

2011

'It's Not That Easy Being Green': Greenwashing of Environmental Discourses in Advertising

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'IT'S NOT THAT EASY BEING GREEN':
GREENWASHING OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES IN ADVERTISING

by
Jennifer Budinsky

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through Communication and Social Justice
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2011

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

While environmental problems increase exponentially, our fate rests on the long-term sustainability of the earth. Under our reigning political framework of free-market fundamentalism, corporations are appropriating environmental discourses through green capitalism and greenwashing. There is a need to problematize the corporate discourses that put a price on nature and obfuscate the domination of nature by capital. I use an eco-Marxist framework to examine the ways environmental products are represented through television advertising. I hypothesize that the discourses reinforce environmental stereotypes aligned with corporate interests, and naturalize the capitalist mode of thinking. I analyze three representations: Clorox Green Works cleaning products, and the Ford Escape Hybrid and Toyota Prius motor vehicles. I perform a multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the advertising discourses of these products to examine how the companies represent the products as environmentally responsible while continuing to shape the discourses to suit the neo-liberal agenda.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Susan Bryant, for her endless hours spent editing and assisting me along this academic journey. For her continuous motivation, immense knowledge, and guidance both personally and academically, I owe her my deepest gratitude. I would also like to thank Dr. Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale for her continued involvement throughout this process and for providing so many relevant and useful resources, from which I based much of my research. Her encouragement and guidance for the past two years has inspired me to continue my academic studies at the doctoral level. Most importantly, I would like to thank both Dr. Susan Bryant and Dr. Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, for being great role models to myself and other women in this program. I would also like to thank Dr. Lynne Phillips for providing valuable perspective and input at my proposal defense, and for her suggestions and time spent editing my work.

I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Kai Hildebrandt, for his mentorship and support throughout my studies. Also, thanks to Sharron Wazny, who was always a source of help and kindness. Of course I must thank my friends and family for supporting me in all of my endeavors, academic or otherwise. Endless thanks and love goes out to David for being everything at every moment. I must express my deepest thanks and love to my mom and dad for their advice, support and for encouraging me to never settle for the path of least resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 22, 1970 the first Earth Day was announced as citizens became increasingly aware of and fearful for environmental preservation (Kovel, 2007). The activism of that era can be described as an on-the-ground movement of people protesting and taking action against corporate and government power in the best interests of humankind (Petkovic, 2009), whereas the role of activism today often takes the form of buying power, consumer activism or armchair activism.

Advertising discourses and capitalist ideology play a major role in shaping the attitudes and behaviour of society, and with their encouragement to endlessly consume products are leading the human race down a road that will eventually lead to catastrophic consequences. Similarly, Sut Jhally echoes this call to action saying,

[h]uman beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring (2000, p.6).

Especially since the Industrial Revolution, the environment has been under siege. We are seeing the immediate effects of global warming and carbon dioxide emissions, including hunger in many poor countries due to agricultural shortages caused by both drought (from extreme heat) and massive flooding (from rising sea levels), the endangerment of many non-human species, Canadian forests emitting more carbon dioxide than they absorb from the stress of insect infestation and persistent fires, and generally warmer temperatures that can be attributed to the spread of disease, and the increasing death rate of trees (Angus, 2010a, p.21). Joel Kovel (2007) also observes

several changes that occurred from 1970 to 2000 that have significantly impacted the environment. This includes an increase in human population from 3.7 billion to 6 billion, an increase in oil consumption from 26 million barrels a day to 73 million, the tripling of natural gas extraction and global motor vehicle population, an increase in human carbon emissions from 3.9 million metric tons annually to 6.4 million, and many others (Kovel, 2007, p.2). We also see a dramatic increase in Third World debt, and a vast increase in the gap between the rich and poor (Ibid, p.2-3).

These factors point to the need for increased on-the-ground activism and environmentalism that goes beyond the narrow set of 'choices' related to consumerism. However, major corporations and big media are deflecting our attention away from this need and replacing it with the apparently easy solution of green consumerism. The problem with green consumerism as a replacement for deeper forms of activism is that, although buying a 'green' product may be 'the lesser of two evils', it still operates within a neo-liberal, capitalist context. Some of the tenets of neo-liberalism include a reliance on the free market as the source of solutions for all problems, along with the complementary focus on the individual and on individual choice within the market. Therefore, individuals are encouraged to believe that they can be environmentalists simply by making ostensibly thoughtful choices from within the range of consumer choices available on the market. Attention is deflected away from the importance of collective action often needed to bring about meaningful social/environmental change.

Moreover, I should note that purchasing 'green' products does not necessarily diminish overconsumption and mass waste, which are significant problems. Heather Rogers notes, "today almost 80 per cent of US products are used once and then thrown away" (2007, p.231). In a world where our philosophy is 'continuous consumption', we

will eventually run out of places to put all of the waste. This does not begin to account for the emissions and pollution released from producing and shipping products, nor the non-renewable resources being used, which are all contributing factors to the overall degradation of the environment.

Political theory to date focuses too much on human-to-human relations (anthropocentrism), whereas in order for meaningful environmental change to occur we need to take a more eco-centric perspective, which focuses on the relationship between humans and nature (Eckersley, 1992). This includes viewing and speaking about ourselves as part of nature rather than seeing nature as an externality. I believe if we begin to put pressure on social institutions to change the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses, then we could reverse the normalization of consumption.

