

EXTRACTION!

ES | HOW'S BUSINESS

COMIX REPORTAGE

THE WALL STREET BLUES

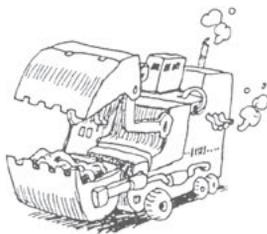
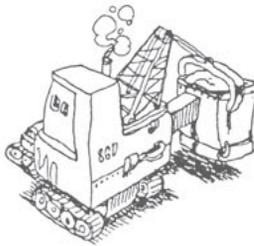
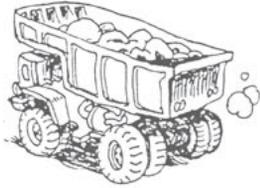
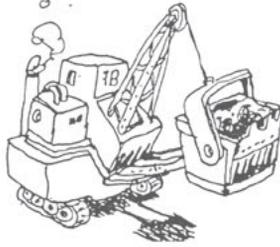
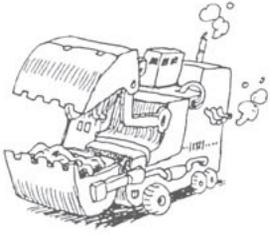
HE WHO goes down to the Street for chips these days has a hard feat to untie. If he has money in his jeans his wife's intuition and a premonition that this is a good time to retine his box for the future, he'll probably look around for blue chips. But blue chips have had a great fall from the ticker, the board and the Wall, and all the brokers and all the brokers' men can't put the blue chips together again 'til business comes out of its

*Ne se voit est de
rendre la parole au
peuple*

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EXTRACTION!

Comix Reportage



EXTRACTION!

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EXTRACTION!

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Inside cover illustration and spot illustrations by Carlos Santos.
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This book is dedicated
to the communities resisting illegitimate extraction;
to serious, dedicated and independently-minded
reporters and investigators, and;
to all the comics artists
who put their talent at work for the common good.

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A PARCEL OF FACTS WRAPPED IN COMIX

It was on a trip to Berlin in January 2007 that *EXTRACTION!* was first conceptualized. I was visiting Frédéric Dubois, squatting his Kreuzberg flat. We often conversed late into the night over bottles of Krusovice beer and paper bags of mixed nuts from the Turkish shop down the street. On one of those nights, while catching up on each other's lives, I mentioned that a few weeks earlier, I had dropped one of Cumulus's fall titles, and was looking for an alternative. Nothing is more inspiring than the potential for something new. We mulled over book ideas and eventually stumbled onto global mining.

From the fourth floor apartment, we asked ourselves questions. How can we as Canadians be mute regarding the way Canadian mining firms conduct business at home and abroad? What could we do to bring attention to these practices? How would such an issue pan out as a Cumulus title?

The next morning, as I leaned out the window to bask in the warmish winter sun, I felt in synch with the neighbourhood whose walls are awash with dissent. I shared the streetscape with the anarchist exhaling cigarette smoke from his squatted perch across Oranienstraße.

On our way to borrow a bicycle for the duration of my visit, Frédéric steered me into Modern Graphics, a comics shop just three doors down from where he lived. We spent hours browsing their multilingual collection, finding non-fiction titles that concretized our previous night's conversation: Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, David Collier's *Portraits from Life*, Guibert, Lefèvre and Lemercier's *Le Photographe*, and Guy Delisle's *Pyongyang*. I picked up an English language edition of Jason Lutes' *Berlin*, even though it was published in Montréal where I live. I have been reading comix for years but had never contemplated publishing any myself until that revelatory browserfest.

By the time I flew out of Schönefeld Airport three weeks later, it was decided. Cumulus would publish a book of comix journalism about Canadian mining practices around the world. *EXTRACTION! Comix Reportage*. The missing book was found.

Mining coverage

Depending on the period, resource extraction has been described as an economic champion, as a sector of engineering expertise, and occasionally engendering working class heroes, particularly during the Soviet era. Reporters have also denounced mining practices built on slavery that benefits only the elite. More recently, its sustainability is questioned as access to non-renewable mineral deposits becomes more challenging and requires extraction strategies that are more invasive on the natural environment.

