

# Opinionation

Scenarios for the future of  
climate-change communications:  
a webinar on new research by  
author George Marshall

1pm ET, Thurs. Feb. 9th, 2023

 EcoAnalytics

A project of  
 MakeWay

# What is EcoAnalytics?

- Cooperative market research project, MakeWay's shared platform
- Aim to strengthen Canada's enviro movement
- Now sharing our research and guidance, through searchable website
- Since 2016: more than 12 national surveys, 25 reports and research webinars
- Since last March: Four rounds of research: qualitative and quantitative
- And...knowledge translation: *Tips* newsletter, *Nutshells*, expert guidance
- Subscribe or join [ecoanalyticscanada.org/join-us/](https://ecoanalyticscanada.org/join-us/)

# Broad research expertise

## Political scientists

- Erick Lachapelle, Professor, Université de Montréal
- Lori Thorlakson, Professor, University of Alberta
- Melanee Thomas, Associate Professor, University of Calgary
- Marjolaine Martel-Morin, PhD candidate, Université de Montréal

## Sociologists

- David Tindall, Professor, Sociology, University of British Columbia
- Louise Comeau, PhD, Iris Communications and University of New Brunswick

## Top polling firm

- Environics Research Group (Sarah Robertson, VP, Public Affairs)

# Members and Associates



# Core funders



# What's coming next

George Marshall

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# The Central Question

How will we really respond  
to the climate crisis?

# Central Question

## We?

- Who is the we?
- How do we align responsibility, good/bad?
- How do we identify the group of “us” and the group of “other”
- Very different responses according to affluence and vulnerability.

**Barack Obama**  
**unveils climate plan:**  
**Georgetown University**  
**June 2013**

We can figure this out . We've got to look after our children; we have to look after our future; and we have to grow the economy and create jobs. We can do all of that as long as we don't fear the future; instead we seize it.



# Calgary Flood 2013

Calgary is about community, about coming together against adversity.

I am so incredibly proud to say that I am a Calgarian.



# Pakistan 2022

When we see rain, we pray to God it should stop. We are tired of this life, We ask God to come and help us. Rich and powerful people are getting money and all the help. Thieves break into homes in villages and steal buffalo and livestock at gunpoint. The government has abandoned us and left us at the mercy of thieves and robbers.



**Würzburg**  
**Bohemia**  
1626-1631



# Assam floods

June 2022

Flood - Jihad



# COVID – a huge experiment

## Co-operation

- Compliance with government control
- High social conformity
- Science and technology solutions
- International co-operation
- Strong sense of social solidarity

## Resistance

- Denial and conspiracy theories (false enemies)
- Growing issue fatigue
- Increased risk taking
- Fuelled political and social polarisation

Wow... Earth is recovering

- Air pollution is slowing down

- Water pollution is clearing up

- Natural wildlife returning home

Coronavirus is Earth's vaccine

We're the virus

11:25 AM · 3/17/20 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

72.2K Retweets 296K Likes



# People will make sense of climate change through narratives

- Constructed from familiar actors, heroes/villains, aggressors/victims, struggle and resolution
- Spread and evolve through social contact
- *Fore-story* and backstory
- Accrete through biased assimilation
- Become embodied in identity

# Narrative challenges of climate change

<b>Weak time scale</b>	No start, no end, hyperbolic
<b>Diffused responsibility</b>	Intergenerational – international
<b>Diffused impacts</b>	No correlation of perpetrator and victim
<b>Degenerative – Terminal</b>	No renewal or rebuilding narrative...decay
<b>Weak narrative arc</b>	No clear enemy, little struggle, no restoration
<b>Weak moral structure</b>	No intention to cause harm – often beneficial

-1990	Foundations	Environmentalism Neo-liberalism pro-market Consumer individualism Vested interest opposition
1990-2000	Formation	Organised denial Defence of status quo Market solutions Innovation and opportunity Resistance and social justice Nihilism
2020-2050	Competition	Evolution and development
2050+	Consolidation	Entrenchment and amplification

**Brief pause**

# 10 Outlooks

1. Co-operation
2. Invention
3. Opportunism
4. Distraction
5. Anger
6. Scapegoating
7. Double-down
8. Religiosity
9. Despair
10. ?

# Lebanon

If I am in business I just try to make a killing now and sell fast with no sense of looking forward to the future.

Some people are totally depressed, continuously asking "What we have to do to get out of this misery?"

You have people who are terribly angry and this anger is manifested in aggressive driving, needless risk-taking, disregard of all norms and what is acceptable.

And then you have people who don't give a shit about anything. I don't want to save a penny I want to party all night. I don't care about having kids. This is very common now with adolescents and is creeping into young parents, 30-year-old with kids go out every night, don't try to save money ... It is the me-me syndrome.