In this thesis I examine the ways in which the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses work to obfuscate the domination of nature by capital. I also examine how green capitalism works to commodify the earth's natural resources and naturalize consumption, and how corporate greenwashing operates to hide this. I start by examining the question: in what ways do environmental discourses operate? I also ask, are certain environmental discourses emphasized in advertising media over others? If so, which ones? I lastly look at the question: do advertising discourses obfuscate the domination of nature by capital? If yes, how so?

The primary method I use to examine the environmental discourses is critical discourse analysis. I examine the ways the environment is represented in television advertising commercials, using three examples. I first look at the Clorox Green Works line of cleaning products, examining the ways their 2009 advertisement either reinforces or challenges the disconnect between corporate environmental discourses and

environmentalism. My second example looks at two vehicles including a hybrid car and a hybrid SUV. For this example I use the Ford Escape Hybrid and the Toyota Prius, both claiming the highest green efficiency in their vehicle class. I analyze the representation of these vehicles, specifically targeting the 2009 television advertising commercials¹.

Some environmental stereotypes I look for are whether or not capitalist ideology is naturalized in relation to the environment and if the environment is sold as a commodity. More specifically I look for whether the environment is viewed as an externality, if the environment is not accounted for, if pseudo-environmental change is emphasized, and any other possibilities that arise.

Some argue the representation of these environmental products and the discourses of green capitalism can reinforce positive discourses of environmentalism by urging consumers to purchase environmentally friendly products over ones that cause greater damage to the earth. However, I challenge this point of view and argue that it merely focuses on the *representations* of products and does not go far enough to critically interrogate the dominant power structures that undermine collective interests and critical environmental emancipation; the neo-liberal agenda is left intact. Therefore, I use an eco-Marxist/eco-socialist perspective rooted in the political economy of the environment, to critically deconstruct the social structures responsible for the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses. The methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis compliments an eco-socialist theoretical framework because it also seeks to

¹ Although I examine the most recent (at the time of selection) representation of the Ford Escape Hybrid, the title of this thesis was derived from the 2006 Ford Escape Hybrid commercial (which was aired during Super Bowl XL) featuring Kermit the Frog singing his famous song “It’s Not That Easy Being Green”.

uncover issues of power and ideology, and specifically analyzes how social inequality is expressed and legitimized through discourses.

My rationale for choosing these particular examples is two-fold. First, Clorox Green Works cleaning products serve to represent a small-scale consumer purchase that is reasonably affordable and somewhat of a necessity for the average person (although I argue simple household ingredients suffice as cleaning products). Second, as a larger scale purchase, the personal vehicle often represents much more than just a mode of transportation, but also a choice of lifestyle, image, or status. Also, in general, the discourses of personal vehicle use and driving are naturalized in our culture, something which advertising discourses contribute to greatly. Therefore, in my quest to examine the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses I believe it is important to look at the hybrid vehicle as one of the central 'green' commodities. A representation of the Toyota Prius is an obvious choice to examine, since it rivals no other in terms of fuel economy and consumer sales, and continues to be the best selling hybrid vehicle from its inception in 2000. The Ford Escape Hybrid commercial is another clear example to use, since it was the first vehicle to combine features of an SUV with hybrid technology, seemingly allowing consumers to experience the best of both the environmentalist's and SUV owner's worlds.

The goal of my research is to uncover the powerful forces that work to create an ideology that is seemingly aligned with both environmental and capitalist interests, how this ideology is represented and appropriated through the discourses of advertising, and what this means for the critical emancipation of the environment and a more socially just society.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The ways in which corporations appropriate environmental discourses play a major role in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour of citizens. In this section I begin by discussing “corporate social responsibility” and how corporations have appropriated the notion of social responsibility through the discourses of green consumerism. I then discuss corporate greenwashing and green capitalism and the broader implications these types of discourse have for the environment. Lastly, I examine capitalism and the role advertising plays in shaping the discourses of corporate environmentalism, with the goal of uncovering the power dynamics that work to legitimize certain representations of the environment over others.

Corporate Responsibility

According to Industry Canada (2010), corporate social responsibility (CSR) promotes principles and practices that make Canadian business more competitive by “supporting operational efficiency gains; improved risk management; favourable relations with the investment community and improved access to capital; enhanced employee relations; stronger relationships with communities and an enhanced license to operate; and improved reputation and branding” (Para.1). I argue, from an eco-socialist perspective, that the concept of CSR should address the accountability of corporations to the public, including initiatives promoting environmental sustainability. However, as outlined, corporations define the term CSR mostly around measuring ‘responsibility’ as economic efficiency or economic success. The underlying problem then is that

corporations have appropriated the term ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ to make them seem caring and socially conscious, while their actions may contradict this message.

As the concept of corporate responsibility is emphasized more and more, corporations are finding new ways to protect themselves from regulation. In order to facilitate this they are initiating proactive action by promoting their companies as being ‘environmentally friendly’. Sharon Beder (1998) problematizes this wave of corporate activism against environmental regulation, by examining how corporations have used their financial power to counter the movements of environmentalists by reshaping public opinion and influencing the political process. Through the efforts of astroturf movements², conservative think tanks, the public relations industry, advertising, and the infiltration of the education system, the corporate agenda has dominated much of the environmental debate. This is problematic because democracy is undermined when the political agenda serves corporate interests rather than the interests of the people.