Although little is written in corporate media these days that openly criticizes the mining industry for some of its less savoury practices, reporting on mining is nothing new. Some criticism has been literary or journalistic, while others have used more visual cues using cinematography, photography and comics (James Sturm's *Hundreds of Feet Below Daylight*). *EXTRACTION!* is a continuation of this tradition but with its own approach and contribution.

George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a book depicting 1930s working class living conditions in England's northern mining districts. This robust criticism of the mining practices of the day, is emphatic on the despicable living and working conditions of the miners.

The Düsseldorf-based Melton Prior Institute holds a collection of reportage drawings portraying mining in the 20th century. The archive displays a number of historical images from daily life in coal mining towns of Europe.

Photojournalist, Sebastião Salgado, has documented brutal human labour in the Serra Pelada gold mine and Dhanbad coal mine photos from the 1980s.

In 2005, documentary filmmaker, Michael Glawogger, directed *Working Man's Death*, venturing into the daily lives of 'illegal' coal miners of former Soviet extraction tenures and those of Indonesian sulfur mine workers.

In mainstream North American newspapers, energy and labour reporters and muckrakers writing for the business sections have described side deals, labour conditions and the successive waves of mergers and acquisitions that characterize the contemporary extractive sector so well.

In Canada, journalists such as Madeleine Drohan, Kelly Patterson and Suzanne Dansereau have researched and written extensively about mining companies and how they interact with the local communities near extraction sites.

Comix reporting

As often occurs soon after the emergence of an exciting project idea, complimentary material for this book emerged. References to comix and comix journalism transpired everywhere. I discovered three bookstores devoted to comics in my neighbourhood rather than just the one I avidly visited. Two distinct comix exhibits opened within days of each other—not more than a five-minute walk from Cumulus' office. And *bande dessinée* was the theme in my neighbourhood for the 2007 Mont-Royal pedestrian street fair where local artists painted dozens of comic strips directly onto the tarmac.

Days before my return to Montréal from Berlin, the Centre Pompidou in Paris hosted *Rencontre BD reporters*, a four-hour conference within an exhibit about comix journalism. It revolved generally around the theme of travel. It looked at issues relating to the observation of others, the selection of what to transcribe,

the subjective representation of reality, the stylistic variations these types of reports are illustrated in, and their relationship with other visual forms of reporting: photojournalism or documentary filmmaking.

Travel was central to the exhibit because journalism relies significantly on fieldwork: conducting interviews, observing the scene, making notes, sketching details. Serious journalists gather key information firsthand, from original sources most often close to the action.

In comix reports like those by Joe Sacco, journalist and illustrator are the same individual. The illustration portion of the comix-making process is based on memory and guided by reminders during the weeks and months it takes to visually articulate the information gathered in the field. Photographs, notes, video footage, sketches, audio recordings are all used to compose the illustrations, delineate the panels, develop the narrative. During the information gathering phase, Sacco is already aware of the comix format the reportage will be presented in and he may assemble his information through a visual bias that filters the content based on the aesthetics or structure of sequential art.

In the case of *EXTRACTION!*, the journalist and comix artist of each story are two separate people. Here the journalists focus is on the story's information without the constraints of considering how it would be represented visually. The visualization would come later during the scripting phase—after the information was gathered.

Out of the four comix artists here, three had not gone into the field with a reporter. Joe Ollmann, Phil Angers and Stanley Wany illustrated their comix mostly from acquired visual cues without having experienced the context within which the cues emerged. They had not met the characters, nor seen the places first-hand. Ruth Tait is the exception, having gone to Mont-Laurier, Québec, with her journalist counterpart,

Sophie Toupin, to investigate uranium exploration. She got to ask questions, sketch on the spot and meet many of the 'characters.'

