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The Sustainability Of Overconsumption? A Discursive Analysis Of Walmart's Sustainability Campaign

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THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OVERCONSUMPTION?
A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF WALMART'S SUSTAINABILITY
CAMPAIGN

by

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ABSTRACT

This study inquires as to whether Walmart's sustainability campaign represents a sincere and holistic change throughout the company's global supply chain or if it is simply a public relations campaign which caters to the growing target market of "next-generation" consumers and justifies further expansion into "emerging markets". A critical analysis of Walmart's sustainability discourse is presented, using transcribed texts of various corporate and publicity-geared publications.

Frequently utilized terms and themes are identified throughout the big-box retailer's sustainability campaign which convey a distinctly Neoliberal ethos—a political economy which lies at the heart of current practices of institutional unsustainability—and emphasize the role of the atomized individual—who may purchase protection from environmental risks via green products. Other themes, which are commonly associated with sustainability research, are glaringly absent: subsidiarity; human rights; steady-state economics; economic inequity; the precautionary principle.

This research aims to shed light on the prospects for the sustainability of green overconsumption, which Walmart is leading the way in promoting, and for the continuation of the modern economistic zeitgeist into the twenty-first century.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Walmart went public with its plan to make big-box retail "sustainable". What is the semantic behavior of Walmart and what goals about sustainability does Walmart's semantic behavior indicate? Does this sustainability campaign represent a sincere and holistic change throughout the company's global supply chain or is it simply a public relations campaign which caters to the growing target market of "next-generation" consumers? Since its inception, Walmart has promoted itself as an exemplar of the Neoliberal ethos—stressing individualism, instrumentalism, consumerism, and a competitive ideology of expansion—a belief system which cannot acclimate to the blueprint of necessary action for committing to sustainability.

When a company as influential and controversial as Walmart announces a long-term initiative to promote its newly acquired "eco-conscious" image, it is not unreasonable to question whether it is motivated primarily by economic or ecological concerns. If the disconnection between ecological and economic allocations of value is part of the cause for our society's institutional unsustainability, then any effort which aims to achieve environmental balance within an economistic framework is unlikely to succeed.

"Green" advertising campaigns—marketing goods as "sustainable", "organic", "GM-free", "all-natural", and "fair trade"—have grown more and more prevalent with each passing year. The demand for these types of products has grown in proportion to the mounting publicity concerning the compounding environmental risks which are inescapable in today's world. The contamination of the global commons—fresh water, soil, oceans, and air—is a result of over two centuries of unrestrained manias of modernism. Industrialism and consumerism are byproducts

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of a worldview which has legitimized the use of Earth's resources as a means to temporary human ends since the era of the Enlightenment, which promoted such ideals as objectivity, atomization, progress, and individualization. The roots of our environmental abuse are ontological and deeply embedded in the very structure of existence in today's first-world societies.

When confronted with escalating evidence of the unsustainability which our way of life depends on, it seems clear that the only way to solve such a systemic dilemma is to address the metanarratives which deter the possibility of a lasting, sustainable future. Contrarily, corporate enterprises have co-opted sustainability as a marketing slogan, distorting the debate by attempting to accommodate concerned and alert consumer-citizens within the current order of instrumentality, free market capitalism, and overconsumption.

Walmart—the world's largest retailer and one of the world's largest private employers— is one such corporation that has embraced the emergent trend of green consumption. When a company as expansive and complex as Walmart claims to be pursuing *more* sustainable business practices, several questions come to mind. Can the norms of overconsumption which big-box retail promotes acclimate to the necessities of a healthy global ecosystem? Does the scale and scope of Walmart's web of business relationships help or hurt its chances of encouraging more eco-friendly practices of production, distribution, and disposal? Is Walmart embracing sustainability from a starting point of care for the sake of others or for the sake of reputation and profitability? Does green consumerism draw people to environmental activism or does it serve to simply pacify fears of environmental risks? These questions can only be answered by first

reflecting on the philosophical assumptions which undergird postmodern social reality, comprehending the current state of ecological dysfunctionality, and recognizing the full range of contributions to the sustainability debate.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING MEANING IN A MORPHING MARKET

The Underlying Facets of Overconsumption

For centuries, the history of the Western world has conditioned its subjects to celebrate, admire, and emulate those who conquer, guided by an implicit belief that there is a critical connection between the acquisition of power by force and obtaining the favor of an extraterrestrial divinity. That acquisition of power, once represented by territorial domination and control over large armies, is now represented by the amassing of dollar bills and stock options: an individual's monetary wealth is assumed to represent some measure of intrinsic worthiness. This faith in free market economics transforms the divine right of kings into the divine right of corporations. Consumer citizens are subject to an utterly ambivalent master, one who proffers an ethic which morphs humans into machine-like entities: efficiency, progress, and profitability are the primary measures of goodness.

Corporate colonialism has become entrenched in the American psyche and the global indoctrination continues to impose itself on self-sustaining communities. By way of the "discourse of economic development", the Neoliberal ethos (which promotes "the primacy of economic growth; the importance of free trade to stimulate growth; the unrestricted free market; individual choice; the reduction of government regulation; and the advocacy of an evolutionary model of development anchored in the Western experience and applicable to the entire world") is exported globally in order to develop a system of commerce which benefits an exclusive elite (Hardt & Negri 2000, 282; Steger 2002, 9). Global economic development does not have an aim

to establish a global egalitarian economy, but to formalize and ingrain hierarchical control; "so-called developed countries are defined by *their dominant position in the global system"* (Hardt & Negri 2000, 282). The American Dream is unsustainable and built upon the nightmares or somnambulism of the vast majority of people, worldwide. Four extra Earths would need to be mined, drilled, and fracked in order to accommodate the global export of American norms of conspicuous consumption (Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2010, 24). It is blatantly unjust for one-fourth of the human population to consume over three-fourths of worldwide energy (Hobson 2002, 97).

Consumption is no longer relegated strictly to the marketplace; it lies at the core of the modern zeitgeist and the contemporary social identity. Practices of objectification and exploitation are transferred beyond the act of exchange, normalized and made routine by way of structural impediments and sociological expectations (Halkier, Katz-Gerro, and Martens 2011, 4). Through the Neoliberal lens, we are consumers, not citizens; we are target markets, not communities; the commons is for consumption, not collective congregation. As William Hipwell has termed it, we live in the age of Industria: the normalized entirety of the global military-industrial-technological complex. The "physical cognitive infrastructure of industrial civilization has coalesced into another global super-organism, one that is parasitic of Gaia, and toxic to human societies" (Hipwell 2007, 305). It is primarily the consistently reinforced mentality which resorts to instrumental rationality that is harming the planet and lies at the core of global issues of environmental injustice done to humans and nonhumans.

Since its inception, the Neoliberal economic structure has catalyzed and justified patterns of injustice, inequity, and immense environmental devastation. It has also provided fertile ground for a new conception of the individual and self-governance, which Ulrich Beck refers to as "radicalized autonomy" or autarchy (Beck 2005, 125). Autarchy revolves around the libertarian belief structure that asserts that government and politics should be as sparse as possible, that the free market is rational and right, and tends to conflate consumer freedoms with political freedoms (Beck 2005, 125). While the market may portray itself as apolitical and indiscriminate, "economic power becomes transformed into political meta-power by way of a side-effect" as the Neoliberal ethos gradually makes its way into normalized governmental and social practice (Beck 2005, 117). The "autonomy of the political" is no longer valid, due to the corporatist economic interests which have infiltrated the political landscape; weakened governmental power makes it difficult for "social capital…to project and realize its collective interests" (Hardt & Negri 2000, 307). This paradigm has caused an erosion of social capital and replaced it with monetary capital, an undeniably deficient alternative for an inherently social species.

As the detrimental effects of this perpetual disregard for ecological limits becomes more widespread and self-evident, these norms of individualism and the omnipotent, morphing market are becoming significantly unsettling. Without a model of decommodified social capital for confronting this confounding collective dilemma, individuals are relegated to the role of consumer-citizen to express themselves: public opinion pronounced through profits. Instead of aiming for governmental or fiscal reform,, the consumer-citizen takes on the weight of the world: every choice made by the consumer is translated into an ethical statement. Because of the

biopolitical nature of the Neoliberal ethos, escape from consumption seems impractical; thus, a more environmentally friendly outlet for the inevitable consumptive behavior becomes essential to appease the guilt that first-world consumers may feel. It should be noted, though, that the market which sets the stage for this individualized rationalization is built upon an ethic of expansion, exploitation, and evolutionary progress. As such, the green consumer consents to, rather than protests against, the seditious structure and ecologically unsound constraints imposed by the emergent transnational political economy.

The Dark Side of the Enlightenment

The demand that "the Market" claims to serve is often nothing more than an individual's craving to belong—a longing which "the Market" is completely aware of and has no qualms about manipulating in order to serve its own ends. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that the value system which has been propagated since the dawn of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution has only served to corrupt human societies: a collective corruption which was the catalyst for and continues to justify the devaluation, destruction, and "disenchantment of the [natural] world" (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 1). Enlightenment ideas brought forth the glorification of the individual and instilled a deep faith in the infallibility of human reason, governed by objectivity and mathematical logic.

> "No metaphysics, except a delirious one, can pretend to define humanity as isolated and powerless. No ontology, except a transcendent one, can relegate humanity to individuality. No anthropology, except a pathological one, can define humanity as a negative power." (Hardt & Negri 2000, 388)

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Contrary to contemporary dogma, the liberation of the individual from traditional constraints of community has rendered each individual more and more powerless with each passing generation. This "pseudoindividuality" is quite evident when one recognizes the increasing reliance of people on corporate power for their subsistence (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 125). This corporate power structure judges individuals, not by their goodness or their intrinsic worth, but by their "market value"—their ability to acquiesce to and fully participate in their own domination by the "free" Market (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 175). Individuals are left to their own devices, without charity or companionship (apart from the nuclear family), to fend for themselves as they dedicate their lives to the seemingly obligatory social role of producer/consumer (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 95). As such, "the economic apparatus…creates a division between human beings" by implanting and demanding the performance of constantly reenacted norms that promote the conception of the social order as one of constant competition, requiring fearful vigilance and mistrust of others, rather than one of care and cooperation or apathy.

Horkheimer and Adorno are particularly adamant about the disingenuous nature of the "free" Market. While the values promoted by Enlightenment thinkers were inextricably linked to the demise of royal, monarchical authority in the West, it often goes unnoticed that the power vacuum left behind was quickly filled with a new breed of bourgeois royalty: one which continues the hereditary transfer of wealth and influence, upheld not by divine right but by the hoarding of personal effects and powerful positions. This power structure, which has justified the acquisition of common resources away from communities in order to make a profit off of selling

them back to individual consumers, has only become more entrenched as the world population expands and the global supply of healthy soil and clean water contracts. Even if someone is uneasy with this socially constructed reality, she/he is utterly powerless to counter it due to "the [impenetrable] tangled mass of cliques and institutions which ensures the indefinite continuation of the status quo…" (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 30)

The gifts of life—nourishment and subsistence—which were valorized and inscribed with spiritual value for most of human evolution—have been co-opted by corporate industry, monetized and molded according to the standardized expectations of the market. The perception of the physical world as a source of profit for human control has serious consequences for the health of Earth systems and for the continuance of human solidarity. Objective rationality demands that one prioritize mind over matter and reason over empathy, in order so that the whole natural world comes under the influence of logic; the manipulation and domination of plants, animals, ecosystems, and human communities are linked by this common thread of reigning rationality.

This mode of thought requires the formalization of knowledge, which Horkheimer and Adorno view as simply the vascular indoctrination of people into the mechanisms of the bourgeois power structure. "Everything—including the individual human being, not to mention the animal—becomes a repeatable process, a mere example of the conceptual models of the system." (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 65) The results of this theoretical interchangeability expose the absurdity of the Enlightenment ideal. The individual is simultaneously a powerful force of self-preservation and, at the same time, subject to the corporate power which sells life's

necessities in exchange for their lifelong servitude to employment in an occupation which views them as exchangeable employees. The individual must internalize the mental model's hierarchical dichotomies of mind over body and human over nature while navigating the cognitive dissonance which is inevitable in a world where humans are entirely dependent on Earth systems, where the human mind is itself a product of nature and resides within a corporeal body.

Performing Consumers and the Community of Consumption

Building upon Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the Enlightenment, Maurya Wickstrom introduces her concept of the performing consumer. Humans inherently crave a sense of belonging with others: an individual's sense of self-worth is inextricably linked to one's role and reputation within human communities. Industrialism has changed social existence in such a way that human individuals have lost this sense of belonging with others (Wickstrom 2006, 6). The embrace of atomization destabilizes traditionally recognized shared identities and undermines the cohesion of communities. Cultures are increasingly coming to resemble one another as they are enveloped by the arrangement of rational capitalism; traditional ties of loyalty, kinship, or nationality are becoming obsolete under the order of Neoliberal globalization (Wickstrom 2006, 40).

In the twentieth century, advertising experts devised an incredibly effective strategy to exploit this existential human void: by staging the market in such a way as to transplant traditional modes of communal identification with brand loyalty (Wickstrom 2006, 6).

Subjectivity in the commercial community is in a continually "indeterminate state" (Wickstrom 2006, 41). The market's primary virtue lies in its inherent ability to adapt to novel technologies and manufacture new "necessities". Superfluous commodities are circulated through a market of planned obsolescence; fulfillment is fleeting, because an inevitable flood of new products will transform the realm of discursively structured self-realization. If one's identity is constructed through the performance of consumer duties, and the maintenance of that performance is dependent on the acquisition of material goods that are repetitively replaced and rendered valueless, then psychological stability is a thing of the past. "The production of affect is…an alibi indispensable to power…an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory" (Wickstrom 2006, 41). The consumer addiction to affect feeds a cycle in which atomized individuals attempt to seize some sense of subjective meaning within an setting which promises security while simultaneously instigating instability. The sense of community and identity that is sought within the corporate brandscape is elusive and inconclusive.

Advertisements emphasize the ability of a commodity to alter and impart some sense of meaning to the performing consumer. Objects of consumption are presented in meticulously designed atmospheric contexts so as to convey either a sense of importance or of achieving a seemingly objective standard of significance. Commodities assure consumers an easing of their existential estrangement—reception into the community of consumption is determined by the extent of an individual's participation in the free market (Wickstrom 2006, 94). "The challenge is to perform effectively at the risk of being rendered invisible…according to the vested interests of American industry" (Wickstrom 2006, 111). The Neoliberal biopolitical organization is reliant

upon our collective consent to "feel life as that which the corporate world builds around us" (Wickstrom 2006, 155). Though it is promoted as a contemporary responsibility, the reverence and reception of the role of the consumer-citizen is, in reality, a choice with collectively corrupting costs.

CHAPTER THREE: DECIPHERING SUSTAINABILITY

Institutional Unsustainability

In less than three centuries—distracted by scientific innovation and technological conveniences—we have quietly, yet conspicuously, overstressed our planet and its resources. Emergent threats to the survival of many species and ecosystems (including our own) exist and continue to compound, most evidently due to modern culture's firm trajectory toward mechanization, overconsumption, unregulated capitalism, instrumentalism, and individualism. Even as the stability of our Home is compromised at an increasingly accelerated scale, those in economic and political position of power, along with many world citizens, are persuaded or compelled to maintain the modern drive for growth and experimentation. There is no lack of scientific proof for the fact that many human and non-human populations are vulnerable and that human industry and overconsumption are causing these risks; still, this desirous delusion of progress lives on (IPCC 2012).

Sustainability is an amorphous term, with variant interpretations according to each individual's context and existential sense of identity; it can only be understood similarly by those who share a similar philosophy or world view, which serves as a model for the way they perceive and care for themselves, different people, and other living organisms and systems. It is complicated to define, particularly given the fact that few people—especially in modern, post-industrial countries—have ever seen it in action. This lack of familiarity is compounded when we subscribe to the positivist confidence that knowledge can only be attained through physical perceptions and that what has happened in the past will continue into the future. The

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anthropocentric assurance in science and progress must keep in mind that their belief system is just one among many; moreover, this young faith (in the perspective of human history) is only just beginning to show evidence of its environmental, philosophical, and sociological side-effects.

If we carry on this way, what can we expect in the future? Is this hypothetical future desirable? How should value be allocated? How should wealth be defined? How is power attained? What is our responsibility to other humans and nonhumans? Is there another way? How can we get there? These questions will not yield any authoritative answer, but it is crucial that they are reflected upon so that basic presumptions about our worldviews are exposed so that they can be accepted or denied with some level of clarity. Unsustainability is pervasive; sustainability, though, can only be envisioned once one has acknowledged the multiple unmentioned motivations that now abound. We are confronted with various visions for the future and immense arenas for alterations; the continued flourishing of human and nonhuman communities will depend on the coherence and conviction underlying these visions and their proponent's fundamental philosophy.

Prospects for Progress

In their 1972 book <u>Limits to Growth</u>, Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, and Jorgen Randers—worried about the various ecological stresses that humans have wrought—presented a complex statistical model which projected eleven diverse potential future-worlds based upon divergent courses of hypothetical actions that could be initiated by individuals and institutions.

Although the model takes many, interdependent variables into account, the authors unambiguously assert that these predictions are presumably too optimistic. In this modeled world, there is

> "no war, no labor strikes, no corruption, no drug addiction, no crime, no terrorism. Its simulated population does its best to solve perceived problems, undistracted by struggles over political power or ethnic intolerance…" (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 2004, 150).

We consumer-citizens pale in comparison to the knowledgeable and active citizenry that the authors presuppose in making their predictions: a particularly prescient detail to be aware of, since the model finds "overshoot and collapse" to be the most likely outcome (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 2004, 174). Only two of the eleven projected futures end sustainably: one of those required humans drastically decreasing their ecological footprint in 1982 (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 2004, 248).

The only plan for a sustainable and livable future that the authors describe is quite challenging and its implementation seems implausible within the modern paradigm. According to the model, our survival depends upon the immediate implementation of strict pollution regulation, major reductions in resource consumption, and immense increases in resource efficiency (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 216 & 218). Additionally, people around the world would recognize the virtue of moderation and would be limited to two children per couple (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 242). Over-consumption would be conscientiously avoided and socially stigmatized (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 244). It should be noted that the authors modeled these behaviors from a starting point in 2002. In this sole sustainable hypothetical world, our reliance on nonrenewables would need to have started falling as of 2010:

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we are already far off-track for following the model's only potentially promising route of action (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 244).

When faced with the inertia that percolates through the political process, the insurmountable influence of transnational corporations, and the natural delays in feedback that result from diverse and disperse stresses upon the environment, the remaining nine model futures seem more probable (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 157). These models depict worlds where human industry continues to over-consume nonrenewable resources as if they were unlimited, industrial food production is expanded and maintained by increasing concentrations of chemical inputs, genetic modification, and rigorous irrigation (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 168). If we had twice as many nonrenewable resources than we currently have estimates of at our disposal and we drastically reduced the human population, we would still suffer from contaminated water, polluted air, and compromised soil, thus imperatively impairing the physical health of all living things that require air, water, and food in order to survive and thrive (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 172).