Advertising and corporate discourses often argue that sustainable development is a way to protect the environment. However, Deb (2006) argues that if the term development means unlimited growth in production and consumption of materials, then the term sustainable development is an oxymoron.

Green Capitalism and Greenwashing

Just as the media, corporations, and government are known to whitewash certain alternative voices, with increased awareness for the environmental movement, greenwashing has become a new concern. Greenwashing is “the act of misleading

² Astroturf movements are formed under the illusion of being citizen formed grassroots movements, but they are typically created and/or funded by corporations.

consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (TerraChoice, 2009, p.1). TerraChoice, an environmentally friendly marketing agency and consulting firm, recently exposed the sins of greenwashing. These sins include the sin of hidden trade-offs, no proof, vagueness, irrelevance, fibbing, the lesser of two evils, and most recently added to this list, the worshipping of false labels (TerraChoice, 2007; 2009).

The sin of hidden trade-offs claims a product is ‘green’ based on a narrow set of attributes and ignores other important environmental issues related to the product (Ibid). An example of this would be a product claiming to use recycled paper, while ignoring the chlorine use in bleaching or adding chemicals to the paper. The sin of no proof occurs when a product claims to be green with no accessible support or reliable third party certification (Ibid). This most often occurs in products claiming to be recycled with either no proof or only a small percentage of the product being made from recyclable material. The sin of vagueness contends that a product’s claims are so poorly defined or broad that the customer is likely to misunderstand the real meaning (Ibid). The most common use of this sin occurs when claiming a product is environmentally friendly because it is ‘all-natural’, when in reality there are plenty of things that are natural, but also harmful to the environment and humans, such as arsenic and mercury. The sin of irrelevance occurs when a product makes claims that may be truthful but are irrelevant to people who are looking for environmentally preferred products (Ibid). This would include a product claiming to be CFC-free, since CFCs are banned by law in Canada and therefore all products should be CFC-free. The sin of fibbing occurs when a product claims something that is actually completely false (Ibid). This often occurs with products that claim to be Energy-Star certified, when they are not. In the sin of the

lesser of two evils, a product's claims may be true but distract the consumer from the overall implications of that category of products for the environment (Ibid). An example of this sin would be organic cigarettes or fuel efficient SUVs. And lastly, the sin of worshipping false labels involves a product giving the illusion of being endorsed by a third party, when it is really not (Ibid). This often occurs with the use of fake logos that are not actually affiliated with a genuine environmental organization or certification.

Greer and Bruno (1996) expose the greenwashing practices of twenty transnational corporations (TNCs) that project images of being environmentally friendly but continue to have harmful effects on the environment in their everyday practices. They outline the change in the projected corporate environmental image from the 1970s when the growth of community based movements uncovered the existing ecological problems and gave rise to environmental awareness (Ibid). The strength of TNCs in the world economy gives them unprecedented financial and, in turn, political power, eroding national sovereignty and holding influence over the deregulation of free trade (Ibid). This has extremely destructive ecological implications because although these companies attempt to appear 'green', their main objective is not to create a better world for us to live in, but to minimize cost and maximize profits for themselves.

Laufer (2003) also found that many familiar Fortune 500 companies engage in greenwashing strategies, such as publishing false health and safety reports, which work to shift the focus from the firm, create confusion, undermine credibility, criticize valuable alternatives, and deceptively promote the firm's objectives, commitments and accomplishments. Laufer contends that greenwashing turns on three elements of deception: confusion, fronting, and posturing (Ibid). Voluntary environmental reporting

undermines the quality and reliability of the reporting, which shows the need for standards in monitoring and reporting environmental information, including third party verification (Ibid).

Growing concern from citizens for the environment has led corporations to advance a new ideology of 'green capitalism', in which consumers are urged to help the environment by 'voting' with their dollar and supporting green and eco-friendly products in substitution for others. The problem with green capitalism is that it still views the environment as an externality - something that can be bought and sold (Lubbers, 2002; Tokar, 1997). It also places responsibility on the individual to change their habits, which is fine to an extent; however, it takes the focus off corporations as the cause of many of our environmental problems, and off the government as regulators. Placing agency in the hands of individuals rather than corporations serves to further advance the neoliberal agenda by keeping us thinking about ourselves as individuals and consumers rather than a community and citizens. The discourses of advertising also serve to keep us thinking about our individual needs over the collective. Jhally problematizes advertising's role in the destruction of our planet stating, "our survival as a species is dependent upon minimizing the threat from advertising and the commercial culture that has spawned it" (2000, p.1).

Richard Kahn (2009) discusses the problem of green consumerism as fundamentalist consumerism, with the view that larger structural problems in society can be fixed by acts of individual consumer choice, rather than real corporate change. In this sense corporations are telling the public to 'vote' with their dollar. This consumer 'democracy' serves to "weaken robust ideas of political and social democracy, as personal agency, social freedom, and the obligations of citizenship are ideologically

tethered to capitalist market relations and renewed profiteering” (Kahn, 2009, p.49).

