

**Narrating Northern Places:  
Space, Place, and Environmentalism in  
Whitehorse, Yukon**

By:

**Lisa Cooke**

A Thesis submitted to  
The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

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University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## **Narrating Northern Place: Space, Place, and Environmentalism in Whitehorse, Yukon.**

### **Abstract:**

There are many factors that influence and frame people's relationships and engagements with environmentalism. In this project I look at how the notion of place, and people's relationships with landscapes merge with people's senses of and relationships with, environmentalism in Whitehorse, Yukon. A theoretical framework informed by Foucaultian ideas about power, knowledge, and discourse, the concept of dialogism, and the notions of space, place, and landscape serves as the foundation upon which this investigation is launched. Of interest is how places are made out of Northern spaces. What social, political, and economic forces inform and frame this process? How are these relationships articulated, internalized, and resisted through Yukon residents' personal place narratives and senses of place? And how do such relations intersect with Yukon residents engagements with the discourses and practices of environmentalism?

This research was conducted over six months (May-October 2003) in Whitehorse, Yukon. During this time I spoke with forty members of the community in addition to conducting participant observation throughout the community. There are central master narratives guiding how Yukon landscapes come to be perceived and experienced. Narratives of the Yukon as a blank, wild, unpeopled, free space run throughout political, environmental, economic, and personal constructions and perceptions these landscapes. Although representing different values and interests, the majority of discursive place-making (both within and from outside) of Yukon landscapes assume this colonial, classed and raced view of the North.

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Getting me to the “field” was only the first step...once there, it was an incredible web of friends and colleagues who kept me housed, fed, focused, and going. Thank you so much to my Yukon community for taking such good care of me.

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And to my parents Rick and Judy – this could not have happened without you. This is for you, with love and thanks.

## Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Overview:

What invokes, inspires or maintains environmental consciousness and activism?

*Don't do what you do out of hate, do it out of love. Don't do it because you hate the oil and gas companies, do it because you love the land. And I think that I honestly do. When you come up here and you see these huge vistas, and also the micro vistas. If you go up the cliffs there and you see all the neat little flowers and trees and smell of sage. And then the view that you get from the cliffs up there. The hills going on forever. I just think that it is amazing. I can go for a cycle and once you pass Riverdale, that's it. It's, we talked earlier about this being a frontier. I don't see this as a frontier; I see this as the last place. It is the last place before the Arctic Ocean. It is the last place in North America where you can find unbroken ecosystems.*

This passage was taken from a conversation that I had with George. George has lived in the Yukon for most of the last 12 years. He is active in a number of environmental efforts throughout the territory. George is white. He was born in Europe and raised in Western Canada. He is a university-educated engineer by trade. From this passage, it is clear that what inspires George's political activism is his sense of place, and relationship with the landscapes where he lives, works, and plays. He loves this place. Out of that love has grown political and environmental activism. But George has a specific, situated relationship with these landscapes. For him, they are romanticised, beautiful, natural, and rare. His perceptions are mediated through class, social status, education, gender, and ethnicity. In the discussion that follows I explore the notion of place, senses of place, and relationships with landscapes and how these factors are influenced by, and influence people's engagements with, environmentalism. I also explore how the social situatedness of this relationship is central in how people's personal and political engagements with environmentalism is shaped, formed, and lived.

How do people's senses of place and relationships with landscapes serve to influence and inform how people relate to and engage with the discourses and practices of environmentalism? In this project I explore how people's specific, situated relationships with Northern Canadian landscapes intersect with various discourses and practices of environmentalism in Whitehorse, Yukon. This two-pronged analytic question is designed to explore first the notion of place and its importance to people, and second how this sense of place is formed, shaped, and influenced and by various discourses of environmentalism.

I consider myself to be an environmentalist, but over the last few years I have become increasingly uncomfortable with some of the ways that the discourses of environmentalism have extracted people from "nature" or the "environment". One does not need to look far into the current debate about the Kyoto Protocol, particularly in Alberta, to see an example of such a dichotomy. Political leaders in Alberta, a province economically reliant on oil and gas energy production, have framed the "Kyoto Debate" as coming down to work (and worker) versus the environmental (and environmentalists). Such discourses set up dichotomous relationships between people and nature, and nature and work (Cronon 1996; White 1996). In so doing, "The Earth becomes more like an object of pity...[and]...we move ourselves outside the system completely" (Weston 1994: 2-3). But people are intricately tied to place, through culture, work, and play. By creating a false distance between the two, the momentum of environmental efforts runs directly into the walls of political economy and individual livelihoods. If there is to be any meaningful change in the ways in which the "Earth" is used and managed, people need to be included – at a fundamental level – as part of the entire system. It is for this

reason that I have chosen to couple an examination of the politics, practices, and discourses of environmentalism with an exploration of people's relationships with landscapes. As illustrated in George's eloquently expressed words cited above, the two are tightly connected, and it is my feeling that the former will not be able to effectively mobilize without understanding and accounting for the latter. Mittelman (2001: 219) suggests that "Rather than reifying the environment, it is important to resist the ontological distinction between humans and nature...If so, humankind and nature may be viewed interactively as 'single causal stream'". As such, I have made a conscious effort in this project to create a forum where those Yukon residents with whom I spoke can re-place themselves in the landscapes where they live, work, and play, as well as within environmental debates. People's relationships with, and attachments to landscapes, may be one of the most powerful tools available to the environmental movement. In this project I explore how.

In looking at ways in which Yukon residents' place narratives intersect with the discourses and practices of environmentalism I have been confronted with the complexities of the discursive networks of environmentalism. Escobar (2001: 163) cautions that such ethnographic works:

"...must relate place-based, yet transnationalized, struggles to transnational networks fostered by global discourses of technoscience and capital; they must look at networks in terms of a diverse set of actors and discourses operating at various scales; and they should investigate the ways in which these actors relate to both places and spaces and they 'travel' back and forth between places in the network, at various levels of scale".

Environmental discourses serve both to make places and situate them within a global scale of worth and value. As such, this discussion needs to account for this discursive

network at a variety of levels. Examining how the Yukon is constructed and represented locally, nationally, and internationally provides a framework against which to explore how such constructions are internalized and / or resisted through people's own personal place narratives and experiences of this place. Looking at the ways the Yukon is constructed and represented through various discourses of environmentalism illustrates how places, and those living in them, can become marginalized by the very discourses claiming concern for their environmental health. Mapping the discourses serving to construct, frame, and represent environmental issues in the Canadian North as a political process of place / issue / risk-making serves as a means by which the topographies of power can be explored.

Above I state that I have become increasingly uncomfortable with some of the ways the discourses of environmentalism serve to separate people from places. This project is a conscious effort to replace place, and people, within this discourse. In so doing, however, a number of thematic currents emerge consistently, both from environmentalist constructions of the Canadian North, and from the place narratives of many of the Yukon residents' with whom I spoke. These interconnected narratives create a master trope within which constructions and experiences of Yukon landscapes are ultimately mediated. However else it is represented, whatever interests expressed, the Yukon is almost always represented as a large, unpopulated, open, free, wild, blank space. Again, mapping these thematic trends, and examining them within the larger discursive network, it becomes clear that the Yukon, this ostensibly wild, free, blank space, continues to be discursively colonized. These discourses serve to create a frontier space out of the Yukon, and in so doing silence the experiences, histories, and senses of

place of Yukon First Nations. This highlights the power of power relations in shaping and forming how places are made, experienced, and politized. Escobar (2001: 143) writes, "Place is, of course, constituted by sedimented social structures and cultural practices". This analysis illustrates that such "sedimented social structures" continue to echo a colonizing set of "cultural practices" in the Canadian North.

### **1.2 Where This Project Comes From:**

As this project is designed to investigate the situatedness of place-based experiences in relation to the discourses of environmentalism, it is important that I firmly situate myself within this context. This project started long before I was a graduate student. In my last semester as an undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia I wrote a paper for a cultural ecology class titled "The Arctic 'Sink': local social and cultural dimensions of a global environmental problem". For this paper, I reviewed stacks of literature on the contamination of arctic environments by persistent organic pollutants (POPs), heavy metals, and radioactive materials. The international environmental community generated much of this literature (for examples see Hanly, 1999; AMAP 1991, 1997, 2002; Tenenbaum 1998). All of the literature that I reviewed represented Northern Canada as a dirty contaminated sink of global pollutants, and those living there as being at great risk. I was horrified. I had never thought much about Northern Canada until I began this research, but was so affected by this literature that I made two decisions. The first was to pursue this "pressing" issue in graduate school and the second was to move to the Yukon to get a first-hand sense of this issue on the ground.

So I moved to the Yukon, set up my home in Whitehorse, and starting talking to people in the territory about the issue of arctic contamination. But no one was talking about it. Instead, the primary environmental trend in the territory was the conservation of this vast, unique, pristine wilderness space called Northern Canada (for examples see CPAWS 2004; YCS 2004; Caribou Commons Project 2004).

So here I was, at a discursive crossroads, having been deeply affected by the constructions of Northern Canadian landscapes as dirty and dangerous before I had ever set foot in Northern Canada myself, and experiencing a place that seemed far from dirty and was being constructed locally as a pristine wilderness space in need of protection. These same landscapes were being constructed in such dichotomous ways: simultaneously dirty and pristine, at once a polluted victim of global industrialization and a wilderness monument of an absence of industrialization.

This was the first time that I started to think about the concepts of space and place, and my susceptibility to their manipulation. Since then, I have come to see that Northern Canada is constructed in more than just these two opposing ways. Steeped in the forces of political economy, power relations, and marginality, Northern Canada is also constructed and perceived as a resource rich hinterland and the last Canadian frontier (Shields 1991). The Canadian North also emerges as a central element to notions of Canadian identity, sovereignty, and security (Shields 1991; McRae 1994-95). The discussion that follows is an extension of this journey that started before I ever set foot in the Yukon - a journey that has deeply shaped the evolution of both my academic interests in space and place, and my personal relationship with the Yukon. As such, this discussion is ultimately an analysis of the multiple constructions of the "North" and how

such constructions serve to underpin how Northern landscapes come to be perceived and experienced.

### **1.3 Logistics and Methodology**

The fieldwork for this project was conducted in Whitehorse, Yukon between May and October 2003. Over this time I spoke with Yukon residents, representatives of local environmental agencies, territorial government officials, and spokespeople from local First Nations. In total, I conducted forty interviews spread out over six months. It is worth noting at this point that as much as I tried to speak with as varied a cross section of the population of Whitehorse as possible, some demographic groups are more represented than others. The majority of people that I spoke with are white, southern Canadians who have lived in the Yukon for many years. Some were born and raised in the Yukon or other parts of the North. Most notably there is a marked absence of First Nations voices heard in this monograph. Of the forty people interviewed, four are members of Yukon First Nations. Everyone else is white. All of the members of Yukon First Nations with whom I spoke talked to me in their professional capacities at the First Nations offices where they work.

I talked to seventeen women and twenty-three men. Of the thirty-six white members of the community that I spoke with, five had been born and raised in Whitehorse. All thirty-one others had moved to the Yukon as adults. Twenty-one possess at least a Bachelor's degree. I spoke with eight spokespeople from local environmental agencies and efforts, seven of whom moved to the Yukon as adults with university educations. One was born and raised in Whitehorse, leaving only to attend

university for four years in his early twenties. Of the Yukon First Nations members that I spoke with, none had any affiliations with organized environmental agencies in Whitehorse. (For a more detailed review please refer to Appendix 1 for a full list and profile of the forty research participants.)

Whitehorse is home to two Yukon First Nations, Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Ta'an Kwatchin Council. Members of both First Nations live throughout the community, although Kwanlin Dun also has a "village" located a short distance from downtown within Whitehorse city limits. I approached members of each of these First Nations to participate in this research. My requests were met with indifference and annoyance. I did not push the issue. As a researcher, (a new researcher at that), I did not feel that it was my place to impose myself on people. That this project is presented without a proportionately appropriate representation of this sector of the population of Whitehorse is a clear weakness of this piece. But it is also reflective of a larger social structure and historically complicated relationship in Whitehorse and the Yukon.

Historical relations between First Nations and non-First Nations people in the Yukon are underscored by the master narratives that drove initial colonial encounters. What makes colonization of the Yukon unique is that it happened quickly, and it happened twice. Non-First Nations visitors started arriving in the Yukon in the late 1880's. Once gold was discovered in the creek beds of the Yukon, the promise of wealth and opportunity inspired a rapid influx of visitors. Between 1896 and 1900 tens of thousands of people, mostly men, stampeded across the Yukon in search of gold. A 1900 census counted twenty-seven thousand people in the Yukon Territory, three thousand of whom were classified as "Indian". Some of those that came North found gold; most did

not. By 1912 the total population of the Yukon had dropped to six thousand (Cruikshank 1998: 10).

The narrative that drove the Gold Rush was one of promise, romance, and money. Of this narrative Julie Cruikshank (1998: 10) writes, “The allure of gold has deep narrative routes, but its discovery in 1886 coincides with a world depression and gave hope to tens of thousands of unemployed men ...”. With this colonial invasion of the Yukon came the establishment of an infrastructure for the administration of this new territory from Ottawa. Thus when the torrent of Gold Rush activity passed, and most had left, what was left behind was a new “Canadian” owned and controlled territory.

Up until 1942 there were no major roads in the Yukon. The Yukon River was the main transportation corridor. Between 1942 and 1943 thirty-four thousand American soldiers arrived in the Yukon with orders to build the Alaska Highway. “The ‘second rush’, as older people call it, marked another transition with consequences substantially more disruptive than those of the gold rush” (Cruikshank 1998: 10). This time, the narrative undercurrent driving the encounter was national security and the threat of war. American soldiers were acting under orders that had come from Washington. These orders would have far reaching and lasting implications for First Nation peoples in the Yukon.

Both “rushes” in the Yukon happened quickly and for specific reasons. In both cases, large numbers of outsiders descended on this “frontier” space to take what they wanted. In the first case it was gold, in the second it was security. As I attempted to forge contacts with First Nations members of the community I came to see that these narratives remain strong. Like those who had come before me, I was in the Yukon for a

reason. I was looking to collect and take something. Thinking about the responses that I got from most of the First Nation members of the community that I contacted in the context of these historical relations allowed me to better situate myself within the colonial narratives of the Yukon.

Another point that stands out when looking back over the demographics of the sample of the population of Whitehorse that I spoke with is the number of people who have come to Whitehorse, with university education, as adults. People just like me. This points to both a key weakness and strength of the research methodologies that I used. Using my existing contacts in the community to get started, I used classic snowball sampling to initiate the interview process. Almost everyone that I spoke with referred me to someone else. At times, people even called me to ask if they could participate. From this eclectic network of contacts I had the chance to meet with a varied range of interesting people. There were segments of the population of Whitehorse, however, that my “snowball” did not roll towards. These gaps included older people and First Nations members of the community. This research method, and the research question itself, inevitably biased the sample group with whom I spoke. I started with my existing contacts, leading me to people similar to myself. Looking to talk with people affiliated with environmental agencies in Whitehorse led me again to a very particular sect of the population.

As I started to notice these gaps, I made an effort to address them. Through more deliberate searching I managed to arrange a few interviews with senior members of the community. Connecting with First Nations participants, however, was far more difficult. In a conversation about this difficulty with a couple of other anthropologists doing work

in the Yukon I mentioned that I had never fully appreciated the social segregation that existed in Whitehorse until I looked back and tracked where my “snowball” had gone, and not gone. Both men nodded knowingly and said, “it is remarkable. I have never seen anything like it”. Although I was comforted by their observation, I was no closer to addressing this matter. Humbled by my previous attempts, and running out of time, I came to see that I was not only up against my own newness as a researcher and status as an “outsider”. Rather I was also running headlong into a long, complicated relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations people in the Yukon. I did meet with a few spokespeople of local First Nations in their professional capacities. But in the end, there is one glaring gap in this research project, and that is a lack of input from First Nations members of the community of Whitehorse.

For the purpose of this project, I define a “Yukon resident” as someone who had lived in the territory for more than twelve consecutive months. Most whom I spoke with have lived in the Yukon for much longer. My choice to define a Yukon resident this way was based on local terminology and definitions. According to local vernacular, those who have been in the Yukon for only a summer are referred to as “Chechakos”. A “Sourdough”, someone who has spent a full winter in the North, is a “true” Yukoner (personal communications 2004). These terms are themselves problematic. They come from the Gold Rush days, and resonate loudly the colonial past of the Yukon. But they are also terms and definitions that have been incorporated into a collective Yukon language – a non First Nations collective Yukon language – pointing again to why I was so unable to penetrate the social barrier existing between “my” Yukon and that of local First Nation residents.

The first time that I drove into Whitehorse I was struck by the vista surrounding it. Rolling mountains flank the city, whose centre lies in the Yukon River Valley. Each neighbourhood in town is surrounded by green belts and trail systems. The City of Whitehorse (2004) markets itself as “The Wilderness City”. The first time that I was able to walk out my door and explore the trails for hours without seeing another person, I got a sense of what that meant to my experiences of this place. Like George, and many others whom I spoke with, my relationship with Yukon landscapes is deeply rooted in a sense of peace and wonder that comes from seeing these landscapes as leisure places. For those of us who moved to the Yukon, with our dogs, university degrees, and environmental morals, this is a place where we can find balance between our professional and recreational selves. We are educated, and thus able to hold well paying, decision making, socially powerful jobs. We are physically active, and thus love the range provided by Yukon landscapes as fitness and recreations spaces. And we are socially and environmentally conscious, so we can work towards ensuring that these leisure spaces remain intact for our pleasure. We are part of the professionally mobile class of Whitehorse’s powerful elite.

Whitehorse is the capital city of Yukon Territory. As of May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2003, about the time I started this research, 19 058 people lived in Whitehorse. This small population lives in a land area of 413.48 square kilometres (City of Whitehorse 2004). As the capital city, Whitehorse hosts all of the amenities of a southern Canadian city. Such amenities include theatre companies, an active arts community, the central campus of Yukon College, and one daily and one tri-weekly newspaper. Both federal and territorial government offices are in Whitehorse, making them the city’s main employers. In

addition, residents of Whitehorse have access to Wal-Mart, Superstore, and Staples, as well as a number of locally owned smaller businesses. As a southern, educated resident of Whitehorse I can sip soy milk lattes, eat organic fruit and vegetables, bargain shop, walk my dog through endless trail systems out my backdoor, and find a well-paying job. This is “my” Whitehorse.

“My” Whitehorse, the one that I remember and miss when I am away, the one that grants me a lifestyle of outdoor recreation and city amenities, is only one experience of this place. By some with whom I spoke through the course of this research, Whitehorse was described as an “ugly Northern town”, “a small, dead-end place at the end of the road”, “a dirty scar in the middle of a lovely place”, or “an ugly reminder of the colonial legacy of this area”. Mediated through class, education, social capital, and race, the “beauty” of Whitehorse is contingent on many factors. Those who talked about this place with the same enthusiasm as I do were almost entirely southern, white, educated professionals who had made a choice to move to the Yukon based on lifestyle and personal interests. Those who find Whitehorse “ugly” and “dead-ended” are largely people born and raised there, with limited education and employment opportunities, who feel “trapped”. For at least one of the First Nations members of the community whom I spoke with, the city of Whitehorse is littered (literally) with reminders of the environmentally devastating legacy of the Gold Rush and the construction of the Alaska Highway. As I talked with people about their senses of place in Whitehorse and in the Yukon, factors such as age, class, gender, and race came up often as mediating forces in how places are perceived, experienced, and related to.

Semi-formal interviews form the primary source of data collected in this project. Interviews were conducted in people's offices, at coffee shops around town, in people's homes, walking the trails around Whitehorse, or sitting by the river. As I was looking to talk to people about their senses of their Yukon, I was open to wherever people wanted to meet. Interviews ranged in length from forty-five minutes to all day. It was important to me that I spent as long with each participant as they felt they wanted to spend. For some, it was very brief. They were busy and were doing me a favour. For others, however, it was important that they show me what they meant. I spent hours kayaking around a lake near Whitehorse, walking through the forests, and sitting by the river listening to wonderful stories. Wherever possible, interviews were tape-recorded and recordings transcribed.

In addition to interviews, I also engaged in participant observation throughout the community. I attended a number of public lectures and meetings. These included noon hour presentations by visiting researchers about a variety of environmental issues such as Climate Change, public debates during the mayoral campaign, and public education evenings about city planning issues. I was lucky enough to be in Whitehorse during the mayoral campaign and election in October. I attended film, music, and arts festivals. I read the local newspapers. It was important that I stay current and aware of what information was circulating through the community.

Through the process of "immersing" myself in the "field" by way of participant observation, I came to realize the "field" is less a physical setting than it is a construction in the anthropological imagination. My journal from May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003 reads:

*Finding the field...did I enter the "field" when I left Winnipeg, at some point along the Alaska Highway, at the Yukon border maybe, when I got to Whitehorse...I can't tell. I*

*have spent months thinking and writing about this – this academic process and journey. What I hadn't anticipated was the elusiveness of the "field" itself. I know that part of my problem is that this is a familiar place. In this "field" my personal and research lives constantly collide. Am I in the field when I am at a friend's BBQ, on a date? (And how does informed consent work at a BBQ, birthday party, or on a date?!) I am overwhelmed by the complexity of what I am doing here...defining Lisa the ethnographer in a place that I love, with people that I love, and a clearly stated job to do. I need to re-configure my ethnographer-self in this place, and re-configure this place into the "field".*

As time went on, I found my stride as being simultaneously a member of the community, with friends and a social life, and as a researcher. I became re-placed in the "field" and the Yukon. I began to understand in practice what Judith Okely (1992: 1) meant when she wrote that the "field" is not "the unmediated world of the 'other' that I am looking to study and report, but rather as the fields of interaction between myself and others". I see now that there is a difference between the locality of research and the "field". The former is the physical setting and the latter is the network of relationships that grows and evolves through the research process.

Amanda Coffey (1999) writes that fieldwork is largely about the construction and production of the self, as ethnographer and individual. "Fieldwork is personal, emotional, and identity *work*" (Coffey 1999:1). Above I mention that I am struggling to re-configure myself as the ethnographer in this place familiar to me as a member of the community. As I had committed myself to engage this process reflexively, I was aware of how important it was to note and account for how I was impacted and changed by this journey. Liberman (2001: 94) writes that reflexive ethnography refers to "the agency of the life-world of the people we study, and the capacity of that agency to affect and deeply transform us, the ethnographer". Like Coffey (1999), Liberman stresses that fieldwork is a process of identity work for the ethnographer. This was my experience, although, I could not have anticipated how deeply I would sense this.

As I learned to negotiate the obvious challenges and subtle nuances of fieldwork, I never got used to the overwhelming volume of information circulating around me. In dialogic overdrive...“I became obsessed with small bits of information as my unconscious struggled to find suitable locations to park them in a mind already overloaded with cultural and genetic notions” (Heming 2003: 157). This state of overdrive continues. From proposal to the “field” and back to the keyboard, I remain overwhelmed by the complex sets of discursive currents, power relations, and social, historical and political influences that serve to shape, frame, and inform how place is constructed and experienced – not to mention how deeply my own sense of place is constantly affected by the confluence of all of these forces.