There are "*layers of limits*" (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 2004, 222): living systems are highly interdependent and complex; there is little we can be sure of after two and a half centuries of corrupting a global eco-system that took millennia to evolve. Human industry has introduced 75,000 manufactured, untested chemicals to the natural world; concentrations of methane and carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere are past any measurement over the past 160,000 years (Ponting 2007, 366; Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 119). Yet, industrial and post-industrial societies—bound by politically and economically expedient expectations—are

disquietingly reticent to enact the required regulations in terms of consumption, development, and pollution. Natural systems do not always act in accordance with scientific predictions of cause and effect. An ecosystem can be resilient against various stresses until it passes over an indeterminable threshold, at which point, the system can abruptly malfunction, unleashing the unintended consequences of determinedly disregarded risks (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 175). While these thresholds are fundamentally unpredictable, the socio-cultural goal of pursuing exponential economic growth certainly does not assist in the implementation of production and consumption patterns that instill habits of precaution or moderation (Meadows, Meadows, Randers 2004, 6).

Our economic expectations are not independent of the physical world on which those expectations rely. These systematically exploitative actions can have far-reaching repercussions, with consequences in distant places and at indiscriminate times, globally dealt out to all humans, non-humans, and ecosystems, terrestrial and aquatic. The consequences of today's modern manias today will be around centuries from now. While the future Meadows, Meadows, and Randers predict is not alluring or just for the generations that will call this planet Home after we are gone, the required reflection that is crucial for change is consistently and aggressively avoided, because the value system that sustainability demands completely deviates from the one that has moved modern humans since the Industrial Revolution. The foundational ideals which guide the reigning political and economic transnational power structure have maintained and made reasonable the demolition of the evolutionary legacy of the planet by replacing its intrinsic worth with money signs which hold no objective value.

Selling our Souls

The idea of valuing moderation, interdependence, or contentment seems like lofty idealism from the modern perspective: impractical ideals for the brutal "realism" of this dog-eat-dog world. To function within society, people are required to subscribe to a specific worldview (knowingly or not) that places immense faith in the virtues of free enterprise, egoism, anthropocentrism, acquisitiveness, specialization, and technological optimism. The combustion created by the combination of these cultural mores is demonstrated in deep-sea oil drilling, depleted fisheries, monoculture fields and forests, the mass extinction of multiple species, increasing levels of atmospheric pollution, mounting international debt crises, human overpopulation, excessive socioeconomic inequalities, and the growing population of the clinically anxious and depressed.

The Cold War was theatrically justified upon the conception that a nation must be willing to be martyred in allegiance to its respective creed: Capitalism or Communism, two political artificially juxtaposed economies which "are agreed on the materialistic basis of civilization; they disagree only on who shall control that basis…" (Lanz 2008, xix) Mirroring many religious wars, this dichotomy between two forms of political economy is a simplification of a complex web of production and consumption practices over the course of documented human history. For the majority of their existence, humans "obtained their subsistence by a combination of gathering foodstuffs and hunting animals…in small, mobile groups" (Ponting 2007, 17). Simplifications such as these serve the purpose of framing the context of what is possible: people are never even presented with a choice of steady-state, bioregionally or communally determined economics.

There is no capitalism without some symbol of representative value; "nothing escapes money" (Hardt & Negri 2000, 32). As John Searle points out,

> "A stroke of genius occurred when somebody figured out that we can increase the supply of money simply by issuing more certificates than we have gold…The next stroke of genius came when somebody figured out…we can forget about the gold and just have the certificates", otherwise known as fiat money. (Searle 1995, 43)

Our economic system is a collective faith—an "institutional fact" which allocates status and value to something objectively purposeless based on common consent (Searle 1995, 82). Monetary value is based in numbers, which can increase exponentially with no obstacle to growth. The material world on which we are dependant for life's necessities, however, is subject to limits and finitude (Schweickart 2009, 568). Because of this, the environmental side-effects of capitalism's ventures are often subject to the economists' special category, called "externalities", an ostensibly innocuous term. The problem lies in the blatant fact that polluted air and degraded soil cannot actually be compensated for in monetary terms: we cannot throw money into the air and expect to be redeemed for causing thousand-year record concentrations of trace gases (Meadows, Meadows, & Randers 2004, 119).

Herman Daly and John Cobb Jr. propose that the cause of the corruption of modern economics is that it is approached as an exact science, rather than as an historical and contextual way of maintaining social order within different traditions (Daly & Cobb 1994, 28). The "laws" of economics were written by humans, who do not have a reputation for perfection: these "laws" only pertain to "what can be formalized… [This] biases economics toward aspects of its subject matter that can be measured." (Daly & Cobb 1994, 29 & 31) Raw materials and untapped

resources are recognized to be of value only after they have been altered, by man or machine, into something more functional for the use of the consumer.

John Searle claims that "the creation of institutional facts is typically a matter of natural evolution, and there need be no explicit conscious imposition of function…" (1995, 125) The assimilation of fiat money into the American economy, which began when President Nixon "decoupled the dollar from the gold standard" in 1971, occurred naturally as younger generations grew up and came into maturity in a socio-economic context which never offered them any alternative (Hardt & Negri 2000, 266). This materialism based on symbolism habituates the perception of resources, animals, plants, ecosystems, and other people as exploitable means to the end of greed.

Homo economicus is stuck in a cycle of self-referentiality: money is conceived of as valuable because we use it and we use money because it we recognize it as representative of value (Searle 1995, 32). This dialectic of self-referentiality must not be reflected upon too closely, or else consumer-citizens may realize that they have severely misallocated value: exchanging the heritage of the planet for short-lived, wasteful, and ultimately worthless objects in order to cater to the unsustainable self-indulgences of a small population of a single species. One critical explanation for our lack of reflection upon this self-referential value system lies in the emphasis that our scholastic system places on intense study within a specialization, which leads to what Daly and Cobb call "disciplinolatry" (1994, 34). This occurs when one is an authority in one academic discipline, but an absolute amateur when it comes to other fields of study. This embedded convention of specialization is a consequence of the division of labor, a

norm promulgated to improve efficiencies within the industrial order. The educational system conditions students to become experts in a specialized subject, at the expense of interdisciplinary forms of knowledge which would enable areas for more holistic understandings and critical contemplations. Ecology is intimately affected by the economically motivated behavior of humans; however, ecological harm is often relegated no value in the accountant's office due to the fact that economists are seldom asked to interact with any other discipline that might conflict with its tenets. Many college graduates have never been asked to critically admit of and assess the core assumptions on which their specialties rely.

> "[T]he *organization* of knowledge in the university is such as to work against its contribution to the broad human need for understanding…The result is an 'information age but little comprehension of our real condition" (Daly & Cobb 1994, 125).

"Disciplinolatry" is manifest in the development and production of modern technology. Technological novelties and scientific experiments, such as cell phones, genetically modified food, sterile seeds, animal cloning, oil drilling, hydraulic fracking, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, are never subject to a vote prior to implementation due to an implicit confidence in the unrelenting progress of humanity. Objections to technocratic "progress" that are raised concerning possible side-effects and risks of such anthropocentric hubris are never asked or never answered. Those who do question the unconstrained development of novel technologies are reprimanded for having doubt as to the Market's power to provide humans with what they want and need. The Market's assumption and critical flaw is that demand should and will be met.

Progressing Toward a Loss of Control

John Ehrenfeld makes the claim that "commodified technological consumption as a ubiquitous cultural mode is fundamentally addictive" (2008, 42). The rejection of our "natural" Cartesian half has led to debilitating psychological ills and sociological shortcomings. Material overconsumption can be understood as overcompensation for what we lack, spiritually: it is the result of rejected yearnings for community, dependence, tradition, and reciprocity.

When technological optimists speak of the steady trajectory toward progress, a vital question should be reflected upon: What is it that we are progressing toward? Humans are able to execute mundane tasks at an exceedingly more rapid pace than ever before. We have the world at the tip of our fingers: however, we "know virtually nothing about how [our technologies] work. [Today's technologies] exchange the practical knowledge of the users for the detached knowledge of a disinterested set of experts" (Ehrenfeld 2008, 32). Most of us are only aware of the purely instrumental uses for technology, while concurrently congratulating ourselves for being so modern and progressive. Technology is not intrinsically bad. Our technologies reflect our anthropocentric, individualistic perspective, since we have designed and determined how to put to use the tools which we create. Our increasing stockpile of personal technologies, derived from raw materials, allows us to entertain a delusion of limitlessness in a personally modified microcosm.

Regardless of our progressive prowess, we are all still utterly dependent upon the ecological systems which deliver the air we inhale, the water we necessitate, and the soil we are sustained by. The self-service supercenter, with over-stocked shelves and hurried payment

procedures, make it effortless to disregard the origin and utility of our processed and packaged self-proclaimed products. Our advanced scientific knowledge, which has enabled the overproduction and pollution of the global commons, has not yet revealed a way for us to economically pollinate flowers to replace the bees that we have driven into extinction, or convert salt water to fresh to make up for our abuse and overuse of our limited water supply, or rid of nuclear waste, or produce a rich and resilient soil that can withstand the unsustainable demands we place upon it. Our planet is not a machine which can be programmed according to our manipulative means: there are some things that technology may not be able to solve—there are some planetary processes which are essentially enigmatic and to which we must inevitably adapt.

For all the safeguards we have set up to keep us secure from fundamentalist Islamic terrorism, we seem apathetic when it comes to the absolute negation of "security" that our technocratic social infrastructure perpetuates. Our abuse of the environment is a result of collective psycho-social deceptions which serve to recontextualize the definition of "freedom", "progress", "wealth" and "knowledge". Material overconsumption does not provide a lasting contentment: social ills run rampant regardless of Gross National Product. Our salient societal standards are in need of modification; anything less is simply unsustainable.

Identity and Community, Purpose and Power

Our species' closest relatives, Chimpanzees and Bonobos, are fundamentally social animals. Organisms, plants, and animals of all shapes, sizes, and species tend to grow, live and thrive in the context of cohesive communities. "The social character of human existence is

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primary. The classical *Homo economicus* model is a radical abstraction from social reality."
(Daly & Cobb 1994, 161) If our evolutionary success is based upon this, then why, after so many
years, have we abandoned this mode of living which has promoted our survival up to this point
in time? (Nowak 2006, 1563)

Martin Heidegger was of a communitarian ethos: he did not accept "the idea of an inner
self. Identity is not something inherent; it is an assessment made by others." (Ehrenfeld 2008,
115) Likewise, Rousseau wrote that "social man knows only how to live beyond himself in the
opinion of others, and it is, so to speak, from their judgment alone that he derives the sentiment
of his own existence." (Rousseau 1988, 56). People perform their role in the marketplace in order
to satisfy ingrained psychological needs: to secure and maintain a good reputation and to
demonstrate a commitment to belonging in the consumer community. This is demonstrated by
dialectically structured social norm of adapting to the advertising strategy of planned
obsolescence. We desperately want to be part of this community, yet the requirements of
belonging are always morphing, updating, and undergoing renovation—designed to be
unattainable. Meadows, Meadows, and Randers made an apt point when they wrote:

> "People don't need enormous cars; they need admiration and respect. They don't need a
> constant stream of new clothes; they need to feel that others consider them to be
> attractive; and they need excitement and variety and beauty. People don't need electronic
> entertainment; they need something interesting to occupy their minds and
> emotions…Trying to fill real but nonmaterial needs with material things is to set up an
> unquenchable appetite for false solutions to never-satisfied longings."(2004, 261)

For Heidegger, it is impossible to accurately and objectively conceive of reality; the
individual's identity is constructed through social interactions. Our communal context defines
"the world" that we are born into and accordingly, has a profound effect on the way we frame

and interpret the events that unfold before us (Ehrenfeld 2008, 117). It seems antithetical to develop a community upon the principle of egotistical individualism: the absurdity is revealed as atomistic individuals then substitute their inherent sociality with a system of sterile commerce in which each participant is a means to an end.

"There can be no effective national economy if a people cannot feed themselves and otherwise meet their essential needs….a national economy for community will be…relatively self-sufficient." (Daly & Cobb 1994, 173) The vast majority of Americans are utterly dependent on a minute and anonymous percentage of the population to provide life's daily necessities for nourishment (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 191). The heritage of agriculture and the customs of farming are not common knowledge anymore, as they were throughout most of human history. Rather, we have traded in the knowledge of our local land for the sake of convenience, breeding dependency on corporate-funded large-scale agriculture, which prioritizes efficiency and profitability rather than respect for the land or local communities (Guttal & Monsalve 2011, 71-72). The priorities of capitalism cannot be sustainably applied to the tradition of farming: the Earth is not designed to satisfy the demands of exponential growth: overproduction causes soil erosion and the pollution of dwindling water supplies from chemical run-off (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 193). The health and resilience of soil are dependent upon a farmer's caution and care for the land: there is a limit to how far the composition of soil can be stressed. Moreover, the transnational corporatization of agriculture has led to the mainstreaming of monoculture fields, which "create paradises for plant diseases and insects…" and the overproduction of high-yielding crops, limiting diversity in our dietary decisions (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999,

194). "Three-quarters of the world's food comes from only seven crops—wheat, rice, corn, potatoes, barley, cassava, and sorghum." (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 194) Americans consume a gratuitous amount of meat, a harmful habit which contributes to methane emissions, the justification for factory farming, human health issues, and a waste of grain and energy that could be used, instead, to contribute to sustainable social dietary norms (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 206). For all our talk of efficiency, the dominant industrial strategies for producing food are exceptionally wasteful, shortsighted, and even immoral when confronted with the millions of people around the world who suffer from poverty and malnourishment while we are plagued by the diseases of obesity and compulsive consumption.

Not long ago, the concept of privately owned land—soil, seeds, and resources—would have been thought of as inequitably prejudicial: the commons should be under the control of the community. Americans prioritize personal freedom and control, yet dependence seems to dictate our daily routines. There is an explanation for the corporate media's obsession with the political theatre of scandal, panic, and propaganda. Mirroring the deliberate Cold War dichotomy between Capitalism and Communism, the two sensationally juxtaposed political parties in America are not so dissimilar when it comes to the political values and economic interests that they represent, despite the shifting landscape of contrived conflict covered by the corporate news. The export of Neoliberal policies around the world is setting the stage for a social world where real power (control over the means of production) will be transferred to a group of transnational economic imperialists who "are controlled by no government" and cannot be easily identified, since they

have "no *place* of power—[power] is both everywhere and nowhere." (Daly & Cobb 1994, 229;

Hardt & Negri 2000, 190)

Regaining Sustainability: Stability, Self-Sufficiency, and Satisfaction

Theoretically, sustainability is simple to characterize. Diverging interpretations, derived

from an individual's contextual framework, are where confusion and stagnation arises when

determining how implement sustainability, practically. There are three general rules of

sustainability, in theory. First, for renewable resources, "the sustainable rate of use can be no

greater than the rate of regeneration ". Second, for nonrenewable resources, "the sustainable rate

of use can be no greater than the rate at which a renewable resource, used sustainably, can be

substituted for it." Lastly, for a pollutant, "the sustainable rate of emission can be no greater than

the rate at which that pollutant can be recycled, absorbed, or rendered harmless in its sink."

(Meadows, Meadows, & Randers 2004, 54) The varying interpretation of these rules will be as

diverse as the ideologies out of which they are framed. An adjustment which could be of use in

helping humans get beyond this ideological chasm is to "dethron[e]…the disciplinary

organization of knowledge" (Daly & Cobb 1994, 123). New concepts and proposed plans for

restoring sustainable systems should be encouraged to go beyond the limits of specializations, in

order to reach a set of critically assessed , coherent, and collaborative solutions.

The following section will detail the strategies of three divergent interpretative visions for

sustainability. The authors of these strategies are agreed on the essential facts: the global

ecosystem is at risk of malfunction, humans have brought about this increasingly hazardous

environment, and the current way of conducting business, politics, and industry could be much improved. However, due to their disparate and incommensurable value systems, the three strategies which follow deviate in their plans of action for addressing these problems. Natural Capitalism promotes the ingenious saving power of *big* business, Sustainability by Design favors the control and regulation of *big* government, and Distributism and Agrarianism suggest we could all benefit from the reemergence of all things *small.*

Natural Capitalism: Big Business Responsibility

At the end of the twentieth century, Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins released their text on Natural Capitalism: it was praised by powerful politicians and mainstream economists all over the first-world. Their strategy calls for "the birth of a new type of industrialism", that will concurrently juggle the priorities of and "promote economic efficiency, ecological conservation, and social equity." (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 2) The authors' central claim is that the primary reason for the ecological endangerment that we have caused is due, simply, to the fact that economists have failed to apply the principles of capitalism to the environment. According to their worldview, there are four types of capital: Human, Financial, Manufactured, and Natural. To fix our economic folly, we must stop defining Natural Capital as an "externality", because it is just as valuable a commodity as the other three (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 4). They admit that the growth of industry relies, ultimately, on ecological strength and success: "The environment is not a minor factor of production, but rather is an envelope…" (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1994, 9) The preserved prioritization of industrial,

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consumerist, and capitalist ideals of privatization, prosperity, and plenty is what makes this plan so attractive to those who have achieved prestige and economic security within the current post-industrial infrastructure. Notably, the term "sustainability" and any mention of decentralization or reduced consumption are seldom found within their detailed text.

The authors propose an exhaustive list of technological adaptations that could be employed to aid us in adapting our current overconsumptive lifestyles to incorporate Natural Capital. Take, for example, the authors' plan for alleviating the consequences of widespread automobility (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 22). Their suggested is not, as may be expected, to make investments in public transportation or promoting a safer way to walk, bike, or skate. Instead, they encourage the development and deployment of "hypercars"—cars that are made out of carbon fibers rather than steel, that use less oil more efficiently—a solution which satisfies both the automobile industry and consumer-citizens who have grown accustomed to the luxury of the private automobile (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 31, 38).

Similarly, they make the claim that it is not overconsumption and growth that are to blame for our problems, but the fact that they are our current industrial practices are far too wasteful. Businesses are encouraged to focus on the long-term, whole-system monetary benefits for optimization: paying the lowest price for each individual service or product in isolation does not always equate to the most efficient organization, overall (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 117). The Market revolves around satisfying consumer *demands*; the consumer demands a *service*—not waste, pollution, or excessive energy use—therefore, these can and should be eliminated. To the authors, reducing waste and recycling should come as common sense for any

business that wants to bring in more profits: a company can cut costs and reap the reputational benefits of reducing its ecological footprint at the same time.

The importance of broadening the variety of resources that we use for food, energy, and consumer products is made clear. The authors suggest substitutes for our overuse of paper—which has caused rampant deforestation--such as hemp, kenaf, and bamboo, and point to the fact that paper will eventually be replaced by electronics (neglecting the fact that the production of electronics also causes the exploitation of nonrenewable resources) (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 174,188). They advise that we should pursue new sources of energy and set new dietary norms: lowering meat intake, increasing our range of food choices, and encouraging the proliferation of local agriculture and backyard gardens (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins 1999, 200). Dozens of other proposals follow suit: from rainwater recycling and toilet bowls with separate compartments to energy-efficient household appliances, low-maintenance lawns, and indoor cities.