Green consumerism is an opportunity for corporations to turn the crisis they have generated through their accumulation of capital (from the exploitation of nature) into profit and investment revenue. As Kahn says, green consumerism distracts us from the big problems and instead encourages “doing one’s little part” for sustainability (Ibid).

Heather Rogers (2007) maps out the roots of corporate greenwash in the United States, which began in the 1950s with a public relations campaign from the group Keep America Beautiful, which shifted responsibility over garbage from industry to the individual. In the 1980s this pattern continued with the corporate exploitation of the rise of recycling and individual culpability in the matter (Ibid). These occurrences highlight the transfer of environmental responsibility from corporations to the public. Rogers concludes that green commerce causes two things to happen -- people are persuaded to accept individual responsibility for changing the environment and, because the solution is then personal, people do not confront those in power and are distracted from addressing issues of inequality and exploitation, which are inherent in our current economic system (Ibid).

The above literature helps to support my analysis by showing how the very ideas of green consumerism and capitalism are highly ideological in and of themselves since they place the onus of ‘saving’ the environment on individuals, which tends to deflect attention away from the destructive nature of capitalist modes of production and corporate activities.

Capitalism and the Discourses of Advertising

Environmentalism tends to be marginalized, since it is often associated with the ‘extreme left’ of the political spectrum. However, the environment should be a concern of everyone since it is one of the few things that we uniquely share across every geographical location, gender, race, religion, and political affiliation. While there are varying degrees of environmentalism, I use this term and terms such as ‘environmentally friendly’ and ‘eco-friendly’ to refer to those practices rooted in reduced consumption, which I argue is most effective in protecting the environment and nature. A major environmental problem is that we consume too many of our non-renewable resources and produce too much waste. This is a result of treating the earth as a commodity and is a component of the disconnect between humans and nature.

The discourses of advertising serve a major function in bringing the capitalist agenda to consumer attention since “[a]dvertising plays an essential role in the production of consumerist demand by inventing false “needs” and by stimulating the formation of compulsive consumption habits, totally violating the conditions for maintenance of planetary ecological equilibrium” (Lowy, 2010, p.2). Lowy also points out the fundamental structural reasons why advertising is an enemy of the earth, including being “an immense, fearsome waste of our planet’s limited resources” with the billions of dollars spent annually on advertising, the raw materials and energy used in production of these resources, and the immense waste left behind (Ibid, p.4).

Capitalism and advertising are at the root of many environmental problems and are major players in the destruction of the earth. The problem with capitalism in relation to the environment is that it reduces nature’s value to its usefulness in the production of goods and services (O’Connor, 1994).

As well, we are heavily dependant on technological progress, which is incompatible with our need to slow down and re-examine our values with tactics such as deep ecology education and human change education (Kaskarelis, 2007). We must alter our philosophy of life by changing our present social, political, economic, and cultural conditions. For example, current technologies are geared towards saving a worker time in order to make production more efficient and make more money with less effort (Ibid); whereas, we should be focusing technologies on producing less waste and conserving scarce non-renewable resources. Several aspects of the political and social spheres of life require massive change, including representative democracy (and the idea that it is not in fact representing the public, but rather corporations), the free-market economy, globalization, and the need for public environmental education.

Our current system that we refer to as a democracy is actually corporate capitalism or free-market fundamentalism (Kovel, 2007)³. It is problematic for people and, more particularly, the environment when the government is not acting in the public's and nature's best interests, but in the interests of those who fund it (big business). When capitalism is the reigning mode of production, that means our society exists merely to reproduce, secure, and expand capital (Ibid). One can argue then that capital is the efficient cause of the ecological crisis because its key to existence is fundamentally opposed to our ecological concerns (Ibid). Kovel (2007) argues that capitalism, under the conditions of the transnational bourgeoisie, cannot be reformed but can only grow or die

³ Although our system is indeed technically a democracy (i.e. one person, one vote), the dominance of the free market within a capitalist structure produces an outcome which is less than equitable – since corporations control the means of capital, they hold more power/control than citizens.

and therefore, without radical change and an uprising from the government and the public “it is either capital or our future” (p.159).

Free-market environmentalism is constantly being promoted by conservative think tanks, with the idea that market-based approaches will solve environmental problems (Beder, 1998). Corporate funded think tanks work to enable the agenda of deregulation, privatization, and an unconstrained market, all of which have been proven to have detrimental environmental effects.

Even environmental NGOs are succumbing to capitalist logic. As they find it increasingly difficult to find sources of revenue, they are turning to the worst polluting corporations to fund them as part of a ‘corporate responsibility’ initiative (Hari, 2010). The National Wildlife Federation, is one organization that turns to big oil and gas companies for funding, and in return rewards them with awards for ‘environmental stewardship’ (Ibid). This is problematic because the organization’s interests then begin to shift towards those who are funding them rather than looking out for the public’s interests. Hari (2010) suggests that environmental NGOs need to maintain a level of responsibility to the public; if the political system is so corrupt that basic human safety cannot be met then they should be encouraging their members to take direct action rather than being swayed by corporate dollars.