The success of these comix reportages relies on the effective combination of quality journalism with well crafted sequential art, despite their inadvertent rivalry. Here the challenge persisted between the 'give' of verifiable facts and the 'take' of graphic interpretation, between the 'push' of fact-based details and the 'pull' of visual narrative. The craft of comix journalism does not stem from the combination of text and image, content and structure. It is the added meaning derived from the interaction between the symbolic and the realistic, the literal and the figurative that gives it strength.

The cartoon characters inserted into the chapter on tar sands extraction combines characters and symbols to insinuate meaning, which is absent in the original journalistic reportage. The caricaturization within a journalistic context forced us to consider its influence on journalistic integrity. The addition of visual bias into a report containing verifiable facts created a tenuous relationship between the two. When a comix artist and a journalist collaborate toward a single outcome, concessions are made and synergies ensue.

During the transition to narrative script, characters emerged, scenes were set, and chronology determined. In each of the three scripts written by the reporters, the reporters themselves became the characters who threaded their way through the stories, making them actual thinking and feeling human beings, rather than passive and absent narrators. In the chapter on uranium, where both journalist and comix artist shared the fieldwork, both appear as characters.

In the tar sands script written by editor Marc Tessier (who was neither the report's journalist nor its

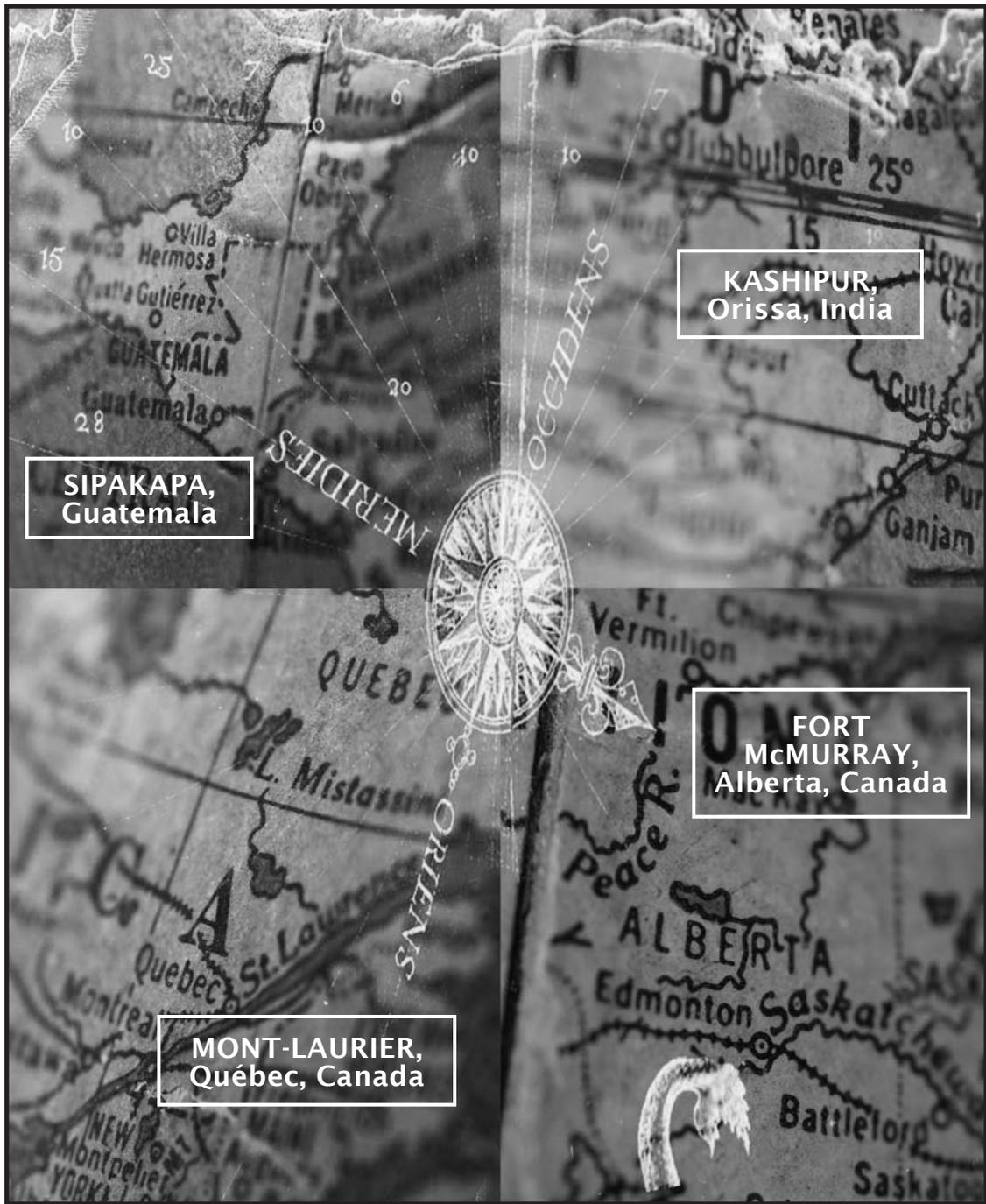
comix artist) and by Phil Angers (who later illustrated it), the central character is a fictitious narrator on a soapbox who transmits the journalistic information to a gathering crowd. Here fiction is used to transmit unfiltered journalistic information. So how does the fictional character compromise the integrity of the initial story, when he becomes the conduit of the journalist's investigation? How far from accurate visual representation can a comix artist take factual information for the resulting comix to still assert itself as reportage? At which point does it become fiction?