The motivating factor of Natural Capitalism is economic efficiency: saving money and decreasing costs. The value system that enables the functioning of capitalism is never considered to be a contributor to institutional unsustainability. David Schweickart claims that "Hawken and the Lovins'…have not confronted two fundamental questions: Does a healthy capitalism require a steady rate of growth? Can exponential growth go on forever...?" (2009, 577) Natural capitalists are motivated to include environmental factors within their cost-accounting by anthropocentric reasons, in order to conserve resources and prevent waste to enable the steady continuation of capitalism, a system which inherently lacks limits and requires growth. Any

strategy which takes this system as a given is guaranteed to be only a bandage for a broken bone, "because the core of capitalist reproduction and accumulation necessarily implies imperialist expansion" (Hardt & Negri 2000, 228). Most transnational corporations do not have a history which warrants them to lead the charge to a sustainable future. The strategy of Natural Capitalism promotes the power of big business, thus maintaining the commoditized control and communal disempowerment that such bigness entails.

Sustainability by Design: Big Government Regulation

John Ehrenfeld defines sustainability as "*the possibility that human and other life will flourish on the planet forever…reducing unsustainability, although critical, does not and will not create sustainability.*" (Ehrenfeld 2008, 6-7) The strategy of "Sustainability by Design" aims to avoid dire environmental consequences by helping humans to rediscover a more inclusive sense of identity, and to recognize their dependence on and responsibility to all humans and non-humans, present and future. To Ehrenfeld, sustainable development (from which Natural Capitalism is derived) is a "technological, technocratic program" that favors the continuation of "the modernistic frame of thinking and acting that has created the metaproblem of unsustainability." (2008, 20-21) This vision has a goal of promoting a less anthropocentric worldview that recognizes that "the human species is merely a single species among the millions that populate the Earth" (Ehrenfeld 2008, 56).

While an ethical epiphany is necessary to encourage a sincere sustainability, it is too risky to await a paradigm shift from ego- to eco-centrism. Government must step in with policy

and regulation that forces people to ask questions in order to make them conscious of and reflect upon the effects of mundane activities which are often taken for granted. Government institutions must *design* "a process in which...routine acts change from the old, ineffective patterns to new ones that produce the desired outcomes." (Ehrenfeld 2008, 60 & 73) Ehrenfeld finds it fruitless to have faith in the motivation of the masses: "collective willpower is not effective" (2008, 76). In Heideggerian fashion, he claims that change must be structural, bigger than the individual: it must alter the contextual social landscape, thus affecting the interpretive framework that individuals are conditioned to internalize (Ehrenfeld 2008, 89).

A big part of the strategy for "Sustainability by Design" rests on the institutionally mandated requirement that consumer goods and technologies communicate their environmental impact, explicitly, to their users: toilets have three levers to represent different flush volumes, automobiles would alert drivers of their daily carbon emissions, trashcans would ask users if they have separated recyclable materials (Ehrenfeld 2008, 154, 158). "Unthinking action has suddenly shown itself to you": users will be forced to confront and acknowledge their routinized overconsumptive behaviors (Ehrenfeld 2008, 158). Government policy would be made in the interest of flourishing, and public education would promote the development of critical and informed citizens (Ehrenfeld 2008, 75). The hope is that these behavioral conditioning strategies will inspire "a cultural upheaval." (Ehrenfeld 2008, 210) Sustainability by Design suggests that the persistent patronization by big government is necessary to regulate big business and to compel the passive populace to embrace less destructive norms. Perhaps social indoctrination is required after centuries of institutionally ingrained imprudent ideologies; however, if it is the

weakened ability of communities to take responsibility for the knowledge and maintenance of their regional ecological niche that has preserved the modern mental model's separation of culture and nature, then a better strategy may reside in devolution to a simpler life.

Distributism and Agrarianism: Small-Scale Solutions

Early in the twentieth century, many social movements arose in response to the surfacing side-effects that the industrial revolution and its accompanying economic ethos had caused: rampant disease, abusive work conditions, the institutionalization of wage labor, rising levels of inequality and debt, the overpopulation of cities and the consequential urban crime, but most crucially—the deterioration of localized self-determination and communal control. Distributism was one such movement that arose in England and Southern Agrarianism gained a following in the United States. Both movements made the normative claim that a self-sufficient rural lifestyle it led to a more profound spiritual fulfillment than that which was offered by the factory framework for the division of labor and the centralization of authority. While Distributists believed that this sense of contentment in community could only be realized for Catholics, Agrarians did not limit themselves as such, and promoted an inclusive, "religious humanism" (Lanz 2008, xxxiv).

Distributists and Agrarians, critics of the capitalist system and the concept of commoditized private property, believed that every family should inherit a permanent homestead, on which no mortgage payment or rent is due. Land is common heritage; so, in a nation that claims to be composed of free and equal citizens, each one of them should be

guaranteed a secured space on which to build a home, grow food and raise animals, bring up a family, and develop a community. In 1930, the Distributist League Manifesto made the claim that

> "A nation of peasants and craftsmen whose wealth is in their tools and skills and materials can laugh at employers, money merchants, and politicians. It is a nation free and fearless…a nation of employees cannot govern itself." (Lanz 2008, xlii)

One of primary principles of the Distributist philosophy is that "production should be as far as possible coterminous with the area of consumption." (Lanz 2008, 16) The centralization and capitalization of food production, which causes periodic panic and unrelenting unease about the safety and integrity of the food system, is an undeniably inefficient process and is indicative of an indolent and ignorant population. There is no need for widespread fear concerning untraceable food contamination: it is unnecessary for thousands of trucks to drive across the country every day to feed its consumer dependents, emitting pollution and using up oil along the way. The Distributists have a fundamental unease about the spread of the "service economy", which the strategy of Natural Capitalism seeks to keep intact:

> "The shift of the most basic economic functions…away from the household to the marketplace accounts for much of the economic growth of the last several decades. It is what is euphemistically called "the service economy". But its essence is consumerism…The only thing that can really counter the consumer culture would be a "producer culture." (Lanz 2008, 155-156)

The proponents of these movements believed that farming is a form of labor that integrates creativity, tradition, and leisure and provides individuals with a sense of accomplishment and pride which the monotonous routine of exchangeable employees could never promise to provide.

Big business and big government would have no role to play in the Distributists' ideal world. Distributists have confidence in the power of the people, not as atomized egotists, but as members of self-sustaining local communities of like-minded people.

Reflection and Responsibility to Combat Unsustainability

Institutionally unsustainable patterns of overconsumption are undeniable; there is broad scientific consent about what sustainability requires, but the strategies for attempting to meet those requirements differ according to each proponent's contextual perceptions. There are various visions for the future; having variety in our strategies for sustainability is not necessarily a hindrance, so long as they are open for critique from and collaboration with contradicting considerations.

If the flourishing of human and non-human life is considered to be a worthy aim, then alternatives are required for corporate, political, and social norms. The global economic system is in a condition of chaotic disorder: as individual and national debts pile up, the absurdity of this entire system exposes itself more evidently. The United States, which "makes up only 5 per cent of the world's population, accounts for over one quarter of global energy consumption (Ponting 2007, 292). Americans should feel obliged to refuse the existing infrastructure of exploitation in order to assume responsibility for societal short-sightedness and habitually unrestrained inclinations toward acquisitiveness. We should not continue to trade in that which has historically been the basis of value, for that which is valueless. Sustainability is not going to be brought about exclusively by way of an indoctrination of the masses or a complete reversion to

an ascetic existence—it will be attained only by questioning faulty premises, combining ideas, and defending essential values. To preserve this destructive social structure is to agree to our own extinction, and moreover, the endangerment of the earth and all living things.

CHAPTER FOUR: COMMODITIZING CONSCIOUSNESS

Can We Shop to a Better World?

As the ecological by-products of capitalist industrialism become undeniably conspicuous, consumer-citizens are no longer able to avoid addressing a difficult set of questions: Can we shop our way out of unsustainability? Can the detrimental side-effects of economic growth be mollified so that the culture of overconsumption can carry on? Can we confront our collective ontological crisis by way of monetary means? Similar to the strategies for sustainability, there is an array of answers to these questions, with each set of solutions derived out of the implicit assumptions held under divergent belief systems. The following section will outline three contrasting conceptual frameworks and their accompanying opinions on the prospects for consuming our way into consciousness: Thomas Friedman's "The Power of Green", Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas' "Mindful Consumption", and Gambrel and Cafaro's "Virtue of Simplicity".

The Power of Green

Thomas Friedman is a proponent of the ingenuity which he claims only Neoliberal capitalism and technological mastery can provide. He assumes that the exportation of the American Dream of ever-increasing consumption is an inevitable and constructive step the progress of humanity. All that is needed are a few simple adjustments to the machinery of materialistic modernity: it is absolutely unnecessary to "radically alter our lifestyles. We are who we are" (Friedman 2007, 2).

Friedman's hope is that is that "green" can be reframed in favor of the Neoliberal ethos, whereby the discourse of sustainability has the power to instigate a whole "new cornucopia of abundance" (Friedman 2007, 16). Under these assumptions, "green" or "sustainable" consumption is perceived as an optimistic opening for further corporate growth and centralized management in the pursuit of economic expediency. Friedman's concern for confronting environmental emergencies is rooted in anthropocentric concerns, alone: the exhaustion of nonrenewable resources, the contamination of the atmosphere, and the warming of the oceans are problems only insofar as they hinder or hurt the trajectory of human industry. The goal of "greening" the the global market is to secure and preserve the integrity of hegemonic institutional facts: reaching ecological equilibrium for its own sake is not a concern. Consumer-citizens are to embrace their acquisitive habits; the objectification and commoditization of the natural world is to be accommodated and accelerated, not restricted.

Mindful Consumption

The strategy of "Mindful Consumption" stages a balancing act between issues of social justice, environmental consciousness and economic growth—the "triple-bottom-line responsibility"—as the solution for combating institutional unsustainability (Sheth, Sethia, Srinivas 2011, 21).The triple-bottom-line sets up an accounting structure, whereby monetary gains do not automatically correspond to the "success" or good reputation of a company. The key to attaining this more inclusive corporate creed is to conceptually shift away from the prioritization of the desires of stockholders to a model which serves the wellbeing of all

stakeholders. Pursuing the satisfaction of stakeholders, rather than that of corporate board members, encourages an expansion of consciousness beyond the marketplace in order to give credence to and serve the non-monetary interests of all humans, nonhumans, and ecosystems (Sheth, Sethia, Srinivas 2011, 23). In most cases, drastically reducing overconsumption is crucial, and could, actually, prove to be profitable for business in the long term: Mindful Consumption "helps restore business profitability as it pulls back overconsumption to a level that is optimal for the consumer as well as for business" (Sheth, Sethia, Srinivas 2011, 31).

There is a caveat, however: Mindful Consumption cannot become an effective strategy for sustainability until a holistic ethic of care and moderation has become normalized within the corporate and consumer psyche. Advocates of this alternative model acknowledge that

> "even when green consumption practices come to be adopted more widely, a continuing rise in consumption would increase harm to the environment to a degree that net sustainability gains are negative" (Sheth, Sethia, Srinivas 2011, 26).

This emergent model seems too good to be true--a painless panacea for systematic unsustainability—but it is admittedly unworkable barring a radical reformation of the routine assumptions which currently dictate the economic, political, and social world. Mindful Consumption seeks to rectify exploitative consumptive habits by trying to generate an equitable dialog between belief systems which are fundamentally opposing. While this strategic initiative may hold promise in a hypothetical, blank-slate economy or a newly formed company, it is not easily applicable to the Neoliberal model which has steered corporate enterprise consistently for decades.

Simplicity

The framework for Gambrel and Cafaro's "Virtue of Simplicity" is built upon the elementary assumption that "we do not flourish in an ecological vacuum" (2010, 87). We have no inherent right to assert ownership or exert mastery over any of our planetary cohabitants or ecosystems. Modern standards for what constitutes "happiness" are guided by misguided morals and impractical aspirations. Since the dawning of Neoliberalism, Americans are working more hours than ever, and cases of anxiety and depression have increased, correspondingly (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 96). Continued consumption of luxuries and pharmaceutical pills are only temporary materialistic means to distract people from their warranted psychological angst.

The strategy of simplicity requires being able to distinguish between short- and long-term satisfaction; this entails the prioritization of a worldview which promotes diversity, prudence, and egalitarian norms of respect and reciprocity. A life of less sensational bombardment and material overconsumption holds potential for the enhancement of individual spirituality and communal cohesion. While critics may depict simplicity as a deprivation, Gambrel and Cafaro counter this framing with the argument that the present state of modern society is actually deficient, in that it prevents the full range of developmental possibilities for individual independence and collective identities. Models of mastery, which aim "to accommodate *more* consumption by *more* people with *less* environmental impact…are unlikely to succeed" (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 102). A shift to a steady-state economy and a restructuring of social norms of consumption are imperative for the continued survival and flourishing of all ecosystems and the species which depend on them (Gambrel & Cafaro 2010, 87, 105-106).

The strategies of simplicity and the "Power of Green" are built upon opposing ontological frameworks which tend to speak past one another. Friedman's "Power of Green" is based upon the assumption that "the only thing as powerful as Mother Nature is Father Greed" (Friedman 2007, 10). This crude rhetorical comparison illustrates the theoretical thinness which must be exposed in order to combat such a cancerous consciousness. "Mother Nature" is a terminological personification of plethora interdependent ecosystems which transfer energy throughout the world in order to sustain all forms of animal and plant life. The term "Father Greed", on the other hand, personifies a naïve man-made monetary system which assigns all things a measure of symbolic worthiness, according to anthropocentric assertions of value. The mythological meta-narratives of individualization and the relentless growth deserve to be dethroned. Mindful Consumption tries to forge a middle path between environmental justice and corporate profit, taking for granted the assumption that the current mode of production and commerce must be appeased. Gambrel and Cafaro claim, however, that "consuming less is not enough. We also need to consume *differently" (*2010, 91). Our physical and social environment affects our mindset and frames our interpretation of our material surroundings: the entire industry of overproduction and overconsumption is in need of an overhaul.

The Target Market for Green Consumption

The marketability of "green" consumption is dependent upon the autonomous agency of the consumer-citizen: it "is a lonely task, conducted in parallel, but not together, with other consumers" (Autio, Heiskanen, and Heinonan 2009, 49). Individuals must assume responsibility

for protecting themselves from the unintended environmental dangers that have been caused by the collective structure of global industrial capitalism, by exchanging money for products which promise to alleviate guilt or pacify the incessant fear of risk (Connolly & Prothero 2008, 134).

There is no certainty when it comes to interpreting "green" labels, because there is no overarching, objective standard for determining the sustainability of products or services. There are three broad categories for "green" labels: government-approved, for-profit third-party, and manufacturer-created (Pederson & Neergaard 2006, 17). All three employ the same vocabulary in making advertising their product's benign ecological effects, but it is highly unlikely that their interpretations of this eco-rhetoric are based upon the same criteria. The terms "sustainability" "natural", and "organic", for example, are ambiguous and are often applied to any marginal improvement from the status quo. The definitions of the words on the labels are determined by professionals from varying backgrounds who approach "green" advertising with limited information and biased agendas. "Organic" is used in reference to both product-oriented and process-oriented product characteristics: it is often unclear whether organic refers to a lack of genetically modified ingredients, food radiation and pesticides or to fair trade, animal welfare, or increased health value. (Klintman 2006, 432) The determination of this depends on the subjective assumptions and motivations of the institution that creates, supplies, and funds the label. The flood of calculated claims of ecological responsibility transfers the task of interpreting and analyzing the credibility of these competing labels to the individual consumer.

The structural constraints posed by the modern industrial infrastructure makes it impossible for anyone to be a "consistently green" consumer (Pederson & Neergaard 2006, 20).

Green consumption will continue to be an internalized struggle of negotiation within the limitations of the status quo until there is a fundamental change in the global political economy. The motivations for the majority of green consumers are diverse and are often altered by budgetary concerns, current events, and advertisements. Some consumers may buy a product because of an aesthetically appealing label, others may make their purchase decision based on concerns for their own personal or family's health, some may be focus their attention on label claims about alternative energy, fair trade, or recyclability. Uniformity across all genres of green consumption is a highly demanding and unlikely achievement: the continued rationalization of structurally sanctioned, unsustainable lifestyles continues to plague environmentally conscious or guilty individuals under this strategy.

The most successful and profitable market for environmentally concerned consumer self-regulation is in the food sector (Connolly & Prothero 2008, 124). The popularity of organic, locally, and pesticide or GM-free food is not surprising: it should not be shocking that a deeply ingrained "belief in the power of the individual self would not include an increasing concern for the self" (Connolly & Prothero 2008, 137). Made aware of the compounding environmental risk and ecological degradation, the consumer-citizen turns inward. This predisposition toward an activism of individual insulation is "a fatalistic, even nihilistic, expression of environmental consciousness": an act which Andrew Szasz has named "Inverted Quarantine" (Szasz 2007, 2).

Preserving Health with Wealth

In contrast to the traditional concept of quarantine—which involves keeping diseased individuals away from healthy environments—*inverted* quarantine is focused on preserving the health of individuals within toxic environments (Szasz 2007, 4). In a society such as ours, which exalts the market and the individual as consumer-citizen, it follows quite logically that people who feel "vulnerable or at risk…think *first* to do something, anything, individually, to take care of himself or herself" (Szasz 2007, 237). People fear the ever-increasing risks all around them—in the air, water, food and soil—and seek to insulate themselves from such hazards by purchasing their own individual protection. The market for organic food, bottled water, water filters, non-toxic and eco-friendly consumer goods and cleaning products has continually expanded by about twenty percent in sales each year since the early 1990s (Szasz 2007, 147).

Szasz sees this form of commodified self-protection as a "strange, new, mutant form of environmentalism", one that does not address the systematic root of all this individualized fear (Szasz 2007, 2). In Industria, "pollution is inscribed in our way of life" (Szasz 2007, 109). Every aspect of modern society upholds a system which thrives by terrorizing itself; "systematic threats require systematic solutions" (Szasz 2007, 3). Green consumer products continue to promote the ideals which have justified the contamination of the environment: individualism, overconsumption, capitalism, and corporate colonialism.

Szasz finds many faults with the logic of inverted quarantine in light of our environmental dilemma. For one, many of the products may not be as healthy or pure as their advertising may claim. There is no federal standard for organic food labels and there is barely

any regulation or testing required of bottled water (Szasz 2007, 177). Tests of bottled water, for instance, have concluded that "in terms of biological or chemical content it is not obviously superior to tap water." (Szasz 2007, 174)

Another fault of inverted quarantine is the fact that full protection is never possible. Even if someone bought every possible green consumer product, filtered all the water that they drank and bathed in, only ate organic food, and only wore organic fibers, he/she would still have to eventually step outside and breathe the polluted outdoor air. "Most consumers are not implementing the full program…the average user is currently getting at best only a modest increment of protection." (Szasz 2007, 173) Even more, the life of the fully insulated green consumer would be incredibly stressful and confining. "Inverted quarantine would have to become the organizing principle for the conduct of everyday life…Such perpetual vigilance borders on the clinical, on phobia and obsession" (Szasz 2007, 193).