There are inherent contradictions between capitalism and the environment, which is why green capitalism is not a viable solution for our environmental problems. Many eco-Marxists suggest socialist ecology as an effective model for protecting the environment and living more harmoniously with nature (Ibid). We must begin to question capitalism’s success at generating an unprecedented productive capacity and

quantity of material goods, and the implications this has for the environment and the alienation of people from one another.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that informs my research draws upon eco-Marxism/eco-socialism, the concept of ideology, and theories of representation—specifically the works of John Bellamy Foster (2000; 2002; 2010), Terry Eagleton (1991) and Stuart Hall (1997), respectively. I draw on eco-socialism because it confronts the destructive aspects of the capitalist mode of production and overconsumption and calls for a systemic overhaul of capitalism. Eagleton’s (1991) formulation of ideology is important because it helps to explain how powerful groups in capitalist society shape dominant discourses—in this case, the discourses (representation) of green consumerism/capitalism; however, the ideological terrain is recognized as a site of struggle in which hegemonic discourses may be contested by oppositional/counter-hegemonic forces. It is also important to consider Stuart Hall’s (1997) theory of representation as it accounts for the cultural studies dimension of my analysis; it also provides a bridge to the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which I employ in this research. Since my use of CDA is both text- and image-based, an understanding of the concept of representation is significant for analysis of the selected documents.

Political Economy

Environmental political economy stems from the larger theory of political economy, which is a foundational branch of critical theory. Political economy focuses on and critiques the role of economics in profoundly influencing social structure and power in relation to the role of government. We can define political economy as, “the study of social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the

production, distribution, and consumption of resources” (Mosco, 2009, p.24). This accounts for the power relations influencing communications and the ability of corporations to influence people even when they are resistant.

An even more general definition suggests that political economy concerns itself with studying the “control and survival in social life” (Ibid, p.25). This definition analyzes the ways in which corporations control the means by which people produce what they need in order to live. Furthermore, environmental political economy calls for the transformation of our dominant values, social institutions, and ways of living in order to avoid ecological disaster (Kassiola, 2003; Boardman, 2001). In this context, it is imperative to acknowledge the important role that advertising plays in shaping and reinforcing the capitalist values that disconnect us from the earth. As Jhally notes, “20th century advertising is the most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human history and its cumulative effects, unless quickly checked, will be responsible for destroying the world as we know it” (2000, p.1). The central function of this industry is to create a culture that fuses desire and identity with commodities to make the “dead world of things come alive with human and social possibilities”, or what Marx calls commodity fetishism (Ibid).

Commodity fetishism is the idea that social relationships are organized around the exchange of commodities and money, which have been ascribed with properties (value) through cultural processes; however, they appear to be natural or inherent in the objects (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002). Commodity fetishism works ideologically to attribute an identity or image to a product, which people are then willing to pay more for based on these attributes. For example, people are often willing to pay more for seemingly ‘green’ products because they feel that they are contributing to helping the environment.

However, in reality 95 per cent of products claiming to be green are not truly environmentally friendly and have committed at least one sin of greenwashing (TerraChoice, 2011). Companies have realized the huge market willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products and have essentially used 'green' as a way of branding their products to appear socially conscious. This is the epitome of commodity fetishism, because it attributes heroic qualities (of saving the earth) to these products that they do not inherently possess. With commodity fetishism and consumption so ingrained in society, we fail to see the effects this will have on our future sustainability. In keeping with the neo-liberal agenda, advertising is continually presenting us with discourses about our individual needs, and disregards collective issues such as poverty, healthcare, and the environment; however, it is crucial that environmental problems be addressed collectively as they are globally present and affect everyone (Ibid). This is why I argue that green consumerism is neither particularly relevant nor effective, since it places the onus on the individual (rather than the collective) to make environmental change.

At the core of Marxian political economy is the analysis of class "including the structure and operation of capital, the nature and consequences of social class divisions, the labour process, class struggle, and on inquiries of imperialism and dependency, encompassing the globalization of capital, militarism, class oppression, and struggle in the dependent world" (Mosco, p.55). One implication of political economy for environmentalism is that those in positions of power (the elite) exploit natural resources without repercussions because they control the means of capital. Political economy critiques neo-classical economics, which has as a key principle the externalization of the environment.

Arguably, the concept of commodity fetishism—which is central to political economy—can help in identifying the inherent class bias of green consumerism. Although it is not the main focus of my thesis, the class bias in green consumerism is also linked to an eco-Marxist perspective and critique of green capitalism. Since green products are typically more expensive than other comparable products, those with more money are able to make ‘green’ purchasing decisions, whereas people with fewer financial resources are usually forced to choose cheaper products. In addition, environmental problems typically affect the poor more than the rich, since they do not have the financial ability to correct these problems and therefore often live in unhealthy conditions (Vlachou, 2004).

A 2005 study revealed that 50 per cent of people surveyed said they were willing to pay more money for products they believed were ‘green’, while a 2003 poll showed that 80 per cent of people made purchasing decisions based on whether they thought a product was good for the environment, and 70 per cent were more likely to choose a product from an environmentally friendly company (Rogers, 2007, p.240-241). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that corporations have attempted to capitalize on such public sentiments for they have realized that selling seemingly green products could be beneficial to their bottom lines. As a result, they have developed elaborate advertising campaigns designed to communicate their ‘environmentally friendly’ credentials to the public. In such instances, the realities of destructive corporate production practices are often obfuscated by the glossy images presented in the advertisements themselves.