These issues attest to the need for further experimentation with comix journalism before it becomes a reporting style readily accepted by a news- and image-hungry society. Our approach to comix journalism, with the division of the roles of journalist and comix artist, raised many questions and provided us with significant challenges. The resulting four comix reportages certainly meet our expectations and probably surpass them, although once the decision was made back in Berlin to proceed with *EXTRACTION!*, its very prospect at the time inhibited all expectations.

This collection of comix investigates an industry thriving on corporate takeovers, stock market inflations, and the race to control the world's mineral resources. It began with serious journalism: verifiable facts, trusted sources, investigation and analysis then ended disarmingly wrapped in comix. For the uninitiated who may stumble onto it by its sheer beauty, the artwork is our secret weapon to get them to the facts. This mix provides the reader and viewer with a critical glimpse at global extraction practices that they may have otherwise never come across. This is *EXTRACTION!*, its raison d'être.

David Widginton, October 2007





SIPAKAPA,
Guatemala

KASHIPUR,
Orissa, India

FORT
McMURRAY,
Alberta, Canada

MONT-LAURIER,
Québec, Canada

A BLITZKRIEG CALLED EXTRACTION

The extraction of natural resources in today's capitalism is a dirty business. Since the turn of the millennium, most energy and mineral prices have skyrocketed. Junior mining adventurers and unscrupulous corporate oligopolies rush into new territory to suck what's hot out of the earth's lucrative veins. But that alone hardly qualifies as news.

In recent history, the war for resources was represented as colonisation. Now that most former colonies are sovereign nations (at least on paper), competition for resources grows at a rate previously unseen.

Canada and Australia's extractive industries developed phenomenally after the 1950s. More recently, China's state enterprises have multiplied investments in Africa and Latin America. Brazil's giant, CVRD, has taken over companies at an accelerated rate. Russia's Gazprom worked its way deep into continental Europe.

What is new in today's gas, oil and mining industries, is the pace at which exploration, extraction, transformation and delivery is taking place. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* speaks of a Third World War for the world's resources. But it is more if a *blitzkrieg*.

The precedent-setting magnitude of extractive projects now rivals any megaloman's wildest dreams. In times when open-pit mines have become the norm, even the displacement of entire towns and villages by extractors no longer raises eyebrows or make for juicy headlines.

Hasty development sponsored by the stock markets in New York, Toronto and Frankfurt—to name just a few—is a key component of this race for resources.

More fundamental and less cyclical though, lies the dogma of economic growth, which encourages disloyal corporate practices and oligopoly-friendly policies on behalf of governments. Most politicians, the business community and scores of academics insist on growth even when the population in most industrialized countries is in decline and over-consumption is at an all time high.