Even if a full program of inverted quarantine protection was feasible, this protection would only be accessible to those who could afford to pay for it: "a class gradient is the inevitable corollary of a consumer orientation to risk" (Szasz 2007, 166). As levels of economic inequality continue to grow in the United States and around the world, only a small minority of wealthy individuals will be able to purchase protection from collective risks. This wealthy cohort will be purchasing these "green" products for their own health and benefit, not for the sake of the integrity of ecosystems or environmental justice. Szasz's apprehension about inverted quarantine springs from the fact that the illusion of protection which these consumer goods promise seem to pacify populations which could be mobilized to demand a transformation of the current system.

If the rich have the most political clout and are the most politically mobilized, and affluence buys them a false impression of safety, then they will be less inclined to prioritize environmental issues at the voting booth. Szasz calls this the "anesthesia effect" (Szasz 2007, 209). "Doing inverted quarantine changes people's *experience*. It alters their perception of the situation." (Szasz 2007, 195) Whereas our noxious planet should be a source for egalitarian activism, acts of inverted quarantine "[impede] the development of public sentiment that would support a broader reconsideration of the toxic mode of production in general." (Szasz 2007, 209)

The commoditized, isolated acts of Inverted Quarantine signify a collective concession to the continuation of the corporatist capitalist structure (Szasz 2007, 1). Participation in "green" consumption maintains the growth of the economic system which has enabled the escalation of institutional unsustainability. Many conglomerates that promote specialty brands with "green" labels simultaneously promote and publicize their un-green product brands. In fact, conglomerates such as Perrier/Nestle, Danone, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Con Agra, and ADM, have successfully colonized the market for green consumption (Szasz 2007, 130 & 148). The fact that such corporations have embraced the "green" movement serves as a perfect example for why inverted quarantine practices will never be enough to create a sustainable future. "Marketing itself is a practice based on differences, and the more differences that are given, the more marketing strategies can develop. Ever more hybrid and differentiated populations present a proliferating number of "target markets"…Every difference is an opportunity." (Hardt & Negri 2000, 152) To multinational corporations, the "green" consumer is nothing more than a target market. Horkheimer and Adorno wrote that distinctions between goods on the market

"do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated…consumers are divided up as statistical material…" (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 97)

Corporations are concerned with profit, not the planet. The increasing availability of "green" products in retail chains across the country is not a sign of corporate responsibility: it is a result of the fact that these goods have "advertising appeal" to a large enough segment of consumers (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 197). The goal of inverted quarantine is to keep people passive: to fool them into thinking they have solved a problem, when in fact the problem has only been cloaked with a "green" label. "Tinkering at the margins of production processes and purchasing behavior will not get society on an ecologically and socially sustainable path", because the ontological assumptions which undergird the materialist and overconsumptive mindset are left intact (Conca, Princen, and Maniates 2001, 2).

CHAPTER FIVE: SUSTAINABLE SUPERCENTERS?

Save Money. Live Better.

"As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve."
--Martin Heidegger (2008, 332)

Walmart is an exemplar for American norms of overconsumption. When prototypical products are lined up—one after the other—with no real meaning, apart from their instrumental purpose and price, they are representative of Heidegger's interpretation of "the standing-reserve": that which is thought of as a mere means to be controlled, manipulated, and utilized for anthropocentric ends. For Heidegger, there are two aspects to the human life-world: there is the *earth*--"which exists independent of our awareness"—and there is the *world*—which we come to recognize as "reality" by way of socially embedded hermeneutical frameworks (Peters & Lambier 2002, 106). The alignment between these two distinct understandings of the real is crucial for developing "the possibilities for authentic being" (Kinsella 2007, 196). He names our particular modern framework "enframing"; the ontological gestalt built upon the technologically driven social structure which interprets all life as part of a stockpile to be ordered and consumed, according to the priorities of profit and power (Peters & Lambier 2002, 108-109).

Big-box retail provides massive quantities of naturally derived consumer goods for the sole benefit of human individuals industries, and economies. Consumer-citizens are atmospherically conditioned to neglect the origin and essence of the packaged products which line the shelves, on call for immediate conspicuous consumption. Heidegger's worry is that our habitual "mastery of the world blocks the fullness of being in the world…Once adopted as a

universal approach to other beings, enframing proceeds to colonize the human world as well."

(Kinsella 2007, 204) The technological apparatus enframes humans as they come to be

understood as an endless supply of resources to be drawn upon and used up in the interest of

production and efficiency. This way of interpreting reality establishes a hazardous chasm

between the world *out there* and the world *in our minds*, which is ultimately destructive for the

continuation of both. Big-box retail—of which Walmart is a leader—has institutionalized the

instrumental enframing of both the natural world and human individuals, seeing instead

resources to be obtained and sold and consumers to be manipulated and marketed to.

The Richest Man in America

The worldview embraced by Walmart's founder and demi-god, Sam Walton, is critical to

understanding Walmart culture. Walton worked his way up in the retail business: he began as a

clerk at JC Penney, moved on to manage a number of Ben Franklin variety stores in the 1940s,

and ended up opening his first discount store, Walton's Five and Dime, with the help of his

brother, Bud, by the beginning of the 1960s. From there on, Walton "caught store fever"; by the

mid-seventies, Walmart was the industry leader in retail, with thirty-two stores and $31 million

in sales (Walton & Huey 1992, 52-53 & 153). Even still, Walton "couldn't see any logic to

stopping there": by 1980, he had opened 276 stores and was bringing in over $1.2 billion in sales

(Walton and Huey 1992, 153 & 250).

In 1985, Walton was named "the richest man in America" by *Forbes* magazine: a title

which he was not proud of wearing due to the fact that "all of a sudden everybody expected [his

family] to pay their way" (Walton and Huey 1992, 2). According to Walton, money was of little importance to him; the excitement that he experienced from his success in retail was derived from his competitive obsession with winning (Walton and Huey 1992, 9 & 260). He ascribes this to the fact that, as a teen, he "never played in a losing football game…It taught [him] to expect to win..." He goes on to elaborate that "[t]hinking like that often seems to turn into sort of a self-fulfilling prophesy." (Walton and Huey 1992, 18) What is fairly evident from Walton's worldview is that he enjoys the game of the power grab—the conquering mentality which the "free" market enables. He was an ardent advocate of free enterprise and believed that it offered the only route to improved quality of life (Walton and Huey 1992, 320). In accordance with the value system which undergirds the free market, Walton had a strong faith in individual determination and self-improvement and a strong disdain for obligatory charity. He rejected any sense of guilt for his massive wealth:

> "We have never been inclined to give any undeserving stranger a free ride…Nor do we believe that because we have money, we should be called upon to solve every personal problem that comes to our attention, every problem of the community, the state, or for that matter, the country." (Walton and Huey 1992, 299)

Walton understood the concept of the performing consumer very well, as he seemed to recognize that a big part of the success of his business was due to the consumer obsession with "being modern" and keeping "up-to-date" (Walton and Huey 1992, 225). He also seemed to have a firm grasp on the concept of planned obsolescence, since he constantly reiterates the notion that "constant change is a vital part of the Walmart culture itself" (Walton and Huey 1992, 216) and that "to succeed in this world, you have to change all the time" (Walton and Huey 1992, 324).

An interesting theme which recurs throughout Walton's autobiography is a constant tug-and-pull between his belief in the consumer's sovereignty and the consumer's gullibility. For instance, he claims that Walmart's success was the result of a "necessary and inevitable evolution in retailing…because the whole thing is driven by the customers, who are free to choose where to shop" (Walton and Huey 1992, 228). At the same time, however, he seems to have been obsessed with manipulating consumer demand and augmenting sales by placing some mundane product on a wooden pallet in the center of an aisle, in order to "call attention to" and "dramatize it" (Walton and Huey 1992, 73). Walton's "guiding principle" of retail synthesizes these conflicting tendencies: "the secret of successful retailing is to give your customers what they want. And really, if you think about it, from your point of view as a customer, you want everything…" (Walton and Huey 1992, 221) In other words, the customer is always right; however, a clever businessperson knows how to create a retail atmosphere which covertly predetermines the consumer's conception of what is right in the first place.

Concrete Castles for the Culture of Consumerism

Since Walton's death in 1992, Walmart has grown by over $240 billion in sales and has hired 1.2 million more "associates"—and this does not even touch the tens of millions of jobs that have been created by Walmart's expanding global supply chain (Fishman 2006, 48). In the mid-2000s, America reached a milestone achievement: retail employees outnumbered American factory workers for the first time (Fishman 2006, 108). The large majority of retailing jobs in the United States is due, singlehandedly, to the growth of Walmart. At the same time that U.S

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factory jobs were declining, Walmart's imports from China increased by 200 percent (Fishman 2006, 108).

Despite the fact that Walmart seems to have played a sizable role in the transformation of the United States from a producer- to a consumer-culture, American shoppers continue to patron the megalithic self-service retail chain (among other competitors). In fact, Walmart's 2,000 or so supercenters sell more groceries than any other business in America (and also the world) (Fishman 2006, 3). In addition to groceries, one can find over 120,000 different consumer products in a Walmart supercenter. The Walmart consumer "command[s] a cornucopia from every corner of the globe that wasn't available, not even to the richest and most powerful, one hundred years ago." (Fishman 2006, 16) When faced with the statistic that over 100,000,000 Americans go to a Walmart every seven days, and that 93 percent of Americans will shop there at least once each year, it is fair to say that Walmart has become the new "national commons" (Fishman 2006, 6).

Walmart's history has revolved around the corporate promotion of collective overconsumption and illusory luxuries to the American lower- and middle-class, and has store locations in more than half of the United States' counties (Neumark, Zhang, and Ciccarella 2007, 416). Natural resources are mined and molded in "undeveloped" countries for the use and disposal for the privileged populations of post-industrialism. Fifteen percent of U.S imports from China are resultant of Walmart purchases: one hundred percent of the clothes the company sells are constructed in third-world factories by poorly paid laborers (Basker 2007, 177 & 193). These

corporate practices continue the unjust modern habit of taking resources away from ecologically viable communities for the benefit of the economically voracious.

Walmart does not have a clean record when it comes to domestic labor, either. Walmart "associates" are responsible for the workload of 1.4 employees from other retail companies, but are compensated at the same wage-rate (Neumark, Zhang, and Ciccarella 2007, 428). It is fairly established that the imperial spread of Walmart stores has caused significant injury to locally situated, independently-owned retailers. "[T]he number of single store retailers in the United States declined by 55 percent while the number of chain stores nearly doubled" ever since the flagship Walmart store opened for business in 1963 (Basker 2007, 178). Over the years, Walmart's corporate lawyers have constantly been defending the company in an extensive array of cases: from the fight against the unionization of its 1.2 million American associates to a variety of lawsuits, ranging from issues of unhealthy working conditions, unjust labor practices, undocumented workers, widespread gender discrimination, the lack of sufficient wages and reasonably priced healthcare, and incompliance with state environmental regulations (Basker 2007, 187 & Humes 2011, 226). By and large, Walmart caters to a (growing) demographic of lower-income consumers, offering prices that are significantly discounted in comparison to its competitors (Basker 2007, 187-188). Truly, Walmart plays a large role in perpetuating Neoliberal policies, which justify trends toward amplified global and domestic economic inequities, while concurrently purchasing the consent of the disadvantaged masses of "developed" countries with cheap goods which promise the discardable fulfillment of fleeting desires.

Poor first-world consumer-citizens seem to find consolation in their place of relative, marginal advantage in the transnational marketplace. This is understandable when confronted with the fact that advertisements advance materialistic misinformation, planned obsolescence promotes the misallocation of existential priorities, and public education enforces the indoctrination of economic rationality. In the interpretive world of the consumer-citizen, identity is indicated by ownership. Most American consumers seek this elusive form of self-definition within the confines of the big-box supercenter, stocked full of overproduced, underpriced products for every target market. It is highly improbable that a transnational corporation of exploitative enterprise could remake itself into an ecologically and socially responsible global citizen; nevertheless, this is exactly what Walmart is in the process of planning and promoting.

Walmart Goes Green

Walmart has been combating against its deteriorating reputation since the beginning of the twenty-first century. During the six years which followed the millennium, Walmart stock dropped by thirty percent and its prime competition—Costco and Target—was closing in on the corporation's big-box dominance (Gunther 2006, 2). Walmart's incoming CEO, Lee Scott, knew full well that his position was at stake and that a company-wide rebranding was necessary. Sam Walton's son, Rob Walton, is a friend of Peter Seligmann, the CEO of Conservation International—an environmental think-tank that "works closely with corporations" like Starbucks, Intel, and BP (Gunther 2006, 3). During the summer of 2004, Scott arranged a brainstorming meeting with Walton and Seligmann. Following the meeting, he hired twelve

consultants from Conservation International and an associated firm, BluSkye—of which Walmart was the first client—to estimate the company's environmental footprint. By the following year, the team alerted corporate executives that there were millions of dollars in savings which could be achieved by addressing widespread inefficiencies. Notably, it was concluded that the "direct environmental footprint of [Walmart] stores…represented less than one-tenth of its overall impact": the remainder was caused by the thousands of Walmart suppliers around the globe (Humes 2011, 81).

If this defensive strategy for sustainability failed to supply a substantial return on investment, then it is fair to assume that Walmart executives would not be as eager to pursue it. During a company meeting in 2005, Scott proclaimed the ultimate justification to his associates and stockholders: "No waste, and we get paid instead" (Gunther 2006, 3). According to Walmart's former chief of merchandising, John Fleming, this push for a more eco-friendly image is mostly a defensive move to try and attract the next generation of Walmart shoppers—young people who are knowledgeable and "deeply concerned about the environment" (Humes 2011, 236). In a world where environmental issues are only going to grow more and more salient, it will become increasingly important for businesses to portray themselves as conscientious capitalists—paragons of corporate responsibility.

For seven years, Walmart has fervently funded and forged the formation of their newfound "sustainable" identity, promoting and single-handedly spawning the sales of CFL light bulbs, eco-friendly toilet paper, organic milk, sustainably-certified fish, fair-trade coffee, concentrated laundry detergent and the reduced use and increased recyclability of packaging.

The company's expansive scale enabled the doubling of global organic cotton production within a single year (Gunther 2006, 5-6). Denver, Colorado became the home for the prototype for their new eco-supercenters, which run on renewable energy and exhibit jewelry counters made from bamboo, sidewalks constructed out of recycled airplane runways, energy-efficient lighting (Gunther 2006, 6). Environmental activists charge Walmart with "collecting low-hanging fruit" and union leaders accuse the company of failing to pass along its newly acquired revenues to their minimum wage employees (Rosenbloom & Barbaro 2009, 5-6). Stacy Mitchell, of *Grist* magazine, argues that "big-box retailing is intrinsically unsustainable", and that "green" marketing initiatives, like Walmart's, primarily serve to distract attention away from systematic solutions (Humes 2011, 105). Regardless of these criticisms and even in the middle of the 2008 recession, Walmart "was one of only two companies in the Dow Jones industrial average whose share price rose" (Rosenbloom & Barbaro 2009, 2). Its reputational renovation and the reduction of the middle class population allowed the company to recover its leadership position in democratized consumption, "green" or not.

In 2009, incoming CEO, Michael Duke, took charge of the sustainability strategy for eliminating waste and augmenting profitability. He announced the launch of the "Sustainability Index", a universal rating system for estimating the "greenness" of Walmart products, and mailed a voluntary questionnaire of fifteen inquiries to more than 100,000 suppliers to review the efficiency of their production processes (Rosenbloom 2009, 3). In addition, Duke proclaimed the establishment of the "Sustainability Consortium": a committee of corporate and company executives who were given the responsibility to agree upon what criteria would determine the

qualifications for sustainability under the "Index" Notably, inclusion within the "Sustainability Consortium" decision-making process entails a $100,000 membership fee; therefore, the panel is limited to established and lucrative industry heavyweights, such as Monsanto, Tyson Foods, Clorox, and Cargill (Humes 2011, 194). Due to committee infighting, with each company struggling to maintain their own competitive advantage and special interests, the goal to have a set of criteria for The Index by 2014 has already been renegotiated. A more effective strategy would be for Walmart to delegate standards and demand accountability from their suppliers. However, this would certainly be difficult for Walmart to do, with only six full-time employees dedicated to issues of sustainability (Humes 2011, 94).

Mike Duke has proclaimed that Walmart's goal is to make consumption more "smart", but he never addresses the imperative to reduce the capitalistic overconsumptive ethos in order to pursue environmental equilibrium or norms of social equity (Rosenbloom 2009, 1). The intention of Walmart's "green" crusade is to lead the retail world in catering to a profitable, emergent target market: to "reflect the new consumer-citizen" who expresses political principles by way of their individual purchases (Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha 2010, 156).

CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH AND METHOD

Discerning Motives through Discourse

The "control over linguistic sense and meaning and the networks of communication becomes an ever more central issue for political struggle…All the elements of corruption and exploitation are imposed on us by the linguistic and communicative regimes of production: destroying them in words is as urgent as doing so in deeds."
--Michael Hardt & Anthony Negri (2000, 404)

The following research is conducted from a position which stresses the importance of institutional facts and the crucial role that language plays in situating, amplifying, and maintaining socially constructed norms. Real world events are framed and contextualized through discursive strategies, and selective interpretations of reality are proffered as full truth by way of institutionally governed rhetorical staging and repetition. The following section clarifies this claim. This is proceeded by an elaboration of Norman Fairclough's method of Critical Discourse Analysis, which draws a distinct and direct dialectic between the way a topic is framed and the way an uncritical audience interprets and acts in accordance with that frame. The concluding section provides an elucidation of how Fairclough's methods will be operationalized within the analysis of Walmart's sustainability campaign.

Language Invested by Ideology

Identities are often fluid and unstable: the cognitively constructed identity is an interminable idealized dialectical performance negotiated "between the self and social structure" (Ybema, et al. 2009, 300). These performances are often expressed through language: the discursive lexicon which is put into practice to promote a particular identity can unveil the fundamental framework which validates it. The familiar words promoted consistently by an

individual or an institution—identity talk—are usually simple and recurrent. Directorial discourses "facilitate socialization and enable institutional rules and routines to become part of an individual's habitus" (Ybema, et al. 2009, 302). The terminology that is conscientiously chosen not only serves the purpose of explaining events, but also "filter[ing] experienced realities" (Ybema, et al. 2009, 304). Vague vocabularies are imbued with biased values; these defining maps of discourse are templates for selective modes of interpreting the world.