Environmental Political Economy & Eco-Marxism

I believe this particular framework is important to examine in relation to the environment because it questions the very system of capitalism and the mass consumption that has resulted in the degradation of our natural world. Since Eco-Marxism is a branch of Environmental Political Economy, I will first provide a brief outline of the latter before delving more specifically into Eco-Marxism.

Under capitalism we are encouraged to believe that our world is limitless in terms of the production and consumption of goods, and that as long as we have enough money we can have whatever we want. Corporations have completely taken advantage of this world-view in their exploitation of natural resources and their emissions of excessive pollution with limited repercussions.

Take for example the BP oil spill that occurred on April 20, 2010, which spilled 5 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico and has cost over \$11 billion US to clean up (CBC, 2010). BP has agreed to set up a \$20 billion fund for damage claims, which may seem like a lot of money, but only amounts to approximately one year of BP's profits (Mason, 2010). This was the largest oil spill in history and will continue to cause irrevocable damage to the area's fish and wildlife, not to mention the destruction to coastlines and the marine floor.

We can also point to the long-standing greenwashing practices of a company such as the General Motors Corporation, which, until recently, was the world's largest vehicle manufacturer (Toyota is now the largest). Writing fifteen years ago, Greer and Bruno (1996) pointed out that GM was contributing to an estimated two per cent of carbon emissions, eleven per cent of carbon monoxide, eight per cent of the nitrogen oxides, and six per cent of hydrocarbons emitted annually by vehicles (p.160). Those

emissions take a huge toll on human health--the American Lung Association estimated those costs to be about US\$25 billion annually at the time (Ibid, p.162). Yet, Greer and Bruno noted that the company was not required to pay for those emissions because there were no measures in place to account for the harmful effects to the environment. Instead GM proposed that for every car sold in its Geo division, it would plant one tree to offset the carbon dioxide produced. However, such gestures were rather meaningless since it would have actually taken 734 trees to counteract a ten-year lifetime of one GM car (Ibid).

This example is one among many, which suggests that we must begin to reflect on the effects that our everyday actions--such as driving a personal vehicle, and energy and product consumption--have on the long-term effects of the earth. We must begin to account for all things in nature. Yet, this is difficult within a capitalist system where growth is measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product. Suzuki argues that we should assess growth in terms of human happiness and well-being. He writes:

[a]n economy must exist to improve the quality of life for people. When growth becomes the primary goal of an economy, the instruments developed to measure economic success are based on measuring growth. But the leading measurement today, the GDP (gross domestic product), is merely a sum of national spending, with no distinctions between transactions that add to well-being and those that diminish it (2010, p.52).

In a similar vein, politician and environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy claims that

[t]he [GDP] counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage... Yet [it] does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play... It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile (Quoted in Suzuki, 2010, p.53).

Hence, Suzuki suggests we should begin to measure growth in terms of the GPI (genuine progress indicator) as developed in 1995 by the organization Redefining Progress (Ibid). This is a more effective indicator of actual human growth because it

considers income distribution, adding money spent if the poor receive a greater share of the economy and subtracting when the rich get more. The value of household work, volunteering, and higher education, which do not normally contribute to the GDP, is added to the GPI. The cost of crime, resource depletion, pollution, environmental damage and disposable goods is subtracted from the GPI (Ibid).

The reason a measurement such as the GPI is important to mention in my analysis is because it would give people a clearer picture of what the world actually looks like in terms of 'growth', while taking into consideration the effects our actions have not only on the economy, but also on human well-being and nature. It presents a clear challenge to capitalism's measurement systems.

Environmental political economy incorporates the natural totality of organic life by looking at the links between social behaviour and the environment (Mosco, 2009, p.6). This approach is important because if we fail to take the environment into account in our everyday actions, eventually we will exhaust all of our natural resources and it will be a much more difficult world for future generations to live in, if the planet survives at all (Suzuki & Taylor, 2009).

Environmental political theory calls into question what we value as a society and as individuals. It critiques market based society, globalized capitalism and the emphasis placed in our society on the need for endless material consumption (Kassiola, 2003). These common values are inconsistent with our ecological abilities and are resulting in an unsustainable society, and one that is unsatisfying and undesirable for many citizens (Ibid).

A collaborative environmental perspective requires both collective and participatory decision making (which we see in democratic socialism) in order to produce a healthy ecology (Mosco, 2009, p.60). Marxian political economists examine nature and economic value, the consequences of treating nature as a commodity, and sustainable development (Ibid).

The development of an ecological perspective is an important point in history because “no other form of thinking about nature and society has conclusively shown the importance of irreversible change, contingency, coevolution, and contradiction” (Foster, 2010, p.245). Fundamental to an eco-Marxist theoretical perspective is the belief that to be true to itself Marxism must become ecological (O’Connor, 1994). At its core, eco-Marxism questions the legitimacy of the capitalist system and deconstructs the interactions between capitalism and ecology.

Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution brought about many changes which engendered distinct forms of alienation. One such form manifested itself in the realm of production, particularly in relation to the division of labour and the fragmentation of the labour process, characteristic of industrial modes of mass production. This works to alienate workers from the products they are making, since they do not carry out the production of the product from beginning to end, but are responsible for only one part of the process. Marx also notes that capitalism produces a surplus market in which workers make an excess of capital from the product or service they are providing, but instead of investing the money back into their workers and compensating them for their achievements, the money is kept by capitalists that are at the top of the corporate hierarchy (Rinehart, 2006).