Greg Heming (2003) writes that our stories are scattered through place. “They are woven from experience with our natural and cultural landscapes, blended without spatial or temporal boundaries” (Heming 2003: 154). This “scattering” and lack of “spatial or temporal boundaries” created an interesting, unexpected element in this research. I am looking at how place is constructed, defined, and experienced. I had difficulty “finding” and “defining” the field in practice. And some of those with whom I spoke had difficulty with this notion also. I can say that this research was conducted in the Whitehorse area. But the conversations that form the heart of this document transcended the physical locality of where they took place. Asking people about their senses of place and their relationships with landscapes means that the conversations traveled. For some, their sense of place was rooted in a tangible spot - their house, yard, street. Their landscapes extended out from there. For others the conversation started in the “North” and was localized by the “Yukon”. When people talked about feeling at home, or sensing their

place, as being the entire Canadian North (and for many in the Yukon, the Canadian North includes Alaska), I felt as though we were talking about something that could not be reduced to locality. The boundaries of Whitehorse, and the Yukon, and Canada even, started meaning less. And just as I had had trouble defining where I meant by the “field”, some of the people that I spoke to had difficulty drawing edges to the landscapes that formed their senses of place. Places are always both real and imagined. As such, although the “stories” that make up this thesis were recorded in the Whitehorse area, the ethnographic edges of this project reach far further.

#### **1.4 Ethical Considerations:**

In keeping with the Foucaultian notions of power, knowledge and discourse that form the theoretic premise of this project, and the reflexive position that I have assumed as the ethnographer, it is crucial that I account for power relations circulating between the people with whom I spoke through course of this research and myself. Although I lived in the community of Whitehorse for two years prior to doing this research, I am from “Down South”, or “Outside”. I am a white, middle-class women with a post secondary education doing research in a place with a complicated history of colonization, great economic disparity and many socio-economic issues. In recognizing the power relations existing between myself and research participants my goal was to conscientiously honour the dynamic nature of my interactions with participants, and their agency in the research process (Lieberman 2001). My goal in each interview was not to “extract” or “harvest” information from “subjects”, but rather to explore and share interactions with members of

the community (Reinharz 1992). This is why I was so uncomfortable pushing myself, and my agenda, on First Nations members of the community.

Many of those that I spoke with were talking to me from their professional capacities as government employees, representatives of local environmental organizations, and spokespeople for local First Nations. Everyone knew who I was, and what I was looking to accomplish through these interviews. As such, many of these interviews were used as platforms upon which people could express “for the record” official, political points of view. As I think through the power relationships between research participants and myself, I need to acknowledge that I was, at times, being manipulated through these conversations. In these instances both of us had agendas and goals for our conversations, illustrating the blurring lines of intentions and power between speakers and listeners in this form of dialogic exchange.

Jean-Guy Goulet (1998: 1) writes “One can never tell all that has occurred in the field, however, but must necessarily select what events and encounters to narrate. Moreover, the telling of the account is always from the perspective of the ethnographer...”. The present work is no exception to either of these statements. Firstly, due to space limitations, I was not able to include excerpts from every one of the forty interviews. Each interview, however, played a part in shaping this project, and although quoted words may not appear from everyone, I hope that their voices resonate throughout this text all the same. Each of these interviews and shared interactions served to shape and form this project.

In addition, every conversation, observation, and comment made here is presented from the perspective of the ethnographer. From the inception of the idea for this project,

through the design of this research, throughout my time in the field, and during the entire writing process my voice, my perspective, is central. And although I have tried to create a forum within which the voices of those with whom I spoke could be articulated, the decisions of which passages to cite, which to omit, which to edit, how they are framed, and how they are interpreted were made by me. In the end, this thesis is my re-telling of the stories that people shared with me.

I set out to talk to people in Whitehorse about a very personal matter – how they sense and relate to places where they live, work, and play. I was aware of the personal nature of what I was doing before I started, but I had not anticipated some of the emotional conversations that would follow. In talking about place and people’s intimate relationships with them, I was asking people to talk to me about something deeply personal. As such, in making arrangements to meet for interviews I always offered to give people a copy of the interview schedule that guided these conversations. This way, if people wanted to, they would have time to consider if there was anything in particular that they did or did not want to discuss.

Taking the time to discuss my goals for each interview meant that many people came “prepared”. Some had written down a few notes of things that they wanted to discuss, and others had given the conversation thought before the interview. This provided an interesting depth to the interviews at times as people had taken the time to think about place and their relationships with landscape before meeting with me. Out of respect for the personal nature of the content of this project, I was absolutely clear from the beginning of each interview that if there were any questions that people did not want to answer, to just say so. I also clearly stated that if at any point in the interview someone

wanted to stop, the interview would end without prejudice or consequence. I did not have any requests to end interviews or anyone refuse to answer a question. I did, however, have some very powerful, personal, and emotional conversations. At the end of each interview I asked people if there was anything that I had not asked, or anything more that they wanted to talk about. Some said no, but others took this opportunity to really open up. These final moments in many interviews, when the formalities were through and the conversation was flowing proved to be some of the most interesting and textured conversations that I had. The power of what people shared with me was moving, and I am continuously grateful to all of those who took the time to sit and talk with me.

Why is this matter so personal? How is it that people are attached to places in such deeply sentimental ways? One of the most common themes was the notion of possession. Those who talked about their senses of place with the most emotion talked about “their” places. Those things that bothered them were things that threatened their personal senses of those places. I will return to the matter of possession as this discussion evolves. It is worth noting at this point that the personal nature of many of the interviews conducted throughout this research was largely rooted in this notion. The notion of possession is itself problematic, especially given the demographic make up of the group that I talked to. Possession implies rights and ownership. The Yukon is a place where people came, found places to call “theirs” and became deeply personally connected to those places. This implies that this space was open and free before they arrived, and was waiting for them to claim it. This points out that the discourses serving

to make places out of Yukon spaces continue to reflect a colonial “frontier” image of these spaces.

The issue of confidentiality and anonymity posed an interesting challenge in the writing of this thesis. Although all of the names of people have been changed in this document, the community of Whitehorse is relatively small. For this reason I have changed or left out other potentially identifying information when referring to specific people and/or organizations. As this discussion is designed to investigate the relationship between people’s senses of place and various discourses of environmentalism, sources of environmental information are an important component of this project. As such I have briefly sketched the environmental movement in the Yukon. In so doing, I use the actual names of these organizations, state their mandates as they present them, and provide a sense of how these groups work to disseminate their information. Any personal conversations that I had with people affiliated with these organizations are not included in this section. In an effort to simultaneously honour confidentiality and respect authorship of various literature used in this thesis, the actual names of organizations and government departments that have been formally cited are included in this text. Such sources include literature and information that is published and public, such as websites and newsletters. Conversations that I had with representatives from any organizations are guarded by the same guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality as all other interviews, and as such no names linking people with organizations are used in the text of this document. Some people asked me to turn off the tape recorder at certain points in our conversation. This request was always honoured immediately. No information discussed when the tape recorder was turned off has been included in this text.

As stated, participant observation formed a large part of the research conducted in this project. This methodological approach brings with it some particular ethical considerations. The first is the matter of informed consent (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002). I spent time observing a number of events, meeting, and gatherings. It was not always possible to announce who I was, and that I was there as a researcher. As a result, my notes on these events center on the content rather than the people in attendance. I made a few notes about how many people were there, but without the opportunity to clearly tell people who I was, I refrained from making these notes too detailed, or recording any information that may have caused ethical conflicts. There were other times when I observed staff, volunteers, and members of the public at various environmental agencies. In these instances I took the time to clearly explain to everyone who I was and what I was doing there. It was important to me that the kind of information that I was gathering and recording was understood by everyone (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002). I made sure that if anyone had any questions or concerns that I was approachable and available to them. In addition, I did not observe or participate in any activities or events that were planned for children under the age of sixteen.

This research was conducted in accordance with the Yukon – Canada Scientists and Explorers Act licensing guidelines and conditions. The Yukon Government's Heritage Resources Unit, Cultural Services Branch granted official permission for this research project with the issue of research license number 03-05S&E. As a condition of this research license the Cultural Services Branch at the Heritage Resource Unit requires progress reports and copies of all papers resulting from this research that are published or presented. I continue to ensure that all such documents have been provided to the

appropriate office in a timely manner. In addition, this research was conducted with the approval of the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board and in accordance with all of their ethical standards and regulations.

### **1.5 Analysis:**

I used a variety of methods in the analysis of the data presented here. Some were formal and academic, and others personal and unconventional. Wherever possible, the interviews conducted through the course of this research were recorded. All of these tapes were then transcribed. The process of transcribing interviews provided an interesting opportunity for analysis as I was going over each interview so slowly. Through the transcription process I made notes and organized interviews thematically. As tedious as the transcription process was at times, it provided an invaluable element to the analysis of the data collected and presented here.

Once interviews were transcribed, I reviewed them again for thematic currents. I was looking for references to place and senses of place, discussions of environmental issues, and people's formal or informal engagements with environmentalism. Again, although time-consuming, this process was also valuable in that it offered me the chance to revisit each of these conversations slowly. Throughout this process I continue to be overwhelmed by the beautifully textured and rich streams of narrative that people took the time to share with me. In recognition of people's contribution to this project, and that without them there would be no project, it was important to me that I spent as much time with each interviewee as he or she wanted to share. Sitting at the kitchen table, re-reading the transcribed printouts of these conversations, I was transported back to where

they had first taken place. I was able to smell the forests, taste the coffee, or hear the river through their words. Through this process of analysis I was able to see again how dense with place these narratives are, and how deeply intertwined in my own place-imagination these encounters have become.

Another, albeit less conventional, means by which the “data” presented here was analysed was by walking with it. Throughout the design, execution, analysis, and writing of this research process, I walked. As I walked, I thought about what people were telling me, and how I was changed or impacted by these encounters. I considered the complexity of the discourses converging on places. In so doing I took this project with me through place and space. I infused it with my own senses of place and perceptions of and relationships to landscapes. In offering advice to writers concerned with physical environments and place Gary Snyder (1995: 71) insists, “That it [writings] be literate – that is, nature literate...[and]...That it be grounded in a place – thus place literate”. I hope that this project is just that – place literature. Not place-specific, but situated, personally place literate. My goal is create a discursive space where people, myself included, can re-place ourselves in our physical and social landscapes through our own place narratives. In walking with this “data” I allowed it time to be re-placed, both in the landscapes of my outings, and in the fibre of my own sense of place. This process of analysis points again to the “field of interaction” between the ethnographer and research participants. My sense of place, the very reflexive foundation out of which this project grew, has been inextricably changed by the ethnographic encounters that form the heart of this project.

## **Chapter 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

To help manage the complexity of the matter at hand I have adopted a theoretical framework that merges a number of ideas. Foucault's notions of power, discourse and knowledge are particularly useful here, as I am looking to explore the ways in which the discourses of environmentalism serve to frame or influence people's relationships with landscapes. Power relations and ways of knowing are central elements in this question. Extending smoothly from Foucaultian ideas, dialogism offers a means of understanding the ways in which discourses interact. And as I use the terms space, place, landscape, and environmentalism often, how they are defined in the context of the theoretic framework within which they are being used is important. As constructions and experiences of places and landscapes are mediated through social factors, class, gender, and race, all need also be accounted for theoretically as well as ethnographically.

### **2.1 Power, Discourse, Knowledge – Foucault and Dialogism:**

As in all social research, issues of power need to be accounted for on all levels. Engaging Foucaultian conceptualizations of power and knowledge, and the fluidity of the relationship between them allows for such an account. For Foucault, power only exists in practice. It is not given or taken; it is exercised. The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge, which is engendered by the power relations from which it emerged, and is continuously re-imprinted on the mechanisms of power. Power and knowledge are thus continuously engaged in a fluid exchange, each serving to reinforce the other (Foucault 1980; McHoul and Grace 1999).

The relationship between power and knowledge is central in this examination of the systems of knowledge responsible for identifying environmental “problems” and producing “knowledge” and “expertise” about them (Foucault 1980; Taylor and Buttel 1992; Yearley 1993). Foucault states, “the term discourse refers not to language or social interaction but to relatively well-bounded areas of social knowledge” (McHoul and Grace 1999: 31). By this definition the discourses of environmentalism can be conceived of in a broadened sense, referring to the entire discursive formation and power relations informing and maintaining it. Foucault offers an excellent lens through which relations of power and knowledge can be explored. But as Foucault does not account for language or social interactions in his conception of discourse, this theoretic model alone falls short in this discussion seeking to investigate the ways in which people articulate their senses of place and relationships with landscapes. Merging these ideas with those of dialogism offers a wider theoretic framework that also accounts for the social interactions woven together to create the complex tapestry upon which people talk about and experience place.

Dialogism is a term often used and seldom defined. In an attempt not to become trapped in the same ambiguous haze that seems to shroud the concept, I have merged various interpretations into a definition that is useful to this discussion. The term dialogism refers to the relationships between various distinct “voices” in text (Hirschkop 1989). Text here includes written and spoken language, sighs, nuances, and silences (Todorov 1984). Dialogism is a means by which the intertextual dimensions serving to inform, locate, and contextualize a human utterance (that is any form of text), are incorporated into the investigation of the relationship between the voices engaged in the exchange (Morson and Emerson 1990). Dialogism is interested in the moment of

interception where human utterances meet and interact (Todorov 1984); that place where a single utterance holds two distinct, identifiable voices; that constant murky-mixing of intentions between a speaker and a listener; the ways in which an utterance acquires its meaning from past utterances that have carved its path (Hirschkop 1989); and the horizon of knowledge and meaning upon which the utterance is exchanged (Todorov 1984).

Constant fluidity and process are the emphasis of dialogism (Hitchcock 1993). Text here includes the written, spoken, and non-verbal expressions of culture. Culture is made up of the discourses retained in the collective memory (Todorov 1984). As such, texts are discourses, and voices the means by which they are expressed. Dialogism is interested in the relationships between the two. Dialogism is thus the term assigned to describe *the relationship* between various voices at the moment of their discursive encounter (Hirschkop 1989).

Dialogism, as it relates to this discussion, offers a mean by which to conceptualize notions of place and landscapes as cultural texts. It allows for a conceptual framework broad enough to note the complexities of the interactions occurring between “speakers” and “listeners” in the social, cultural, and political process of place-making. Dialogism is a means by which the intertextual dimensions serving to inform, locate, and contextualize how places are made and landscapes experienced can be incorporated into the discussion.

Creating a framework where Foucaultian notions of power and knowledge are tightly married to the concept of dialogism also accounts for the reflexive character of this project. Using this theoretic framework, I, the ethnographer, am firmly located within the discursive exchanges of the research process. Not only are the places, landscapes, and discourses discussed here articulations of cultural text in dialogic

exchange between speakers and listeners, but so too are the personal exchanges that form the ethnographic backbone of this project. I am looking here to create cultural text from cultural texts that have been shaped and informed by cultural texts. I thus have to account for all of these levels of interaction, exchange, and intertext circulating through both the theory and practice of this project.

## **2.2 Space, Place, and Landscape:**

Much has been written recently on the place of place in social research. “The past decade has witnessed the eruption of place consciousness into social and political analysis” (Dirlik 2001: 15). This project is located within this eruption, informed in large part by anthropological works on place narratives and senses of place (Basso 1996; Basso and Feld 1996; Stewart 1996a, 1996b). There are two main currents to place-based analysis (Escobar 2001). One investigates movement from place through deterritorialization and migration (for examples see Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997; Gupta 1992), and another interested in those staying in place (for examples see Basso 1996; Basso and Feld 1996; Stewart 1996a, 1996b; Kuletz 1998). As I am interested in people’s senses of place and attachments to Yukon places, this project falls into the latter of these currents. From this perspective, places are seen as occupied with cultural meaning (Basso 1996; Stewart 1996a). “Personal and cultural identity is bound up in place...”(Escobar 2001: 143), and “the sense of place grows dense with a social imagination” (Stewart 1996a: 137). Place narratives thus act as personal expressions of collective ideals and imaginations. Throughout this project I explore these personal place narratives and what some of the agents of social learning are that serve to shape how they are formed and lived.

Places are carved out of space. Space can be understood as an objective, or mind independent reality. The concept of place embraces the idea that specific localities can only be understood in terms of people's perceptions and experience of them. As such, a place-based analysis needs to take into account the emotional, aesthetic and symbolic appeals of places, as well as the historically and socially specific interpretations that people have of places (Casey, 1997; Sack, 1997; Norton, 2000). Simply put, places are those localities carved into space through cultural processes of meaning (Casey 1996). "Places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions" (Rodman 1992: 641). They are symbolic representations of personal, political, historical and economic relationship and meanings carved into space. As such, seeking to investigate the cultural construction of places provides fruitful ethnographic terrain into the series of taken for granted assumptions upon which cultural complexes of knowledge and meaning are fundamentally built. Places are not merely the localities of culture, but rather are mirrored reflections of history, cultural values and meanings. The ways in which people relate to the world in which they live is reflected in the ways in which places come to be conceptualized and experienced (Rodman 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997).

Places are also historically located. They are "produced by human activity" (Dirlik 2001: 15) and are thus bound not only to the present, but are manifestations of the past. "A place is a socially meaningful and identifiable space to which a historical dimension is attributed" (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 4). They are those real and imagined localities "in which the erosion of our lives, our time, and our history occurs" (Foucault 1986: 23). The historical component to this place-based analysis provides

depth to the narratives that form the soul of this discussion. History, and how people situate themselves in it, is often reflected in the way that they talk about and relate to place. I was reminded of this by Jillian in a conversation about how she came to own her small home on the shores of a lake near Whitehorse. Sitting on her front porch sharing a pot of tea, I asked Jillian how this place came to be hers. In telling me the story she says:

*...And I was telling a story one day and I was talking and I said, what do you want to know first, do you want to know the history, or do you want to know the story? And he says oh, tell me the story. So I told the story, which was funny in itself, I can't remember which one it was, and then I told him the history it really made the story much more full. Why it made it stick out as a story that I would tell as a story of this place made so much more sense when he knew the history of it. It totally changes everything... And then getting the bigger picture, you know...getting the micro to macro...we have talked about that...and I was talking about how this is the micro...living here and this is what it is...and then you pull back and you have to include the history of these places along here...and then pull back again and you can see the boats going past right along here to Dawson City...and then pull back again and it becomes a First Nations only place...and go back again and there is just trees.*

Jillian's words remind us of the role of history in the study of place in the same way that Greg Heming (2003: 154) does when he writes that "our stories scatter our personal histories" through place. Stories, the stories that form the core of this project, are all situated. They are situated in space, place, time, and history. They are also firmly situated in class, gender, and ethnicity which all serve as mediating factors in the ways in which places are made, perceived, and experienced.

These academic notions of place are tidy and clear, in theory. But when I first started talking to people about their senses of place I was concerned by the responses that I was getting. Not because they were not the eloquent streams of ethnographic narrative that I had envisioned weaving into the text of this thesis - they were - but rather because I wondered if people knew what I was asking. I came into these interviews having spent a year reading about space and place. I had a clear, academically informed, idea of what I

was looking for. I realized that my problem was not with what I was trying to extract from these interviews, but rather the way I had framed it in my mind.

“Senses of place” is an ambiguous little phrase. It attempts to capture a very personal and elusive notion. Senses of place are notions that are expressed and articulated in a number of ways but are not often thought about consciously. Of the difficulties of exploring senses of place Kathleen Stewart (1996a: 139) writes, “The problem of considering ‘senses of place’, then, is a problem of tracking the force of cultural practices subject to social use and thus filled with moments of tension, digression, displacement, excess, deferral, arrest, contradiction, immanence, and desire”. As such, the flow of place narratives presented here does not follow one steady stream of consciousness. Running parallel in this text to this non-linear ethnographic discussion is a look at some of the master narratives serving to shape, frame, and contextualize people’s individual articulation. It is in looking at these master narratives that issues of class, gender, and ethnicity become the most glaring.

In time, as I settled into the research process and started to find my stride as an interviewer, I came to see that the problem was not the phrasing of the question, but rather my expectations for the answers. How people interpreted my use of the phrase “senses of place” became as interesting to me as their articulations of it. I also realized that I needed to train my ears to hear references to people’s place narratives without my having prompted them. People talk about place all the time. Articulations of the elusive “senses of place” percolate everywhere - walking with friends, sitting in the coffee shop, talking about plans for the upcoming weekend. But place, and senses of place, are more complex than being tied to physical landscapes. They are hybrid mergings of history,

experience, memory, social relations, and imagination. Place is a part of this narrative, but the concept itself is not broad enough to encompass all that forms and informs “senses of place”. I see now that when I asked people to talk about their “senses of place” they were talking about their landscapes – social, physical, remembered and imagined.

The notion of landscape allows for a broadened interpretation of the idea of place. Introduced into English by painters as a technical term “taken as a term to describe the artistic presentation of a scene, it can well be applied to the creative and imaginative ways in which people place themselves within their environments” (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 2). When I ask people to talk about their relationships with Northern landscapes, I am asking them to talk about the entire “scene” and how they place themselves within it.

The concept of landscape is useful in this place-based analysis because it allows for a broader positioning of the idea of place. As defined above, places are those localities carved into space by cultural meanings and values. Landscapes are constellations of these places that set the larger “scene” in which lives, and places, are experienced. As such, “The idea of landscape gives us a meaningful context into which we can set notions of place and community...landscape refers to the perceived settings that frame people’s senses of place and community...Landscape is thus a contextualized horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world” (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 4).

As “contextualized horizons” landscapes are deeply encoded with power relations, historical forces, and contested visions. They are cultural texts. Duncan (1990:

2) writes, “The Landscape, I would argue is one of the central elements in a cultural system, for as an ordered assemblage of objects, a text, it acts as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored”. As a collection of social symbols and articulations of cultural values and social relations, landscapes are a complex tool by which to explore some of these issues. As an expression of cultural text, landscapes are reflections of social systems. As such, asking people to talk about their relationships with landscapes and how they sense and articulate place within them is also asking people to talk about how they see themselves in relation to the larger social systems within which they live. From this perspective landscapes, in addition to being the places through which people experience the world, can also be a site of potential struggle. People can resist dominant discourses through their images and experiences of their landscapes (Mittelman 2001). Duncan and Mittleman agree that landscapes are political spaces, “a critical venue where civil society is voicing its concerns” (Mittelman 2001: 220). As such exploring the notion of landscapes and people’s perceptions of, and relationships with, them provides a marker by which to explore the ways in which dominant discourses about the environment are articulated, resisted and experienced.

### **2.3 Environmentalism**

I have adopted a broad conception of the term environmentalism, “referring to a broad field of discursive constructions of nature and human agency” (Brosius 1999: 278). In granting the notion of environmentalism this widened stance, we can avoid seeing it in the more limited context of social movements. In this light, “environmentalism as a

discourse is the field of communication through which environmental responsibilities are constituted” (Milton 1993: 9). How do we come to know and care about certain issues? Where is the knowledge and expertise informing such concern coming from? “Environmental discourse is an astonishing collection of claims and concerns brought together by a variety of actors. Yet somehow we distil seemingly coherent problems out of this jamboree of claim and concerns” (Hajer 1995: 2). I am interested in how northern spaces and issues are represented within this “jamboree” and how such representations are internalized, resisted and articulated in the place narratives of those who call these places “home”.

Having just said that I have adopted a broadened conception of environmentalism to avoid limiting it to a social movement, I am also interested in this movement. I am looking at environmental discourse as both discourse and practice. Therefore, it is not enough to seek out the processes by which environmental issues come to garnish environmentalist concern. I am interested in the ways in which these concerns are articulated within the environmental movement. I call this “organized environmentalism” and investigate the ways in which Northern spaces are represented and constructed at local, national, and international levels within these “organized” articulations of the discursive formation of environmentalism. Each level of environmentalism, local, regional, national, and international, generates literature and information about the North that circulates through the North. How this information is disseminated and how it is then interpreted, internalized, rejected, or resisted by Northern residents forms a central element of this project. I contend that the discourses of environmentalism are locally lived and experienced. Discourses of environmentalism are

not benign. They are value-laden, entangled in a mesh of political relations, and built on a foundation of root metaphors informing perceptions of people, physical environments, and worth (Ellis 1996; Harre *et. al.* 1999). By looking at how Northern places, landscapes and issues are made through the discourses of environmentalism, and how these constructions are interpreted and articulated through Northern residents' place narratives I aim to trace such construction and some of the lived local interpretations and implications of them.