In the last decade, the fusion of the economic growth mantra and the high value of some natural resources became the driver behind what is increasingly seen by the public as irresponsible extraction.

Despite the fact that 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) has now become a trendy expression among top industry bureaucrats, mining chief executives, engineering academics and human rights organisations, many extractive projects are setting precedents of large-scale ecosystem disruption and of human dignity violations. Size and speed are good indicators of an industrial sector running amok.

'Mining communities' most often live in an export-driven drama where the extractor is the main benefactor. After only twenty years of intensive exploitation, the mining corporation exits, often leaving a devastated landscape. They also leave behind 'externalities'—long-term expenses unaccounted for by the exploiter—that the local taxpayers will need to pay for. What's worse, is that belligerent policies of most of the industrial nations are resource-driven.

Economic and military power regularly join forces to access and exploit resources, which is disturbing for the communities who happen to live in the valleys and on the mountains proven to contain valuable mineral deposits. *EXTRACTION!* presents varying examples of an extractive *blitzkrieg*. Three of the four reportages expose the ramifications of having military, paramilitary and other non-civil institutions involved in the decisions of how resources are accessed, extracted or used.

Canada as the top miner

The book you are holding in your hands is a modest contribution to an existing tradition of reporting on mining. It comes at a time when citizens of many countries are increasingly worried about mining practices and their on the environment. They are worried about jobs and their livelihood, as well as long-term revenues from mining.

Canada is a haven to more mining corporations than all other countries combined. Extractive industries drive the Canadian economy. 60% of investments in extractive activities worldwide are reputed to be Canadian or from a corporation registered on one of Canada's stock exchanges. It creates significant wealth for shareholders including the Canadian Pension Plan, to which every employee in Canada contributes.

Canada is the biggest oil supplier to the world's first economy (USA's). The province of Alberta's tar sands production now exceeds one million barrels per day and could reach three million barrels per day by 2015. The tar sands represent the largest single oil deposit in the world at 1.6 trillion barrels. To date, only a small portion—175 billion barrels—has been categorized as proven reserves, but already, Canada is reputed to possess the second largest oil reserves in the world after Saudi Arabia.

Canada remains the largest supplier of natural gas to the United States, placing the country second only to Russia in terms of natural gas resources and production, as presented in the 2006 statistics of Natural Resources Canada.

Canadian mining benefits from a long history of government subsidies. Access to start-up capital funding through the stock market is relatively easy. Royalties are low in many mining sectors, mining legislation is highly favourable to large-scale mining and the technologies used in the Canadian mining sector are state-of-the-art.

Human resources are abundant and their expertise is unmatched. Every second engineer or manager you'll meet in the fields of extraction has a Canadian passport.

A made-in-Canada conquest

The irony of these glamorous facts is that Canada's hold on its 'gold medal' as the world's top miner is starting to erode Canada's reputation abroad.

Generally seen as a soft power, a peaceful and humanitarian place, Canada is increasingly synonymous with evil and destruction.

In the last decade, the media has disseminated exuberant national pride based on Canada's ranking in the top five among 175 countries in the United Nations Quality of Life Index.

There is little media mention of how Canadians came about the wealth that determines their quality of life nor how the country is experiencing increasing levels of childhood poverty. International criticism for its treatment of indigenous communities is difficult to find in the media, as is the country's increasing divide between the wealthy and the poor.

The Canadian myth that emphasizes a gentle non-aggressive citizenry who proudly refers to the country's historic military role as United Nations peacekeeper and a human rights advocate is... a myth.

Many of the mining projects Canadian corporations are involved in are vehemently opposed by local communities, yet permits are given by national/regional governments, people get displaced, and Canadian trans-nationals gain access to the mineral wealth.

The Canadian government decided to establish the National Roundtable Discussions on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Extractive Industries in 2006-2007 to hop on the 'social responsibility' bandwagon and improve its public profile. There were four public assemblies. Members of civil society, the private sector and the government met in Vancouver in June, Calgary in September, Toronto in October and Montréal in November of 2006 to discuss what extractive corporations should be responsible for.