The mainstreamed discourses of post-industrial consumerist societies inherently conform to and convey the meta-narratives of individual determination and free market capitalism. In their book, The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice, Michael Maniates and John Meyer perform a cultural discourse analysis focused on the rhetoric of sacrifice within the environmental debate in the United States. They assert that "[w]e act…within a set of social rules, norms, and relationships that, like a curtain, selectively obscure and reveal the paths before us…" (Maniates & Meyer 2010, 7). Driving personal automobiles, the habitual overconsumption of luxuries, and the suburban ideal are taken for granted as positive aspects of modern life by the mainstream. Framing is a "simplification of [a] complex and uncertain reality in order to make parts of reality more understandable and/or to push an agenda" (Klintman 2006, 429). Opponents of the environmental movement often frame their arguments by claiming that environmentalists want to force people to *sacrifice* their cars, their homes, their lifestyles—their very identities as modern consumer-citizens. It is the goal of Maniates and Meyer to expose the unseen sacrifices that this curtain of socially constructed reality makes seemingly inevitable: to uncover the "ubiquity of sacrifice" (Maniates & Meyer 2010, 20). When we work forty or more hours a week, we

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sacrifice leisure time; when we live in isolated units behind gates with only a few members of our nuclear family, we sacrifice a wider and more traditional sense of community; when we acquiesce to the system of automobility, we sacrifice our own physical health and the health of the atmosphere; when we accept the laws of the free market, we sacrifice the common heritage of the earth. The authors conclude that the environmental movement must re-frame the debate from one between sacrifice and no-sacrifice to one which asks "on behalf of what—or whom— do we sacrifice?" (Maniates & Meyer 2010, 20) Rather than assuming the inevitability of current industrial practices, this shift offers up to people a deliberative choice regarding what is truly valuable. Thus, it is in the way that an argument is framed and the rationalization that this framing is built upon that are important in understanding the rhetoric of *sacrifice*.

John Zaller wrote that " [p]erhaps the most fundamental question about…frames of reference, is whether the public is given any choice about them—whether, that is, it is permitted to choose between alternative visions of what the issue is." (Zaller 1992, 8) It was his belief that the opinions of the masses in modern society are largely manufactured by political and economic elites who decide what issues are worthy of exposure and what avenues of debate are off-limits (Zaller 1992, 313). Corporate marketing initiatives purposefully employ a specific terminology and frame their campaigns accordingly in order to portray a noble and marketable public identity. Walmart has spent considerable time and money investing in a new sustainable corporate identity. The language that is used in communicating this remodeled identity will be indicative of the company's principal interests and underlying ontological assumptions.

Methodological Reasoning of Critical Discourse Analysis

The following research will be heavily informed by Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which asserts that there is an undeniable dialectic between the language that people use and the way that people act (Fairclough 2006, 11). Discourses are often framed with reference to "background knowledge" or implicit ideological assumptions (Fairclough 2010, 31); in other words, "particular ways of talking are based upon particular 'ways of seeing'" (Fairclough 2010, 41). The "de-sacrilization" of texts is the primary objective in any critical discourse analysis: exposing the ontology between the lines and questioning whether specific representations of reality are "practically" adequate, feasible, and desirable in relationship to the physical world and actual events (Fairclough 2010, 18 & 280). CDA is based upon a realist social ontology: "the natural and social worlds differ in that the latter but not the former is dependent on human action for its existence—it is socially constructed." (Fairclough 2010, 74 & 355) There is a reality, but the way that the "real" is represented is determined by human agency.

Institutionalized social practices are exposed through discourse (ways of contextualizing) based upon genres (ways of acting) which are developed through specific styles (ways of being) (Fairclough 2006, 31): these combine to constitute an "order of discourse" (Fairclough 2010, 74). At their core, institutions are "speech communities" that communicate their expectations and values through professionally tailored language which provides its members with a "frame for action": promoting a particular gestalt while discouraging or neglecting others (Fairclough 2010, 40-41) The strategic intentions of institutions or organizations that consistently communicate the

perspective of a selective order of discourse and the possible resulting interpretations by the intended audience of that discourse are both crucial elements to pay attention to when analyzing "meaning-making" through texts (Fairclough 2010, 74). Social practices are not guided by discourse, alone, but limiting language can certainly filter the experiences of those who are exposed to it.

Fairclough proposes that discourse is only becoming more worthy of careful study with the dawning of the "knowledge-based" or "discourse-driven" economy, which is compelled by a "neo-liberal political project" which justifies a market that assigns value to employees/consumers in accordance with their proficiency in and internalization of specialized discourses (Fairclough 2010, 282). The Neoliberal order of discourse--or "new spirit of capitalism"—presents globalization as a form of economic colonialism under a guise of universalized, democratic freedom (Fairclough 2010, 256).

Manfred Steger points out that this strategic narrative, 'globalism', is the "dominant ideology of our time": it portrays a narrow interpretation of the actual event of globalization for the purpose of maintaining "legitimacy and cover for the consolidation and extension of asymmetries of power and wealth." (Steger 2002, x; Fairclough 2006, 41) Globalist discourse often treats the global marketplace as a positive, unstoppable, and inescapable economic phenomenon of ever-expanding scale and productivity, uncontrolled by anyone and benefitting everyone (Steger 2002, 47-73). In line with this, Angus Cameron and Ronen Palan wrote that the social "construction of poverty…as 'social exclusion'" is part of the globalist order of discourse which naturalizes expansion, incorporating members of the "anti-economy" into the global

market, armed with concerns for global poverty and hunger (Fairclough 2006, 87). Globalism is only one strategy for "project[ing] imaginaries" of globalization, and thus it can be counteracted with other discursive strategies or real events (Fairclough 2006, 34 & 43).

As people have become more aware of the social and environmental risks and the multitude of unintended consequences from a legacy of overconsumptive, institutional practices, those who hold power—those who have the most money—must seek to develop and promote a strategy which will effectively speak to and subdue this emergent eco-consciousness. Fairclough writes:

> "…as in any situation of major social change, various groups of people develop strategies to try to regulate, direct and control elements of these real processes, and if these strategies are successful they may inflect and partly redirect the trajectory of actual globalization." (Fairclough 2006, 28)

The discourse of sustainability appears to be a neo-liberal "appropriation/colonization" strategy to incorporate and recontextualize selective aspects of environmental discourse for the purposes of preserving hegemony—exercised by those who control the money, which controls the media, which is the primary means through which discourses are promoted (Fairclough 2010, 68 & 76). Of course, not all discourses are blindly accepted by all audiences, but some are, especially if they offer an appealing narrative to address whatever issue or anxiety is at hand.

Fairclough names this acceptance of a narrative "inculcation—the dialectical transformation of discourses into new ways of being, new identities, which includes new styles." (Fairclough 2010, 370) Thus, discourses which justify continued capital accumulation through language which portrays such a continuation as a benefit for the market and the environment ("sustainable consumption", "sustainable development", "sustainable growth") should not be

taken lightly, because such a "texturing" could have an effect on the way that people come to interpret reality and their role in it (Fairclough 2010, 360).

Mechanics of Method in the Analysis of Walmart's Sustainability Initiative

Walmart spends billions of dollars on marketing and promotions each year. The way in which sustainability is presented to their employees and customers is a direct result of the efforts of professional advertisers, who are trained in skillful manipulation of rhetoric and framing. The identity talk which becomes apparent through an analysis of these publications will be presented in the following research. These dominant discourses will expose Walmart's assumptions concerning individual agency and the culture of overconsumption. If one assumes that the Walmart culture will continue to play a large role, even in their sustainability campaign, then this analysis is likely to reveal an extensive demonstration of the discourses of globalism and inverted quarantine.

Walmart has a broad array of publications available which promote their sustainability campaign. On their corporate website, Walmartstores.com, one can access a film, "Sustainability 2.0" as well as a recorded live-stream of their "Global Sustainability Milestone Meetings" from October 14, 2010, March 17, 2011, and April 18, 2012. These videos are primarily targeted toward Walmart employees, stockholders and suppliers, and will serve as the basis for analyzing the company's intercompany eco-discourse.

In addition, Walmart has a blog called "The Green Room" at Walmartgreenroom.com, where inquiring minds can quickly access information regarding the company's most recent

sustainability accomplishments. Walmart.com also provides a link for green consumers to explore Walmart's tips for living sustainably. The identity talk and framing depicted through these publications will shed a light on Walmart's public-facing eco-discourse.

In order to perform a critical analysis of Walmart's eco-discourse, I will make a transcript for each of the preceding eco-discourse variables. The objective of this investigation is to identify patterns of frequently recurring key words or phrases which connote "culture-laden language" or identity talk and then, to dissect this language in order to ascertain the meta-narrative or order of discourse that such rhetorical framing relies upon (Quinn 2005, 49 & 72). The focus of this discursive analysis is on word and phrase repetition, as determined by frequency counts. Key words and identity talk found throughout these corporate and publicity discourses will be indicative of Walmart's priorities and assumptions when it comes to sustainability.

Inevitably, research such as this involves normative judgments; it is admittedly and necessarily lacking in the objectivity given precedence in many scholarly publications. However, as Maniates and Meyer put it, "[w]ithout moral insight, environmentalism loses its compass." (Maniates & Meyer 2010, 35) What is critical in cultural discourse analysis is that the researcher shows ample proof and provides explicit explanations for the conclusions that she/he comes to (Quinn 2005, 243). It also requires that the researcher be aware of and straightforward about her/his ontological assumptions. Furthermore, such studies are essentially emergent: while one can surmise at what one may find before undertaking a critical discourse analysis, there are some patterns or phrases which may only present themselves with careful attention to detail.

While it may already be fairly evident, the author's assumptions are as follows. I reject an ontology based on anthropocentrism, detachment and competition, and embrace, rather, an intersubjective ontology. I ascribe to the constructivist view that institutions and social groups play an integral role in the creation, reenactment, and deployment of social values and institutional facts. I am an epistemic realist that acknowledges the fact that interpretations are cognitively filtered through socially encouraged ontological assumptions: there are real events in a material world, but the explanations of those events are affected by the norms set by institutions. Interpretations of an event should be as interdisciplinary and critical as possible. Axiologically, I consider compassion, cooperation, stability, and diversity (biological, economic, and cultural) as inherently valuable attributes which are to be pursued and encouraged. Many of our social ills are rooted in the lack of institutional prioritization of these values. Inevitably, my critique of Walmart's sustainability publications will be developed based upon the preceding assumptions.

Initially, I will perform a word frequency count of the transcribed texts whereby a quantitative conclusion can be made regarding the prevalence or absence of the aforementioned themed terminologies. A series of tables containing these themes and their corresponding vocabularies can be found on pages 73-76. Rhetoric which stresses themes such as the agency of the individual consumer-citizen ("consumer", "customer", "shopper", "personal"), the nonnegotiable right to convenience and overconsumption ("easy", "simple", "convenient"), and the prioritization of global economic interests ("expand", "global", "progress", "efficient") will be juxtaposed with a frequency count of terms which communicate concerns of environmental or

social justice ("ecosystem", "equity", "pollution", "preserve", "limit", "biodiversity") or which convey alternative, eco-centric visions of sustainability ("interdependence", "public", "citizen", "prudence", "restraint", "self-sufficient", "steady-state"). It should be noted that the word count will include any term which contains the relevant word stem. In other words, the frequency count for the word stem, "sell", will include "sell" as well as "selling", "sells"; the frequency count for "global" will include "global" as well as "globally"; the frequency count for "simple" will include "simple", "simply", and "simplify".

The second stage of the research will be based on conclusions drawn from a careful and detailed study of the evident framing throughout the transcribed texts. Consistently recurrent phrases and metaphors will be documented and categorized according to theme. Each theme will be presented and analyzed in terms of its relevance to Walmart's sustainability campaign.

I expect the word frequency count of Walmart's eco-discourse to reveal consistent patterns of framing which promote themes of convenience, individualized agency, and Neoliberalism. I expect references to environmental and social justice to be prominent, but still outnumbered by the three former themes. In addition, I anticipate there to be a complete absence of any discourse promoting spirituality, moderation, or alternative political economies. I expect the thematic analysis to expose a globalist discursive proclivity. If one accepts Andrew Szasz's claim that acts of inverted quarantine lead to an "anesthesia effect", then Walmart's widespread embrace of green consumption could, feasibly, work against the structural changes which are necessary for the support of a livable, equitable, and sustainable future. If these hypotheses are found to be credible, this research will shed light on the prospects for the sustainability of green

overconsumption, which Walmart is leading the way in promoting, and for the continuation of the modern economistic zeitgeist into the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS AND RAMIFICATIONS

"The worlds we live in are not givens. They are not just there. Rather they are products of human endeavor. We have made them, and we remake them, but most importantly we keep them in existence…We talk our worlds into existence, and we maintain them in existence by our talk."
--John D. Groppe (1984, 165)

Main Findings

Walmart's sustainability discourse, in both corporate and publicity texts, emphasizes the frames of atomized agency and Neoliberalism. An elucidation of this claim will be presented in the following pages. Initially, the vague nature of the term "sustainability" and its frequent usage is noted. Second, a review of the most (and least) frequent key words is presented. I find a much greater recurrence of the series of words associated with the priorities and values of individualization and Neoliberalism; terms which express themes of alternative visions for sustainability are comparatively lacking. Third, the prevailing themes and narratives—exhibited by repetitive phrases, word linkages, and metaphors—are presented and reflected upon. The first prevailing narrative is that of Neoliberalism, which is conveyed by the rhetorical themes of progress and competition, expansion and development, and maximized utility. The second narrative is that of Inverted Quarantine, which is demonstrated by the themes of egotistical environmentalism, next-generation consumerism, and voluntarily purchased protection from environmental risks. This is followed by a brief concluding section, detailing a few of the many frames which are absent throughout Walmart's eco-discourse: inequity, steady-state economic principles, precaution, diversity, and subsidiarity, among others.

Strictly Frequencies

"Sustainability": Rate of Recurrence and Context

By and large, the results from the word frequency count of Walmart's eco-discourse confirm my expectations. A few notable numbers and conclusions are worth reflecting upon. First and perhaps unsurprisingly, the most frequently used term across the eco-discourses—both corporate and public—is "sustainability" or "sustainable", which was found 548 times.

> "If [a] worldview is healthy, that is if it is accepted as fact and lived out, repetition of key terms and even repetition itself might be unnecessary…The more unstable the worldview, the more pronounced the repetition must be." (Groppe 1984, 167-168)

To portray a multinational chain of big-box supercenters as "sustainable" is certainly easier in word than in deed. If frequency of use translated into substance and action, then it could be concluded that Walmart is more concerned with "sustainability" than with "progress", "development", "competition", "efficiency", and their "customers".

The amorphous meaning of the key word, "sustainability", is evident throughout Walmart's eco-discourse. At times, the term "sustainable" is used with no qualification; the phrase "*more* sustainable" (emphasis added) was found 38 times throughout the transcripts, with no mention of what "*more*" entails or whether it will bring about *sustainability* or simply reduce current patterns of egregious *unsustainability*. The remaining references to "sustainability" initiatives are varied: expanding purchases of fair trade bananas and sugar, CFL lightbulbs, organic cotton and responsibly sourced palm oil, the implementation of Sam's Club eco-labels and the Sustainability Index, and opening a few eco-stores and distribution centers.

Walmart's shifting interpretation of what constitutes "sustainability" is exemplified by its initiative, My Sustainability Plan (MSP), which is geared at energizing company "associates" and was presented at the Sustainability Milestone Meeting on March 17, 2011. An introductory video about MSP described the program as follows:

> "Imagine the possibilities if YOU made ONE small change to live better. Now what if two million people each made one small change to live better? That's the power and potential of MSP. So…what is MSP? MSP= My Sustainability Plan. It's a global initiative designed for and by associates—just like YOU! MSP helps you connect with sustainability on your terms."

At the end of the video, a disclaimer is displayed in small print:

> "Creating an MSP goal is entirely voluntary. No associates will, in any way benefit or be penalized for participation, non-participation, or success in an MSP activity."

Following the video, twelve Walmart associates are lined up on stage to announce their personal "sustainability" plans. The MSPs that follow range from losing weight, quitting smoking, exercising, and eating healthy to reducing stress, enjoying nature, reducing household waste, driving a solar car, attending college classes, managing money, volunteering, and spending quality time with family members. These personal goals and accomplishments, while admirable and worthy of praise, are not necessarily correlative with the actions that are absolutely essential to pave a way for a sustainable future.

Since early on in Walmart's sustainability initiative, the company has propounded their three sustainability goals:

> "To be supplied by 100% renewable energy, to create zero waste, and third, to sell products that sustain people and the environment."

By and large, these aspirations are lofty, if not vague. Of the three goals, only the commitment to creating zero waste has an anticipated timeframe for achievement, though it is a long way off:

2025. At its current rate of movement toward implementing 100% renewable energy,

accomplishing this goal will take about 300 years (Mitchell 2011). During the April 2012

Sustainability Milestone Meeting, CEO and President of Walmart, Mike Duke, remarked:

> "Some would say we haven't accomplished all of our goals. You know, I'd rather set a stretch goal, that really is one that's out there, that we've really got to work hard to achieve, rather than setting an easy goal that anybody could do. So, this really is about stretching and setting aggressive goals that we really don't always know the path to get there, but we're going to go after the goals and that's what we've been doing."

Recurring Key Words

Next, I wanted to determine what three terms were most frequently used (other than

"sustainability") in the overall transcript, the corporate-aimed transcript, and the publicity-geared

transcript. Tables 1-5 summarize these findings.