When looking at the discourses of environmentalism as agents of place-making, seeing landscapes as “a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored” (Duncan 1990: 2) is useful. As cultural texts, landscapes are discourses, reflecting the social values, power relations, and ways of knowing of the dominant agents in the production of them. In the case of environmentalism, place-making efforts need to produce landscapes that reflect the dominant ways of knowing and perceiving these places, while simultaneously serving to silence those that stand to contradict it. In so doing, dominant power relations are exercised. In the case of environmentalist constructions of the Yukon, and by mapping how these constructions are reflected in some of the place narratives that I heard through the course of this research, the importance of the exercise of power becomes quite clear.

If environmentalism is conceptualized as a discursive formation, then who is an environmentalist? In the opening of this thesis I state that I consider myself to be an environmentalist. My identity politics frame the ways in which I have come to identify myself as such. Just as I consider myself to be a feminist, I am also an environmentalist. For me, this means that I care about the environment. This self-identification is

subjective, political, and personal. I am not affiliated with any organized environmental agencies. I do not actively participate in any political efforts. “My” “environmentalism” is part of my personal politic. I make lifestyle and consumer choices based on these concerns. This subjective identification locates me within the discourses of environmentalism. These discourses are largely problematic and deserving of rigorous critical examination. The reflexive nature of this project required that I engage both the discourses and practices of environmentalism, and my own identification with them. As this discussion evolves, I will refer to many of the conversations that I had through the course of this research. How people identified with the discourse and practices of environmentalism is often reflected in how they identify themselves in relation to “environmentalism”.

George, whose words opened this discussion, refers to himself as an “eco-freak”. He prefers this identification over “environmentalist”. For George, and many others that I talked with, the term environmentalist carries a lot of baggage. This passage from Ken Madsen’s (2004) book *Under the Arctic Sun: Gwich’in, Caribou and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge* makes an interesting point about certain perceptions of environmentalists:

...I don’t consider myself to be a *real* environmentalist. Environmentalists work more than I do. They understand the deep inner life of GIS mapping, endangered species legislation, and conservation biology. They organize meetings in Toronto, Seattle, and Rio de Janeiro. They amass thousands of air miles points so they can go to more meetings. They write proposals when they should be sleeping. They write proposals when they should be canoeing...(Madsen 2002: 16-17).

Of “environmentalism”, following the same lines as Madsen, George says:

*We can’t import southern solutions and technology for Northern landscapes. We are going to have to create our own...And what is quite dangerous is that we sent our best and brightest, whether it is environmentalists or politicians, down south to get*

*“educated” or the skills needed, and then apply the skills. It is often derogatory, called the “Jet Plane Syndrome”, it happens all the time in the environmental movement.*

Both George and Ken Madsen are active members of the environmental community in the Yukon. The book from which I cited Madsen’s words is an environmental call to arms. Most would likely look at both these men and consider them to be “environmentalists”. That they resist that identification, despite their politics and efforts, indicates that the ways in which “environmentalism”, as a discursive formation, has framed itself in theory and practice as alienating, even to those engaged in the movement itself. This alienation points to the series of problematic issues pulsing through the discourses of environmentalism. Some of these problematics will be explored and discussed in the discussion that is to follow here.

George and Ken Madsen’s comments also point out that the term “environmentalist” is not universal. It is defined and understood differently. The edges of these definitions are fluid, and personal. Throughout this discussion, as I talk about environmentalism and people’s engagements with it, how people identify themselves is important. Unlike me, not everyone I have spoken with, regardless of their political affiliations or social activism, consider themselves to be environmentalists.

## **2.4 – Class, Gender, and Race**

Cornel West (1993: 394) writes that the complex relationships between class, gender, and race need to be “more adequately theorized, and more fused in our concrete ideological and political practices”. Class, gender, and race, as factors in social analysis, create a complicated set of theoretical issues. Although unique, all share certain characteristics; namely that each only exists as a cultural construction in relation to an

“other” (Flax 1993; Giroux 1993). In keeping with the theoretical framework guiding this project, class, gender, and race are conceptualized here as cultural categories. When I talk about class, I am talking about “class culture”. The fluidity of conceptualizing these central issues as such allows for a closer examination of the exercises of power that serve to create and maintain their “otherness”.

Through complex networks of power relations, historical, social, political, and psychological forces class, gender, and race become tightly tangled. In the context of this work, issue of class, gender, and race percolate constantly. In attempting to theorize through issues of class, gender, and race, particularly in the context of a place-based analysis, I have come to see how tightly webbed relations between all three can be, and how firmly these relations can become encoded in place. Historical and material practices construct and maintain relations along classed, gendered, and raced lines. Master narratives serve to inscribe and reinforce dominant interests and silence the oppressed “other” (Giroux 1993).

In the context of place, these material consequences include physical displacement and a re-placing of dominant place narratives onto landscapes. This is particularly evident in the Yukon when historical relations between Yukon First Nations and non First Nations peoples are examined. How Yukon landscapes have come to be made, perceived, represented, and marketed illustrates “the ability of white, male, Eurocentric culture to normalize and universalize its own interests” (Giroux 1993: 485). Yukon First Nations people, although resilient and resistant, have been discursively and physically pushed out of many Yukon landscapes, and narratives. As this discussion evolves, some examples of this will be highlighted.

The matter of class has presented particular challenges in this work. Earlier I mentioned that I have conceptualized class as “cultural class”, rather than material or economic class. As I conceptualize it, class has less to do with capital than it has to do with social currency and power. I spent many hours through the course of this research sitting in run down old cabins, or small modest homes. Most that live in these houses have made lifestyle choices to do so, and are happily “living off the grid”. Many are underemployed, or chose to work little. Almost all were also university educated, white, and had moved to the Yukon from “Down South” as adults. This group, and I count myself among them, have a certain “view” of Yukon landscapes. These spaces are leisure places, enjoyed through layers of expensive technological gear.

Armed with this perception, and the social currency that comes with education and life chances (access to which is often mediated through class and race) this group also maintains a level of political power. Classed cultures give rise to political organizations which represent their interests (Heller 1993: 507). In the Yukon, the Yukon Conservation Society, Raven Recycling, the Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and the Caribou Commons Project all emerged from the efforts of small groups of educated, transplanted Yukoners. This network of environmental groups forms the core of the conservation effort in the territory. As such, the interests and values of a class cultural that perceives Yukon landscapes in a particular way have been institutionalized and mobilized.

That none of the First Nations people that I spoke with had any official affiliation with the environmental groups listed above illustrates the raced nature of class culture. Historical relations between First Nations and non First Nations people in the Yukon

underscore contemporary social and political affiliations. This is not to suggest that Yukon First Nations people are not concerned with environmental issues. Those that I spoke with are. But none have found a place for their voices within the context of organized environmental groups in the territory. This suggests that radicalized differences, meshed with class and history, intersect to silence First Nations voices and experiences of Yukon landscapes.

Unlike the tightly tangled relationship between class and race, the issue of gender is a murkier line of inquiry. Jennifer Duncan (2003) suggests that the “frontier” spaces of the Yukon provided, and continue to provide, a social space where women are able to live outside the hegemonic master narratives of social expectations. In many ways, this is my experience. There is a strong sense of womanhood in the Yukon. A Yukon woman is strong, independent, and tough. She drives a truck, chops wood, and runs dogs. She is the lone woman on the frontier with her dog for company. In conversations about this narrative over the years with my circle of “Yukon women” we have often talked about why we all perceived this to be a place where we could come and be (somewhat) freed from social expectations about what it meant to be women. This circle is part of the classed, raced culture mentioned earlier. We are southern, white, educated, and have the social currency and mobility to make certain lifestyle choices. But we are also living, although on the margins, within the same hegemonic ideological horizon that simultaneously defines our gendered experiences and grants us classed and racialized privilege.

Given this knot of multiplicity and complicated relationships, issues of class, gender, and race circulate throughout this discussion, on a number of levels. In keeping

with the reflexive tone of this effort, I have tried fold these factors into the fibre of this discussion at various points of textual encounter. In so doing I have been forced to confront these issues both theoretically and personally.

### **Chapter 3 - THE CANADIAN “NORTH”: A Concept and a Geographical Location:**

The ‘North’, like the ‘Arctic’, has been a fabrication created (until quite recently) to entertain, to develop, to market, and always to serve the interests and goals of a southern, dominant discourse, whether that discourse is in our history books, the speeches and policies of our politicians, the imagery of our artists, the stories of our writers, or the brochures and display cases of our tourist industry (Grace 2000: 22).

In this chapter I will discuss various constructions of the Yukon and the Canadian North, as both geographical locations and concepts. It is important at this juncture to examine the larger frame of reference through which Northern places are constructed and experienced in the Yukon. For many (like me), images and perceptions of the North were deeply formed before they had ever been there. Others who have lived their entire lives in the Yukon resist these “outside” constructions of their home-place.

The Canadian North is an interesting analytic starting point in seeking to investigate the construction of space and place as it is so heavily shrouded in conflicting symbolism. The “North” is at once a direction, a geographical location, and a way of life. It is simultaneously constructed as an empty, resource rich hinterland, where people go to work but not live; a pristine wilderness space to be protected and cherished; the last Canadian frontier to be explored, conquered, and tamed (Shields 1991); and a contaminated reservoir of the world’s pollutants (Hanly 1999; Tenenbaum 1998; WWF 2002a, 2000b, 2003). As stated earlier, the “North” also emerges as an element central to notions of Canadian identity, sovereignty, and security (Shields 1991; McRae 1994-95). For the purposes of this discussion, the “Canadian North” is conceptualized as all of

these things. It is at once a geographical location, with fluid edges determined by perception, a direction, contingent on where anyone is looking from, and a symbolic icon of Canada, and Canadianism. I am talking here about the “Canadian North” as both a concept and a geographical location.

The Northern-ness of the Yukon plays heavily in people’s place narratives. “In the North, there still exists a strong sense of place – of being not just in Canada but in the greater, natural world outside. Nowhere else are the seasons cast in such sharp relief. Nowhere else do winter and summer seem like – literally – night and day. People have a different perspective living in Canada’s arctic” (Dunn 1992: 1). This “Northernness”, however, is situated. There is no latitudinal boundary that marks Northern from Southern Canada. The notion of the “North” as being both a concept and a place was expressed in varied ways in many of the conversations that I had. For some the Yukon was the “North”, but Whitehorse was not. As he was pouring me a cup of tea in his cabin just outside of Whitehorse, Ed laughingly says:

*Whitehorse is nice...it's only 20 minutes from the Yukon!*

Of Whitehorse, Ellie, who has called the Yukon “home” for the last 20 years, says:

*One thing that I liked when I first came up here I never lived in Whitehorse. I always lived in the bush so I met the trappers and the hunters. I feel like then I experienced the North. Since I have lived in Whitehorse, it is like, I feel like I could be in Calgary or Edmonton. You get so removed from that. To me that is the Yukon, the North, out there. The people who live in small communities and live with the rhythms of the land. I live in a southern city really.*

I conducted the ethnographic research presented here in Whitehorse, which for me feels like the “North”. I constructed it as such in the design of this project. I relied on its “Northernness” to secure the funding that financed this venture. I have thought a lot about the ways in which the North is constructed from the perspective of a Whitehorse resident.

That for some Whitehorse is not North provides an interesting glimpse at the slippery nature of the concept/place of the “North”.

For Ellie the “North” is a lifestyle, not a place and international politics, particularly those of environmentalism, threaten it:

*...but that movement [the environmental movement] managed to wipe out trapping and a Northern way of life. A lot of...I don't see us as the North anymore, because a lot of people that lived out on the land, don't live out on the land anymore. Those international issues are killing our culture. Everybody who lived here relies on an economy that is based down south. If we didn't have that we wouldn't live here.*

Ellie points out a key element of this discussion. I am looking here at how notions of the local and global are formed and lived (Escobar 2001). The “North”, as concept and place, is both locally and globally constructed and experienced. These constructions are simultaneously politicized, infused with power relations, and circulated. There are material consequences that emerge out of these politicizations. Ellie is referring to the international environmental backlash against fur trapping that has had devastating effects on many Northern trappers.

Led initially by Greenpeace, and sustained most notably by a powerful and well-funded organization, an outgrowth of Greenpeace called the International Fund for Animal Welfare, a world-wide campaign of extraordinary virulence has been carried out. It has overtly placed animals rights over human rights, and both directly and with increasing frankness displayed raw racism in egregiously distorted statements about indigenous people and their lives as hunters and trappers (Williamson 2002: 197)

One impact of this international political power play, according to Ellie, is that the Northernness of the Yukon has been striped with the loss of the trapping way of life.

This discussion will return to Ellie's thoughts on international environmental politicization of northern places. But first it is important to quickly explore the place/concept of the North further. In looking at the ways in which various discourses

serve to carve places out of Northern space, the notions of the local and global become important. Environmental discourse in particular is globalizing. It globalizes places and issues. As such, this discussion is ultimately about how notions of the local and global are formed and lived. And thus it calls for an investigation into the discursive trends in the constructions of the Yukon. The next section explores the ways in which the Yukon, and the Canadian North, is constructed and perceived from the “Outside”, and how agents of place making in the Yukon serve to construct it locally.

### **3.1 This Place Called Yukon – The view from “Outside” – Romance and Resources:**

Local Yukon vernacular clearly distinguishes between “here” and “there”. When referring to the Yukon many say “up here”. “Up here”, meaning the Yukon, exists in contrast to “Down South”. Anywhere beyond the territory is called “Outside” (Dunn 1992: 2). In this section I will briefly review some of the ways that the Yukon, and the North, are constructed from “Outside” and how people “Up here” perceive and interpret these constructions.

Since Jack London and Robert Service started spinning yarns about the Yukon and the North, these places have captured something in a larger collective imagination. For those “Outside” these imagined images of this place are shrouded with political will, economic interest, and romantic mystique.

The Yukon from “Outside” is constructed in opposing terms. It is either seen as a resource rich hinterland, or an endless adventure space. What both thematic constructions have in common is that the Yukon is constructed as being relatively uninhabited by people. It is a place in waiting for those from “Outside” to either develop,

or explore. It is a 'frontier'. How it is to be experienced/conquered varies. But the master narrative behind the constructions is the same. The Yukon is a large, unpeopled, wild place.

The following excerpt from Robert Service's poem *The Spell of the Yukon* invokes a sense of the vast, "unpeopled" perception of the Yukon. And although almost a hundred years old, this representation of the Yukon remains strong.

There's a land where the mountains are nameless,  
And the rivers all run God knows where;  
There are lives that are erring and aimless,  
And death that just hang by a hair.  
There are hardships that nobody reckons;  
There are valleys unpeopled and still;  
There's a land – oh, it beckons and beckons,  
And I want to go back – and I will.  
(From *The Spell of the Yukon*, Robert Service 2001: 15)

Constructing the Yukon in these terms has complicated implications. Not only does it reinforce existing historical relations between First Nations and non First Nations people in the Yukon, but it reifies this relationship. The Yukon, as frontier, is a strong, contemporary construction with deep historical routes. (Although in many interviews, when I used the term 'frontier' people recoiled, and looked for alternatives to describe what they meant when they said "*this huge, wild, unpopulated place where I was so free to do whatever I wanted*" (interview with Anna). This indicates that perhaps a colonial guilt accompanies this perception.

### **Romance:**

Sherrill Grace (2000: 32) writes that how the North is constructed "demonstrates the ideological investment Canadians have made and are still making in the North and in

their identity as northerners. This investment is both practical – a matter of resources and power – and psychological”. Running throughout this psychological investment is the notion of the imagined “North”.

Jack London writes:

But all of this – the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all – made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a *chechaquo*, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination” (London (1910) 1993: 4).

The role of imagination is central to the “magic and the mystery” of the Yukon. For many who have come to call this home, it was their imaginary sense of this place that led them here. When asked what brought him to the Yukon originally Ted, a forty-two year old, university educated small business owner replied:

*There was this whole mystique about the North. It felt very adventurous. It wasn't that adventurous in the end...Once I got up here I was captured by all the romance and stereotypes of the North. I was pretty excited.*

Ted moved to the Yukon because he saw the potential to develop an outdoor business in a place with limitless potential. An article in *National Geographic Adventure Magazine* claims that in “Yukon Country”, “the spell of white water, wildlife refuges, and gold rush history will enthrall you” (Rennicke 2003: 60). This representation of the Yukon suggests a rugged adventure space.

In a conversation with Jane, a professional photographer in the Yukon, I asked her about which images of the Yukon “sold”, and to “whom”:

*J: There is demand for landscape and wildlife stuff...Quite a bit actually. Tourism pieces is a good percentage of my sales in the winter months. And then people phone up and they say do you have people canoeing down the Yukon River, do you have kayakers on Atlin, do you have a First Nation hunter, that sort of thing.*

*LC: And southern clients, who is looking for these images?*

*J: Magazines. I do work with magazines. Canadian and European. A small amount with Newspapers.*

*LC: And the magazines, is it outdoor type magazines?*

*J: Yep.*

What is interesting in Jane's comments about "Southern" demand for her Yukon images is the types of photographs that people are looking for, and who is looking. Jane gets requests from Southern outdoor and adventure magazines for big landscape shots with no signs of roads or power lines, people "playing" in the landscape, First Nations people doing "traditional" things, wildlife, and "quirky" Yukon people. In reviewing a number of these publications, these are the only images that I could find. The Yukon is a big, vast, open, wilderness, adventure play space filled with a few odd (but harmless) people, a few First Nations people (living a "traditional" way of life), majestic wildlife (like moose, grizzly bears, and caribou), and well Gore-Tex clad people recreating outside.

These images create a particular Yukon, and inspire a particular kind of Yukon resident. Like Ted, many of the men with whom I spoke came to the Yukon with these images filling their imagined sense of the Yukon. Already adventure-seeking personalities, going North was another boundary for them push. And once in the Yukon, the landscape becomes an enormous adventure playground (for those who can afford to see it as such).

## Resources:

Since gold was first discovered in Yukon at the end of the 1800's there has been the sense that this is a place where fortunes can be made. "It began with four words: 'Gold Gold, Gold, Gold!... They came by dogsled, by boat, even by bicycle – a hundred thousand people, all travelling north towards the gold fields of the Yukon'" (Rennicke 2003: 60). Of the Yukon, Robert Service wrote:

You come to get rich (damned good reason);  
You feel like an exile at first.  
You hate it like hell for a season,  
And then you are worse than the worse.  
(From *The Spell of the Yukon*, Robert Service 2001: 14).

Robert Service's representation of the Yukon continues to inform the ways that some still see and in turn value and experience the Yukon. One example of the construction of the Canadian North as a resource rich hinterland is reflected in a current political and environmental debate. Currently, the Alaska Government and the Government of British Columbia are negotiating the building of a road that would join the Alaska panhandle with the Stewart Cassiar Highway (Highway 37) in B.C. The Bradfield Canal Road will run up the mainland river valley between Wrangell, Alaska and Ketchikan, British Columbia where it will meet with highway 37 that runs north to Watson Lake, Yukon (Williams 2001: 1). Both the governments of Alaska and British Columbia are enthusiastic about the possibility of opening this transportation corridor, allowing for easier access to resources in Northern B.C. and the Yukon (Nagel 2002a: 1). Of this proposal Governor of Alaska Frank Murkowski says that the road will "provide access to Canada and at the same time open up known mining country to exploration and development" (quoted in Mackinnon 2002: 10). "The economic vision of the North

emanating from those two [Murkowski and B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell] is, simply put, ‘there’s gold in them there hills’” (Mackinnon 2002: 10). The construction of the Bradfield Canal Road illustrates a material consequence of the construction and perception of landscapes. If the North is seen as a resource rich place its landscapes are valued as such, and material articulations, like roads, become imprinted on them.

Of particular interest in this matter is that the construction of this road will divert any economic benefits from the Yukon and British Columbia to Alaska. As it stands there is no deep-sea port at Wrangell, Alaska. There is, however, one at Stewart, British Columbia. All resources extracted and shipped by sea from North Western British Columbia and the Yukon pass through that port. With a road joining Wrangell and Highway 37, resources extracted will be able to bypass Canada all together and travel directly into, and out of, the new port proposed to accompany the construction of this road at Wrangell, Alaska (Road to Ruin 2002; Smith 2002). The politics of this arrangement are obvious. Negotiated between Gordon Campbell in B.C and Frank Murkowski in Alaska, Northern B.C. and the Yukon are seen as blank resource rich places. From their perspective, facilitating the extraction of those resources just makes economic, and political, sense.

Environmental groups in British Columbia, Alaska, and the Yukon are adamantly opposed to the construction of this road. “Environmentalists on both sides of the border are mobilizing to block an Alaskan drive to build a new road into B.C. through the Iskut River wilderness” (Nagel 2002b: 1). The “Road to Ruin” website (<http://www.roadtoruin.ca>) provides detailed interpretations of the environmental impact studies and documents circulating about this proposal (Nagel 2002c). Of this proposed

road, the director of Cassiar Watch's Iskut-based Wild Rivers, Jim Bourquin, says "We see this as a resource grab" (Nagel 2002a: 1). David Mackinnon (2002: 10) suggests that it reflects the vision of those "...that measure the landscape in terms of a quick buck...".

Rob Shields (1991: 165) writes, "Much to the frustration of Northerners, the North has been defined solely in terms of Southern interests". The debate surrounding the Bradfield Canal Road illustrates how the North is seen through certain lenses – lenses informed by southern, or "Outside" interests. The power dynamics of this process are not lost on those who live in this "uninhabited" place. Of her interpretation of the ways that the North is perceived from "Outside", Kelly, a thirty-eight year old resident of Whitehorse for the past six years, says solemnly,

*People see the North with dollar signs, and the job of the North is to feed the South.*

This makes Kelly angry. She feels betrayed by these southern interests. She is also frustrated by the ways that political leaders in the North join their Southern counterparts and actively "feed" the images of the North that lead to this perception of it. As if swallowed up by dominant southern discourses, power relations, and interest, the Government of the Yukon markets and sells the Yukon in the same terms that it is constructed and perceived from "Outside". The marginality of the Yukon is only further entrenched by this political process of place making. Of this marginality Dave, a thirty-nine year old life-long Yukoner, says:

*We are a company of Canada...that is all we really are. We have created a government here that is funded by Canada that keeps the territory going.*

### **3.2 This Place Called Yukon – The view from “Up Here”:**

Local political constructions of the Yukon do not differ greatly from those occurring “Outside”. Rather, they serve to reinforce and encourage the perception of the Yukon as either a magical wilderness place, or a resource rich place. As this discussion evolves it is interesting to track the ways in which these constructions appear in individual Yukoners’ senses of, and relationships with this place.