The recommendations that came out of this roundtable process could have marked a new step in addressing the increasing human rights and ecology abuses left in

the wake of extractive tractors and sludge-hammers. But they fail to do so! They fall short of advocating international extraction regulation and tough checks and balances. Instead they demand the creation of an ombud's office and clear criteria to orient responsible extraction. This is not enough, particularly as one looks at several multinational's abuse records. This public relations move, at times certainly a genuine attempt to consult with extraction experts, meant to calm down criticism about mining, gas and oil exploitation.

Goldcorp's documented pollution of rivers in Honduras; Gabriel Resources' avid pursuit for a licence to dig gold in the hills of Transylvania with an invalid Environmental Impact Assessment; and Canada's junior exploration firms taking advantage of lean legislation in African nations for uranium are examples that shout for tough and rigorous laws on extraction—in Canada and internationally. These examples also mean that more needs to be done to document and publicize the industry to develop awareness within the larger public.

Some increasingly argue that mining is not just a Canadian phenomenon. Capital interests from other countries are buying up more and more Canadian corporations. Instead of focusing on the many negative impacts of mining, they argue, we should be more patriotic and support "our" companies. The truth is that "our" companies are completely out of control. The general public has little influence on the course taken by a corporation, be it Canadian or from another jurisdiction.

The made-in-Canada *blitzkrieg* in extraction is real and it is being raged upon communities with the support of our public policies, sponsored in part by our money and with the help of our ignorance of the facts. Our patriotism lies with the common good. This is why community and public interest were our points of reference to know whether the way extraction of resources is done can be regarded as being responsible or not.

It is important that critical perspectives on mining practices reach audiences of dividend seekers, union

workers, and future pensioners, among others. This, in parallel with stringent legislation, will allow communities and those resisting mining projects to understand and prevent the greenwashing tactics of self-proclaimed 'good corporate citizens'.

Four resources, four reportages

The story about mining cannot be considered as a black-and-white issue. The extraction process is complex, requiring nuances in the discourse. There are well-intentioned mining entrepreneurs, just as there are opportunistic and corrupt non-governmental organizations. There are self-interested civil servants and promoting indigenous leaders. Our interest is therefore not to take a position against the sector as such, but rather to take a hard look at the Canadian-led *blitzkrieg* and to listen to what dissenting voices have to say.

But nuances are rarely explicit so journalism needs to provide an overview of mining's realities by documenting, analyzing and critically assessing the impacts mining has on communities and on the environment. That's the responsibility of critical, independent and honest reporters who go into the field.

EXTRACTION! delves into the implications of Canadian mining practices. It considers the communities affected by them. It is certainly not anti-development, but it adopts a critical and journalistic view of all actors involved in some significant tragedies of our time.

This book of comix reportage is about the exploration, exploitation and extraction of oil, uranium, bauxite and gold. Although we could have chosen to look into more than these four resources, the intention is to initiate a comix reportage series—with this as its first book.

We chose gold, uranium, bauxite and oil for a number of reasons. We aimed for the news value and their significance in depicting the extractive sectors that are important today. We also wanted to work with those journalists who had experience reporting on mining and who were already familiar with the particular mineral.

Gold was a natural fit, since it is the resource for which Canada's corporations are notorious. Self-serving behaviour, a complete disrespect for local communities and bad faith are legendary in the gold sector. In recent years, with gold selling at high prices, many abandoned mines have been reactivated. The pressure from new developments such as in Rosia Montana, Romania, has gone as far as igniting conflicts with neighbouring Hungary.

Dawn Paley's outstanding and courageous journalism in Guatemala delves deeper into the gold file. She investigates Goldcorp's presence in indigenous communities and brings the news back to Vancouver, to the corporation's corridors of power.

Uranium was impossible to ignore. This mineral represents the future, as the Kyoto Protocol is being implemented internationally, and nuclear energy is now touted as a green alternative to dirty oil. Canada's uranium history as a source for the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was worth pointing out, to debate the sustainability and ethics of its use.