Table 1: Frequency Count for Terminology of Convenience

Theme	Term	Frequency within Corporate Eco-Discourse	Frequency within Publicity Eco-Discourse	Frequency throughout Overall Eco-Discourse
Convenience				
	Easy	7	8	15
	Convenient	2	2	4
	Simple	20	15	35
	Live Better	24	6	30

Table 2: Frequency Count for Terminology of Atomized Agency

Theme	Term	Frequency within Corporate Eco-Discourse	Frequency within Publicity Eco-Discourse	Frequency throughout Overall Eco-Discourse
Atomized Agency				
	Individual	18	7	25
	Customer	124	50	174
	Consumer	27	20	47
	Shopper	4	5	9
	Buyer	36	7	43
	Buy	38	31	69
	Personal	33	5	38

Theme	Term	Frequency within Corporate Eco-Discourse	Frequency within Publicity Eco-Discourse	Frequency throughout Overall Eco-Discourse
Neoliberal Ethos				
	Progress	39	10	49
	Develop	26	47	73
	Sales/Sell	78	33	111
	Cost/Price	103	52	155
	Corporate	13	3	16
	Market	55	25	80
	Shareholder	7	1	8
	Expand	7	19	26
	Global	58	39	97
	World	157	52	209
	Scale	21	20	41
	Supply Chain	62	21	63
	Productive	18	1	19
	Efficient	62	69	131
	Save Money	15	4	19
	Business	136	55	191
	Compete	8	3	11
	Win	35	3	38

Table 4: Frequency Count for Terminology of Environmental/Social Justice

Theme	Term	Frequency within Corporate Eco-Discourse	Frequency within Publicity Eco-Discourse	Frequency throughout Overall Eco-Discourse
Environmental/Social Justice Terminology				
	Depleted	3	0	3
	Population	13	7	20
	Endangered Species	1	5	6
	Conserve	6	15	21
	Footprint	21	7	28
	Poverty	5	2	7
	Hunger	4	11	15
	Deforestation	6	5	11
	Pollution	4	6	10
	Emissions	15	16	31
	Ecosystem	10	2	12
	Nature	6	1	7
	Wildlife	3	12	15
	Biodiversity	5	0	5
	Limit	3	6	9
	Preserve	3	8	11
	Renewable	6	45	51
	Local	44	85	129
	Organic	28	74	102

Theme	Term	Frequency within Corporate Eco-Discourse	Frequency within Publicity Eco-Discourse	Frequency throughout Overall Eco-Discourse
Unexpected Vocabulary				
	Citizen	1	1	2
	Legacy	1	0	1
	Interdependence	0	0	0
	Balance	4	0	4
	Community	29	15	44
	Compassion	0	0	0
	Cultivate	3	4	7
	Prudence	0	0	0
	Sacrifice	1	0	1
	Spiritual	1	0	1
	Flourish	1	0	1
	Complex	3	4	7
	Moderation	0	0	0
	Fulfillment	0	0	0
	Cooperate	1	0	1
	Intrinsic Value	0	0	0
	Restraint	0	0	0
	Public	7	5	12
	Self-Sufficient	0	0	0
	Land-use	1	0	1
	Sprawl	0	0	0
	Precaution	0	0	0
	Inequity	0	0	0
	Steady-state	0	0	0
	Autonomy	0	0	0
	Introspection	0	0	0

PUBLICITY FREQUENCIES

■	*NEOLIBERAL ETHOS*
■	*INDIVIDUALIZED AGENCY*
■	*ENVT/SOCIAL CONCERN*
■	*CONVENIENCE*
■	*ECO-CENTRIC*

31   29
307   456
125
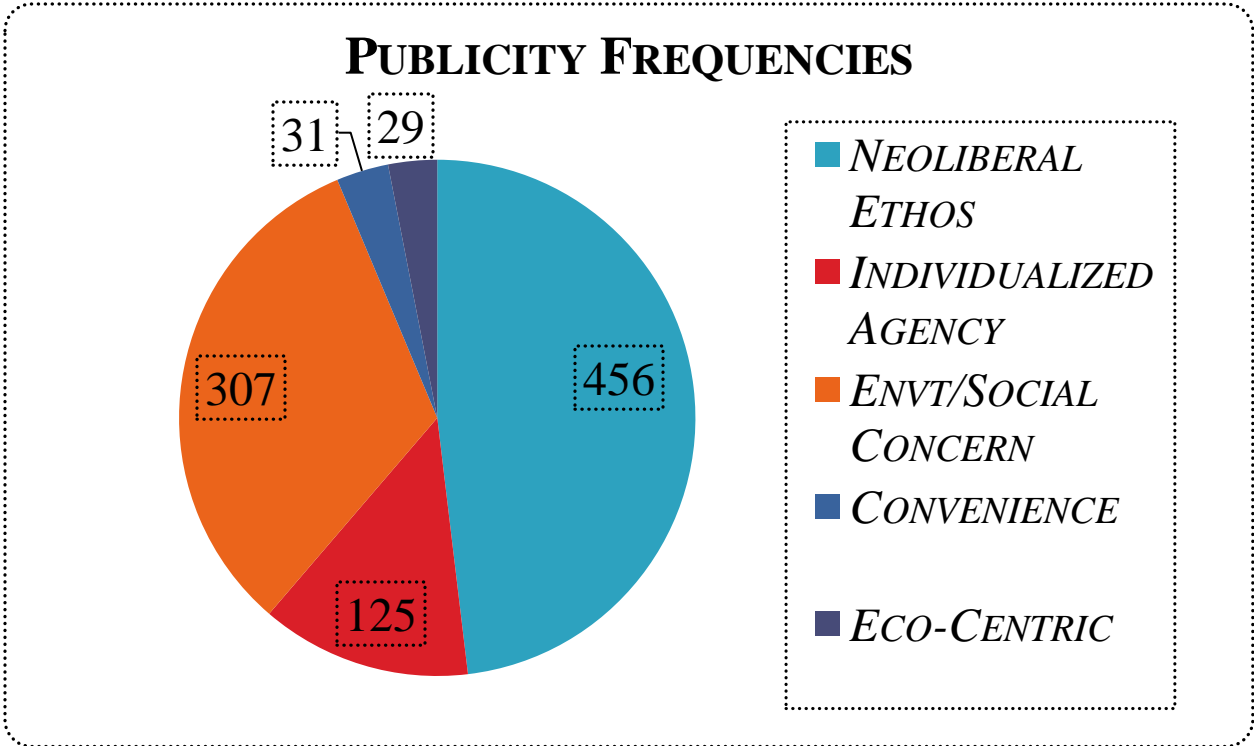
Figure 1:   Prevalence of Themes in Publicity Eco-Discourse

CORPORATE FREQUENCIES

■	*NEOLIBERAL ETHOS*
■	*INDIVIDUALIZED AGENCY*
■	*ENVT/SOCIAL CONCERN*
■	*CONVENIENCE*
■	*ECO-CENTRIC*

53   52
186
280
900

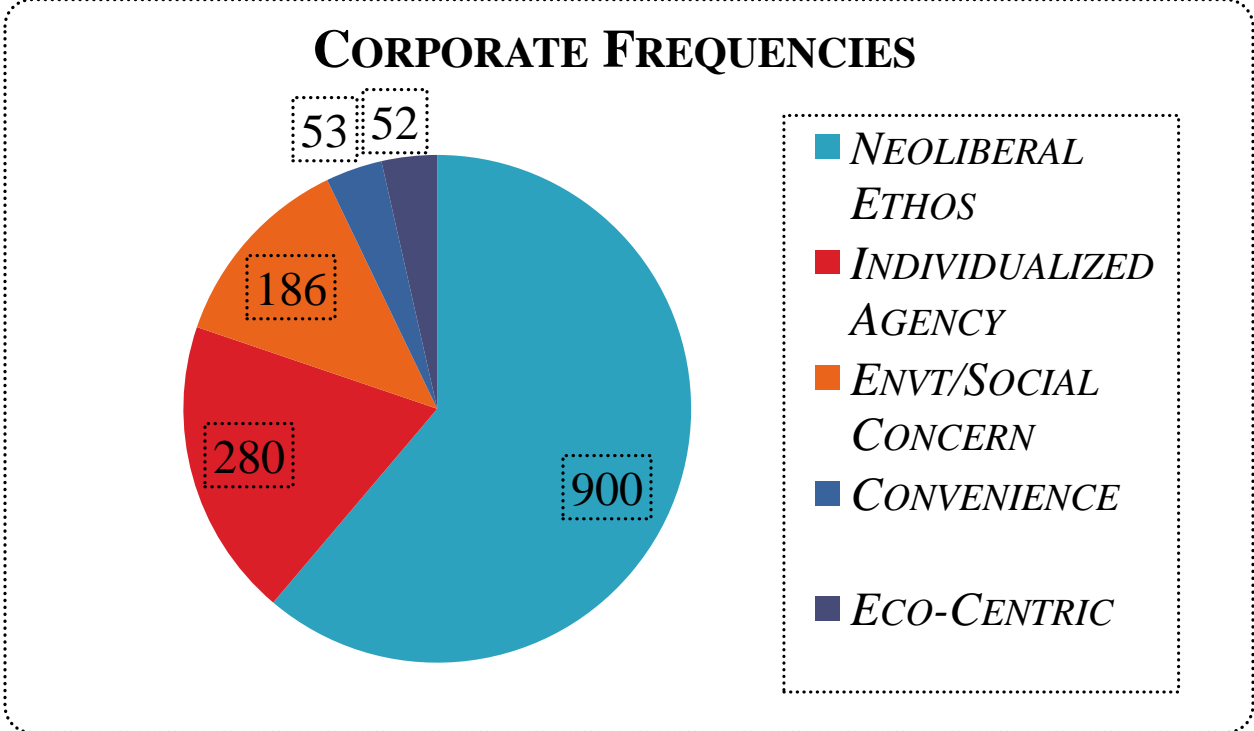**Figure 2:   Prevalence of Themes in Corporate Eco-Discourse**

Overall, when searching through the series of terms I selected to represent the discourses of convenience, atomized agency, Neoliberalism, environmental/social justice, and unexpected themes, the most repetitive words were "world" (209), "business" (191), and "customer" (174). In the transcript of the Sustainability Milestone Meetings and the Sustainability 2.0 DVD, which are primarily meant for an intercompany audience, "world" (157), "business" (136), and "customer" (124) were also the most prevalent key words. However, the transcript of the blog and website sustainability page, designed for a public audience, reveals that the three most frequent key words throughout their publicity texts are "local" (85), "organic" (74), and "efficient" (69). Obviously, the message that Walmart wants to stress about its "sustainable" image diverges between corporate and public audiences: the corporate texts represent a Neoliberal theme while the publicity texts portray a more environmentally conscious theme.

Interestingly, the fourth and fifth most frequent terms in the publicity discourse are "business" (55) and "customer" (50): mirroring the theme of the corporate text. On the other hand, the fourth and fifth most recurrent terms found in the corporate transcript are "cost"/"price" (103) and "sale"/"sell" (78), maintaining the focus on economic considerations. Of the environmental/social justice series, which were all found at least once throughout the corporate transcript, "local" and "organic" were the most repeated key words. However, their representation was outnumbered by "efficient", "supply chain", "global", and "market".

As illustrated by Figures 1 and 2, the themes of individualized agency, Neoliberalism, and environmental/social justice were all fairly well represented throughout the texts, while the unexpected terminology was fairly absent. The discourse of convenience, however, was not as

evident as expected; in fact, it was about as prevalent as the series of unexpected terms. In the corporate transcript, words aligned with the theme of Neoliberalism (900) are more than three times as frequent as those representative of individualized agency (280) and environmental/social justice (186), and almost seventeen times more prevalent than the discourse of convenience and the series of unexpected words. In the publicity transcript, words aligned with Neoliberalism (456) are the most recurrent, followed by words which connote a theme of environmental/social justice (307), individualized agency (125), convenience (31), and unexpected themes (29).

As is already evident, the series of terms which I deemed "unexpected discourse" did not completely live up to its name, though it did prove to be comparatively infrequent. Fourteen of the twenty-six words were completely absent, such as "inequity", "moderation", "sprawl", and "justice". Another seven of the twenty-six were only found one or two times; for example, "cooperate", "flourish", and "land-use". This leaves only five words, only two of which occur more than ten times throughout Walmart's cumulative eco-discourse: "community" (44) and "public" (12). The frequency of "community" is perhaps due to the flexibility of the term. For instance, in the transcript, it is applied in all of the following ways: "community development", "retail community", "farming community", "supply community", "the growing human community", "investor community", "community garden", and "community action". Likewise, the term "public" is used mostly in reference to the "public relations" or "public awareness" aspects of Walmart's sustainability campaign.

What is evident from a simple word frequency count is that, even throughout texts which are presumably focused on "sustainability", Walmart's framing leans overwhelmingly toward a Neoliberal ethos, with a strong emphasis on the atomized agency of the consumer. In the following section, a series of quotations which exemplify Walmart's sustainability discourse will be presented according to each narrative and its themes.
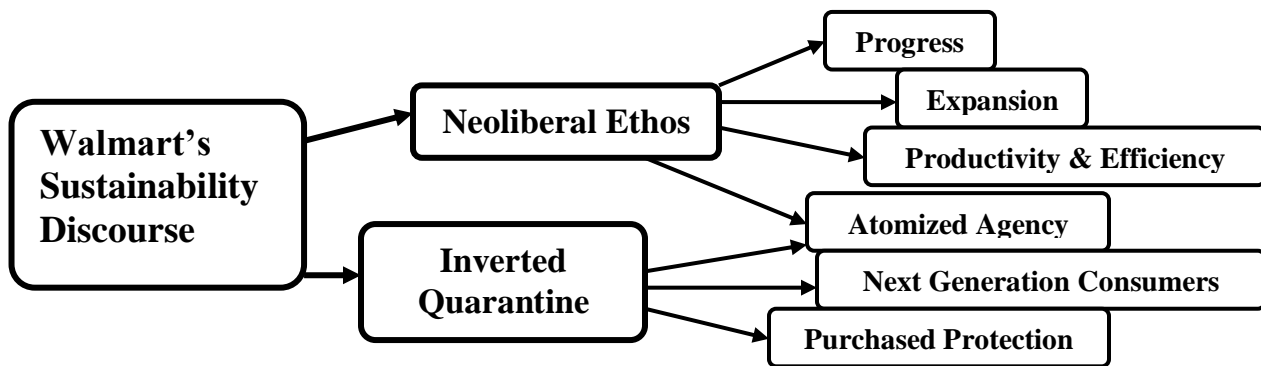

Figure 3: Walmart's Sustainability Discourse: Narratives & Themes

The Neoliberal Narrative

Before presenting and elaborating upon the distinctly Neoliberal framing of Walmart's sustainability campaign, it is worth repeating some of the core characteristics of the Neoliberal ethos: the sovereignty of the individual consumer-citizen, the prioritization of exchange value, the liberalization of markets from government regulations, and an unwavering certainty that economic growth, "third-world" development, and corporate competition will bring about positive progress for all people (Steger 2002, 9 & 12; Bakker & Gill 2003, 69). A critical review of the transcripts of Walmart's eco-discourse unveiled a consistent and unapologetic acquiescence to the norms and values of Neoliberalism—a political economy which is at the

center of current patterns of institutional unsustainability, as discussed in Chapter 3. Recurrent phrases, word linkages and metaphors that conveyed a specific aspect of the Neoliberal ethos were grouped together according to three themes: progress and competition, expansion and development, and efficiency and productivity. In the following sections, a series of quotations which exemplify each theme and sub-narrative will initially be presented and then followed by a brief critique.

Progress and Competition

Driving a Revolution; Leading a Corporate Armada

- "There's tremendous interest in our approach *to driving change* across our footprint, and how it's improving lives all across our supply chain."(C)
- "…a big honor to be able to use that position and that perspective to *drive change*."(C)
- "We are thrilled to work with such *progressive* partners that are committed to *driving change*...(C)
- "Walmart is, almost kind of like, *leading* a fleet—a huge armada of companies…"(C)
- "…*driving* an entire revolution of how products are manufactured."(C)
- "We have so many things we can do to *drive change*." (C)
- "…we think we've found an innovative way to *drive change*." (P)
- "…that's what we're here today is really to talk about the next degree of *acceleration* of our work on sustainability." (C)
- "…we talked about broadening and *accelerating*, we made it one of our pillars of growth…" (C)
- "…today, I want to ask you to *accelerate* that hard work…" (C)
- "…we kinda *hit the accelerator;* we put it into high gear during this meeting…"(C)
- "What I'd like to see us do it to *accelerate* that even more…And so, we hope to *accelerate* that."(C)
- "We will continue to *accelerate*."(C)
- "…we get back to work, and then *accelerate*. So, the celebration's over; it's time to *accelerate* now…"(C)
- "…broaden and *accelerate* our efforts." (C)
- "…we anticipate that our efforts are about to *accelerate*." (P)
- "…you used the word '*accelerate*' a number of times…the Club manager could not wait to tell me how he took your message of *accelerate* at your YBM and was breaking it down so that every member of his Club… was thinking about *accelerating*. He said, 'we do so many things well'; he said, 'why don't we do them well, faster and do them even more, so that everybody is *accelerating* …?" That's our message this morning…I think all of us should be focused on *accelerating*…"(C)

<u>Competitive Corporate Strategy: Winning the Future</u>

- "…this really is about being able to *compete in the marketplace in the future*." (C)
- "…sustainability as a critical part of our *strategic objectives* that the company is involved in."(C)
- "again, *it's right for our business*."(C)
- "…it's part of our *overall corporate strategy* and corporate objectives and the world."(C)
- "…sustainability is important and how it's tied to the *strategy*."(C)
- "…we take a *strategic approach* to sustainability."(C)
- "…look at sustainability and what it's taught us in a *strategic* sense"(C)
- "…sustainability is a core part of *our strategy*."(C)
- "I believe that sustainable products will be a *competitive advantage* in the future."(C)
- "Sustainable agriculture sits very well with how Walmart does its business."(C)
- "This is truly *a strategic initiative*, this morning."(C)
- "How will businesses *win in this future*? ...These are opportunities for small and large businesses to *prosper and grow*. Businesses can not only succeed in the future, they can lead the way. Some have already begun."(C)
- "I think that will give us a *competitive advantage…*"(C)
- "The cost of inaction is you're going to find yourself way behind. And at some point or another, you're going to lose a *competitive,* sort of, *edge and advantage* in the marketplace…"(C)
- "…make a long-term *strategic business choice* to enter into the organic marketplace…"(C)
- "The more we can do to save money in the supply chain, then the more we can do to give people a better value at the store. Also, if we can help, from the standpoint of providing a better Earth, providing a better place…that *dovetails exactly with our mission*, which is save money so people can live better."(C)
- "*Our competition…*are going to be pushing these opportunities and these savings, and we need to be leading that innovation."(C)
- "…the manufacturers and the people who are going to *win this next century of sustainability* challenges are going to be those who see the whole system and understand that they're part of a chain, and endeavor to optimize each element of the chain."(C)
- "And it has also been *good for our business*, which is something we speak about frequently because we want other companies to see that they can afford to be sustainable, too. In fact*, it really does help the bottom line*."(P)
- "…it makes *good business sense*."(C)

This series of quotations establishes the framing for a theme of progress and competition, conveyed by a sense of "driving" at a rapid pace toward achieving a strategic advantage. The central message of "acceleration" is the concept that moving forward is necessary and positive: stagnation, stability or stopping to reflect are simply not options offered up within the corporate paradigm of profit, progress, and constant change. This acceleration is geared at "winning the future": making sustainability into a strategic objective that will aid in maintaining a position of

market dominance ("leadership") over corporate competitors. Sustainability is viewed as a sensible business opportunity, whereby increased "optimization" delivers "prosperity" and "growth" to the company's bottom line.

Despite the frequent usage of the term "win" throughout the transcripts, the market is admittedly based on a never-ending vigilant struggle for something unachievable—absolute dominance: there are no winners; this competition is only ever "a game played between actual and potential losers" (Beck 2005, 117). This competitive vision is rooted in the Hobbesian narrative that "if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies" (Hobbes 1997, 69). For Hobbes, it is in the nature of humans to be at odds with one another—to compete, rather than cooperate. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, recent evidence suggests that "cooperation is the secret behind the open-endedness of the evolutionary process": that it is worthy of being deemed the "third fundamental principle of evolution beside mutation and natural selection" (Nowak 2006, 1563). If this is so, then building a groundwork for a sustainable vision, which should aim to work with ecological systems rather than against them, should not be built upon a metanarrative of perpetual war and fear (Hobbes 1997, 70). This is all to say that Walmart is utilizing a discourse of high-stakes, hurried competition as a frame to convey the company's motivations for going green. It is perhaps worth noting that the majority of these references are found throughout the corporate texts: this narrative of progress was meant to be stressed to the audience which primarily included associates, managers, corporate executives and stockholders from around the "Walmart world".