#### **The Yukon – “Canada’s True North”**

The Department of Tourism and Culture at the Yukon Territorial Government refers to the Yukon as “Canada’s True North”...Claiming that “Canada’s True North is rugged and beautiful, pristine and larger than life”(YTG 2003). Headlines such as “Canada’s True North is Beckoning! – North to Adventure”, “You can still canoe in solitude...Endless Adventure”, “So much to explore” showcase the Yukon as a beautiful, natural place filled with possibility and adventure (YTG 2003). Short articles about the romance of the Gold Rush, wilderness adventures, and the amenities available to visitors underscore these headings. One such article reads:

There are two very happy moose for every human being in the Yukon. This comparison helps to illustrate an appealing fact: 80% of the Yukon’s total area is true wilderness...And moose aren’t the only animals that have discovered this unspoiled paradise. Healthy numbers of caribou, mountain sheep, grizzly bears, black bears, 254 bird species and many kinds of fish have also answered this call. Together, they offer a howling, chirping, splashing testimonial for the Yukon’s pristine nature (YTG 2003: 5).

As a conscious effort in place-making, this passage presents the Yukon as relatively unpopulated by people, and as a pristine wilderness space filled with wildlife living in blissful natural conditions. The central “selling” feature of this Yukon is its

“wilderness”. When I asked a representative of the Yukon Government why “wilderness” was so heavily marketed as the defining feature of the Yukon to travelers, his response was:

*Because wilderness sells. It is simple supply and demand. There is a demand, and we have a supply.*

The Department of Tourism and Culture’s website hosts a gallery of photographs showcasing some of the beautiful wilderness vistas and landscapes of the Yukon. Images of mountains, rivers, waterfalls, and sunsets make up this montage (YTG 2004a). In my conversation with Dave, an employee of a different department at YTG, about tourism in the Yukon, he explains his perceptions:

*LC: Why do you think people come here?*

*D: To see great open spaces and a bit of our history. German school kids all read Jack London, and a lot of Germans come here and want to follow the footsteps of Jack London. Americans come here because of the history of the road and the highway. Over time we can make that a better experience for them. The future of tourism is dependent on Yukon making sure that whatever we do we have an eye to the future.*

*LC: How does the Yukon government sell itself...how does it market itself?*

*D: For tourism? They have several strategies to get different types of tourists here. So you have tourists that are adventure eco-tourists. Then you have the European marketing strategy. Then the RV traffic heading to Alaska. And the cruise business to Alaska. And they also have a “stay another day” program encouraging people to stay a little longer. That program has been very effective because every day they stay here they spend more and that is good for Yukon business.*

*LC: Would you say that they.. that it is the same Yukon being sold to all those groups?*

*D: The themes are the same, but the targets are different. There is the Gold Rush Theme. The scenic beauty. And the adventure. Those are the themes. That is my perception.*

Dave refers to various marketing strategies aimed at different types of travelers to the Yukon. Much of the tourist traffic through the Yukon in the summer is RV travelers

driving the Alaska Highway. The Yukon is only a place that people pass through on their way to Alaska. As such, the Department of Tourism and Culture actively tries to keep people in the Yukon as long as possible. One way of doing this is by framing people's experiences in the Yukon while they are having them. The Whitehorse Visitors Center is an impressive building overlooking the Yukon River. Inside there are photograph displays, maps, literature, and a film show. The film, called *As the Crow Flies* (Chapman 1997), provides a picture of the "Yukon Experience" marketed to visitors once they have arrived. Images of Yukon landscapes are peppered with images of people throughout the film. Overlaid on these images are the narrative voices of various people. There are three central themes emerging in this film – Revelation, Freedom, and Wilderness.

The first is a strong narrative of revelation and identity:

*FV: (female voice) When I first came up here it was like going back to when I was a girl.*

*MV: (male voice) The Yukon pulls the cotton out of your ears. It pulls the blinds away from the eyes.*

*FV: The Yukon experience. The wilderness experience can only be character building.*

*FV: I think that I became a better person, for sure.*

*FV: I don't think that I was real before I came to the Yukon. I think that it turned me into the real person.*

*MV: You can't be in a place with this kind of vista without being emotionally moved, or spiritually enlightened.*

*MV (German accent): It gave me different scope. It gave me different outlook. And it made me calm and it made me content. This is something that I don't think I could have found someplace else.*

*FV: The Yukon is such a precious place. It is probably the only place in the world that could have given me what I have.*

These passages from the film suggest that the Yukon is a place where one becomes "real". Childhood innocence waits for you in the Yukon. It is a place where you can go

back in history and rediscover who you are. The Yukon is a place that will inspire transformation in you, and that transformation can not happen anywhere else. According to this film, there is something inherent in this place called the Yukon that will open you up and set you free and allow you to become real.

In the final lines of this passage, a female voice suggests that the “Yukon is such a precious place” that “has given her what she has. As a “precious”, sacred place, the Yukon has granted this speaker a sense of something that she was missing. Yukon landscapes are commodified as possessing something precious for those able to find it. This “something” was there for the speaker to come and get. She thus had to have the social and financial currency to travel to find it. This film was made for, and shown to, people who have traveled long distances to experience this place. Therefore, these life-changing, precious experiences are only for those selected few who can afford the trip.

The “freedom” that the Yukon grants people is a theme that has come up over and over throughout this research. I was surprised by this notion of the Yukon as a “free” place as it is not something that I had ever thought about before starting this project. In looking more closely at how places are made, however, I can see how this theme emerges at many levels of the discursive network. The freedom narrative in *As the Crow Flies* resonates loud and clear:

*FV: You can be alone in a place where nobody can interrupt your peaceful thoughts. You can see people who are friends, you can fish, you are free. You are more free here than anywhere else.*

*MV: It's freedom you have here. There is so much opportunity, especially for a person who is outdoor minded, to do a lot of things.*

Here the Yukon is a place where you are free to do and be whoever you want – or rather, the person that you “really” are. The volume of space in the Yukon grants a large part of this freedom. There is enough space to be and do what you want. This is particularly true for those who are “outdoor minded”, creating again a Yukon landscape as recreation and leisure-scape.

The importance of this natural, “wild” space forms the third thematic current in this film:

*FV: You don't know the spirit of the Yukon until you walk in some of its wild places. The most profound thing that happened to me here is the awakening I experienced in the natural world. I felt that there was this whole area of knowledge that wasn't contained in books. It is like living in a masterpiece.*

*FV: The Yukon experience. The wilderness experience can only be character building.*

Of interest in this film are not only the images and narratives that make up its content, but also what is not in the film. Every image was of the Yukon in the summer. There was no mention of winter anywhere. No one in the film was swatting at mosquitoes or black flies. It was never raining, windy, or cold. The Yukon, as presented in this film, is a magical place - a place where people go to discover who they “really” are – a place of adventure and beauty and wilderness and mystery.

Images of Yukon First Nations people bookend the film. First Nations voices are heard only at the beginning and end of the film, suggesting that they are not central to one's experience of the Yukon. Given the strong freedom / wilderness narratives in this film this marginality is not only understandable, it is necessary. Constructions of the Yukon as a free / wild space imply that it is an uninhabited ‘frontier’ space. As such, First Nations voices need to be silenced by this dominant place-making discourse. (I will return to the colonizing constructions of the Yukon as free and wild shortly). Images of

First Nations people in the film are of people doing “traditional” things – making bannock, wearing beaded cloths, drying salmon. In this film, none of the visitors, shopkeepers, and people recreating in Yukon landscapes are First Nations. This suggests that not only are Yukon First Nations people not involved in the tourism industry in the Yukon, but that First Nations people from elsewhere do not travel to the Yukon as tourists.

The film *As the Crow Flies* highlights three interconnected and problematic thematic currents running through certain constructions of the Yukon occurring in the Yukon. The first is the notion of the Yukon being an identity-authenticating place; a place of revelation. The second is the sense of freedom granted by this place. And the third is that the Yukon is a place rich in “wilderness” space. These thematic currents also run through many of the conversations that I had with Yukon residents about their senses of place. The notions of freedom and wilderness in particular form central narrative threads in many of the place narratives in the interviews that I conducted. This thematic overlap illustrates the ways in which constructions of place circulate. And although designed for visitors to the Yukon, the film *As the Crow Flies* is an example of how “consumers are tutored to see a particular representation of a commoditized landscape in a number of ways, and via a number of actors” and that the result of this tutelage can be that when such “cultural texts are read, meanings are also incorporated into lived cultures and everyday life, eventually contributing to new moments of production, new textual forms, and ultimately, new readings” (Milne *et.al.* 1998: 102).

**The Yukon – “Our abundant natural resources are yours to discover” (YTG 2004b).**

The Yukon Government Department of Energy, Mines, and Resources markets another

Yukon:

Our territory is virtually untapped compared to other parts of Canada. We invite you to explore the Yukon - our abundant natural resources are yours to discover.

The Yukon offers many exciting opportunities to invest, explore and develop the territory's abundant land-based natural resources.

We lay claim to over 80 mineral deposits with established reserves. A number of these are world-class.

We also enjoy significant oil and gas potential. The territory is in the middle of areas of known reserves. Our two producing gas wells rank among the top producing wells in Canada.

The Yukon also possesses vast forests, of high-quality, fine-grained wood. We locally manufacture several different types of wood products such as log homes, trusses, lumber, furniture, wood flooring and other finishing products such as and trim.

We possess abundant and diverse energy resources due to the presence of fossil fuel reserves, numerous lakes and rivers, windy and mountainous terrain, broad forest cover and sunny conditions. (YTG 2004b)

These passages construct the Yukon as a resource rich place sitting idly by waiting for industrial development. There is the sense of limitless potential for economic opportunities and a government open and willing to assist in any efforts to capitalize on this. From this perspective, the Yukon is an uninhabited, open, and ripe place waiting for outside development. The irony in these varied constructions is not lost on Yukon residents. Kelly, a university educated professional who has lived in Whitehorse for the last six years, comments of this divide:

*This is the great irony. There are people who are marketing the Yukon and they go out and work themselves in a lather talking about the wilderness. The Yukon spirit, the*

*Yukon sense of adventure...That there is an abundance of wildlife...These are the key selling features that they are flogging. And meanwhile there are other parts of that same government that are going out to develop it, to plunder it, to promote development that is incompatible with the first. There is a huge divide there...So I encounter on a regular basis conflict in the ways this place is marketed. They are going to the table to talk about forestry tender leases for along the highways that will change the viewscape for someone driving up the Alaska Highway, while Tourism is trying to market that viewscape.*

The conflicting ways of constructing Yukon landscapes expressed in this passage point to an issue that came up again and again in the conversations that I had with Yukon residents through the course of this research: the environmental and economic future of the Yukon. There are two visions, one that envisions an increasingly industrialized Yukon landscape, and another that sees Yukon landscapes as wilderness destination for travelers. When I asked people what environmental issues were on their minds, almost all said that the future of economic development in the territory was the main thing that worried them. All agreed that something needs to occur in order for the Yukon to sustain a viable economic base. But many worry about the implications of this development on the natural spaces so integral to their sense of place.

Of this debate Tom, a university educated professional and resident of Whitehorse for the past six years, says:

*I think there are two visions. One is that people could value it enough that it goes the conservation/tourist route. That is that people are making money on keeping it intact. The other is that it goes the industrial landscape route that Northern Alberta has, with little respect for aesthetics.*

The conflicting ways in which Yukon landscapes are constructed by different departments of the same territorial government points to the importance of politics in the place-making process. There are political, economic, and social reasons for constructing the Yukon as either pristine or resource rich. What these constructions of Yukon landscapes share is the overarching master narrative of the Yukon as a large, blank,

unpopulated space – a frontier. The politics of place-making are highlighted further when the discourses of environmentalism are folded into this discussion.

#### **Chapter 4 - ENVIRONMENTALISM – Politicizing Northern Landscapes:**

“The spectrum of environmental institutions does not form a continuum running from left to right. Rather, the environmental movement may be likened to a broad tree with many branches and shoots of varying degrees of maturity” (Mittelman 2001: 229).

Ellie’s words cited earlier about international environmentalism “killing our culture” carve a smooth passage into a conversation about the ways in which places are politicized through the discourses of environmentalism. As stated, I have adopted a broad definition of the concept of environmentalism, seeing it a field of communication, or discursive formation. In the Yukon, local, national, and international agents serve to inform and shape this formation. This network of discursive agents is maintained, informed, and supported by various political agendas. At times, these agendas mesh, and sometimes they are in conflict with each other. All of them make claims, and places, within the same paradigm of knowledge, tightly weaving individual political agendas into the very foundation of their arguments.

In reviewing environmental literature, whether locally, nationally, or internationally produced, the central informing factor was Western “Science”. Almost all claims, data, and information are offered a “scientific” backbone upon which emotional arguments are built. Of the implications of this, Taylor and Buttel (1992: 406) write:

In science, certain courses of action are facilitated over others, not just in the use or misuse of science, but in its very formulation – the problems chosen, categories used, relationships investigated, and confirming evidence required. Politics – in the sense of social action pursued or promoted – are not merely stimulated by scientific findings; politics are *woven into* science at its ‘upstream’ end.

Taylor and Buttel (1992) examine the role of science in shaping what issues come to qualify as environmental problems. The authors present an argument suggesting that science not only acts as the key informing agent in the construction of environmental problems, but that by its very formulation science also serves to facilitate certain types of concern and subsequent action. As illustrated in the passage cited above, science does not act alone in this manipulation. Never far from scientific formulation is political influence. In looking at environmentalism as a discursive formation, from the perspective offered by Taylor and Buttel, we can see the interlocking of scientific and political discourses (and influence) creating the very foundation upon which the discourse environmentalism is constructed.

Capital "S" science identifies a "problem" - a process that by its very formulation (politically) biases its own findings. Once identified, "S"cience monitors the "problem", reporting findings (when appropriate) to those engaged in popularizing the issue. Dramatizing the issue allows it gain attention, potentially invoking civil or political action (Hannigan 1995). Of particular interest here is the founding role played by both scientific and political discourses in the creation of environmentalist discourse and the power relations circulating throughout this dialogic exchange. As a discursive formation serving to reinforce power / knowledge relations between dominant scientific and alternative ways of knowing and perceiving environments, the views and voices of these alternatives are inevitably silenced by dominant environmental discourses. Brosius (1999: 227-8) suggest that as a result of this power dynamic:

As environmental concerns have come to occupy a central place in local struggles, national debates, and international fora, there is an important place for an analytical enterprise which seeks to bring a critical perspective to bear on these diverse, often contested, visions of the

environment, environmental problems, and the forms of agency such discourses conjure into (or out of) being.

Brosius makes a pointed comment about the ways in which dominant discourses of environmentalism serve to silence opposing visions of landscapes and environmental problems.

The role of science as an informing feature of environmental issues came up often in my conversations with people about environmental concerns that they have about issues affecting the North. For some, science validated their views and observations. The issue of the value of scientific knowledge came up most often when people were talking about the issue of Climate Change. Climate Change was one of the few globalized environmental issues that people talked about being on their minds.

One example was in a conversation with Dave. Dave was born and raised in the Yukon and has lived there for thirty-five years. He is university educated and works as a civil servant for the territorial government. Our conversation about what environmental issues were on his mind included this exchange:

*Dave: Global warming is an issue. It is good in that it is bringing warmer winters...we rarely hit minus forty in the winter now. And then last year it was disturbing because we didn't get any snow until December. And people think that it is not really affecting them, but it is affecting us greatly. Things are happening that I have noticed, like certain kinds of bugs in the trees that are killing off certain species of trees and leaving them as standing deadfall. Those kinds of things bother me, and are really going to change the landscape and I think are directly related to warmer weather. We need long periods of really cold weather to kill those insects. That sucks for me, but it is better for the trees.*

*LC: When you see the blights on the poplar trees in the summer do you link it in your mind immediately to global warming?*

*Dave: It is the first time that I have ever seen blights like this in the Yukon, and I have lived here for thirty-five years. I have to link it to something, and certainly we have had warmer weather...and the science is telling us that our temperatures are up up here. It is noticeable in the last twenty years. You would have to look at it over the long term, but if we don't get some normal winters soon there is going to be a lot of dead trees out there.*

*And maybe that is a natural course of things. But everybody tells me it is global warming.*

Others question the relevance or timeliness of the scientific community in making claims about issues affecting their landscapes. Brenda, a university educated professional in her early thirties who as lived in the Yukon for twelve years says:

*It is interesting, I was just up in Inuvik and a lot of the elders were talking about the melting of the ice that just made the news, and they have been talking about it for years. This year the scientists noticed...but the elders have been saying it for years. It is interesting to hear...it reaffirms that a lot of people come from outside and people are different up here. People up here understand the changes because people have to pay such close attention to the land.*

For Dave, his observations and experienced are backed up by the “science”. For Brenda, people’s lived experiences of landscapes are a large informing factor in how environmental issues are understood. And the “science” is late in arriving. Either way, both Dave and Brenda are aware of the scientific discourses circulating about the issue of climate change, and how it is affecting the North. The political influences woven into the discourses about climate change add another layer to this network of information.

Climate Change, or Global Warming, as an environmental issue is an interesting one as it has had a complicated career. It did not register in people’s senses of environmental issues until the summer of 1988 when temperatures were high, and people were hot. Scientifically based discussions about increasing temperatures meant little until people started feeling it in their own lives (Ungar 1992). In the Yukon, the issue of Climate Change is both globalized, that is constructed as a global issue, and localized, as an issue directly affecting the North. People, like Dave, see and sense changes, and look for an issue under which to classify their concerns. In conversation with Kristine, an

academic working in the area of Climate Change research, about the issue of Climate Change she comments:

*...I think that one area in the North that, and this is where the sense of place perhaps comes in, I think people are more connected to their surroundings than in some of the southern regions. I think people are more connected to the issue of climate change in terms of seeing changes that are taking place and wanted to see action being done to reduce emissions because people see and feel the changes, perhaps more than in some of the big cities.*

Localizing a global issue like Climate Change through place is one way to garner concern and mobilize action. On July 12<sup>th</sup> 2003 the Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre in Whitehorse opened a Climate Change Exhibit called *2.6 Million Years of Climate Change*. Beringia was selected as one of twenty-one museums across Canada to put together exhibits funded by the Climate Change Action Fund. This event was advertised throughout the community. The Beringia Centre is located on the Alaska Highway near the airport and is a central tourist attraction. Judging by the vehicles in the parking lot on the day of this event I suspect that about a third of those in attendance were visitors. First Nations dancers opened the event, which was followed by a number of speeches. The first was a speaker from the Marketing Branch of Tourism Yukon where visitors were encouraged to stay longer in the Yukon. This talk had little to do with Climate Change, and I suspect was geared towards those in the crowd from out of town. Ironically, most visitors to the Yukon drive large recreation vehicles a long distance to get to there, emitting large amounts of green house gases as they travel. That this is the speech that opened an exhibit on climate change is interesting, ironic, and highly suspect. This irony highlights the complicated set of contradictions circulating between how Yukon landscapes are constructed and the political interests informing these productions.

Next an Ottawa based Outreach Coordinator from Environment Canada spoke about the Climate Change Action Fund. A speaker from the Yukon Energy Commission followed, discussing the need for sustainable energy choices. The last speaker was Liberal MP for Yukon Larry Bagnell. Bagnell opened his talk by saying that he was deeply concerned because his constituency was shrinking. Parts of the north coast of the Yukon are melting away due to changes in climate. He made reference to specific places where erosion is occurring and water tables dropping. Bagnell was the only speaker to frame the issue of Climate Change in local terms. He pointed to specific localities where this globalizing issue was affecting the Yukon. He closed by making a call to action on Climate Change, saying that this issue was threatening “the Yukon way of life”.

In addition to this event, a number of articles in local papers talking about Climate Change appeared throughout the summer and fall that I was in Whitehorse. Of all of the globalized environmental issues, Climate Change is the one that received the most local press in Whitehorse. Larry Bagnell’s choice to frame this issue in local terms, however, was fairly unique. Most of the articles appearing in local paper came from the New York Times Service and were not locally authored. Almost all of the discussion about Climate Change as an environmental issue that I reviewed contains arguments and claims rooted in Western Science. In the conversations that I had about this issue it was not until people could see, sense and internalize the impacts of Climate Change as a problem that it came to occupy a place in their consciousness of environmental concern. One of the implications of changing climates is that the past few years have seen warmer winters in Whitehorse. Many with whom I spoke like this. As such, Climate Change, as an environmental problem, is not a concern. Rather, warming temperature means more

pleasant winters. This is an example of the ways in which individual experiences of places and landscapes deeply influence how environmental issues are perceived. Warmer weather means little to many, except perhaps more pleasant winters, until it becomes framed in problematized terms.

Climate change is only one example of how power relations and politics are woven into the environmental claims making process. In looking at how the discourses of environmentalism serve to make and bolster their claims it becomes clear that often the discourses of environmentalism are engaged in what Deborah Bird Rose (2003: 54) refers to as a discursive monologue. “Monologue is the narcissistic conversation that the West has with itself, a key feature of which is that the ‘other’ never gets to talk back on its own terms”. Relying on dominant scientific systems of knowledge and key political forces, the process of making environmental issues, and in turn making the places where these issues land, is a one-way monologue, not a conversation, serving to maintain and reinforce existing power relations. “Monologue is a practice of power, of course, since it involves silencing the people whose words and thoughts would require a break with self-absorption” (Rose 2003: 54). Brenda’s comments cited earlier about scientists finally “discovering” something that First Nations elders in the community had been talking about for years provides an example of such “silencing” and illustrates the colonizing impacts of the discourses of environmentalism.

#### **4.1 Northern Canada through the lens of International Environmentalism:**

In the case of environmental problems, we know they are global in part because scientists and political actors

jointly construct them in global terms (Taylor and Buttel 1992: 406)

There are a number of environmental issues converging on circumpolar regions. As discussed, Climate Change is one generating a lot of local, national, and international attention. Another is the issue of persistent organic pollutant and heavy metal contamination of circumpolar landscapes. This issue is generating a lot of attention and press in the international environmental community (Myers 2001; White 2001; Wristen 2002; Crump 2000), but receives very little attention locally in the Yukon. Much effort has been invested into surveillance and measurement of the empirically quantifiable impacts and risks of these issues (AMAP 1991, 1997, 2002; Crump 2000; Kassi 1998; Muir 1997; O'Neil *et.al.* 1997; Tenenbaum 1998). These efforts generate literature that circulates throughout academic, environmental, political, and local landscapes of knowledge. Interestingly, however, the international construction of Northern Canadian landscapes as contaminated, dirty and dangerous is strongly resisted in the Yukon.

The Circumpolar North, or the "Arctic", has a strong hold in the international environmental imagination. Much of the international environmental literature generated about Northern Canadian issues comes a long way from the North. In this, visions of Northern landscapes become hybrids of both real and imagined imagery: places imagined but not seen, or visited and then remembered. This was certainly the case for me, and my initial relationship with Northern landscapes.

Of interest is how this space, imagined and real, comes to be represented in international environmental discourse.

The top of the world – with its frigid expanses of water, ice, tundra, stunted forest, and wetlands – may look pristine, but the Arctic

environment and its inhabitants contain surprisingly high levels of heavy metals, organic pollutants, and radiation (Tenenbaum 1998: 1).

The Arctic is a natural storage reservoir for atmospheric and water pollution...The people of the Arctic have been recorded carrying pollutant levels 10 to 20 times higher than in most temperate regions (Hanly 1999: 1).

Certain Arctic populations are among the most exposed populations in the world to certain environmental contaminants (AMAP 1997: 4).

Passages like these informed my first perception and relationship with Northern Canadian landscapes as being contaminated and dangerous. Of particular interest in the above passages are the ways in which Northern spaces and people are constructed. Tenenbaum (1998) invokes imagery of landscapes. He writes of a vast, natural place, "frigid expanses of water, ice, tundra, stunted forests, and wetlands". For Tenenbaum, all of these features constitute what he calls "the Arctic". For Hanley (1999) it is the "people of the Arctic" that are lumped together. The "Arctic" is one contaminated place, and the people living there are one homogenous group. The AMAP (1997) is less specific. The passage cited above is circular and ambiguous. It is also very alarmist.