Radio journalist Sophie Toupin's interview skills and sharp research helped her access a small-town uranium story with universal implications. In an independent and devoted manner, she demonstrated where that sector is headed in the region and around the world.

We chose bauxite because Alcan, one of the world's leading aluminium producers, is based in Montréal. Our intimate knowledge of Alcan's involvement in a bauxite extraction and smelting case in East-India, with its strong opposition from local activists, was sufficient to convince us of its relevance.

International reporter Tamara Herman, who had visited the mining concession area two years earlier, has reactivated the file. She double-checked the received truths from both sides of the spectrum and reconstituted the facts along the lines of common-good reporting.

EXTRACTION! would not have been as nuanced and comprehensive as it is, were it not for the mother of all resources: oil. Carbon-dependent Canada and the United States, corporate oil giants, NGOs and resource think tanks are lining up for an important showdown in the tar sands of Alberta. There are a thousand report-ages to be made about oil and we necessarily had to limit ourselves to one.

Petr Cizek, a seasoned northerner, cartographer and writer, caught our attention with a fine analysis and well-researched article about the nuanced relationships between the various players of Canada's oil bonanza.

The limits of *EXTRACTION!*

The value of *EXTRACTION!* lies in the depth of the reporting, the quality of the illustrations and its commitment to keep each of the extraction stories accessible to a general readership.

Like in every book, there are shortcomings that also deserve highlighting for reasons of transparency and fairness; two core principles of common-good journalism. The four chapters that make up *EXTRACTION!* fall short of describing certain fundamentals about the industry.

An important blind spot is geographical: Africa is absent. This was unintentional. We had started investigating several diamond extraction cases in African countries. The idea was to move beyond the 'blood diamond' narratives of the last decade and demystify the official and illegal mining dynamics practiced today. We hope to add regional diversity (Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania) to subsequent editions should this book become the starting point for a series.

We decided not to elaborate on the escalation of 'counter-insurgency tactics' used by mining corporations to delegitimize their opponents. There are stories we could have told about journalists producing pro-industry documentary films, such as *Mine Your*

Own Business, a propaganda piece taking aim at environmentalists. We would have insisted on company-floated NGOs and the whitewashing of corporate images with the hiring of former prime ministers of Canada as lobbyists, but space restraints disallowed for it in this volume.

Living conditions of migrant workers, of rank-and-file miners and the security of their workplaces are not put to the fore in *EXTRACTION!*. We believe that labour issues have historically been the most striking illustrations of the large-scale abuse that the extractive sector is capable of. Today, many small-scale and cooperative miners—and miners in general—face risks to their health, which are often life-threatening.

In most Canadian corporations though, it must be recognized that labour standards are relatively high and our journalists have seen the urgency as being rooted in other dimensions of the mining business. We have deliberately decided not to put the accent on labour issues, although future editions may include this rather fundamental component of mining's impacts. In the meantime, we're receiving weekly reminders via news-wires, about China's coal mine accidents.

Renewable energies drawn from wind, water, sunlight and geothermal heat are absent from most of the coverage herein. Clever technological advances using biomass and biofuels for transportation would certainly have broadened our understanding of the alternatives to conflict-inducing extraction. After the resistance, the alternatives. We hope to shed light on the energies that could potentially help minimize *blitzkrieg* extraction and find an equilibrium in the diversity of resources we employ, in the future.

There are certainly many other aspects that would merit media attention and in-depth analysis. We have had to compose with very limited means and a tight timeframe. Our hope is that the following chapters do contribute in a constructive way to the debate around extraction.

The reaction *EXTRACTION!* is trying to trigger is best summed up by humanist photographer Sebastião Salgado: "Are we condemned to be largely spectators? Can we affect the course of events? Can we claim 'compassion fatigue' when we show no sign of consumption fatigue?"

We hope that *EXTRACTION!*, with its Canadian angle, fresh reporting and accessible style, will inspire debate. We also hope that the stories of resistance that we celebrate herein will be understood as acts of courage and survival: fundamental to human development.

There are many ways to affect the course of events. One is by extracting stories and sharing them. This is what we have done.

Frédéric Dubois, October 2007