Expansion and Development

<u>Scale as a Friend</u>

- "…*scale*—being a big company—can really work for good…using *scale* and expertise and a lot of the things that Walmart has to bear—to really make sustainability and the world a better place…"(C)
- "…some of these ideas feel small when they start, but when you apply them across the company at our *scale*, they're huge…"(C)
- "…*scale* helps here…*scale* is our friend in this conversation…"(C)
- "…we could actually make size and *scale* work for us in a dramatic way…the real strength we have is in our business model…our strength—as I mentioned—is in our business model."(C)
- "…we can make a huge difference in the world. You know a company of our *size and our scale* and the number of people that we touch…"(C)
- "…our size and *scale* have been big tools for change…"(C)
- "Because of who we are, *the size* of Walmart and Sam's, we think that we can help facilitate change in the industry."(C)
- "…we are committed to using our *size and scale* to address pressing societal needs."(P)
- "We can use our size and *scale* to lead change on a global scale."(P)
- "That's where we are getting creative and using our size and *scale* – and partnerships with suppliers – to drive down prices."(P)

<u>Emerging Markets</u>

- "…how important is sustainability as we move into *new markets*? This past year, you know, you moved into South Africa and other sub-Saharan…we have a lot more flags in the auditorium now than we did a few years ago. And, this is because of the *new markets* that you go into. So, tell us about *growth*, international, and what role does sustainability play in that?"(C)
- "it's important in *emerging markets* and *high-growth markets*"(C)
- "In some countries, in the *emerging markets*, that will mean more inputs—in order to make them more efficient…"(C)
- "In the *emerging markets*, we expect this to help ease the income of the small and medium farmers."(C)
- "…*emerging markets* today, we are going to announce a goal to sell $1 billion in food that we source from small and medium farmers by the end of 2015."(C)
- "…reduce food waste in our own stores and clubs in the *emerging markets* by fifteen percent…"(C)
- "…we have pledged to buy $1 billion in produce sourced from one million small and medium-sized farmers in *emerging markets*…"(P)

The Neoliberal narrative of growth is conveyed, primarily, by two themes. First, scale is

argued to be a positive asset—"a tool for change"—in leading businesses toward *more*

sustainable practices. Walmart has one of the largest-scale supply chains in the world, and by

way of "the Walmart effect", can "facilitate change" in an industry via its policies and practices

(Fishman 2006). While it may be true that Walmart's size and scale could work to make certain wasteful or inefficient practices *more* sustainable (and profitable), a *reformed* industry may not be enough.

An opposing argument could be made that scale will work against sustainable initiatives, due to the globally disperse, fragmented and compartmentalized nature of Walmart's supply chain. Though accountability and transparency may be fairly simple to achieve when it comes to measuring economic profits and losses from stores around the world, the varied, mundane habits of Walmart's suppliers and those suppliers' suppliers, etc, are much more difficult to maintain authority over. In addition, it is unlikely that a company which has reaped so much success by integrating social and environmental exploitation across their supply chain will be able to provide the needed authority and credibility to motivate a shift into a sustainable paradigm. Furthermore, since scale is to blame for the escalation of many environmental problems, perhaps it is not the best of all possible options to aid in achieving practices which are more in line with ecological limits. There is not much that Walmart's scale can achieve that could not be done by smaller, regional levels of organization: market-based or political.

The second theme which constitutes the narrative of growth is that of expansion into "emerging" or "new" markets. The word "emerging" conveys an image of a nation or territory spontaneously blooming into a worthy economic actor in the global marketplace. This inclusion in the worldwide system of trade and monetization is implicitly assumed to be a positive step forward, according to the "evolutionary model of development anchored in the Western experience and applicable to the entire world" (Steger 2002, 9). The truth of the matter is that

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"emerging markets" more often resemble "submerging markets" as they suffer exploitation from the mechanism of unequal exchange (Kohler & Tausch 2002, xviii). Countries at the center have an advantage to succeeding in global economic competition, because they delegate the rules of the game, inequitably. Unequal exchange occurs when countries at the center trade monetary value for the *real* wealth (natural capital) of a country on the periphery: an "emerging" market (Kohler & Tausch 2002, 52). While this globalist tendency to expand and exploit is often portrayed as a net-positive for "underdeveloped" economies, the fact is that most peripheral countries have actually been going through a recession since 1965, while a few countries at the center of global economic policies have benefitted (Kohler & Tausch 2002, 84). The "absolute and relative magnitude of unequal exchange has increased significantly within the last thirty years, taking from the poor and giving it to" the countries who are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Kohler & Tausch 2002, 84).

Since 2005,the same year that Lee Scott announced the company's sustainability initiative, Walmart has opened over 3,000 stores outside of the United States (Mitchell 2011). The need to grow and expand is still a critical part of Walmart's corporate strategy, even as it is cloaked with a coopted eco-discourse. The Neoliberal obsession with infinite economic growth is at the root of social and environmental exploitation and the misappropriation of value to a monetary construct which recognizes no limits. This territorial expansion, which breeds dependency on corporate industrialists for daily sustenance and survival, will not help to instill a more responsible, ecologically conscious global citizenry, but will aid in the preservation of the current globalist power structure based on privatization, stratification, servitude and

commodification. There is evident cognitive dissonance between Walmart's sustainable goals

and its continued imperial aspirations and actions.

Productivity and Efficiency: Maximized Utility

Triple Bottom Line: Everybody Wins!

- "…this is *right for our business and it's the right thing to do*. It's not just one or the other; clearly, this is the right thing to do. But, it's also good for our business…"(C)
- "…one thing I've always liked is the term 'win-win'…And I love the term, 'win-win': you win, I win..get us on the same page. When I came to Walmart, I learned a new term: 'win-win-win', where…where the customer wins, the associate wins, and the shareholders win. What I've learned in sustainability is…there's a *quadruple win: the customer wins, the associate wins, the shareholder wins, and the environment wins*…Let's have a quadruple win this year."(C)
- "That's a real *win-win* when we get to raise the quality, lower price, as the result of saving money through sustainability."(C)
- "…there's *a definite linkage* here between doing what's right for the business and sustainability."(C)
- "…do something good for your *business* and do something good for the *community* and the *environment*."(C)
- "Walmart can actually tackle both: the global leverage and being local at the same time. This will also make our business stronger. It's like all the areas of *sustainability: it's the right thing to do, but it's also right for our business*."(C)
- "…that *makes everybody happy*, because from our customers, they get lower prices from that, to our shareholders, because we get a better return, and to our communities, because there's not a lot of waste from our stores going into landfills."(C)
- "I believe that everyday *low price and sustainability can work together*."(C)
- "…the right thing to do, and it's right for our customers, which means it's right for our business."(C)
- "…sustainability can make you a stronger, and does make you a stronger business; that *there isn't any conflict* between being a sustainable business and an EDLC, EDLP business."(C)
- "We are talking about production, and at the same time *economic returns*, but having that *in harmony with nature, communities*, and protecting and preserving our natural resource base."(C)
- "…sustainable agriculture creates *a lot of winners*. At Walmart, we serve a lot of stakeholders. We serve customers and associates, we serve shareholders, we serve communities, we serve society at large. And, sustainable ag. makes every one of those winners."(C)
- "Our program is *a win for consumers* who get fresh, safe, delicious, and affordable produce. It's a win for Walmart, as it reduces costs, improves freshness, and reduces waste. And for farmers and rural communities, it means higher income and greater financial security. And, it's *a win for the environment*…"(C)
- "…this we're talking about today, *it's right for our world, but it's right for our customers, and it's right for our business*."(C)
- "…it appears to me like this is a *win-win*, financially. The supplier can win, we can win, the customer can win: we're all just better off."(C)
- "I think for a long time there was a sense, and certainly an argument was made, is that business, the economy, job creation, and the environment were in conflict: that you had to make a choice. And the issues

were often postured that way on purpose…that's just a false choice. The fact is: much, *much progress can be made without that choice.*"(C)

- "…better *health, more profits, and longer sustainability* for the planet."(C)
- "The basic take-away from the SEEP program is it can only make you *more profitable*, and that's it. And, you get an *environmental benefit* at the same time."(C)
- "Efficient water use can have major *environmental, public health, and economic benefits*"(P)
- "At Walmart, we know that being an efficient and profitable business and being a good steward of the environment are *goals that can work together*… We know that business can be stronger while also being more environmentally sustainable…"(P)
- "It was such a powerful experience to sit side by side and analyze the produce sourcing business models in each of our markets and explore how *economic, social and environmental sustainability attributes can be integrated* into them."(P)
- "We believe sustainability is not just *good for the environment,* it is also *good for the bottom line.* You really can be a successful business and address pressing social issues at the same time."(P)
- "The project was *a big win* for the environment, Walmart and The Wine Group."(P)
- "It's the right thing to do for the environment and also for our business."(P)

Economical Ecologism: Keeping the Green in Your Wallet

- "…sustainability *doesn't have to cost more*."(C)
- "…sustainability is good for our business. Sustainable agriculture, also, *doesn't have to cost more*, *doesn't really have to be inefficient*."(C)
- "…whenever we do *save money* in packaging or reduce fuel costs, energy, it's good for our business."(C)
- "…it makes *economic sense* to do this. Not just the right thing to do, not just the good thing to do, but it's…it makes *economic sense*."(C)
- "…isn't it great that you can do something that's really good and it really fits in well with our business model, too, at the same time. Because doing all the work that we're doing to *save money, eliminate waste*, it's good for our customers and it's good for our business…"(C)
- "…this improves fuel economy which prevents pollution and *saves you money*!"(P)
- "…*you'll save money* and promote reuse."(P)
- "While all of these ideas are great for the environment, conservation is also *good for your budget*…Small steps like these add up to less waste and *can save your family money*."(P)
- "The good news is that being greener every day doesn't take a lot of time or effort. And even better, that little bit of effort can *save you money*."(P)
- "Bringing lunch rather than buying takeout at work will also *save your family money*… cut down on the amount of waste created by disposable containers (and to *save money* over time)… buying in bulk is usually a *more economical* choice…This reduces plastic bottle waste and may *save you money* in the long run."(P)
- "The good news is that there is a lot you can do to *save energy and money* at home and in your car."(P)
- "Energy-efficient improvements not only make your home more comfortable, they can yield *long-term financial rewards*."(P)
- "This will make it easy to *keep the green in your yard and your wallet*."(P)
- "Upgrading 15 of the inefficient incandescent light bulbs in your home could *save you about $50* per year."(P)
- "That lost energy is *money we are throwing away*…The new lights are also much more efficient — so they *save you money*."(P)
- "Sustainability continues to make us a better company by reducing waste, *lowering costs*, driving innovation, and helping us fulfill our mission to *save people money* so they can live better."(P)

- "*Will people pay to go green?* That's a key question – maybe *the* question – for any company committed to sustainability. At Walmart, we've learned that the answer is a bit nuanced: Basically, usually not – but it depends."(P)
- "*But many shoppers cannot or will not pay more…*We can do a lot of good by helping to make the products people are already buying more sustainable so they don't have to make changes to what they buy to make a difference."(P)
- "People should not have to choose between products they can afford and products that are better for the planet."(P)
- "The most important thing is that members have responded well to the item and *initial sales* look great."(P)
- "Less glass. Less paper. *Lower cost*."(P)

The narrative of productivity and efficiency is discursively delivered via two themes which convey a similar message, but are aimed at two distinct audiences. The theme of triple-bottom-line responsibility, akin to the strategy of mindful consumption discussed in Chapter 4, is the idea that a company can deliver economic, environmental, and social benefits simultaneously. This language is concentrated within the corporate transcript and frames sustainability as a positive-sum game for all stakeholders: we are to reject the "false choice" between environment and business and realize that no compromise between priorities is necessary. To assert that humans—rich and poor—businesses—big and small—and nonhuman ecosystems—terrestrial and aquatic—have sufficient common interests to produce a "sustainable" economic system, is a complex and dubious claim. The discourse of triple-bottom-line strategies is based on the concept that everybody comes out winning; but once "sustainability" stops delivering profits (through decreased waste and increased efficiencies), will environmental health still be " the right thing to do" for business?

The second theme is similar to the first, but is directed at a public audience. The economic sensibility of sustainability is stressed: one can effortlessly help the environment without having to make a choice between consumption and ecologism and with no imposition of

cost or inconvenience. Throughout the publicity discourse, it is rare to find any mention of

sustainability without a corresponding reference to "saving money". This frame conveys a

hollow environmentalism: not only do (over)consumers not need to change their behavior or

their mindset, they do not even need to incur a small financial burden for any green guilt they

may have. Sustainability must come easy and make economic sense. Similar to the point made

above concerning triple-bottom-line responsibility, it is worth reflecting as to whether a vision

for a sustainable future can be built upon economistic expectations and consumer demands, over

and above social equity and ecological balance.

The Inverted Quarantine Narrative

Egotistical Environmentalism: Atomized Agency and Self-Centered Motives

- "Imagine the possibilities *if YOU made ONE small change* to live better…Now what if two million people each made one small change to live better? That's the power and potential of MSP. So…what is MSP? MSP= *My Sustainability Plan*…MSP helps you *connect with sustainability on your terms*."(C)
- "…sometimes when you hear about all the things in the world that need to change, or that could stand some improvement, it can be a little bit overwhelming and you wonder what kind of a difference you can make. And the fact is *each one of us individually* choosing to live differently, live better, and by virtue of that, helping others can make a huge difference in the world."(C)
- "When you talk about the environment, people are always concerned about it, but they tend to have a feeling of helplessness. They don't know what they can do themselves: the problem is too big for them to tackle as individuals…*MSP* has been a fantastic way of giving our associates *something practical to do about sustainability*."(C)
- "MSP is not only good for the environment; it's actually good for us, for *each and every individual*."(C)
- "…an *individual can make a huge difference*."(C)
- "You can take small steps to improve your life, to improve the community, and to take care of the planet. And these practices—what they call *nanopractices, tiny things that you can do in your everyday life—can actually make a difference*."(C)
- "The shoppers that are loyal to *Tide: Cold Water* are saving over $60 a year on their electricity bill. Now, that doesn't sound like a significant number, but when you think about, '*what if everybody used Tide: Cold Water?':* well, you're looking at billions of dollars in savings for consumers."(C)
- "…I remember thinking, '*what does this have to do with me?*"(C)
- "Sustainability *didn't come naturally* to us."(C)
- "…when we talk to our customer, our customer says, 'I get sustainability and I want to help, but I don't know how to help and I'm *not gonna pay for it, so figure it out'*."(C)

- "…the customer is telling us: 'make it mainstream, don't give me a green section, and oh, by the way, *I'm not gonna pay more for it.'*"(C)
- "And, you know, *this doesn't involve sacrifice.*"(C)
- "I don't think we would have seen the movement or the fire around personal sustainability if we had started by saying, 'we're going to reduce our energy conservation by 25% in every store'…*what's in it for me?* That's the question everyone would ask. So we started with: *'what's in it for you?'*"(C)
- "We went out and asked them, you know, 'what does sustainability mean to you?' And it came back with, you know, it was a clear message. *It has to be personal.*"(C)
- "The engagement project was really co-designed by the associates at Walmart, who basically asked the question: *'how can sustainability matter to me* in my life?' And they came up with three basic principles…for how sustainability could become important. First, it had to be *personal*…Second, it had to be voluntary…And finally, it had to be bottom-up."(C)
- "We look at *the goal as human happiness.* How do you *make people happier*? And, if you can tie up happiness into actually making the planet healthier, better, well, that's a win all the way around."(C)

Figure 3 on page 80 shows a connection linking both discourses (Neoliberal and Inverted Quarantine) with the theme of atomized agency. The narrative of individualism is, obviously, an integral part of the Neoliberal discourse. However, while individualization is one of many aspects to Neoliberalism, it is the keystone for understanding the discourse of Inverted Quarantine. The Inverted Quarantine approach—subduing environmentally-oriented fears and anxieties with appealing specialty consumer goods--introduces a whole new range of questions about the possibility for establishing sustainable patterns of production, consumption and a political economy that reinforces those patterns. The weight of the global contamination of the commons cannot be held up by each solitary individual via corporate contributions. Atomized agency is the meta-narrative on which actions of inverted quarantine rely upon.

The transcripts reveal a tendency to be pessimistic about the possibility of people (consumers) wanting to do something for the environment for altruistic, rather than egotistical, reasons. Walmart's publications reiterate the theme that sustainability "has to be personal",

"practical": it has to fit into people's daily lives, no alteration of individual lifestyle or sacrifice of individual liberty required.

Another repeated frame is that of the "huge impact" that individual actions (purchases) can make when they add up; one Walmart executive introduced a term for this frame: "nanopractices". The problem with nanopractices is that individual actions--even thousands of them added up—are not an appropriate route for radically transforming worldwide political, industrial, and economic institutions. A collective problem such as the ecological crisis requires social capital and cooperation, a legitimate authority and a plan for collective, de-monetized protest.

Next Generation Consumers

- "…our customers are more and more, this is going to become important. You know, I think we all have to absolutely *look out to the future and realize that this is going to be important*."(C)
- "…it makes a real big difference when you begin to put the product in front of the member and they respond, and then our merchant team responds even more and looks at *that next growth opportunity*."(C)
- "…our members remind us what's important to them, and so *these products have become important and we're selling more* and more of them."(C)
- "…to drive that *next-generation supply chain* and products…"(C)
- "…sometimes here at Walmart about *the next generation*, then I start thinking about the *next generation*…"(C)
- "…this is in line with our *next-generation Walmart strategies*…We talk about *next generation Walmart*; all of this fits in very, very well."(C)
- "…we are seeing consumers from around the world who buy products, increasingly, *they don't just want to see price and performance, but they also want to know how those products were made and what the consequences are for the planet*."(C)
- "*The coming years will see an even greater demand for products that come to us efficiently, ethically, and sustainably*."(C)
- "The prize is for Walmart to work with its suppliers, to be the favored brand *for the customer of tomorrow* to get the goods and services that they want for themselves and for their families."(C)
- "And this is going to be of *growing importance to your consumers*."(C)
- "Maybe the greatest opportunity for this *next generation*, really, will be in this entire area of sustainability."(C)

Walmart is acutely aware of the growth opportunity that is the green target market: to which they assign the name "next-generation consumers". The company understands that sustainable marketing is only going to become "more important" in the coming years. Walmart's green growth is entirely based on the hope that it can democratize inverted quarantine by catering specifically to the growing number of people in the "developed" countries who are coming to experience, and will continue to experience, the effects of climate change, water pollution, oil spills, soil salinity, depleted fisheries, etc. The rhetoric of "next-generation strategies" that recurs throughout the corporate texts provides evidence for, perhaps, the central motivating factor for Walmart's public-facing sustainability campaign, which is represented by the series of quotations below.