The international environmental community has made an industry out of monitoring, measuring, and discussing contaminant loads in Arctic environments (see AMAP; IPEN 2004). Cindi Katz (1998: 51) writes that corporate "environmentalism is now a pillar of establishment orthodoxy, its own cash cow". The same could be said for international environmentalism. Two central actors in the generation of literature on Arctic contamination are the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) and the International POPs Environmental Network (IPEN) (there are of course others). Both agencies are prolific, well connected, and well funded. The literature generated by AMAP in particular is interesting. It is generally presented in impenetrable scientific

code with tables, charts and data that make little sense to those of us who are not chemists (see AMAP 1991, 1997, 2002). The text that frames this data, however, is written in ambiguous, alarmist, and emotional language:

A mother nurtures her child with love, energy, nutrients, fluids, protection against disease, and physical warmth. In recent years, many women have become concerned that during pregnancy and through breastfeeding, they also expose their children to environmental contaminants. This concern is justified (AMAP 1991: 1).

The report that follows this opening quote goes on to state that there have not been any links made between human health and levels of contamination in Arctic environments, “However, a lack of readily-visible illness does not mean that the exposure of indigenous peoples in the Arctic is without medical consequence” (AMAP 1991: 2).

It is this alarmist tone that sets up the urgency of the issue, which increases funding, which increases research, which increases literature - the very cycle that I found myself caught up a few years ago. I agree that if there is the chance of risk, that this issue should be monitored and researched. I do not, however, agree with the business of inciting fear and alienating people from places. Constructing Northern spaces as being only dirty, dangerous places assaults more than just food sources and local subsistent economies. It directly impacts on people’s relationships with those landscapes, and senses of place (Basso 1996; Basso and Feld 1996; Escobar 2001; Stewart 1996).

Also occurring through this process of place-making is that the Canadian North, along with other circumpolar regions, is constructed in homogenous terms; the entire region is dirty. The Circumpolar North becomes one place – the Arctic. Again, individual articulations and experiences of place are paved over by these globalizing environmental discourses, lumping all Northern spaces into one place, and all Northern

people as incarcerated in it (see Appadurai 1988 for a discussion on the “incarceration” of people in place through anthropological imagery and concepts).

The issue of arctic contamination illustrated the temporal aspect of environmental discourse. Environmentalism links the past with the future. The present is represented as the sum of the consequences of the past, and the platform upon which to gauge the future (Harre *et.al.* 1999:7). A result of the temporal aspect of environmentalism is the speed by which it, and the counter-discourses that it encourages, evolve (Brosius 1999). This rapidity reinforces the importance of examining discursive relationships as contextualized and dynamic (Honadle 1999). In so doing, a discursive space is opened up where these relationships can be discussed in meaningful “dialogue” rather than hearing them as an overbearing “monologue” (Rose 2003).

One of the things that I found most interesting in my discussions with Yukon residents over the past few years is people’s dismissal of this construction of the places that they work, live, and play. I have been told that there was a lot of talk about this matter in the mid 90’s, but that the buzz has settled, and people realized that the Yukon is “safe”.

Of the issue of Arctic Contamination, Tom, a long time Yukon resident says:

*It is clearly an issue. But I think that it is a lot less of an issue than it is made into. I could be wrong, but that is my impression.*

The Council of Yukon First Nations, in conjunction with the Yukon Conservation Society has organized an aggressive public education campaign called “Country Foods: Are they safe? – YES!”. With brochures, refrigerator magnets, and booklets available to the public, CYFN and YCS are clearly attempting to re-construct Yukon landscapes as clean, safe places. In response to the issue of contaminant loads in Yukon ecosystems,

Norma Kassi writes (1998: 2), “Yukon ‘country foods’ in comparison with market foods far outweigh the risk from contaminants”.. An article written in both Inuktitut and English in *Makivik* magazine, a publication aimed at northern readers, reads, “Country foods are healthy, safe, and sometimes less expensive than store bought food, and locally available” (Bernier 2000).

Despite all the press that the issue of Arctic contamination has received, most of the people that I spoke with have little concern about the safety of their Yukon landscapes. Sam, a lifelong non First Nations resident of the Yukon, and avid hunter and fisher, says:

*As of right now I really have no environmental concerns about eating the fish or harvesting animals or eating meat off those animals or anything. It really hasn't affected, in my mind anyway, the Yukon.*

Both the organized efforts of the Yukon Conservation Society and the Council of Yukon First Nations, and Sam and Tom's personal perceptions of Yukon landscapes illustrate an example of a local counter-discourse emerging against a globalizing discourse of place/issue/risk making (see O'Neil *et.al.* 1997 for another example of resilience to “poisoned food”/ “dirty place” discourse in Northern Quebec). Northern indigenous communities face a dilemma of weighing the multiple nutritional, socioeconomic and cultural benefits of traditional, or “country foods” against the scientifically measured risk of contaminants in those foods (Kuhnlein and Chan 2000; Furgal *et.al.* 2000). Deborah Lupton (1999: 14) writes that, “Risk selection, and the activities associated with the management of risk, are central to ordering, function and individual and cultural identity”. Rather than medicalize the space between health and illness in anticipation of the future consequences of arctic contamination (Gifford 1986),

Northern groups appear to be localizing the benefits of not doing so. This process of resistance to the dominant discourses constructing Northern landscapes as potentially dangerous re-places people within the context of their own landscapes, and their own experiences and lives in them.

Given that counter-discourses have emerged in Northern Canada against the “dirty landscape” literature, the process of keeping people informed about potential risks will be made more difficult, and will likely be met with increasing resistance. This example points to a key problem with framing spaces in globalizing, homogenizing environmental terms – it does not account for the multiple ways in which places are constructed, articulated, and experienced locally by those living there.

The “monologue” of Arctic contamination is a self-sustaining discursive loop. The louder claims are made, the more resources there are to continue to make them. Pearce (1991) calls the scientifically informed, politically driven, historically bound process of environmental problem location “environmental colonization”. Although Pearce is referring directly to the sourcing of environmental problems in “developing” countries as part of the discursive formation of Development, the concept of environmental colonization is worth appropriating for the purpose of this discussion. This process sources environmental “problems” in “developing” countries. International discourses on arctic contamination “source” the problem in the “Developing” “South” (AMAP 1991, 1997, 2003; Tenenbaum 1998; Hanly 1999; Muir 1997) with definitive statements like, “It is now recognized that there are major contamination problems in the Arctic due to long range transport of pollutants from the south...” (Muir 1997: 55). The “North” is victimized by this global industrial pollution. Both the “South”, the culprit,

and the “North”, the victim, are marginalized within this environmental monologue (see Escobar 1995 for a discussion on the construction of “worlds” as “North” and “South”, “First” and “Third”). Sourcing the “root cause” of a Northern environmental “problem” in the “developing” South, by those in the powerful middle, reinforces power relations within the discursive and political structure of environmentalism (Ellis 1996).

Foucault (1980) suggests that we examine power at its extreme points of exercise. At these points, people are completely invested in the real and effective practices of power. Examining local negotiations of the issue of “arctic contamination” provides one such point of extreme investigation. Here, we can see how local articulations of power and resilience, informed by alternate systems of knowledge, are resisting the established scientific regimes of thought being articulated through environmental discourses. These local articulations, however, do little to halt the larger environmental monologue going on above, and about, these localized places. Rather, local experiences and resistance to globalizing discourses remain silenced by the strength of the dominating power relations.

This example also points to a central argument of this thesis. That is that if meaningful environmental change is to occur, people need to be included in the critical dialogue about the environment, and not solely be “informed” by the dominant monologue. “Dialogue breaks up monologue; it clears a ground for meeting, generating a place where people can speak on their own terms” (Rose 2003: 54). In other words, engaging in a dialogic conversation about the environment, and environmental issues, stands to open up a discursive space where the discourses of environmentalism can begin to be decolonized. Rose (2003: 54) writes that “...dialogue begins where one is, and thus is always situated...and...dialogue is open, and thus the outcome is not known in

advance”. By allowing people to re-place themselves within both the physical landscapes that form their senses of place and the social and political landscapes of environmentalism, it is my hope that a space can be created where critical, meaningful dialogue can occur.

#### **4.2 Environmentalism in the Yukon:**

Trying to map the ways that the discourses of environmentalism intersect with people’s relationships with landscape is a complicated endeavour. These discourses emerge locally, nationally, and internationally. Information circulates at incredible speed throughout the world. Discourses and counter-discourses emerge constantly (Brosius 1999). So far in this discussion I have focused on the ways in which Northern environmental issues and landscapes are represented in some of the larger, more globalized discourses. There is, however, an active environmental community in Whitehorse also constantly engaged in this discursive flow of information. In the section that follows I will chart the priorities and mandates of the environmental agencies at work in the Yukon and how these groups disseminate their information. I will then use this as a framework against which to examine how “environmentalism” and environmental concerns were articulated by those with whom I spoke through the course of this research.

#### **“Organized” Environmentalism in Whitehorse:**

There are a number of environmental agencies operating in the Yukon. These include the Yukon Conservation Society (YCS), the Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Parks and

Wilderness Society (CPAWS), Raven Recycling Society, and the Caribou Commons Project (CCP). Although there is some overlap in concerns and membership, these organizations operate independently of each other. The Northern Climate Exchange (NCE) is another group in the Yukon, although it is not politically active. Based out of Yukon College, the role of the NCE is to act as a clearinghouse for information about Climate Change in the North. Each group works extremely hard and reducing their efforts to a few paragraphs seems simplistic. But in the interest of economy, this section will focus on illustrating how these groups circulate information, frame issues, and infuse places in the Yukon with their political agendas.

**Yukon Conservation Society (YCS):**

The Yukon Conservation Society was established in 1968 by a group of local residents. It is a non-profit NGO. Their mandate is to “encourage the conservation of Yukon wilderness, wildlife and natural resources” (YCS 2004). YCS’s efforts follow a number of avenues. The first is in the area of advocacy and research where they serve as a “voice on many environmental issues in Canada’s north” (YCS 2004). In this capacity, YCS refers to itself as a “public watchdog” for environmental problems and concerns. Another is environmental education where they are “instrumental in promoting greater environmental awareness and understanding. [And]...to promote and enhance awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the Yukon’s ecosystems and support behaviour and practices which lead to conservation in the Yukon and beyond” (YCS 2004). YCS’ environmental education program includes a Free Interpretive Hikes program that runs through the summer. The goal of this program is to take people out into the landscapes with the hopes of fostering an increased awareness and appreciation of them. Part of this

program includes events for children, where kids learn about some of what is going on in the landscapes around them. Hikes run seven days a week from early July to mid-August. Children's programs run twice a week, one day for children ages four to six and another for kids seven to ten. Hikes are geared towards both visitors and Yukon residents, and depending on the theme of the hike, more of one group or the other may participate. Also as part of their educational efforts, YCS hosts an impressive library of resources that is available to anyone who is interested. In addition, they also have specific program areas in forestry, mining, environmental assessment, protected areas, and energy.

The YCS office is housed in an inviting building in downtown Whitehorse. In good weather the door is often open, there is water dish outside for dogs, and the energy of the office is busy but welcoming. Inside the door you can find stacks of pamphlets, booklets, facts sheets, and literature available. Here I found literature on YCS itself, City of Whitehorse pamphlets on "Whitehorse – The wilderness city", the 2003 Northern Contaminants Program *Canadian Arctic Contaminants Assessment Report II (highlights)*, and a booklet issued by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board called *The Effects of Oil and Gas Industry Activity on Fish and Wildlife*. It was here where I found brochures and fridge magnets for the "Yukon Country Food – Are they Safe – YES!" campaign. In addition, there were letters written to members of the legislature urging people to take action on the issue of placer mining. There are also a number of books for sale at the YCS office. These include a number of guidebooks and natural history interpretive guides. YCS also issues a quarterly newsletter that is free to anyone, regardless of membership to the organization.

## **Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Yukon Chapter (CPAWS):**

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Yukon Chapter states that its mission is:

To protect the Yukon's wilderness and wildlife through an interconnected system of protected areas and conservation lands. To promote awareness, understanding, and enjoyment of the inherent values of Yukon wildlands through education and experience. To encourage all levels of governments to fulfill their conservation and protected areas commitments. [And] To work in cooperation with other organizations and individuals to meet conservation goals (CPAWS 2004).

The Yukon Chapter of CPAWS is part of the larger national organization. Unlike YCS, which was started locally and remains a Yukon-based organization, CPAWS is a national organization.

One example of how CPAWS works towards achieving their mission of promoting awareness, understanding, and enjoyment of Yukon wilderness is through organized "wilderness" trips. In July 2003, CPAWS organized the Three Rivers Journey. The goal of this event was to increase awareness of conservation issues in the Peel Watershed. Thirty-seven participants joined in this event that saw them travel by boat for eighteen days down the Wind, Snake, and Bonnet Plume Rivers. Local writer and trip participant Teresa Earle (2003: 3) describes the trip:

Imagine boatloads of creators – artists, poets, writers, videographers, photographers – joined by conservationists, wilderness guides and members of First Nation and nearby communities, paddling through one of the continent's most pristine and fragile wilderness areas.

The political goal of this trip was clearly stated from the beginning – to promote awareness and mobilize efforts for the conservation of the Peel Watershed. The means by which this was accomplished is described by one participant as "a refreshing way for

an environmental group to be involved in a conservation initiative” (Earle 2003:3). The landscape that this effort is looking to protect is constructed as a wilderness landscape.

CPAWS, working in collaboration with the Yukon Arts Centre, the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon and the Tetlit Gwichin First Nation, created a forum in which people were placed in the landscape, and where their individual experiences of that place could be incorporated into the political effort. Granted, the ways in which this place is framed is shaped by the political agenda of the trip’s organizers from the beginning, but through the artistic expressions of place narrative that will emerge from this event, senses of this place will be felt beyond the boundaries of the journey itself. This example of place-making through placing people in landscapes as a political tool is one that I would like to see the environmental movement use more. This type of effort allows for situated experiences of place. Biases and politics are clearly built into the project at all levels. There is no hiding what CPAWS was looking to accomplish with this trip, yet CPAWS itself has little say in what art is produced out of this journey, and what then happens as a result of the circulation of various articulation of this place through that art, stories, and personal experiences.

In many ways, although occurring within the larger monologue of “conservation”, this effort is an attempt at a situated dialogue. Particularly important to note is the involvement of local First Nations community members on this trip. Members of the Tetlit Gwichin First Nation participated as paddlers on this journey as well as by hosting a final dinner at the end. The Peel watershed is a culturally and economically important region for Tetlit Gwichin First Nation peoples. As such, they have a vested interest in

working towards its conservation. In turn, creating a political alliance with CPAWS on this effort serves to benefit members of this community.

CPAWS has also published an impressive book called *Yukon Wild: Natural Regions of the Yukon*. This publication is glossy, professional, and loaded with “eco-facts” about the Yukon and its “ecoregions” and “conservation areas”. Lovely pictures of wildlife and regional flora fill the pages. These images are framed by text discussing environmental issues in the North, including Climate Change and the loss of biodiversity. Reading through this book the Yukon is constructed as a “fragile”, “precious”, “unique”, and “wild” place that needs to be “protected”. Again, CPAWS makes no effort to shield its political agenda. This publication, which I noticed on the shelves on many of the homes I was invited into in Whitehorse, frames the Yukon as a wilderness place that needs to be protected and conserved.

### **Raven Recycling Society:**

Raven Recycling Society was started in 1989 by a group of Yukon Conservation Society members looking to initiate a recycling program in Whitehorse. This small group started collecting pop cans from people in exchange for a penny out of their own pockets.

During this time the group was lobbying the government to institute a legislative system where beverage containers would be accepted for refunds. In 1992 that legislation was passed and Raven Recycling broke away from YCS and became its own Society. The central mandate of Raven Recycling is to divert waste from Yukon landfills. From there, it has grown into an impressive operation. Now a main beverage container depot and recycling centre, Raven is a non-profit organization that runs like a business. They employ twenty people and are the largest exporter of raw materials in the Yukon. As a

non-profit group, Raven is in a position to accept, handle, and ship as many as forty types of materials, out of which only two yield any income for the organization.

In addition to housing an impressive recycling depot, Raven also actively engages in public education campaigns. They run a weekly article in *The Yukon News* called “Waste Not Want Not”, which discusses recycling and environmental issues. They have a “Recycling Club” for kids, and target considerable educational resources at children’s education programs. Free tours of the depot and landfill are available through Raven, and a range of people participate, from school groups, to day cares, to government officials, to tourists. As a complement to their public education and outreach programs, Raven is also actively engaged in lobbying the government for changes in environmental and waste management legislation.

Of all of the environmental groups in the Yukon, Raven is the one that transcends class boundaries with the most ease. Because the bottle depot is on site, Raven sees this as a jumping off point where people are participating in an activity for the “cause”. Once they get people on site to return refundable items, they can offer information about other forms of recycling. The hope is that maybe next time people will bring their cardboard along with their beer cans. A huge cross-section of the population of Whitehorse visits the bottle depot at Raven Recycling. Fewer bring their recycling, and it is difficult to track the numbers, but the staff at Raven Recycling makes an effort to increase awareness through educating those already coming to them.

**Northern Climate ExChange (NCE):**

The Northern Climate ExChange is not an environmental lobby group. They are an “independent” source of information on Climate Change. Started in 2000, as a means

through which the large volume of information about Climate Change could be mediated, the Northern Climate Exchange runs out of a small building behind Yukon College in Whitehorse. I include them in this list because they serve as a central agent for the dissemination of information about Climate Change throughout the North.

Inside the NCE building there is wall of literature and information available to anyone who is interested. Fact sheets (explaining the “science” of Climate Change), Climate Change workshop reports, academic papers, and a volume of *The Northern Review* dedicated to the proceedings of the Circumpolar Climate Change Summit hosted by the NCE and Yukon College in March 2001, fill this wall. There is also a library on site open to everyone. The NCE’s website reports as many as 700 hits a day. This website provides an impressive resource for anyone looking for information about Climate Change and related issues in the North.

**The Caribou Commons Project (CCP):**

Initiated six years ago by a local conservation activist in Whitehorse, the Caribou Commons Project works towards protecting the habitat range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Through a website, a touring slide show and lecture series, published books, and music CD’s, the goal of the Caribou Commons Project is aimed at circulating their message and gain support for their cause as many ways as possible. It is particularly important that information about this issue be spread through the United States, as the calving grounds of the caribou are in Alaska, and are slated for oil and gas exploration and drilling. The Caribou Commons Project works hard to increase awareness about this conservation issue and lobby the American Government. CCP is loosely affiliated through joint concerns with both YCS and CPAWS but works independently of both.

### **4.3 Discursive Confluence - Environmental issues on people's minds:**

At some point in every conversation I asked people if there were any environmental issues affecting the North that concerned them. Responses to this question ranged greatly. As when I asked people about their "senses of place", I had an idea of what I meant by "environmental issues". Also as when I asked people to talk about their "senses of place", people interpreted "environmental issues" in many ways. Some had no concerns. Others had concerns rooted directly in their places, their homes, yards, and neighbourhoods. For others still, the question was too big and broad. They had too many to list. As has already been discussed, some were worried about the large global issue of Climate Change. The difference in the responses that this question solicited illustrates the ambiguity of the notion of "environmental issues". How people interpreted my use of the phrase "environmental issues" is as interesting as the "issues" themselves. The range of responses to this question illustrates again that notions of environmentalism, and environmental issues are not universals. Rather, they are situated and fluid. Also of interest is where people learn about these issues, and why they care about certain issues while others are not given much thought. In asking this question I was curious about the ways discourses of environmentalism circulate and how people incorporate them into their own senses of place, relationships with landscapes and environmentalism.

Some, like Sam, did not have any environmental worries:

*LC: And when you are out, or when you look around you and you think about the Yukon landscape, are there any environmental issues that you think about? Or that you worry about?*

*S: I really can't say that there is any, no.*

Sam has lived in the Yukon his entire life. He is an active outdoors person. Sam reads local newspapers once in a while, has no interest in watching the news on television (“because it is all only about Down South”). Sam does, however, spend a lot of time on the Internet exploring outdoor and adventure websites. Sam says that it is on the Internet and by word of mouth around town that he learns about what is going on.

Like Sam, Alison, another life-long Yukoner replied:

*Things are going to happen the way they are going to happen, and you can try and change things, but you know, sometimes you just got to let things go. When you look at what the rest of the world is going through, there isn't much hardship going here...I don't really worry too much. If it happens it happens. I used to get worried. I used to freak out about things. And now I realize that things are going to happen.*

Alison also does not read the newspaper very often and is not affiliated with any environmental organization. Like Sam, she gets her information about things from people around town. She figures that if she needs to know about something, someone will tell her.

For others, the question was too big. When I asked Lucy if there were environmental issues that were on her mind, her response was:

*That's a huge question. It bothers me that this lake is polluted. That is such a huge question. There is so much that a person can say about that. Huge. It bothers me all the time. It effects how I live, it is a factor in deciding to have children or not...the food I eat. I get very angry about it sometimes when people think of things only in economic terms. I find it really, I get very angry and frustrated...it is definitely a big issue for me.*

Lucy is a thirty-five year old, university educated professional, who lives in a small cabin outside Whitehorse. She has lived in the Yukon for the past six years. For Lucy my question was too broad, and she had too many things on her mind to discuss. Her environmental consciousness frames her lifestyle choices and informs the ways that she relates to her landscapes. Later in this conversation we talked about this question again,

and again Lucy did not know where to start. When I asked Lucy if she had any affiliations to environmental groups in the territory she said no - her environmentalism is personal, not political.

The notion of the personal came up as being extremely important to people in their political engagements with environmentalism. When I asked Jillian about environmental issues that were on her mind, without hesitation she said:

*Definitely. Specifically, [my neighbour] up the hill. He has already added one lot and wants to add another one. He wants a heavier industrial thing there...so the silence is threatened. The sound I should say, because when you go out there there is no nowhere near silence. The wind and waves and birds and everything. So that gets threatened....My sense of peace is threatened by other people's different senses of this place than mine.*

Jillian has lived in the same place just outside Whitehorse since she arrived in the Yukon fifteen years ago. She is forty years old, university educated, and works as a professional in Whitehorse. Jillian's environment is the place where she lives, and threats to her environment are things that assault her sense of place there. Later I asked Jillian if there were other, more globalized, issues that were on her mind. She said, oh yes, but started talking again immediately about the development plans for her community and the choices that some of her neighbours were making that bothered her. Jillian's "environment" is her place, her landscape, and her concern for it is informed deeply by her sense of place and attachment to it. She is not affiliated with any environmental groups in the territory. She chooses rather to express herself as an environmentalist through her lifestyle choices. Like for Lucy, environmentalism for Jillian is personal, not political.

