draw the links between the critique of existing energy politics and power relations, and the possibilities for an alternative sustainability more closely coupled with ecological systems. Through an exploration of the pipeline debate and the citizen movement that is building around it via interviews with key participants and an auto-ethnography of my own participation, I will demonstrate that confrontational environmentalism, along with more 'positive,' local actions that foster resilient food systems and reconstitute ecosystems, are co-constitutive of the necessary re-politicization of the environmental question and the requisite social desire to engage therein. Thinking through these two approaches might work to move beyond our current carbon lock-in, or "post-ecologist paradox," whereby "on the one hand, people want consumerism and capitalism more than ever; on the other hand, knowledge of the need to change the system has never been greater" (Bluhdorn,2013).

**Bio**  
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