# 1. Collaboration



# 1. Collaboration

Intensification of identity leads to othering, blame and worse.



# Protection

The impulse to defend your family, descendants and kin is strong and universal.



## 2. Invention

- Humans are the toolmakers
- We have always evolved in response to environment
- Challenges make us stronger

### The David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins

Travel back 6 million years to discover how our ancestors struggled to survive dramatic climate changes and, in the process, evolved the traits that make us human.

## 2. Invention

- Technology will save us
- Geo-engineering
- Corporate power
- Elite solutions

DOUBLE ISSUE

APRIL 25 / MAY 2, 2022



# 3. Opportunism

- Financial opportunity
- How will the rich and powerful respond to defend their privilege?

CRISIS

A large, bold Chinese character in a traditional calligraphic style, representing the word 'Crisis'.

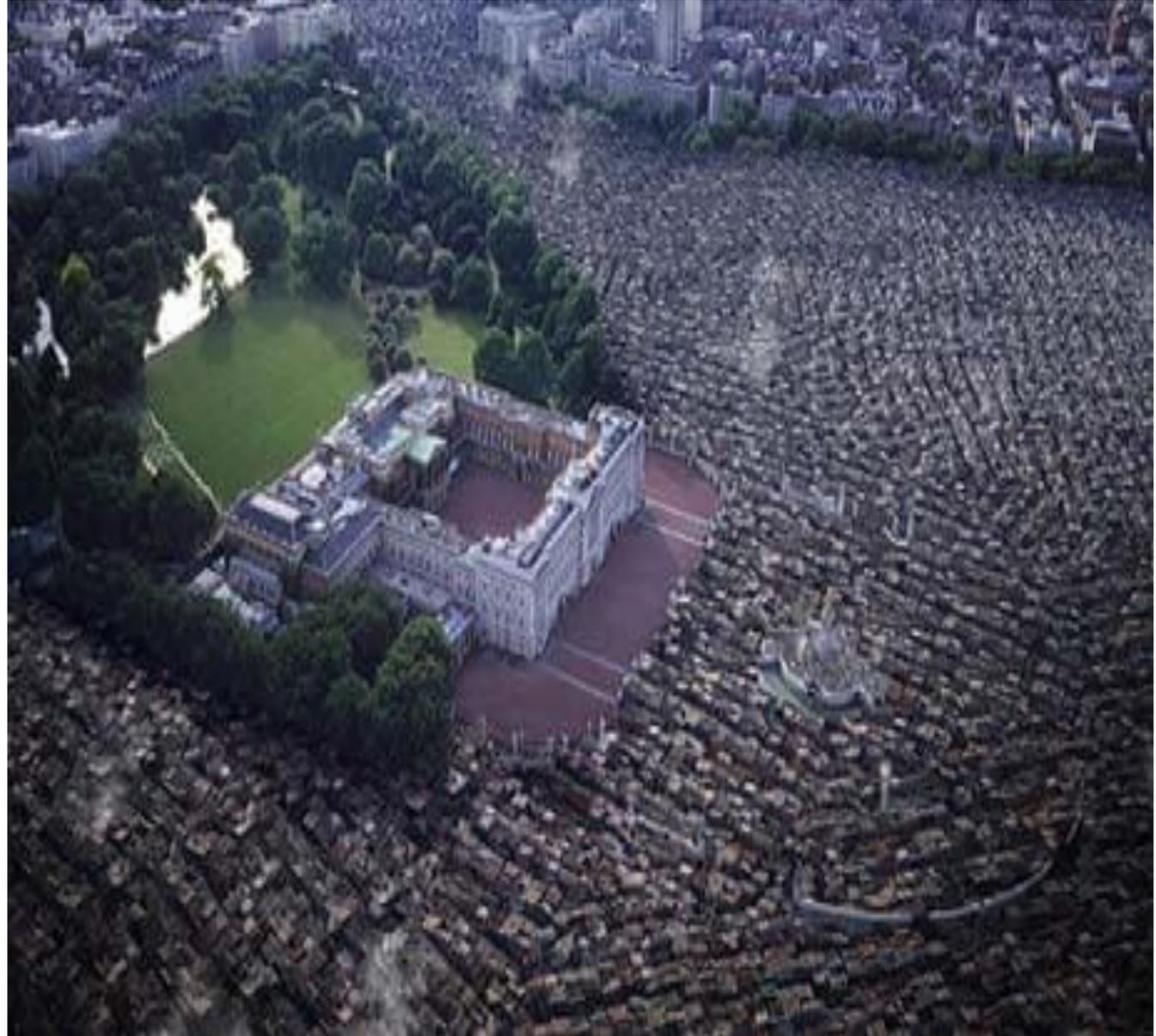
A time of danger;

A large, bold Chinese character in a traditional calligraphic style, representing the word 'Opportunity'.