Anna, who like Jillian has lived on the same property for many years, locates her sense of place as emanating out from that spot. Anna is forty years old, has three

children, and lives with her husband on a property that they purchased when they moved to Canada ten years ago from Europe. She and her husband work as professionals in Whitehorse. When asked about environmental issues that were on her mind, Anna got tears in her eyes. She quietly said:

*Yes. Pipeline. That pipeline was supposed to come here and I was devastated. It would go right through our subdivision, very close by. It would ruin a pond where me and the kids go. It is a very nice spot. Now they say that they will go through NWT. I had nightmares about that. I think it also had to do with the environment. The pipeline goes right through it. The damage, the danger...I hate that idea. This place was threatened seriously by that. (As Anna says "this place" she points to the ground, indicating this exact place, and all that it represents for her and her family).*

Jillian and Anna's senses of environmentalism and environmental threats are rooted in a classed notion of possession. They own their places, and feel deeply attached to them through this ownership. Both women moved to the Yukon looking for a sense of space and freedom. They were attracted to the Yukon because of the natural spaces surrounding a city where they could find professional work. Both have chosen to make their homes outside of Whitehorse. And both commute into town to work at professional jobs. Threats to their senses of place reflect the values and interests of those with differing socio-economic social locations than theirs.

The issue of class permeates deeply through the conversations that I had with people about environmental issues. The most common response to my question about environmental issues that were on people's minds was concerns about economic and industrial development in the Territory. Anna's concerns were immediate. She was scared of the impacts of the pipeline on her place. Others' concerns are broader. The "visions" for the future that Tom referred to earlier worry them.

When asked this question, Jane,(the professional photographer) responded:

*I think mining. Any mining up here, open pit mining. I have seen the area around Faro and what that can do. And just the mining and putting roads in. I hate that idea of making areas more accessible. Mining in regards to the fish and the waterways. That concerns me a lot. That's about it. More roads is not a good idea, and just tearing up the ground.*

Brenda answers:

*Yes. I think that we need a long range developing plan here. There is no development plan here. They filled in a wetland to put up Wal-Mart. And now they are dealing with traffic issues. So there is no long-term plan for Whitehorse. That is a product of boom and bust here. Long term planning in how to deal with wetlands and mines...we need that. This is a place that is so dependant on resources...and there is no long-term vision about how to do that.*

Of the people that I spoke with, most of those who had grown up in the Yukon had very few environmental concerns. Those who had made the conscious choice to move here were most concerned with the future of economic development in the territory. Of this difference, Ellie comments:

*That is what I call the old red neck Yukon. Resource. Whitehorse, there is really two groups of people. There is the group that are born and raised here and have mining roots and they want forestry and they want mines. And I would say that is about sixty or seventy percent of our population. And then there are people like me, who have a university education and have made a choice to come here because we are so close to that space.*

Ellie has lived in the Yukon for twenty years, the last seven of them in Whitehorse. She is university educated and makes her living working for a local environmental agency in Whitehorse. This comment by Ellie makes a poignant statement of the classed nature of environmentalism in the Yukon. Ellie was not the only one to make such comments.

Anna also sees a clear distinction between those born and raised "Up Here" and those who have come from "Outside" to make their home here.

*Yes. That is probably...the way people have lived here, they just drain their oil when they want to change it in their car. They just drain it on the ground. It is that lack of respect for the environment that I see so much here. People throw in the garbage their oil canisters. When we clean up here what you find. When you throw deliberately on the*

*side of the highway. When people get a flat tire and they leave their tire on the road. They just leave it there. It is amazing how many times I have pulled over to pick that up. I find that people's sense of...I cannot come to the word...but it is often people who grew up here in the Yukon, they are very disrespectful for the environment. So many people don't even recycle.*

I did not speak to enough people to make any generalized comments about the percentages of native Yukoners versus newcomers affiliated with environmental agencies in the Yukon. Of those non First Nations people born and raised in the Yukon that I did talk with, like Sam and Alison, most had very few environmental concerns. But this is not to say that they did not express a very strong sense of place. Both Sam and Alison told me that they are who they are because of the Yukon landscapes. Of the relationship between place and identity Alison says:

*And being here brings me back to who I really am...Who I really am is where I am from...There is a lot of different spots, because Yukon if you have been around it enough it is just full of different geological ranges and stuff. There is so much variety in forests and elevations. I think that that has a lot to do with why I am so dynamic.*

For Sam and Alison, being here, being "out on the land", is what keeps them whole.

Both have left the Yukon for short times, and have always returned. This is their place - the place they love - their home-place. That Sam and Alison are not worried about environmental threats in the Yukon does not suggest that they are not both deeply attached to it. It indicates, rather, that within their own place-narratives the discourses of environmentalism have not affectively mobilized concern, and that the politics of environmentalism have alienated them, rather than draw them into it. And this alienation from environmental discourses and practices is tightly tied to issues of class and power.

#### 4.4 Environmentalism, Class and Power:

The classed dimension of this project, although always circulating throughout, was put to me in clear terms through an unexpected conversation. Sitting on a bench by the Yukon River downtown, as I was just finishing a conversation with Jim, Phil approached and asked what we were talking about. I explained that I was an anthropology student looking into people's relationships with Yukon landscapes. Without hesitation Phil sat down beside me and declared that he had a few things to say about that. Jim and I said goodbye, and Phil started talking. My interrupting him to ask if I could record our conversation and have him look over an informed consent form annoyed him. Without reading the form he signed it. Not sure that he understood what I was doing and would do with anything that we discussed I tried to explain again. Phil said... *"I know, I know...whatever...you are going to make big long report that about four people will ever read..."*. Chuckling to myself, thinking, well – that sounds about right!, I turned on the tape recorder and listened to his story. Phil has lived in the Yukon for thirty years, but he would not tell me how old he was when he came, or how old he is now. He has worked as a miner, a labourer, and a contractor throughout the territory. Mine closures and dips in the economy put Phil out of work about ten years ago. In recent years he moved to Whitehorse, where he now lives in a downtown hotel. And although Phil was not born and raised in the Yukon, I suspect that he qualifies as what Ellie referred to as *"the old red neck Yukon"*. One of the first things that Phil said was:

*The problem with this goddamn place is the government spends all their time talking and no time doing anything. There is so much wealth here. There is so much money that could be made if the goddamn government would just do something. It's a waste to have all that land just sitting there. The only thing that the economy of the Yukon does is support the office supply industry with all the meetings and memos they have.*

When Phil looks out on the landscapes of the Yukon he sees economic potential. He sees the Yukon that the Department of Energy, Mines, and Resources sells on their website. It was this Yukon that drew him here thirty years ago. It was the promise of work and money and opportunity. He now spends his days walking the streets of Whitehorse lamenting the days when the Yukon was a place of promise. When I asked him to talk more about his idea that the Yukon was being wasted, he said:

*And those goddamn environmentalists...they come from Down South with their big ideas and big bank accounts...it's their faults that everything here is going to waste. It is just such a goddamn waste. People are on welfare here and all the money is just sitting out there being wasted.*

Phil sees Yukon landscapes as resource rich, and being wasted. The classed dimension of the environmental movement is not lost on him. He blames the environmental movement itself for putting him out of work. For Phil, there is a clean line between him being out of work, and the environmental movement's efforts to promote conservation. He feels powerless in the face of this dynamic. And this powerlessness translates into palpable anger.

That my conversation with Phil occurred immediately after my talk with Jim placed these two in sharp juxtaposition. Jim and I had talked at length about the Yukon as a recreation, leisure-space. He moved to Whitehorse because he wanted to experience "true wilderness". He spent his free time exploring and wandering the hills and forests of the Yukon. He talked about loving the space, quiet, peace, freedom, and wilderness that he found in the Yukon. He talked about loving how this wild space shaped the community of Whitehorse into a dynamic social environment for him. Jim, like many of the other people that I spoke with (and I include myself in this sect), is university educated, professional, and has the social and financial currency to enjoy this place as a

recreation space. Phil's Yukon is so different from Jim's and mine. Phil did not talk about recreating in the Yukon "wilderness". He talked about working in the Yukon "bush". (I do not mean to suggest here that those who work in resource extraction are unable to recreate in the landscapes. I am suggesting, however, that in the conversation that I had with Phil, he made no mention of this. He may well fish, or hunt, or hike, or canoe for pleasure. But in the context of the conversation that I had with him, his references to Yukon landscapes were entirely related to their economic potential, not their recreational value). And although I have theorized much about it over the years, my conversation with Phil profoundly illustrated to me how deeply senses of place are mediated through class, education, age, and social mobility. Sitting on that bench, looking out over the river, talking with Phil, I saw in the landscape around me a complicated set of places – places that overlap and contradict and silence and resist each other.

When Phil sat down with me and announced that he had something to say I was tired, hungry, and had to pee. I had just spent two hours talking with Jim, and was ready for a break. It was out of politeness and professional sensibilities that I changed the tape and settled in for our conversation. To my surprise, this conversation proved to be a turning point in this research process. Phil pushed me well beyond my comfort area as an academic and forced me confront some of the issues of class, power, and history that I have been theorizing about throughout my academic career. Phil's words, experiences and stories required me to take another look around, and tested how committed I was to the reflexivity of this "reflexive ethnography". In addition, this conversation illustrated to me how safe I had kept this research process. I never would have met Phil if he had

not happened upon Jim and me. He interrupted our conversation, and forced himself into this data set. My snowball would not have rolled towards Phil. Phil found me, and I am grateful.

The banks of the Yukon River through downtown are a gathering place for First Nations members of the community of Whitehorse. I should clarify – the area in the bushes down the steep banks of the Yukon River is where people gather. It is a place where people gather to drink and talk and fish. For those who gather here it is a social place, with cultural and historical significance. According to the RCMP, it is a “problem” place. According to Street Outreach workers, it a place where clients live and gather. The property along the top of the bank is a gentrified tourist space. There is a nice paved walkway that runs the length of the river through downtown. A free streetcar tram runs back and forth in the summer. As I walked the banks of the river with a local anthropologist we talked about landscapes as contested spaces. He told me about how important the river is to members of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation. For years there was squatter housing along the river downtown. When that property became too “valuable” to the city, people were moved out to the Industrial Park. When the “value” of that property rose, the Kwanlin Dun First Nation was given an area up the hill to build a “village”. The “village”, as it is referred to, is a fair distance up hill from the river. It is a small hamlet subdivision shrouded by trees. After my conversation with Phil, feeling blindsided by the obviousness of the politics and power relations encoded in place, I made a few naive attempts to talk to some of the people gathering by the river. Those that I approached had little interest in talking with me. (And why would they, really?).

For those walking along the paved path by the river, this looks like a nice place - a pleasant place to eat lunch - a place where I myself ate lunch often when I worked in a downtown office. The “pleasantness” of this place paves over the struggle, history, politics, and power relations of encoded in this landscape. Mitchell (2000: 91) suggests that the notion of landscape creates an illusion of “reality”. “But the important point is precisely that ‘landscape’ fully mystifies that contentiousness, creating instead a smooth surface, a mute representation, a clear view that is little clouded by considerations of inequality, power, coercion, or resistance - at least until the moment when those struggles for power become overt”. Walking along the banks of the river there is an illusion of reality - a pleasant reality. But these banks of the Yukon River through downtown Whitehorse are the site of struggle. And although pushed out and pushed down the slope, First Nations members of this community continue to assert their place by this river by placing themselves in the landscape. Stuart Hall (1991: 34) suggests, “Marginality has become a powerful space. It is a space of weak power but it is a space of power, nonetheless”. By placing themselves along the river, First Nations members of the community are asserting and resisting power. As much as the RCMP, City of Whitehorse and the Government of Yukon have tried to push them out, they remain firmly placed in this place of significance. The attempted (and largely successful) displacement of First Nations people from the banks of the Yukon River in downtown Whitehorse provides an example of how various discursive streams confluence to create a strong dominant “reality” articulated in constructions of landscape. Those members of the First Nation community who continue to assert their place along the river are fighting hard against a strong current seeking to keep them out.

Although framed in different terms, and in a completely different historical context, Phil's words also echo with the sounds of displacement. Phil is angry because of the ways that he sees the discourses of environmentalism pushing him out of the landscapes where he makes his living. Alison and Sam do not engage the discourses of environmentalism as agents of place-making. They do not allow "those" constructions to influence "their" relationships with their home-places. Ellie and Anna are frustrated by the ways that "Yukoners" (that is those born and raised in the Yukon) treat the landscapes that they themselves have come to love and call home. Jillian worries about threats to her sense of place posed by others who have a different one. Brenda and Jane worry about long-term economic development that stands to shift their landscapes from leisure/wilderness places to industrial places. All the while, the main thrust of environmental efforts in the Yukon is the conservation and preservation of this "pristine" wilderness space. Environmental issues receiving the most press locally in the Yukon have to do with economic and industrial development and the impacts that this will have on Yukon's "wild" landscapes. Maintaining "wilderness" is central in this discourse to maintaining the integrity of the Yukon. And the importance of the Yukon as a "wilderness" place has economic benefit for tourism to the territory. The question then needs to be asked, who is the Yukon being "preserved" for? Tourists, the educated and socially mobile who can afford to make moving to the Yukon a lifestyle choice; members of Yukon First Nations sitting by the banks of the Yukon river; life-long Yukoners trying to make a living?

The notion of wilderness, and the construction of Yukon landscapes as wilderness is heavily classed, deeply political, and steeped in the colonial legacy of the North. It is a

discourse of displacement. Wilderness by virtue is unpeopled. I will return shortly to a discussion on the concept of wilderness, and how problematic it is. But for now, let me re-ask – who is this wilderness landscape being preserved for?

William Jordon (III) (2000: 31) puts this question into the larger context of the environmental movement over the past thirty years:

The environmentalism of the past generation has placed a high priority on wilderness preservation, but has had only limited success in actually achieving it on an adequate scale. Despite notable successes, it is probably fair to say (and I suspect that few environmentalists would argue the point) that environmentalism has generally failed to provide a plausible basis for the conservation of large natural areas in a crowded and increasingly democratic world. Traditionally, preserves were hunting parks, the prerogatives of the wealthy and privileged, and something of this exclusivity survives today in our culture of nature. In the political and economic sphere, it survives in an environmentalism that idealizes the remote – and, for most, inaccessible – wilderness areas as the quintessence of nature. And at the personal level, it survives in a culture that provides only an extremely limited repertory of ways for contacting nature – ways, I mean, that engage only a limited range of human interests, talents, and abilities. The result – unintended of course – is a kind of psychological elitism that accommodates those inclined by nature to those experiences of observation and appreciation, but has less to offer the mechanics, nurturers, healers, hunters, gatherers, artists, craftsman, pilots, planners, leasers, and ditch-diggers among us.

Why the limited success of environmentalism in this effort to preserve and conserve natural spaces? I suggest that between the political economy of resource extraction and discursively pushing all but a limited, privileged elite out of landscapes, the discourses of environmentalism have hit a wall. People are attached to places in so many ways. These individual articulations and experiences need to be incorporated into an environmental discourse that uses these relationships to foster political concern, rather than silence them. “The mechanics, nurturers, healers, hunters, gatherers, artists, craftsman, pilots, planners,

leasers, and ditch-diggers among us”, in addition to First Nations people, need to be included in the environmental dialogue. As it stands, most are silenced by the monologue of conservation.

Efforts like CPAWS’ Three Rivers Journey and YCS’ Free Interpretive Hikes Program serving to foster individual place-based relationships make an attempt to break away (in part) from this monologue, although both groups do this within the larger discursive and political formations of conservation. (The Three Rivers Journey in particular, as it included First Nations participants from the very region that the effort was seeking to protect). And although I agree with the premise of these efforts, and maintain that it is only through fostering individual relationships with landscapes that meaningful social and political change can occur, I think that there needs to be a space created in this dialogue for other articulations of this relationship. There needs to be room for Phil and Sam and Alison who are turned off by the rhetoric of conservation but who each have a deep personal connection to the landscapes of the Yukon.

Sam, Dave, Alison, and Ted, all of whom spend much of their time recreating outside, and none of whom rely on resource extraction for their livelihoods, all mentioned that there was plenty of space in the Yukon for both “wilderness” and “development”. They all agreed that long-term planning and learning from past mistakes was important. But all were also in favour of increased logging, mining, and oil and gas exploration as viable economic possibilities for the Yukon.

Throughout the summer, articles appeared in local newspapers reporting on the Three Rivers Journey trip, its progress, and profiling some of the participants. One participant was noted Canadian writer John Ralston Saul. In an interview reported in *The*

*Yukon News*, Saul (quoted in Hale 2003: 3) says, “There are two enemy camps that really make it impossible to think about how we are actually going to live here...There’s a lot of work that has to be done in thinking about the old dichotomies – ‘Oh the North must be kept pure and safe, like a museum’, versus ‘Let’s develop. Let’s get in there and mine’...Rather we should be asking, how are the people in the North going to benefit and have a long stable existence”. Many of those who I spoke with through the course of this research are asking this same question. When I asked Eric, a fifty-nine year old tradesperson and resident of the Yukon for the past twenty-three years, if he was affiliated with any environmental organizations in the territory his response was:

*No...not because I don't give a shit about the environment. I do. I do a lot. But I also am not against mining and logging and that stuff...and it is sort of one or the other with those guys...so I just stay out of it.*

Eric, like many that I talked to, feels alienated by the environmental movement in the territory because he is not opposed to development. Echoing Saul’s comments, Eric likes living here, and knows that if he is going to be able to continue to live here there needs to be a viable economic base. Perception goes a long way in shaping how people relate to political movements, and Eric’s perception of environmentalism in the Yukon is that it is only open to the monologue of conservation. In order for Eric to be able to engage with the discourses of environmentalism in a meaningful way, which he is interested in doing, he needs to feel welcomed into a dialogue that is situated in the economic and social realities of “his” Yukon and his life.

## **Chapter 5 DISCURSIVE CONFLUENCE - Place Narratives and Environmental Consciousness in the Yukon**

So many things influence people's senses of place. How people internalized environmental discourses into their place narratives is only one thread in the complicated constellation of factors and forces serving to shape people's relationships with Yukon landscapes. As discussed earlier, agents both inside and outside the territory are constantly acting to make this place in various and sometimes conflicting, ways. All of these constructions circulate throughout the Yukon, and in turn run, or are resisted, through people's own senses of place here. But "...senses of place, while always informed by bodies of local knowledge, are finally the possessions of particular individuals. People, not cultures, sense places..." (Basso 1996: xv-xvi). And people place themselves in their landscapes through a complex process of time, history, story telling, remembering, experience, perception, politics, and imagination. The relationship between people's senses of place and the discourses of environmentalism is mediated via all of these paths. How people place themselves in the history of a place, how they place their own personal history on place, and how they negotiate their personal relationships with place in the political sphere of environmentalism all influence the ways that people engage the discourses of environmentalism into their own place narratives.

In the section that follows I explore the notion of history, memory, and stories as forces at play in framing, contextualizing, and shaping people's senses of place and relationships with environmentalism. From there, I look at how some of the ways that problematic constructions of the Yukon as free and wild are incorporated into people's senses of place, and the environmental consequences of some of these representations.

## 5.1 Storied Landscapes: Memory, History, and Landscapes:

We define ourselves through our stories. We tell these stories to others. And we enter other's lives as listeners to their stories. Like fall leaves on this valley floor, detached and light in the wind, our stories scatter our personal histories. They are woven from experience with our natural and cultural landscapes, blended without spatial or temporal boundaries. In stories we tap into an inheritable ecological reckoning – a stream of very old consciousness – merging us with our place....The proper study of this place will take place over time, and will emerge from the stories that I will tell (Heming 2003: 154).

On my first morning in Whitehorse, or rather “in the field”, I sought out the familiar. Having spent months preparing for this morning, the day that my fieldwork was to begin, I woke up feeling excited and overwhelmed. So I got in my car, picked up a latte from my favourite coffee shop, and drove to Canyon City. Canyon City is one of my favourite spots. It was once the stop on the Yukon River where Stampedeers had to pull off the river before negotiating the White Horse Rapids of the Yukon River. This now vacant clearing, with only midden piles and depressions in the ground, was once a major staging point in the quest for gold. When I sit on the banks of the river now I can look upstream and see where the river bends out of sight towards Marsh Lake. Downstream the clear turquoise water narrows as it moves through Miles Canyon. There is a labyrinth of trails that lead here. My favourite walking and ski trails. There was a time when I stopped at this spot everyday. I have spent hours remembering this place, revisiting it in my mind, re-telling myself the stories of my experiences here. When I think of the landscapes of the Yukon, “my” landscapes of “my” Yukon, I think of this spot. This is “my” Yukon...visited both with my body and in my imagination many times over. C. John Burk (1986: 59) writes, “I suspect that most of us share a need for lookouts and overlooks, mountain peaks, hilltops, places from which we can view familiar landscapes

in perspective”. This spot on the banks of the Yukon River is one of my lookouts; a point of confluence between the past, present, remembered and retold. My journal from

October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003 reads:

*“Before I can do any of the things that I came back here to do I need to satisfy my senses – My Yukon senses. First – I want to walk the Chadburn Lake trails to Canyon City. This is the first place that I came in May, the last place that I visited before I left. This is my favourite place. It looks different now. The leaves have all left the trees – in May they were still fighting out of their buds – now they litter the ground. The berries have been picked clean. I can see further into the forest now. The air is crisp, the sun less warm, and the river a darker green. In the spring it was a vibrant turquoise – clear and cold and high. Now it is darker, slower, and low. I like knowing this place over time. I marched these trails everyday all summer...determined to take in as much into memory-bank as I could. In the years that I was away from here, I spent hours remembering these trails, this river, these smells, the stories that wait for me here...”*

Mark Nuttall (1992: 39) writes that places, landscapes, act as “reference points for orientation in the present”, but that they emerge out of memory. For Nuttall, landscapes are memoryscapes. “Memoryscape is constructed with people’s mental images of the environment, with particular emphasis on places as remembered places” (Nuttall 1992: 39). Canyon City is part of my memoryscape. I remember it, miss it, retell stories about it, and revisit it. It is a place both real and imagined, experienced and remembered.

For many people that I spoke with the notion of memory, memoryscape, and landscape are tightly bound. Keith Basso (1996: 5) writes, “remembering often provides a basis for imagining”. My memoryscape is heavily steeped in the remembered and imagined. Some people’s stories are as romantic and idealized as mine. I seldom remember the times that I have been standing at Canyon City under a tree waiting for the cold rain to pass, or when I have been hungry and uncomfortable there. In my memoryscape, Canyon City is a pleasant place, remembered as such. My idealized, romantic vision of Canyon City is loaded with the colonial narrative serving to construct

Yukon landscapes. The place itself is made significant because of its role during the Gold Rush. The midden piles scattered there are colonial litter. It was not until I was well into this research process that I started to put these critical questions to my sense of this place. Everyday, I conducted interviews, visited various sites around town, and when I was finished my “work”, I would gather my water bottle and my dog and wander through the forest to this place. I would sit by the river and reflect on what I had learnt. For years, I have taken this place for granted. The dominant discourses of colonialism and history pulsed through my experiences and perceptions of this place, and I did not take much notice. I still visit Canyon City often. But now, although I continue to enjoy the view of the river, the smell of the trees, and the sense of peace that I find in the familiarity of it, I am slightly more critical about how and why I see and experience it as I do.

For others, the histories and legacies remembered through place are much more immediately sensed:

Memory and place, via landscape (including seascape), can be seen as crucial transducers whereby the local, national and global are brought into mutual alignment; or as providing sites where conflicts between these influences are played out (Stewart and Strathern 2003: 2).