Change in a Shopping Cart: Recognized Risk; Purchased Protection; Consumer Choice

- "…fully implemented, the vision is, is that we'll have a way for customers and buyers and suppliers to evaluate a particular product's impact on the environment…'ooh, I *still have a choice of whether I want this or not, but now that I know the impact of it, I might make a different decision.*' And that's, ultimately, what it needs to be, and we're working towards that."(C)
- "…in *addition to calories and all the other things that's in the ingredients, sustainability will be one of those measures that customers will pay attention to.*"(C)
- "…our member has responded to us, and *they tell us every day based on what they purchase, what's important to them.*"(C)
- "…the Walmart customer—should not have to choose between a product that they can afford and a product that is good for them: that's good for the environment and good for their families. *They don't have to go in and make a choice and pay more* when they can't afford it, for something that's going to make *them healthier or their family healthier.*"(C)
- "I think *consumers are becoming much more aware* about where their food comes from and what the impact is on the planet...But what they also want to know is that they're not paying an inflated premium for those products…And I think the leadership that we're giving in this area is saying to customers, '*you can do the right thing for the planet and feed your family well.*' The two are not mutually exclusive...getting people to buy responsibly, to think about what they're buying, and for us to *make it easy for them* to do it."(C)
- "The following are some specific tips to act on – dos and don'ts, organized by category, to help you *become part of the solution rather than part of the problem* of "nonpoint-source pollution."(P)
- "…studies have shown that *children who eat organic food have lower levels of pesticides in their blood* than children who eat regular food. Organic food is produced *without pesticides, hormones and antibiotics.*

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And, because it's free of *potentially harmful chemicals*, organic baby food also may lower your baby's *risk* of developing food allergies."(P)

- "Whole grains are good for you, and organic whole grains are even better. That's because organic food is produced without *pesticides, hormones and antibiotics*."(P)
- "Many popular cheeses are now available in organic varieties. Organic food is produced without *prohibited fertilizers, pesticides, artificial preservatives, hormones and antibiotics*."(P)
- "You may want to consider cooking with organic eggs. Now that *more and more people are interested in foods that are produced naturally, organic eggs are becoming more popular*. Organic eggs come from hens that have been given feed containing *no commercial fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides*…In addition to being *free of unwanted chemicals*, organic food may be higher in nutritional value."(P)
- "…you want to be sure that you're eating healthy *foods that haven't been exposed to harmful chemicals*. Join the *growing number of consumers* heading for the bins of organic fruit. You probably know that organic food is produced *without certain fertilizers, pesticides, artificial preservatives, hormones and antibiotics*… Perhaps the biggest reason for the popularity of organic vegetables is the absence of *pesticides,* which may be especially *harmful to children and pregnant women*."(P)
- "…consumers who want the *purest* fruit juice available are choosing organic juices because they're produced *without pesticides, hormones and antibiotics*."(P)
- "…organic soup makes a quick meal that may be *healthier*. Organic food is produced *without pesticides, hormones and antibiotics*."(P)
- "Of course, the ultimate in *healthy* yogurt is organic yogurt because it's produced *without pesticides, hormones or antibiotics*."(P)
- "The key to achieving these savings in your home is a *whole-house energy efficiency plan*."(P)
- "…*change that makes its way into shopping carts* and homes around the world."(P)
- "Some customers *will* pay more for certain products that are better for the environment, and their *top purchases include chicken, milk, fruits and vegetables, household cleaners and laundry/dish care*."(P)
- "They can be more expensive but some people will pay more because *they feel good about them*."(P)
- "Remember: *Every Purchase Matters*."(P)
- "Customers have to make a *very important risk calculation* when they step into the produce aisle."(P)

Walmart seeks to export the obsessive, "perpetual vigilance" that is inverted quarantine to all first-world citizens, not just those who can afford to patron Whole Foods, Trader Joes, Fresh Market, or other boutique grocery chains that cater to higher-income eco-conscious consumers (Szasz 2007, 193). It is not only the upper-middle class and the very wealthy who wish to individually insulate and protect themselves and their families from environmental risks and personal health anxieties: truly, this is a lucrative market for growth and gaining the allegiance of fearful green consumers.

Almost every link accessed from Walmart's main website's "Sustainability" page includes some form of recognized risk. The stress is on non-toxic household products and organic foods, "eco-friendly" consumer goods which directly affect one's personal health and the health of one's family. The public Walmart texts warn consumers of the following risks: nonpoint source pollution, pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, preservatives, antibiotics, and "harmful chemicals" that can give babies food allergies and harm children and pregnant women. The consumer bears the responsibility for making a "very important risk calculation" that determines purchase decisions that aim to avoid all of these mounting problems caused by the toxic infrastructure of globalism. One Walmart executive likens the coming Sustainability Index to the calorie count on the side of products: in both cases, societal gluttony is dealt with at an individual, cognitive level—promoting a discourse of quiet guilt—though overconsumptive tendencies are rooted in ontological habits and psychological stresses.

> "We'll pay little attention to political freedoms and give pride of place to consumer freedoms, so that the difference gets submerged amid the spectacle of being able to choose…" (Beck 2005, 125)

Within the paradigm of purchased protection, consumer choice among various product genres remains an integral aspect of retail merchandising. The entire store and all its suppliers do not need to whole-heartedly (or even half-heartedly) embrace eco-labeling and green consumer goods. A corporate farm conglomerate can produce and profit from *both* hormone-free, free-range chicken fingers shaped like endangered animals and a wholesale bag of 50 chicken breasts from a factory farm that feeds its genetically modified animals a diet of grain and polluted water. The discourse of inverted quarantine does not coerce: consumer choice is critical to developing an effective inverted quarantine strategy. Individuals who fit the "next-generation" demographic

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must feel like they are doing *something*—taking some sort of personal initiative toward becoming "part of the solution rather than part of the problem". If the growing "green" consumer audience buys into Walmart's discourse of democratized inverted quarantine—where "every purchase matters" if one wishes to achieve maximum protection from risk, and change can be demanded via the contents of an individual consumer's shopping cart—then we are in for an even more "mutant" and defeatist brand of environmentalism in the years to come (Szasz 2007, 2).

Absent Frames: Equity, Ethics, Ecocentrism

The environmentally-oriented topics on which Walmart focuses are improved efficiency, waste elimination, "responsible" sourcing, making industrial agriculture more productive with less inputs, and finding *more* sustainable substitutes for unsustainably sourced raw materials or toxic chemicals: initiatives derived from the philosophy of "natural capitalism", discussed in Chapter 3. This plan for sustainability is focused on maintaining profitability and the hierarchical infrastructure of global capital. Throughout this chapter, an emphasis has been made on Walmart's initiatives to encourage *more* sustainable business practices: this emphasis is found throughout the Walmart transcripts, as well. It certainly cannot be argued that Walmart's sustainability campaign is completely useless and fruitless, or that everyone involved in the initiatives is approaching sustainability with a disingenuous spirit. It can be argued, however, that the ontological bases for the consistently reinforced frames communicated through Walmart's eco-discourse distort the discursive presentation of sustainability, so that it is not a lasting, permanent sustainability that is sought, but simply a *more* sustainable version of what we

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already have. The several themes which are not at all present within Walmart's sustainability discourse follow.

Steady-State

A steady-state economy would replace "progress" with "stability": it would "[depend] upon a *minimum* number of goods and the *minimum* amount of environmental disruption along with the *maximum* use of renewable resources and the *maximum* use of human labor and ingenuity: (Sale 2000, 68-69). It would work toward maintaining ecological balance and its allocation of wealth and value would reflect this aim. The concept of Gross National Product, especially as a measure for human happiness, would be eradicated and replaced (Sale 2000, 71).

Democratic Values

Democratic values such as equality and accountability are fairly absent throughout the transcripts, except when executives are discussing the Sustainability Index: which delivers "accountability" via a label created by the executives of the most powerful corporations and conglomerates in the world. Absentee ownership and the privatization and manipulation of land half-way around the world are undemocratic practices. From a perspective of equality and accountability, governance systems should be put in place that ensure that the same communities that will bear the burden of industrial practices should have a say in the trade, finance, and investment policies which will affect them; in turn, any enterprise which causes a social or environmental problem should be held liable of its indiscretion. (Cavanaugh 2002, 57-58)

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity seeks to increase the local self-sufficiency of communities and to decrease dependency on imperial businesses and governments. What can be done locally should be done locally, and economic power should be localized or regionalized, not globalized (Cavanaugh 2002, 60-61). Kirkpatrick Sale bases his "bioregional vision" on this principle of subsidiarity. He promotes a descaling away from the level of world or nation-state to the regional or communal, an economy of conservation and cooperation, rather than exploitation and competition, a decentralized, non-hierarchical polity, and a society that works within a discourse of symbiosis rather than polarization. (Sale 2000, 50)

Eliminate Export-Oriented Production

The business model that Walmart works within (necessarily) is one of "export-oriented production", where goods are mined, produced, and assembled with the sole purpose of moving and selling them across global markets. This globalist practice is "responsible for increasing global transport activity, fossil fuel use, and refrigeration and packaging, while requiring very costly and ecologically damaging new infrastructures such as ports, airports, dams, canals, and so on" (Cavanaugh 2002, 61). As mentioned in the section on Distributism in Chapter 3, ultimate "efficiency", if that is really what Neoliberals are concerned with, is achieved by making production and consumption as simultaneous as possible.

Common Heritage

The notion of the commons recognizes that all humans, whether or not they are equally intelligent, strong, wealthy, conniving or gullible, are owed an equal allocation of common resources: everyone deserves the right to clean water, healthy soil, and a means of obtaining an adequate diet. Gary Snyder wrote that "we are all natives here, and this is our only sacred spot" (Sale 2000, 181). Natural capital should be treated with respect, since the corruption and depletion of the commons is eventually felt by people (and nonhumans) around the world, in the present and in the future.

Diversity

Diversity is important to sustainability in two respects: economic and biological. The former is the "foundation of resilient, stable, energy-efficient, self-reliant local communities" (Cavanaugh 2002, 65). The latter "is essential to the complex, self-regulating, self-regenerating processes of the ecosystem from which all life and wealth ultimately flow" (Cavanaugh 2002, 70). The multifaceted global and local consequences of institutional unsustainability require varied and differently determined experiments for re-institutionalizing sustainability.

Employment

In the globalist marketplace of industrial mechanization and economic recession, a new paradigm needs to arise which will deal with the growing numbers of employed people with "obsolete" skills and the decreasing number of available employment opportunities due to

technological substitutes. The theme of employment includes such concepts as the "right to work", the "right to unionize", and the "right to a living wage" (Cavanaugh 2002, 73).

Food Security

The theme of food security reinforces the value of self-sufficiency, by promoting less reliance on industrial agriculture and food conglomerates who monopolize the food chain and patent seeds (Cavanaugh 2002, 74). While food security is a prevalent theme throughout Walmart's sustainability campaign, the solution the company offers is quite different from the one that is more in line with encouraging lasting sustainability. I will return to Walmart's solution for food insecurity in Chapter 8.

Inequity

Inequity is inherent and basic to the Neoliberal ethos. "Extreme inequality in income and ownership distorts the allocation of economic resources" (Cavanaugh 2002, 75). The globalist infrastructure has no sovereign to answer to: no authority effectively regulates the web of world commerce. Any mention of inequity, thus, questions the validity of the Neoliberal narrative of sparse governmental regulations and economic competition. The overconsumption of a very few has been enjoyed on the backs of the deprived masses, justified by a virtual concept of wealth power, and progress.

Precautionary Principle

The precautionary principle asserts that if there is any potential harm or risk due to a practice that would outweigh the benefits of such a practice, then it should cease or be avoided, "even if there is scientific uncertainty about whether or how it is actually causing that harm" (Cavanaugh 2002, 76). The norm of accelerated innovation should be exchanged for one of preventative prudence.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Possible Positives to Walmart's "Unique Position"

Walmart's Unique Position

- "…Walmart is in *a unique position*…this issue of food and how we can really think about the way *we need to expand food to feed the population* as it grows over the next several decades…Walmart is in a *unique position*."(C)
- "…we have *a unique responsibility* because we are the world's largest grocer."(C)
- "…humanity is projected to nine billion people around the world. *We are going to need to find a way to feed humanity*."(C)
- "…*if we are going to feed nine billion people in the future*, we are going to need every tool, every technique we can to make this happen."(C)
- "I think we are going to see more and more awareness of this, particularly the challenge of *how do we feed nine and a half billion people* by 2050?"(C)
- "Worldwide, we work with more than 100,000 suppliers – and every week – more than 200 million people shop our stores. That gives us *a unique opportunity* to have real impact."(P)
- "…everyone – individuals, NGOS, businesses, governments – absolutely everyone must step up and be responsible for the caretaking of our planet. That includes corporations, and *as the world's largest retailer, we have a unique ability and responsibility* to make a difference."(P)

Fixing Food Deserts

Another theme that recurs throughout Walmart's eco-discourse is that of the company's "unique position" and "responsibility" to feed disadvantaged consumers who lack an adequate means to produce or purchase fresh food. Walmart's actions to cater to food deserts have been portrayed as a positive aspect of the company's continued expansion (Philpott 2012). The definition of "food desert", itself, is a complex matter. The USDA definition of a "food desert" is a place where "at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store" (Philpott 2012). This definition ignores other places where fresh food might be bought, like rooftop gardens, local farms, fruit stands, and corner stores.

Even if the definition of a "food desert" is accepted at face-value, there are still many other more equitable options for confronting this social problem. First of all, "food deserts" are the result of "the long-term change in food shopping provision [that] has led to a pattern of fewer but larger stores" (Clarke et. al. 2004, 96) and the systematic placement of those large supermarkets in more profitable areas. Now that those lucrative markets are covered, Walmart can continue to expand, domestically, by filling in the spaces. This should not be difficult, since the USDA has developed a list of locations where, by definition, big-box grocery has not yet paved a parking lot.

Other policies which could address and alleviate the problem of food deserts would be "increased SNAP benefits or cash assistance to the poor", "transportation vouchers to stores to facilitate food shopping", classes on local sustainable agriculture, or grants for community gardens: these strategies are based on a presumption that supply is the issue at hand and not demand (Bitler & Haider 2011, 168-170). Inadequate health education, purchasing power, leisure time, and self-control are all demand-side factors that could also partially explain food deserts (Bitler & Haider 2011, 157; Clarke et. al. 2004, 90). Walmart does not have a "unique responsibility" to use up resources and emit pollutants to open new stores in "food deserts". Walmart already caters to the food necessities of a quarter of the U.S population (Mitchell 2011, Nov.). An expansion of human dependency on corporate, privatized food production is not a long-term solution to domestic food security issues.

Feeding the Global Human Population

Walmart's "unique position" is also stressed in reference to the need to feed the growing

global human population. First, if the need to feed all of humanity was a sincere goal, then this

could already be achieved right now: "world agriculture produces…enough to provide everyone

in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories per person per day" (World Hunger Education

Service 2012). It is not availability, but equity, that is at issue in "feeding the global population".

Corporate colonialism into third-world countries—continuing the inequitable practices of

patronization, privatization and the commoditization of the commons—will not address

humanitarian concerns about starvation and relative deprivation, especially since this deprivation

is due to the gradual infiltration by globalist interests over the past fifty years. The consumption

patterns of "developed" countries, backed by a Neoliberal, atomistic ontology and catered to by

corporations and retail outlets such as Walmart, are to blame for these humanitarian crises of

malnourishment. These inequities are unlikely to subside until a de-commoditized vision for

feeding a human population of 9 billion becomes an integral part of a new political economy,

rooted in a radically different ontology.

Grassroots Globalism

The Emerging Grassroots Frame

- "This was a *grassroots* movement…"(C)
- "…this is a *grassroots* effort…"(C)
- "…make it *grassroots* in your organization…"(C)
- "…*grassroots* effort to the sustainable value networks taking hold."
- "…has taken us a long time to incubate these ideas because they really came *from the bottom, up* in the company."(C)

During the April 18, 2012 Global Sustainability Meeting, which was focused on making "the business case for sustainability", a new frame emerged in Walmart's sustainability discourse. A rhetorical portrayal of Walmart's sustainability campaign as the result of a "grassroots" effort recurred throughout the transcript. However, it is fairly well-known that Walmart only began this initiative after Rob Walton and Lee Scott—among other Walmart executives—called on and were consulted by a number of corporate "sustainability consultants" who assured the company that sustainability would not only improve their reputation but also deliver short- and long-term profits (Rosenbloom & Barbaro 2009, 1; Humes 2011).

The Inculcation of Inverted Quarantine: Commoditized Collective Action

The alignment of Walmart's embrace of the "next-generation" green consumer with a "grassroots" framing is a covert admission of the political nature of Walmart's sustainability campaign. While the democratization of inverted quarantine may not have started out as a result of associates and consumers protesting in the streets for a cheaper version of inverted quarantine or less waste in Walmart's global supply chain, the goal, certainly, is to "make it grassroots". Many environmental scholars and activists argue that collective action is needed to combat prevailing patterns of overproduction. While it may not be what they envisioned when they suggested it, the practice of inverted quarantine is, indeed, a form of collective action.

Self-categorization theory suggests that people can personally identify with a number of different social groups simultaneously; when "particular (social) categories become

salient…people are expected to act in terms of the social identities associated with those categories" (McGarty et. al. 2009, 842). As discussed in Chapter 2, the "institutional identity" of the performing consumer is to be internalized by each consumer-citizen within the community of "the market"/ "the economy" (McGarty et. al. 2009, 844). If "sustainability" is effectively and repeatedly rhetorically framed as an amorphous goal that can only be addressed through the market community by way of the "grassroots" efforts of individual consumers—slightly altered (*more* sustainable) corporate-sponsored consumption patterns—then other visions for a sustainable future will be blocked out and other identities and communities with which citizens could identify that could lead to a lasting sustainability will not be made salient. This blocking out is what Szasz termed "the anesthesia effect": when risk-riddled atomized consumers pacify their environmental woes with purchased protection. Walmart offers green consumption to a demographic not before reached by the discourse of inverted quarantine and has democratized this illusion of protection, making it available to all first-world consumer-citizens. It must continually be remembered, however—no matter how successful green consumerism becomes—that full protection is absolutely impossible; thus, an inverted quarantine approach to fixing institutional unsustainability is indefinitely inadequate.

"Collective action must be connected to ideas…political action must be connected to ideology, and all of these things, action, ideas, and ideology must be tied to collective identity" (McGarty et. al. 2009, 854). Participation in the practice of inverted quarantine is a political statement, one which is rooted in a deeply ingrained ideology (Chapter 2) which prioritizes market value over intrinsic value, the isolation and independence of the individual, objective

rationality, and competitive acquisitiveness. The community of consumers has responded

positively to this route for political action, and so it qualifies as a form of collective action. Thus,

it is not collective action that is needed to inspire a fire in citizens around the world to demand a

lasting sustainability, rather than accepting the narrative of a *more* sustainable globalism.

Instead, the salience of other identities and communities must be enlarged and incessantly

emphasized as often—if not more often—than is the identity of consumer-citizens.

Obviously, the sheer immanence of consumer culture is hard to counter effectively: the

streets are lined with advertisements and stores, the media is steeped in product placement and

commercials, the news is sponsored by corporations, and political offices come closer to

complete commoditization. Visions for a lasting sustainability have been around for thousands of

years (in practice) and for decades (in academia); it is not a lack of alternative discourses that is

the problem, but the unequal amplification of one narrative over all others. Until there is some

event that diminishes the consumer identity and the market community and replaces it with

something else (the Earthian identity and the Gaean community?) and then a clear plan of action

laid out based upon that salient identity, then inverted quarantine will continue to be the

dominant form of collective action for concerned consumer-citizens to perform their

environmental awareness. E.F Schumacher wrote:

> "Only if we know that we have actually descended into infernal regions where nothing
> awaits us but "the cold death of society and the extinguishing of all civilized relations",
> can we summon the courage and imagination needed for a "turning around", a metanoia."
> (Sale 2000, 133)

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