A time of opportunity;

# 3. Opportunism

- Eco-totalitarianism
- Anti-immigration  
populism
- Yearning for strong  
parental figures



# 4. Distraction



# 4. Distraction

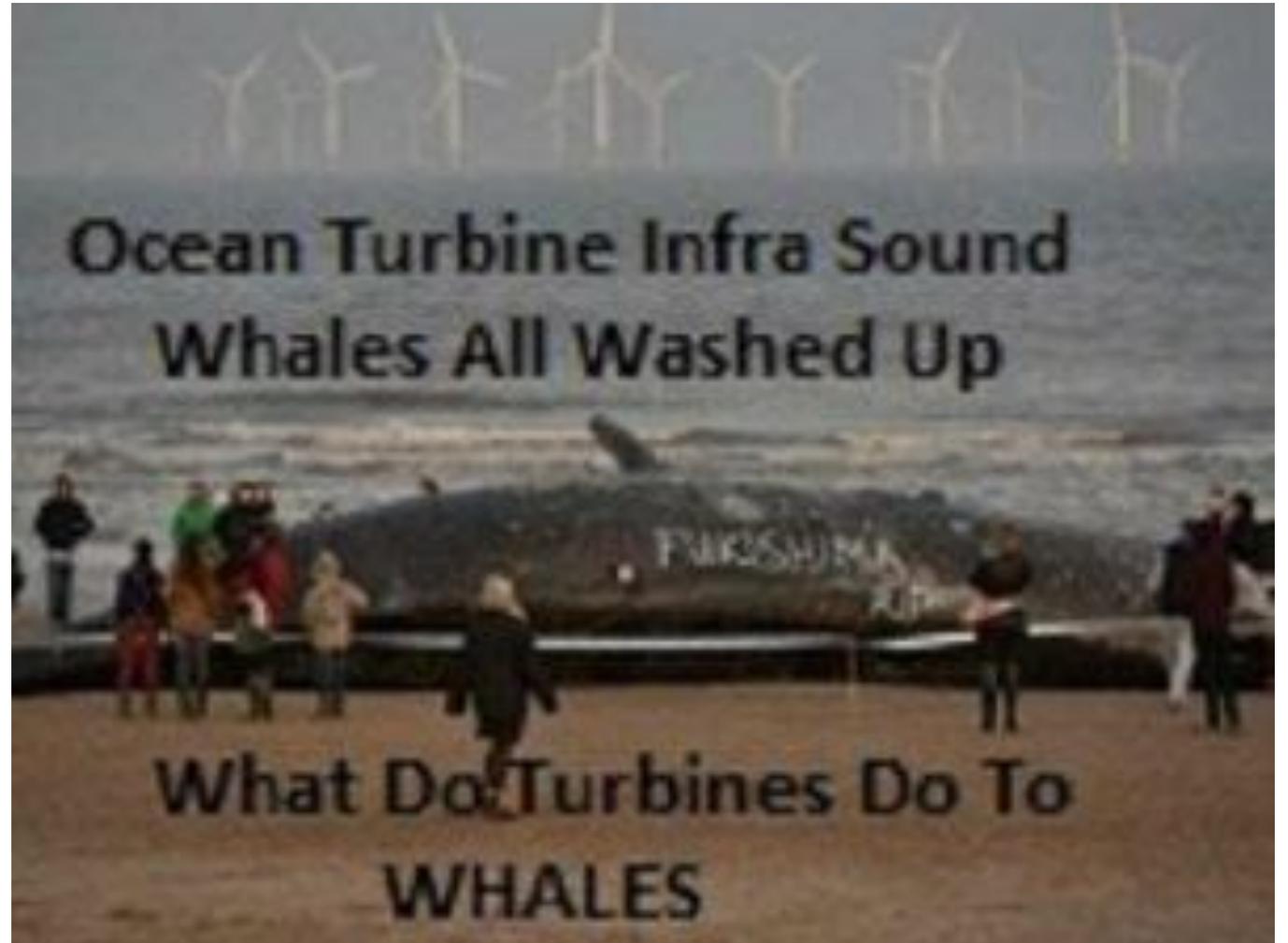


# 4. Distraction

- Norms of disattention
- Framing
- Barriers
- Sacrifice zones



# Displacement Fetishism



# 5. Anger



## 5. Anger



# 6. Scapegoating

**Over  
98% of  
California's  
Population  
Growth Is From  
Immigration**

CAPSWeb.org  
Statistic includes births to immigrants.