In a conversation with a member of a local First Nation about environmental issues that concerned him in the North, James went straight to the map hanging on his wall. He had many concerns, and could show me exactly on the map the sites of his worry. The traditional territory of his First Nation is in the area downstream from Whitehorse. As he pointed out this territory to me on the map, James explained:

*I guess it is one area in the Yukon, or one lake that is well known for its environmental downfalls. You can see up there, it is quite a big lake, about 30 miles long anyway, and being downstream of Whitehorse, in the past it has been quite well known for its reservoir*

*of Whitehorse sewage. It wasn't until 99, 2000 I guess that the new sewage lagoon was built and in operation. There is a lot of history about that lake going way back to the highways and sternwheelers going through Whitehorse...and down to Dawson and whatnot... There is, the way of thinking way back when still blows me away, when they can dump things in the waters and think that they are making things disappear.*

The “downstream” legacy of where James grew up runs deeply through his own place narrative. He insists that it is his responsibility to know and understand what is going on “out on the land” so that he is better able to do something about it.

*Once you start getting into it it is quite ugly in a sense. Something that it is good to know. You don't want to just forget about it.*

He is adamant that he needs to know about what happened, and where it happened, so that he can work on ways of reclaiming those places for his First Nation. When I asked him how he gathers his information about troubled places he says:

*It is one thing that I still have left to do is get a more thorough view of the issues. An inventory. You know, get the elders together and, you know the elders have a lot of history in these lands, and they will know if something new has popped up. However I may get that information...I'll either take them out on the land...or hear their stories.*

As James and I closed our conversation I asked him if there was anything that I had not asked, or anything more that he wanted to add. His response was:

*I guess, environmental issues...when you look at the Yukon, it is supposed to be a pristine place...but it is not as pristine as people overseas, or in Canada would think. I guess for one who has constantly grown up in the city where there is pollution and stuff, I guess it just becomes a mindset kind of thing. When you grow up in pollution I guess it just becomes a normal kind of thing. I guess it is not normal for us. It is something that has some history to it.*

Much of the history that James is talking about started at the turn of the last century with the colonial encounter. This history started with the Gold Rush, and continued through the construction of the Alaska Highway. The Yukon River was the main highway through the territory and the easiest way to get from Whitehorse to Dawson City. Just as there are midden piles at Canyon City reminding me (eventually)

of those who passed through this way, there are other “artefacts” along the Yukon River that remind James. One such “artefact” is the pollutant levels in the lake that forms the centre of his First Nation’s traditional territory. An archived article from the *Yukon News* discusses some of the hangover effects of the rapid colonization of this northern “frontier” on Lake Lebarge:

In 1928, the company (the British Yukon Navigation Company) initiated a practice that continues to haunt the Yukon today. In late spring a truck drove down the middle of the ice on the lake, spraying on it a suspect blend of lampblack, old crankcase oil and diesel oil. The blackened ice, if not covered by a later snowfall, helped speed the rotting of the ice so that the first riverboat of the season could push its way downstream. This practice was continued annually until the mid 1940’s, so for nearly 20 years this sludge settled into the bottom of the northern half of the lake after the ice melted. (your Yukon, archived colum#138)  
<http://www.taiga.net/yourYukon/col138.html>.

James’ words express the colonial, political, and environmental histories that merge to inform his relationship with his landscape. For James, the landscape of his traditional territory, his homeplace, is a text reflecting a colonial downstream legacy. For James, like for all of us:

There is a past to be learned about, but the past is now seen, and has to be grasped as a history, as something that has to be told. It is narrated. It is grasped through memory. It is grasped through desire. It is grasped through reconstruction. It is not just a fact that has been waiting for us on the ground of our identities. What emerges from this is nothing like an uncomplicated, dehistoricised, undynamic, and uncontradictory past (Hall 1991: 39).

James’ sense of environmentalism is very strong, although he is not affiliated with any of the environmental organizations in the territory. He cares deeply for the health of his landscape and works hard towards educating himself and others about problems. He is actively looking for solutions to some of these problems, and seeks counsel from both

Western science and First Nation community members' knowledge and understanding of this landscape. James' relationship with his home-place landscape informs his environmental consciousness and activism, and he knows that that same relationship in other members of his First Nation is what will provide the momentum to effectively mobilize action on the issues impacting this place.

When I asked James why he was not affiliated with any of the environmental organizations in the territory he shrugged his shoulders. He said that he has thought about becoming a member of the Yukon Conservation Society, but can never be bothered. James' environmental activism is through his First Nation, not through any of the environmental groups in the territory. This point highlights again the social segregation of Whitehorse. It also provides commentary on the colonially informed, classed nature of the environmental movement. James has only limited interest in the non First Nations environmental groups in the Yukon. Politically, James' environmental concerns and efforts are differently placed than those of the environmental agencies in Whitehorse. James perceived the environmentally troubled landscapes in the Yukon as being dirty and polluted. This directly contradicts the loudest messages coming from environmental organizations in the territory. The strongest construction of Yukon landscapes coming from the Yukon Conservation Society and CPAWS, the territories two largest groups, is of a pristine wilderness space in need of protection. James' concerns and perceptions are more in line with those of the international environmental community that constructs the North as a contaminated "sink" - although, James and the international environmental community locate the sources and causes of this contamination very differently.

In contrast to my conversation with James, for many others that I spoke with, the notion of history was rooted in the personal connections that they have with place. Like my story above about Canyon City, people are tied to places via memory through the stories that they remember and retell about them. People place themselves in the landscape through stories. When asked if she had any favourite places in the Yukon, Ellie says:

*They are all favorites. They become favorite....I am thinking of the Dempster. I could go along every kilometer of that highway and tell you a story. Every kilometer is a story to me. That makes it a very favorite.*

Like Ellie, Brenda places herself in place through stories.

*And I have all these stories and in the last couple of years I feel like my stories are coming back to me. For me it is like my stories are gathering. They are all related to place and environments. And they are all about places I have been.*

Place thus become a central element in personal histories. When I think about Canyon City I remember the day that I first made it down a little hill on my way there on my skis without falling. I remember how I felt when I sat in that spot by the river with my acceptance letter to graduate school, considering if I should leave and move to Winnipeg. My personal history is bound in the conflicting histories that make this place. My place-history at Canyon City is mediated through gender, class, ethnicity, and experience. This is a leisure place for me - a safe place - a place that I go to think and admire the river - a play where I consider my future and my education. It is not an ugly place, where I am reminded of the struggles and dirty histories of the rapid colonization of this "...fresh scar on the farthest edge of the New World" (Robertson 1992: 61). I suspect that James would see a different Canyon City than I do. My memories of this place are short (because as I discovered through this research process, when I let them go

long, I am confronted with my place and role in the colonial landscape of this place – an important, but difficult thing to do), James' are long (he firmly located himself within this historical landscape). My stories are immediate to my own life, James are created out of a tapestry of pasts and people and legacies and power and politics and struggles and hope. This place, like all places – like that banks of the Yukon River where I sat and talked with Phil - are complicated, historicised, dynamic, and contradictory (Hall 1991: 39).

But they are also personal, and people's personal relationships and attachments to these places foster a sense of environmental concern. Ellie, Brenda, and I are attached to landscapes and place through our own stories, and are, or have been, active members of the environmental community in Whitehorse. Ellie and Brenda assert that their politics are informed by their personal relationships to the places where they live, work, and play. This is my experience as well. Just as George suggested in the opening quote of this discussion, we do what we do out of love – love for the land. But we also relate to Yukon landscapes as recreational spaces. All three of us are university educated, white women from "Down South". We all moved to the Yukon as a "lifestyle" choice, work (or in my case worked) in offices downtown. It is not hard for us to buy into an environmental message that encourages the "conservation" of this place – because we are not dependant on its "development" to survive, and by conserving it, we will be able to continue to enjoy it.

But environmental consciousness is more complicated then that. Ellie, Brenda, and myself, although willing to engage in environmental efforts in the Yukon, are not limited by the discourses of "conservation". Brenda's love of this place has led her to make certain lifestyle choices. She lives simply in a small cabin "off the grid". Ellie

works hard to foster a sense of community in Whitehorse. It is her belief that when people love where they live, both their physical and social landscapes, that they will work together as a collective to sustain those things they love. Just as Jillian and Lucy said that their environmentalism was personal, at the core of this environmentalism lies people's personal relationships, relationships of all kinds, with landscapes and places and history and community.

For Ellie, Brenda, Jillian, Lucy, and myself, our engagement with environmentalism is rooted in our personal subjectivities. It is classed, raced, and gendered. We, as members of the dominant powerful elite, can exert our values and morality because we are in a social position to do so. We have not been displaced, but rather are part of the dominant social formation that displaces others. And herein lays a central problem with the very notion of environmentalism. It is a colonial construction. Environmentalism as both discourse and practice implies moral authority and judgement (Cronon 1996). As such, is it no wonder that James, despite his environmental concerns, has little interest in participating in the movement? And where would efforts to decolonize this discourse begin? Of the challenges of the process of decolonizing discourse Deborah Bird Rose (2003: 54) writes, "Decolonizing poses a particular epistemological challenge. Not only is there no way to theorize in advance how decolonization should or ought to occur, but it would be morally reprehensible to try to do so". I agree. But at the same time, any process of decolonization needs to begin by acknowledging the need to do so. Through the course of the research presented in this present work, I have come to clearly see such a need.

## **5.2 Themed Landscapes – Space, Freedom, and Environmentalism....**

As has been discussed, the Yukon is constructed in a variety of ways by a variety of actors. International environmental discourses construct it as a polluted “sink”, a victim of global pollutants. Local environmental discourses construct it as a pristine wilderness space in need of protection. The Department of Mines, Energy, and Resources in the Yukon construct it as a resource rich place. And the Department of Tourism and Culture construct it as a wilderness adventure place. Each of these discursive threads weaves their way through and into Yukon resident’s perceptions of and relationship with Yukon landscapes. Some are resisted, others are internalized, but all circulate throughout.

In looking at the ways in which the discourses of place-making in the Yukon intersect with people’s place narratives I found that the notion of freedom and space came up again and again. Regardless of which discursive current I followed, all of them led back to the notion of the North/Arctic/Yukon as being huge and relatively unpopulated. I certainly sense this vastness when I wander through the woods for hours and never see another person, or drive for hours on Yukon highways passing only through a handful of tiny communities flanked by what seems like endless wild space. Running parallel to the notion of vast, huge, volumes of space in the Yukon is the idea of the freedom that this grants people.

The freedom narrative is strong in constructions and experiences in the Yukon. This is illustrated in the discussion on the Department of Tourism and Culture’s representation of the Yukon as a “free” space where people can be and do whatever they want. This sense of freedom resounds loudly in many of the conversations that I had in the Yukon.

The sense of freedom that Brenda gets from Yukon landscapes is central to why she has chosen to make this her home.

*It is a really common theme that people need to be out and not see anyone. And I think that there is a sense of freedom, and a sense of control over your own destiny. Someone else is not dictating where you can go and what you can do. And that attracts a certain type of people... I need to feel that there is no fences and limits on where I can go and what I can do, and this place gives me that.*

The sense of freedom that Brenda experiences here, which is directly tied to her sense of place, is fostered by both the social and physical landscapes of the Yukon:

*There is so much that you can get away with up here. It is very, and I think that that is more social, but I think that it is dictated by the fact that we live in such an immense, free space. You can live openly here, and be what you want, and go where you want here. And I really value that.*

For Anna, this feeling of freedom was overwhelming when she arrived in the Yukon ten years ago from Europe. As we sat in her cabin outside of Whitehorse, Anna made a pot of her “Yukon Blend” tea. Anna’s “Yukon Blend” tea is made from a collection of herbs that she gathers on her property. She says that she does this so that she can taste Yukon summers in the winter. As we talked, I asked Anna what it was about this place that made her want to stay. Her response was:

*If you want that space you can have it, and if you want to interact with other people you can. But you can also say no. That is a really important thing. That you are...that you can not be controlled by others. That is how I feel when I live here.*

Jessica came to the Yukon ten years ago with her two young children. When I asked her why she said:

*I had to leave my marriage. It was a terrible situation and I wanted a place where me and my kids could just start over completely. The Yukon seemed like a good idea because it was far away from the past, and it was so big that we could just come here and reinvent ourselves as a family.*

When I asked her what had made her envision the Yukon in these terms, she could not remember. She did, however, laughingly remind me of the Yukon protocol of never asking people what brought them here, because most people were running away from something and looking to start fresh. Jessica's comment, although made lightly, reminded me again of how personal these conversations were, and that I needed to be careful in how I navigated these personal waters. Her comments about why she moved her family to the Yukon are interesting. She had a sense that in the Yukon she could find personal freedom; freedom from the past, and freedom to chart her own future.

Drew, a forty-three year old, university educated professional who moved to the Yukon five years ago, also had a sense of this freedom before he had ever set in the Yukon:

*And, I think that the essence that is here, that drew me here, is the sense of freedom.*

Anna and Brenda fell in love with the Yukon once they had arrived. Jessica and Drew had a sense of this place before they had ever physically been there. Somewhere in Drew and Jessica's imagination the Yukon existed as a vast, wild, free space full of adventure and possibility. When Drew moved to the Yukon five years ago he claims that he was not disappointed. This place is what he imagined it would be. Drew's perception of the Yukon, formed before he had arrived, points out the effectiveness and mobility of social imagery. The collective Canadian imagination is dense with images of the "North". For some, like Jessica, Drew, and me, these images are enough to get us there.

Constructing, and perceiving the Yukon as a huge, vast, free space is not without material, environmental consequences. In conversation with Delilah about the perception

of there being so much space in the Yukon, and a strong sense of individual freedom she makes the comment:

*...So why not dump your oil on the ground, because it is just a little bit of oil and there is a whole lot of space. That is one attitude that I certainly have recognized....Or why bother recycling, because when the landfill is full, just go built another one.*

Delilah is twenty-nine years old. She has worked at a local environmental agency since moving to Whitehorse five years ago. Delilah's observations were not uncommon in some of the conversations that I had. Anna mentioned these same concerns earlier when talking about how she views people who have grown up in the Yukon relating to their landscapes. Jillian, whose environmental concerns were largely centred on immediate threats to her home and sense of place there, comments that:

*This is a place – the Yukon I mean – where there's a strong sense of individual freedom. That is probably why I fell in love with it so quickly. I had never felt so free and so safe and so at peace as when I first came here. But that freedom, and individual mentality means that people do whatever they want...and it scares me when [my neighbours] treat this place with what I think is disrespect. They are free to do that, but it breaks my heart...I hate what it does to my sense of peace and this place....*

In a place constructed as huge, vast, and free, it is no wonder that individual articulations of place are expressed, and that such expressions cause conflict. With the narrative of freedom and space sounding so loudly in constructions of the Yukon, this produces a complex battle for the discourses of environmentalism looking to encourage and foster a different relationship with these landscapes.

That the Yukon is both constructed and experienced as a space of freedom highlights again the importance of class, power, ethnicity, and history with the notions of place and landscape. As defined earlier, landscapes are the entire scenes within which we experience the world. They are cultural texts, encoded with cultural values, and historical relations (Duncan 1990). That Yukon, and Northern landscapes are constructed so

strongly, and experienced so personally, as spaces where people are free to be whoever they want, and do whatever they want, implies that these landscapes are empty, open spaces waiting for people from away to come and find and experience them. Again, the Yukon is constructed as being uninhabited. It is a “new” place – a frontier place.

Jennifer Duncan (2003: 5) writes “The women of the Klondike Gold Rush fell under the Spell of the Yukon because they loved its wilderness, its promise, its guts and glory”.

And although Duncan is writing about women who travelled North one-hundred years ago, these themes of wilderness, adventure, promise, and freedom resonate strongly in people’s place narratives of why they came North, why they stay, and why they love it there. What is silenced through this narrative is that the Yukon is not a new place. It is not an uninhabited place. It never has been. When asked about her connection to Yukon landscapes Linda, a fifty-one year old member of a local First Nation and life-long

Whitehorse resident says:

*My connection....it is hard to say in so many words. Some days I hate it here. I look out and all I see is everything wrong. I see garbage and dog shit and all that. Those are the days that I forget who I am...those days I am pissed off at what has come to be in my community...because who I am is this place. My people have been on these lands since time immemorial. That makes a connection to this place that is deeper than anything else. Without these lands, we are not a people. People get upset about the land claims agreements...the white Yukoners...they think that we are just trying to take over...but if we don't have that land, we don't have a people...and people need to remember that we have always had these lands.*

Linda works at her First Nation’s band office. Linda’s words tell of a different narrative and experience of Yukon landscapes. When I asked Linda more about those days when she hates “it here”, she talked about hating what Whitehorse culture has done to her community. Linda’s comments echo those of James. Linda laments times when she was small and her family still moved seasonally through bush camps. She remembers that no

one drank “out on the land”. Drinking was an activity inspired by the boredom of life in the city. When she looks around now, some days, she sees that boredom, and the social destruction that has come from her community’s displacement from landscape. Through her work, and her personal politics, Linda is actively engaged in reclaiming that sense of place for herself, her children, and her community. Linda’s words about her people’s occupancy of Yukon landscapes through time throw sharp contrast to the dominant narrative that would have us think that the Yukon is a space where educated southern young professionals can come and find themselves. The Yukon rather is a place with history (older than the Gold Rush) and deeper than the freedom narrative.

Bill is a thirty-seven year old member of a Yukon First Nation who grew up in a community outside of Whitehorse. He now lives in Whitehorse, where he works at a local First Nation office. Bill talks about his relationship with Yukon landscapes in similar terms to Linda.

*It’s like...it’s hard to understand in town here...My grandfather always told me that he was born under a tree, and he would die under a tree. That is our connection to the land. We are born there, and die there. Nowadays there is the all the other stuff that goes on in the city, and in the communities too...But I think that what we are trying to do is to bring people back to those times. Remind people that this land is who we are. We have always been on these lands and we need to always be on them. Our children and their children need these lands, so we have to work to find ways of making things work for them.*

What struck me first about Bill’s words was how often he referenced and framed his thoughts in time. Throughout my conversation with Bill, he located his comments in time, and time was marked by generational family relations. As a result, Bill asserts his place in the landscapes of the Yukon by placing his family relations in it, in the past, the present, and the future. Again, as for Linda, for Bill, Yukon landscapes are far from

uninhabited. This is not a place that is open and free. It is a place where his family roots are deeply grounded in the landscapes themselves.

James Mittelman (2001: 220) writes that, landscapes can be “a critical venue where civil society is voicing its concerns”. As illustrated in the example of the river front in downtown Whitehorse, they can be sites of struggle. Places can be used as expressions of resistance, even if they are simultaneously paved over by articulations of dominant power relations. And like the river front, where First Nations members of the community assert their place in the history and landscape of Whitehorse, Linda and Bill assert their place, and the place of their communities, within the dominant “freedom” narrative that serves to silence them out of these landscapes. Linda and Bill insist, and will continue to insist, that their Yukon, the Yukon of their communities, is not the Yukon of the frontier. Rather it is the Yukon that continues to resist the frontier narrative and remind those of us (and I include myself humbly in this group) that this is not an uninhabited place where we can draw freedom from the landscape and be and do what we like. Yukon landscapes are occupied. They are occupied with people, histories, and stories.

## **Chapter 6 - POLITICAL LANDSCAPES – MOBILIZING CONCERN FROM A DISTANCE**

So far this discussion has focused on the ways in which people relate to landscapes and sense places through largely embodied relationships and experiences. But is firsthand, personal, embodied experience necessary to form an attachment to place or landscape? The environmental movement relies on the notion that it is not. Rather, effective environmental efforts, particularly large, transnational ones, need people to care about places a long way from their own personally experienced landscapes. One such effort, based out of the Yukon, but working internationally, illustrates the power of place-making as a political tool. In this chapter I will explore the notion of places as sensed without being physically experienced and some of the problematic assumptions and metaphors that this process employs.

### **6.1 - Caribou Commons Project:**

In March 2001, I participated in the coordination team for the Northern Climate ExChange Circumpolar Climate Change Summit and Exposition. Part of this event included an entertainment evening. After a group of local musicians had finished performing for delegates, the Caribou Commons Project presented a slideshow. Sitting in the audience, I watched as the room went dark and images started to appear on the screen. I was guided through massive images projected at the front of the room leading me across an incredible open expanse of tundra. To the north is the Arctic Ocean. To the south stands a band of rocky, limestone, snow-covered mountains. Without ever having stood in the place that these images represent, I am moved by images of it.

And then the caribou come. Having traveled across the Mackenzie Delta in the Northwest Territories to this place where they calve and summer, images of tens of thousands of animals overwhelm the room. Now, the soundtrack is music and narrative. Members of the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation recite what this place, and these animals mean to them. As the images shift from herds arriving, to babies nursing, I have chills when I hear an elder say "drilling for oil in this place would be the same as taking a machine gun into a nursery and opening fire. It would be the same thing" (paraphrased from memory). The narrating voice tells me that this place will be transformed from a beautiful wilderness space into an industrialized drilling zone - and that this will occur for "at current consumption rates in the United States, 200 days worth of oil"(paraphrased from memory). My heart is broken.

The Caribou Commons Project's slide show is a powerful textual expression of place and sense of place. The main goal of the CCP is to protect the habitat range of the Porcupine Caribou herd. This effort has snowballed to include a wide network of environmental groups in the United States also concerned with this matter (see CCP 2004 website for links to these organizations). The range of the herd includes the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, the calving grounds of the herd. Slated for oil and gas exploration and drilling, this place is very clearly a contested one. To the current Government of the United States it is a resource rich place with economic potential. To the many environmental groups working to protect it is a precious wilderness space that needs to be conserved. To the Gwich'in people it is "the sacred place where life begins" (Kassi 2002: 7).

In their own words:

The Caribou Commons Project is an international effort to protect the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd...Northern artists and conservationists are working in cooperation with members of the Gwich'in First Nation to educate and inspire others to join in the growing effort to prevent harmful industrial development in the Arctic Refuge...Protecting the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd is more than a conservation issue: it is a matter of survival and human rights...Industrial activity in the calving grounds would have serious impacts on the herd and spell cultural catastrophe for the Gwich'in...Through music, sound recordings, and photography, the Caribou Commons Project is bringing the wilderness of the Arctic Refuge, and the threats facing it, to people everywhere. (CCP 2004: 1)

This passage illustrates the ways that the CCP works to frame the issue on which it is working so hard. Firstly, it is presented as an “international” effort, referring to the network of environmental organizations throughout the world that have joined in offering their support. At the same time, these efforts are localized by stating that it is Northern artists, conservationists and First Nations people working to “educate and inspire” others. The language used in describing the impacts of industrial development in the Arctic Refuge is strong; this would be a “cultural catastrophe” – framing it as both an environmental issue and human rights matter. And the CCP states here that they use various media to invoke a sense of this place, a sense of the value of this “wilderness” to those physically distant from it. As someone sitting in the audience watching their multi-media presentation, I can say that in my case this approach was very effective.

The environmentalist in me is moved to tears by the images of the physical beauty of the place represented on the screen in front of me through this show. Water, tundra, mountains, flowers, animals all create a tapestry of imagery that I call both wilderness, and beautiful. I am haunted by the words of those who “know” this place in a way that I can only imagine understanding. My emotional sense of place and being is assaulted by the thought of loud, dirty, destructive oil and gas exploration in this quiet, peaceful place.

Just as I am starting to internalize these feelings, my anthropological sense of investigation is bombarded with critical, reflexive, and academic questions. I am in dialogic overdrive. I am standing at a point of encounter between the “voices” of environmentalists, First Nations stake-holders, American oil and gas interests, and Yukon Territorial Government Economic Development officers. We have all traveled to this place via the previous discourses that shape the ideological environments from which they stem and all poised in anticipation of those discourses still to come. The term “ideological environment” as it is used here is taken directly from the work of Medvedev and Bakhtin (1978). Medvedev and Bakhtin (1978: 14) use the term interchangeably with the notion of context. “The ideological environment is the realized, materialized, externally expressed social consciousness of a given collective”. I too have arrived at this point of textual encounter by way of collective discourses that serve to inform how I interpret, and am changed by this dialogic textual exchange.