Other important dimensions of alienation within the workplace, according to Marx, include worker estrangement from the products of their labour, loss of control over work, self-estrangement, and estrangement between individuals (Ibid). The sources of this alienation are the concentrated means of production, markets in land, labour, and commodities, and the complex division of labour (Ibid).

John Bellamy Foster adds that

[I]labour and production constituted the active human transformation of nature, but also of human nature, the human relation to nature and of human beings themselves. The alienation of human beings from themselves and their production is also the alienation of human beings from nature, and the alienation of nature, since human beings are ‘a part of nature’ (Foster, 2010, p.228).

Foster discusses the connection between Marx’s theory of alienation in relation to human labour and the alienation of humans from nature. He believes that an eco-Marxist perspective of the environment would “transcend the idealism, spiritualism, and dualism of much of contemporary Green thought, by recovering the deeper critique of the alienation of humanity from nature that was central to Marx’s work” (Foster, 2000, p.20).

Alienation is a mode of experience in which “*man [sic] does not experience himself [sic] as the active bearer of his [sic] own powers and richness, but as an impoverished ‘thing,’ dependent on powers outside of himself [sic], unto whom he [sic] has projected his [sic] living substance [italics in original]*” (Fromm, 1955, p.121). Under capitalism, alienation is evident in all aspects of life including our relationship to our work, the things we consume, the state, our interaction with others, and even our understanding of ‘self’ (Ibid).

Erich Fromm's work attempts to extend Marx's concept of alienation beyond the realm of production and points to the ways in which humans are also alienated in the realm of consumption. Fromm claims that the process of consumption is alienated since we acquire things with money, which is an abstract representation of our labour and effort (Ibid, p.127). He further says we are alienated at the level of consumption since "we are surrounded by things of whose nature and origin we know nothing" (Ibid, p.130). We therefore lack respect for the process of production and our only connectedness to a product is in how to manipulate or consume it (Ibid). This is problematic because we are then deeply disconnected from these products and are never satisfied, which in turn leads us to consume more and more products in the pursuit of feeling fulfilled (Ibid).

According to Burkett (1999) we consistently see three key features of Marx's approach to nature in Marxist literature. First we see the consistency in human production in terms of both its social form and its material content, which Marx insists is shaped and constrained by natural conditions including human existence (Ibid). Second is Marx's dialectical perspective on the necessity and limits of certain forms of human production, highlighting the new possibilities that capitalism creates for human development, while at the same time arguing that capitalist relations prevent the realization of these possibilities (Ibid). Lastly, and most unrecognized in eco-Marxist literature, is the potential of a Marxist approach for analyzing the historical co-evolution of society and nature (Ibid).

However, it was not just the Industrial Revolution and capitalism that caused this shift or disconnect between humans and nature; it is, rather, a key point on a long trajectory of alienation that has been going on for centuries. A key turning point in the disconnection between humans and nature came with the advent of the mechanical clock

in the fourteenth century (Menzies, 1999). By this point people began to rely upon mechanical time and time measurement devices for social organization, rather than biological rhythms or nature-centered time that previously organized work and social life (Ibid). The Industrial Revolution further alienated people from the biological body as the mechanical rhythms of the factory assembly line served as an instrument of social conditioning (Ibid).

Moreover, the advent of technological time in the digital age has marked another key disembodiment between humans and nature. Menzies says the problem with this disconnect is that “[w]e become the extensions of digital networks and global information systems, so removed from matter that we hardly realize that the matter we’re controlling includes our own bodies, the communities where we live and even the earth which sustains life in general” (1999, p.72).

Technology also works to alienate us from one another. Take for example the proliferation of computers, cellular phones, personal music devices, etc., that are designed to ‘connect’ us to one another. However, this constant ‘cyber’ connection is often replacing face-to-face interactions. Although this can be a positive experience in some cases, such as when physical distance does not allow two individuals to interact, for the most part it further isolates people physically and leaves them feeling more disconnected from friends and family (Turkle, 2011) and some argue, from nature as well (Bryant, 2007).

When we begin to lose sight of the things that bring us together as a community and are constantly bombarded by capitalist discourses through advertising and public relations, democracy, human well-being, and happiness are devalued. Neo-liberal discourses teach us to think and live as individuals, rather than as a collective, and this

alienates us from other human beings, as well as from nature. It is capitalism and the discourses of advertising that “systematically relegates discussion of key societal issues to the peripheries of the culture and talks in powerful ways instead of individual desire, fantasy, pleasure and comfort” (Jhally, 2000, p.5). This focus on the individual rather than the collective good discourages the long-term thinking that is needed in order to address problems of environmental degradation.

The environmental movement brought about a new realization of this disconnect between humans and nature. However, these movements have often been marginalized by mainstream thinking, and economics and the solution of green capitalism prevail as the dominant ideas about how to improve the environment. At a surface level, practicing green capitalism appears to reconnect us with nature, but in reality it does not. Green capitalism is in fact extending the externalization of nature by extracting resources without consideration for the environment and selling them back to the public with a big green bow.