# 7. Religiosity

- Search for a “greater than self” identity
- Spirituality
- Growth of main faiths especially Evangelical
- New religions
- Cults



# 7. Religiosity



# 8. Despair

- Habituation of despair
- Powerlessness
- Passivity
- Learned helplessness
- Contraction of time horizon
  - inability to plan
- Resignation

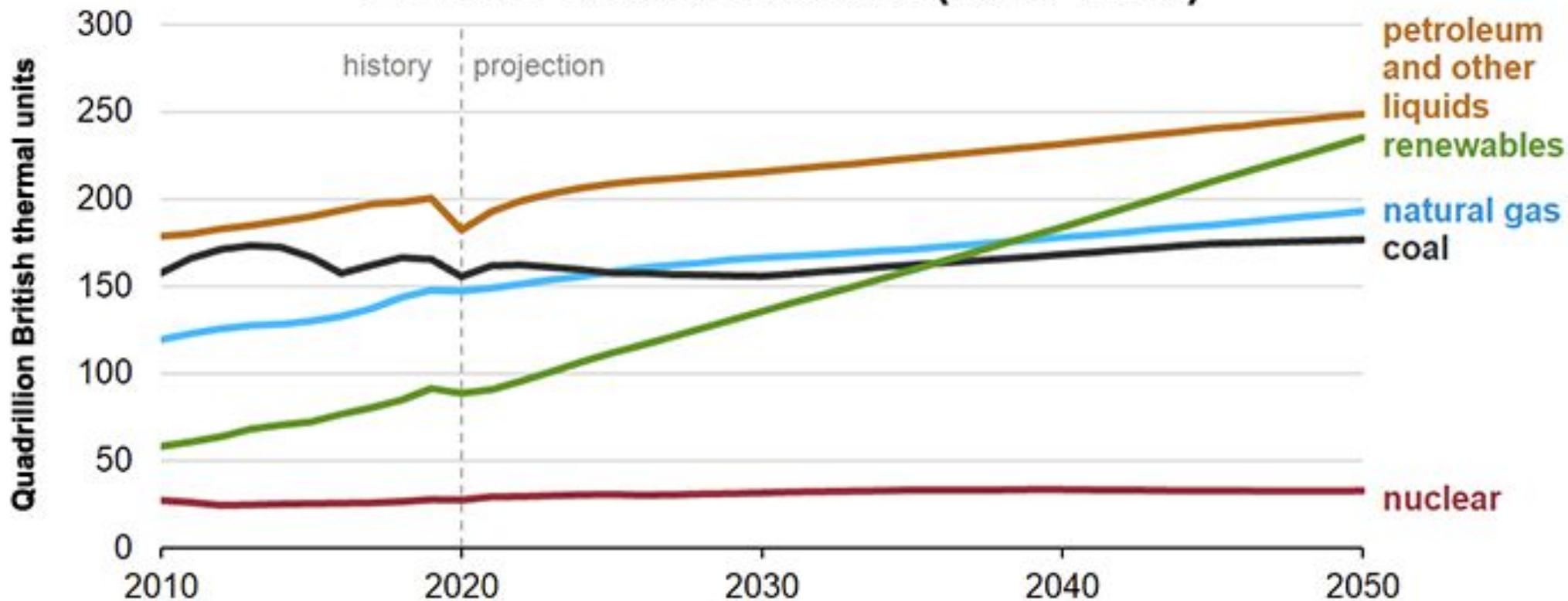


# 9. Double down





## Global Primary Energy Consumption by Source, IEO2021 Reference Case (2010–2050)



**Note:** Petroleum and other liquids includes biofuels.

*Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, International Energy Outlook 2021 (IEO2021)*

# 9. Double down

- Reactive denial
- Backstory defence – who we are
- High carbon lifestyles



# 10. ?

- New ways of being
- A transformation of humanity and the human experience
- A new relationship with the natural world
- A new shadow

# Poll question

Which of the ten *outlooks* do you think will be most prevalent as Canadians respond to the impacts of climate change leading up to 2050?

# Moving forward

Constructive climate outcomes will need narratives of positive and collective action that are more compelling, speak more effectively to people's identity, and are more widely shared than the competing narratives of conflict, avoidance or denial.

# Moving forward

- Backstories: narratives of togetherness
- Build bridges: defuse identity boundaries
- Prepare for despair: educate with meaning



# Moving forward

- Anticipate and prepare
- Channel anger
- Watch the “we”
- Find joy

# Thanks

George Marshall

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# Questions?



What's the news?  
What's the news?  
What's the news?

HIGH SIDE  
RATHER  
LIV

EST 370  
O CANADA  
DO SOMETHING  
ALREADY

LET'S  
make  
the world  
Colourful  
AGAIN  
STOP GLOBAL WARMING