Later, in conversation with a member of this group, I recalled my experienced watching the show:

*... I was inspired by this powerful, emotional presentation, invoking this sense of place that I had never been to, and I left feeling geared up and fired up about it. And it was actually one of the things that informed how I then proceeded through grad school. Thinking about how places are made and experienced and how....and your slide show as an example of mobilizing emotions in me about a place that I have never been and likely will never go. So physically I am really distant from there, but still, through place-making, and invoking that sense of place, I can be inspired to care about a place that I have never been. And in my mind that is a fundamental notion in environmentalism. You need to care about a place that you have never been...not just the places that are “ours”. So as a really effective example of that, is my memory of the slide show. I am wondering if that was a conscious decision when you were putting this show together. Saying, we need create this presentation that inspired people to care about a place that they will probably never go.*

I was assured that invoking a strong and emotional sense of this place was central in the creation of this presentation. Concern for this issue needs to be mobilized in the United States. People need to be inspired to care enough about this place at the top of Alaska that most will never visit that they will lobby the Government to ensure its protection.

Interestingly, those people in the United States inspired to care about this place from a distance are not alone in never visiting it.

The Gwich'in don't ever go there. The coastal plain lives only in their imaginations... 'I have never been up to that area, the calving grounds. That is a sacred place for my people. My mother has never been to that place. My grandmother has never been there. My great-grandparents never walked on those lands. The reason we never go there is that we hold great respect for animals during their birthing time'" (Madsen 2002: 52-53).

Ironically the power of the CCP slide show is in the images and sounds gathered from the landscape. To accomplish this, environmental activists need to visit this place to capture images of it to export and circulate them. These images and sounds are then woven into Gwich'in speakers' narratives to create a powerful presentation that illustrates the relationship between a people and a landscape. And although Gwich'in people themselves may never visit the place at the core of this debate (The Alaska National Wildlife Refuge), the landscape of concern is constructed with them as part of it. People are placed in this place, and one organizer suggests that this is a large part of why this slide show is so effective:

*I think that most people, especially after they see the presentation and listen to the Gwich'in, even if they didn't know before-hand, usually leave thinking that it should be protected. Seeing the images and hearing the music and hearing the environmental sounds and the Gwich'in almost always convinces them that this place should be protected.*

But there is more going here on then effectively politicizing a place by invoking a sense of its cultural significance. I stated earlier that the “environmentalist” in me was brought to tears by the power of what I had seen on screen. Something in me, that thing that tells me that wilderness is beautiful and that I want to see it protected, that thing that I took with into the slide show in the first place, those values and assumptions that frame and shape how I see and relate to landscapes informed how I interpreted this presentation. (Keeping in mind also that it was shown at an “environmental” conference – one that people racked up many air miles points to attend!). So what is it that moved me to tears? What is it about “wilderness” that is so special in the collective environmental imagination? And why is this problematic?

## **6.2 - Wilderness in the Environmental Imagination:**

There is something about “wilderness” - it is a term used all the time. Many of the conversations that I had over the course of this research centered around people’s love of Yukon “wilderness”. When I started asking people what wilderness was to them, the answers were as varied as the Yukon landscapes. For some it is a place where you are scared to go. For others it is a place that is hard to get to. For others still it is a place where natural systems are intact and there are not a lot of people. Regardless of how it is defined individually, for everyone that I spoke with about the concept, wilderness, specifically Northern wilderness, is beautiful, precious, and tied to the sense of freedom that is so important to their senses of place.

The “preciousness” of Northern Canadian wilderness has come to occupy a central place in the imagination of environmental discourses. The flow of discourses is

tricky to map, and it is even trickier to find a starting point, making it hard to say where this construction of Northern Canada originates. Does it start in the North and circulate outward? Or has a global romanticization of wilderness space encouraged this trend? Either way, the images are strong, and politically mobile.

In a conversation with a member of a Yukon conservation effort I asked him why he thought so many people outside Canada were so passionate about the conservation issues in Northern Canada, particularly the conservation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In particular, I was interested in how people far away who have never seen this place come to care so deeply for its protection. His response was this...

*There is not much wilderness left in America, so you can sell Americans on protecting this place as the last wilderness in the United States, in Canada it is much harder, because there is still a lot of beautiful land left, in the States there is not. If you go down to the Lower 48, even the parks are pretty polluted. People are attached to wilderness, I think everyone is attached to wilderness and I think when you have these programs on TV all the time talking about nature, and things like that, it helps attach people to it.... it's the same in Europe. There isn't any wilderness left there either, that is why so many Europeans come to the Yukon every year, to see wilderness. It has an effect on people, even people who have never been there.*

In keeping with this idea of being able to sell wilderness to people who have never (and may never), visit the Canadian North, The World Wildlife Fund and the Sierra Club have both organized international "Arctic Conservation" campaigns. Both groups re-present the "North" (in homogenizing terms as one homogenous place) as the largest remaining "wilderness" place left on earth. The boundaries of this place are undefined, and the language is globalizing. "Development has already degraded most of the world's pristine habitats; the Arctic is one of our last chances to put conservation first" (WWF 2002b). The images of northern landscapes presented on both groups' websites show beautiful wilderness spaces and majestic animals. Neither, however, shows any images

of Northern people, suggesting the question of who inhabits this “largest inhabited wilderness left on earth” (WWF 2003).

The separation of people from nature illustrated by the Sierra Club and WWF’s representations of the North calls into question the very notion “wilderness”. When I say “wilderness” people nod knowingly about what I am talking about. As stated, in talking with people in the Yukon, the idea of wilderness comes up over and over and is a central element of their senses of place and relationships with Northern landscapes. But what is wilderness? Foucault (1986: 23) suggests that any social construction of space is “nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred”. The notion of the sacred is clearly evident in the idea of the “wilderness” concept as it is presented in environmental literature and consciousness. Cronon (1996) illustrates the ways in which social perceptions of “wilderness” have changed over time. From wild, unnatural, and needing to be tamed and survived, wilderness has now come to represent all that is natural, beautiful, sacred, and worth preserving, occupying a central hold in environmental imagination and consciousness. In a piece called “Winning the Wilderness Debate”, linked to from the “Arctic Wilderness Conservation” webpage, the Sierra Club (2003) outlines a few arguments that people can use when arguing “for wilderness”. At the top of the list is the following argument; “Wilderness is part of our heritage as Americans – being patriotic means protecting that heritage for future generations...” (Sierra Club 2003). Nowhere in any of this literature can I find a definition of “wilderness”, or a clear idea of what is meant by the “Arctic” or the “North”. These are concepts that have a hold on a collective environmental imagination, but are never explained or defined by those using them.

Defined or not, the notion of “wilderness” has a hold on a collective environmental imagination. I am not alone in feeling inspired and moved by the Caribou Commons Slide show. And like most that see the show, I have never, and will likely never, visit this place. Still, I care about its protection. It would break my heart to see oil and gas exploration and drilling there. As a Canadian it is easy for me to get behind the message of the CCP. The Porcupine Caribou spend most of the year in Canada and travel to Alaska for the summer to calve. Drilling for oil on the Alaskan side of the border will have few if any economic benefits for those on the Canadian side. As such, there is strong political and social will in Canada opposing this development. Of this issue, Kelly states:

*...and then Alaska which has its own plans, whether it is to tear apart the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which is **our** herd, it is not their herd.*

Kelly, like me, has never visited the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, (but has seen the CCP slideshow); yet, still she feels a sense of attachment and possession over it and the caribou that summer there. Kelly’s statement of possession poses an interesting link in this discussion about the ways that people attach themselves to and relate to landscapes, both physically through their own experiences, and imaginarily. Kelly is expressing “the odd sense of possession, the sense that ‘this is my place’...Not ownership, I don’t mean that. Rather it’s a sense of identification, a sense of place” (Schaller 2002: 30).

It is that “sense of identification – sense of place” that the environmental community needs to be able to mobilize across time and space. In order to meet the goals of the movement, we as an “environmentalist” collective need to care about those places a long way from our own landscapes – and then translate that care into both lifestyle choice and political will. By engaging the sounds, images, and voices of the northern

coastal plains of Alaska, the CCP has been able to effectively engage in this process of place making by politicizing this landscape as a place worth preserving.

But I ask again, what is it about “wilderness” that is so compelling? Stan Rowe (1990: 31) suggests that asking “the question, ‘why is wilderness important?’ is like asking why anything in our background is important. Are calcium and phosphorus of which our bones are made important?”. Rowe makes a series of assumptions here. First, he assumes that the reader knows what he means by “wilderness”. He never defines it. He also implies that “wilderness” is integral to human survival. But wilderness is a social and cultural construction. It is a fluid, undefined fabrication of collective and individual imaginations. And as a social and cultural construction it is loaded with situated, subjective values and interests.

Paul Brooks (1980: 255) suggests that wilderness is “nature as it existed in the first place” and that protecting it is a moral issue. Although this view may be slightly dated, the nugget at its core remains strong in contemporary notions of “wilderness” in the environmental imagination. Wilderness is uninhabited, “pure” nature. And in the context of the contemporary industrialized world, it is rare, and precious. Constructing nature in these terms is colonizing, displacing, silencing, and patronizing. It suggests that landscapes are blank, wild, natural spaces. It suggests that people, a particular class and ilk of people, “know” best how to manage and value these spaces. Max Oelschlaeger (1991: 320-321) suggests that “the idea of wilderness in postmodern context is a search for meaning – for a new creation story or mythology – that is leading humankind out of a homocentric prison into the cosmic wilderness”. I would argue that the idea of wilderness, particularly as it is deployed in environmental discourse, serves to ensure

conceptual incarceration in a Eurocentric prison. As long as the wilderness is romanticised, commoditised, and marketed through the discourses of environmentalism, the colonial discursive monologue of environmentalism will continue to be the loudest.

## **Chapter 7 - CLOSING THOUGHTS:**

J. Peter Brosius (1999: 278) suggests that by engaging in a critical conversation with the discourses of environmentalism, “Anthropologists might stimulate those engaged in environmental debates to problematize the vocabulary with which they both frame environmental issues and solutions”. I would go on to add that there is also room for a critical anthropological dialogue about the ways in which the discourses of environmentalism serve to make and politicize places. People need to feel that their experiences and relationships with place have a place in the environmental conversation. As it stands, many do not.

Remaking nature is a bigger project than ecological preservation and restoration. It is not at all about entertainment, privatization or authenticity. All the indications are that it cannot be done without simultaneously remaking the social world, and this will require class, gender, race, and sexuality politics that engages the concerns of political ecology and environmental justice across scale and nation. To begin to create a world in which all of us can live productively in an enduring way, we will have to be bold in imagining and working out new productions of nature (Katz 1998: 60).

To Katz’s statement I add that we also need to remake environmentalism. We need to reconfigure who environmentalists are. And we need to allow people to re-place themselves throughout. People’s relationships with landscapes are complicated, dynamic, personal, shared, imagined, embodied, and real. Mobilizing those relationships with place and landscape stands to transform the ways that environmentalism evolves as a political, social, and discursive movement. But it will require opening the dialogue to include all people and all experiences and relationships with place to come to solutions that write people into their landscapes, not pull them out of them. Like Rose (2003)

suggests, this dialogue needs to be situated – situated in place, space, history, imagination, and open to wherever it happens to lead.

So again, I ask – what inspires, invokes, and maintains environmental consciousness and activism? As George eloquently states at the opening of this discussion – for many it is love of place. Their relationships with landscapes invoke political will. But this love is very specific. It is specific to certain landscapes, constructed in certain ways, by certain groups, for certain reasons, representing certain interests. In so doing, those landscapes, interests, and voices of many others are silenced.

When asked how he got involved in the environmental efforts that have come to occupy a central part of what he now does, Richard, answers:

*It wasn't really until, I didn't do anything about environmental issues until I moved to the North and then getting out there, being out on the river, in the wilderness, seeing the first grizzly bear, seeing that landscape where wild animals still interact with the land, I just felt a responsibility at that time to just do what I could to try and protect some of those places.*

Richard's environmentalism is "wilderness"-centric. By experiencing these "wilderness" spaces through recreational activities he came to value their protection. This highlights again the classed, colonial aspects of the ways in which discourses of environmentalism serve to construct Yukon landscapes. Richard, as an educated, professional, middle-class white man moved to the Yukon to explore this "wilderness" space. In so doing he found a place that inspired in him a sense of political activism.

Kelly's love and appreciation of the Yukon has also fostered a sense of responsibility in her. It is this potent combination that drives her to remain active in the environmental movement in the territory:

*The Yukon is a rarity. It is an exceptional place for a lot of reasons. And I find that combination of traits very special, very rare....The Yukon has the highest mountains,*

*coastal plain, some of the biggest rivers in the world, it's got hugely lush places, we've got super dry desert like places to wonderful big trees. Mountains like the Tombstones and then weird forms like in the Ogalvies, and then it's got glacial surrounding of Kluane...that for me, the diversity here and the presence of large populations of wildlife in fairly intact form and a relatively small population. I feel honoured...it's a gift to be able to enjoy it.*

*For me it is not a vague sense of place. It's very concrete. It's about the specifics of the landscape. The thing that I think about the Yukon is that it is so varied and so different. It is the size of California with far more variety. The Arctic, these interior mountains with these incredible non-polar ice fields. These extraordinary natural features. I just think that it has a rare combination of these things that I am very appreciative of, and that motivates me to do what I am doing. I feel like it is a little bit my duty, or my obligation to capture some of that, and share it, and record it...engender, foster some appreciation of it, and maybe I can make a contribution to it.*

Both Richard and Kelly base their political activism on personal relationships with landscapes and places. Both have visited many of the places they love, and that they work to protect. They have first hand, embodied, experience of these places. And both attempt to capture that sense, their sense, and encourage others, who have not visited these places, to care for them in the same ways that they do. It is important to note that for Richard and Kelly environmentalism and conservation are interchangeable concepts. They love their Yukon landscapes and want to see them conserved and protected.

As difficult as it is to criticise their efforts, it is important to note the classed, racialized, and situatedness of Richard and Kelly's activism. Both can afford, socially, culturally, and financially, to conceptualize Yukon landscapes as wilderness places, and wilderness places as worth preserving. Both are caught up within the discourses of environmentalism that assert the moral authority of these values. Neither are displaced by these constructions of Yukon landscapes. Rather, by contributing to them, both are actively engaged, through their conscious place-making political efforts.

But Kelly, Richard, and others working in the Yukon to promote environmental awareness and concern are not the only ones working on these efforts. As illustrated in

the example of the issue of Arctic Contamination cited earlier, Northern landscapes are also made and politicized a long way from the North. An industry has emerged around monitoring and researching and making this “issue”. But for those living there, those classified as the victims of this issue, their experiences and individual articulations of the varied places and landscapes that make up the “Arctic” are nowhere to be found in the literature. Rather they are silenced by the thundering international, globalizing, homogenizing discourses of Arctic Contamination. In response, these discourses are resisted and dismissed by many Northern residents. The trouble is, there may well be an environmental concern swirling around in this debate. There may be risks to human health. But those concerns get crushed between the dominant discourses and the counter-discourses of resistance.

If those engaged in the international environmental power play of environmental discourses and politics are “environmentalists”, it is no wonder that Ken Madsen and George resist the label. But as Castree and Braun (1998: 3) suggest “...the matter of nature has become a pressing issue, yet one bewildering in its complexity”. Somewhere between discourse and the physical environment, there are environmental issues. One danger inherent in a discussion such as this is that such issues become reduced to mere social constructions. I do not believe that they are. I agree that the complex network of discourses at work in the process of making place, nature, environmental issues, environmentalism, and environmentalists is layered with problematic elements. I agree that these discourses need to be unpacked, deconstructed, and decolonized. But I also feel that somewhere in this process there needs to be a space where some of the negative consequences to the physical world of human activities need to be addressed. Castree

and Braun (1998: 4) suggest that this occur by “building critical perspectives that focus attention on how social natures are transformed, by which actors, for whose benefit, and with what social and ecological consequences”. I agree. This critical examination of the relationships between people’s senses of place, place narratives, and the discourses of environmentalism was an attempt to do just that. And in so doing I came to see, often in humbling terms, a series of taken for granted assumptions and values through which places are made, experienced, politicized, disputed, and contested. By placing myself within the fibre of this research I was forced to think critically about my own place in all of this. What factors influence and shape my sense of place and environmentalism? And how has my engagement served to silence others’?

In the end, this project created more questions than answers. I have pointed to some of the moments of discursive encounter where threads need to be pulled further. There needs to be a larger critical conversation about the classed nature of environmentalism coupled with a rigorous inquiry into the colonial legacies of the discourse. There needs to be a more detailed exploration of contested landscapes in the Yukon. Yukon First Nations voices and experiences need to be included in this discussion. As I look back on the journey that has taken me from the academic landscapes of theory to the contested landscapes of the Yukon, I am struck still by the complexities of it all.

## Appendix 1:

### List and Brief Biography of Research Participants

1. **Alison\***. Alison is 22 years old. She was born and raised in Whitehorse to parents who moved here from England. Alison is a professional artist.
2. **Andrea**. Andrea is 33 years old. She has lived in Whitehorse her whole life. She works in the hospitality industry seasonally in Whitehorse.
3. **Anna\***. Anna is 40 years old. Anna moved to the Yukon from Holland 10 years ago. She lives with her husband and children in a cabin outside of Whitehorse. She is university educated and works as a professional in Whitehorse.
4. **Andrew**. Andrew is 42 years old. He has lived in the Yukon for 12 years. He moved North from his home in California. He now makes his home just outside Whitehorse in a small cabin overlooking the Yukon River. He is a university educated professional photography / film maker.
5. **Ben**. Ben is 75 years old. He has lived in the Yukon for 50 years. He has worked as a miner, a labourer, and a bush pilot. He now lives in an apartment in downtown Whitehorse.
6. **Bill\***. Bill is 37 years old. He is a member of a Yukon First Nation and has lived in Whitehorse for most of the last 12 years. He grew up in a community outside the city. He works for a local First Nation band office.
7. **Brenda\***. Brenda moved to Whitehorse when she finished university in Ontario 12 years ago. She has lived in communities outside Whitehorse, but currently makes her home in a small cabin just inside the city.
8. **Crystal**. Crystal is 28 years old. She has lived in Dawson City for the past 3 summers and in Whitehorse for the last full year. She makes her living as a musician and artist.
9. **Dave\***. Dave was born in Ontario but raised in Whitehorse. He left the territory to go to university but returned shortly after. He works for the territorial government.
10. **Delilah\***. Delilah is 29 years old. She has lived in Whitehorse for 5 years. She is university educated and currently works for a local environmental agency in Whitehorse.
11. **Drew\***. Drew is 43 years old. He moved to the Yukon 5 years ago where he lives in a small house outside Whitehorse. He is university educated.

12. **Ed\***. Ed is 37 years old. He has lived in the Yukon for 15 years, 10 of which have been in the Whitehorse area. He lives in a cabin outside Whitehorse. He works odd jobs seasonally to make a living.
13. **Ellie\***. Ellie is 49 years old. Ellie moved to the Yukon from BC 20 years ago. She lived most of that time outside Whitehorse, but has called the capital city home for the past 7 years. She is university educated and currently is the Executive Director at a local environmental agency.
14. **Eric\***. Eric is 59 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for 23 years. He is a tradesman working in construction on jobs throughout the territory.
15. **Gary**. Gary is 50 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for the past 25 years. He does not have a university education, but makes his living working for the City of Whitehorse.
16. **George\***. George is 39 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for the past 12 years. He is university educated and makes his living working for a variety of environmental agencies throughout the territory.
17. **Gill**. Gill is 24 years old. He moved to Whitehorse 3 years ago from Quebec. He works in the hospitality industry in Whitehorse.
18. **Greg**. Greg is 30 years old. He moved to the Yukon 4 years ago for the summer and is still here. He is university educated and works as an environmental consultant in Whitehorse.
19. **Jack**. Jack is 30 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for his entire life, leaving only to attend university in his early twenties.. He is university educated and makes his living working on local environmental efforts throughout the territory..
20. **James\***. James is 30 years old. He a member of a Yukon First Nation and has lived his entire life in the Yukon. He currently lives just outside Whitehorse with his wife and son. He has taken some college courses.
21. **Jane\***. Jane is 41 years old. She has lived in Whitehorse for the past 10 years where she makes her living as a photographer. She has a university education.
22. **Jesse**. Jesse is 40 years old. He is a member of Yukon First Nation. He lives just outside Whitehorse with is family. He is currently unemployed.
23. **Jessica\***. Jessica is 44 years old. She is the single mother of two children and has lived in the Yukon for 10 years. She works in the hospitality industry in Whitehorse.

24. **Jillian\***. Jillian is 40 years old. She has lived in the same place just outside Whitehorse since she moved to the Yukon 15 years ago. She left the Yukon 10 years ago to complete a university degree, but returned as quickly as possible. She now works as a professional in Whitehorse.
25. **Jim\***. Jim is 35 years old. He moved to the Yukon 7 years ago and now lives in Whitehorse where he works as a professional. He is university educated.
26. **Jordon**. Jordon is 20 years old. She was born and raised in Whitehorse. She has just finished high school and is anxious to leave in the fall to attend university "down south".
27. **Kelly\***. Kelly is 38 years old. She has lived in Whitehorse for 6 years. She is a professional writer and environmental activist. She is university educated.
28. **Kristine\***. Kristine is 34 years old. She moved to Whitehorse 5 years ago for a job. She is university educated and works in the environmental field.
29. **Lucy\***. Lucy is 35 years old. She has lived in the Yukon for 6 years. She lives in a small cabin outside town. Lucy is university educated and works as a professional in Whitehorse.
30. **Linda\***. Linda is 51 years old. She is a member of a Yukon First Nation and has lived in the Whitehorse area her entire life. She works for her local band office.
31. **Maggie**. Maggie is 28 years old. She has lived in Whitehorse for the past 4 years. She is university educated and works for one of the local environmental agencies in town.
32. **Oliver**. Oliver is 44 years old. He has lived in the Yukon for 20 years. He now lives just outside town where he makes his living as an organic farmer. Oliver is university educated, and blind.
33. **Paul**. Paul is 30 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for a little over a year. He moved to Whitehorse for a job. He is university educated and works as a professional in town.
34. **Phil\***. I am not sure how old Phil is (In his 60's I suspect). He has lived in the Yukon for 35 years. He once worked in mines and on construction sites but is currently unemployed. He lives in a downtown Whitehorse hotel.
35. **Richard\***. Richard is 43 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for the past 20 years. He is university educated and makes his living working on environmental issues in the territory.

- 36. Sam\***. Sam is 33 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for his entire life. He left the Yukon for some professional trades training but returned soon after. He works for the City of Whitehorse.
- 37. Ted\***. Ted is 42 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for the past 8 years, and lived in Dawson City for 3 years before that. He is university educated and owns his own business in Whitehorse.
- 38. Tom\***. Tom is 39 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for the past 7 years. He is university educated and makes his living working for the territorial and federal governments.
- 39. Victor**. Victor is 50 years old. He has lived in Whitehorse for the past 30 years. He is currently unemployed, but has made his living doing odd jobs, working in the mines, and on construction sites.
- 40. Zoe**. Zoe is 19 years old. She has lived in the Yukon for her entire life. She is just finishing high school and hopes to leave Whitehorse as soon as possible to move "Down South".

\* Indicates passages from interviews cited directly in the text.

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