The underlying reason for my use of environmental political economy and eco-Marxism is to show the political nature of the global environmental crisis. We must understand this political nature and its potentially harmful consequences in order to comprehend how we have arrived at the conditions we experience today, and respond to the need to change our dominant values, social institutions, and manner of living to avoid ecological disaster. The fundamental cause of ecological problems is found within the dominant values of market-based society and global capitalism.

It is also important to note the research that reports the insufficiency of material wealth on human survival and happiness. It has been studied and documented that once

we meet our basic life needs (food, shelter, a job or means to sustain ourselves and our family), material wealth does not increase our levels of happiness (Jhally, 2000).

Ideology

Terry Eagleton states that “what persuades men and women to mistake each other from time to time for gods or vermin is ideology” (1991, p.xiii). Ideology is a key idea to employ when examining issues of belief and power. It is through ideology and discourse that dominant powers legitimize themselves by promoting agreeable beliefs and values, naturalizing and universalizing those beliefs, denigrating, opposing and challenging ideas, excluding rival ideas and thoughts, and obscuring social reality in ways convenient to itself (Eagleton, 1991, p.5-6). Ideology achieves legitimacy through the device of universalizing and ‘eternalizing’ itself. Time and space-specific values and interests are projected as the values of all humanity (Ibid, p.56). We often see this with the universalizing and eternalizing of capitalist ideology, which we see, for example, in the advertising discourses representing personal vehicle use and driving. Our society upholds the notion that personal vehicles are an absolute necessity, when in reality putting more resources into public transit systems would be much more environmentally friendly. On some level, this is how ideology works--it makes us believe there is no alternative.

Critics of the concept of ideology argue that we are active participants in accepting ideology, and presume that nobody is ever wholly mystified, and “that those subject to oppression experience *even now* hopes and desires which could only be realistically fulfilled by a transformation of their material conditions” (Ibid, p.xiv). This Eagleton says, “[i]s a testimony to the fact that nobody is, ideologically speaking, a

complete dupe that people who are characterized as inferior must actually learn to be so”

(Ibid). As Jon Elster points out,

[r]uling ideologies actively shape the wants and desires of those subjected to them; but they must also engage significantly with the wants and desires that people already have, catching up genuine hopes and needs, reinflicting them in their own peculiar idiom, and feeding them back to their subjects in ways which render these ideologies plausible and attractive (cited in Eagleton, 1991, p.15).

At its basic level, ideology can be seen as “who is saying what to whom for what purposes” (Ibid, p.5-6). With a more progressive focus, Eagleton claims that ideology can be defined in six ways; (i) the general process of production of ideas beliefs and values in social life, (ii) ideas and beliefs that symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, group or class, (iii) the promotion and legitimation of the interests of such groups in the face of opposing interests, (iv) the promotion and legitimation of the interests of said groups as a dominant social power, (v) signifying ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate interests of the ruling class by distortion and dissimulation, and (vi) false or deceptive beliefs as arising from the material structure of society as a whole (1991, p.28-30).

The concept of ideology is important to my research because it is necessary to acknowledge that cultural representations and discourses do not emerge from or exist in a vacuum. As Scatamburlo-D’Annibale and McLaren (2008) point out, “to treat culture as a mere theatre of significations and to detach cultural production from its basis in economic and political processes...*dis-embeds* culture from its constitutive *embeddedness* in the materiality of social life and can emasculate the very practice of radical critique” (p.145). Ideology grounds discourses in reality and accounts for the political and economic influences that shape our knowledge and our behaviours. Eagleton claims that we should view ideology not as disembodied ideas or behaviour patterns, but as a discursive or

semiotic phenomenon because this “emphasizes its materiality...and preserves the sense that it is essentially concerned with *meanings*” (1991, p.194). Businesses have recognized the financial benefits that might accrue from representing themselves and their products as ‘green’ and have thus attempted to align environmental discourses with corporate ideology.

Since images play a key role in my analysis of advertising, I draw on Bill Nichols argument that “[i]deology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have” (1981, p.1). Images play an important role in representing ideology because “images are the signs of social representation, the markers or bearers of ideology” (1981, p.3). Images have taken on an important role in the digital age, providing a new component of analysis in critical research.

My analysis of green products focuses on how they are represented within advertisements since it is necessary to acknowledge that advertising functions ideologically within capitalist society to promote values of individualism, short term thinking, and immediate satisfaction to the exclusion of collective values that emphasize the public/common good and long term thinking about the environment (and other social issues). Advertising speaks to us as individuals, further reinforcing the neo-conservative notion that “there is no such thing as ‘society’” (only individuals and their families) (Jhally, 2000, p.4). Ideologically, capitalism and the market appeal to the worst qualities in us such as greed and selfishness and undermine and discourage our best qualities such as compassion, caring, and generosity (Ibid). These ideologies further assert that we

should continue to consume things, and to look out for ourselves over the interests of the collective.

Ideologies of capitalism place us in competition with one another and tightly bind our personal identity to the things we own (Schor, 1999). These capitalist ideologies can also be connected to the way our market measures growth (as previously mentioned the GDP versus GPI), focusing not on the quality of life or social health but growth in the economy. As Juliet Schor (1996) points out in *The Overspent American*, “[w]hen we count not only our incomes but also trends in free time, public safety, environmental quality, income distribution, teen suicides, and child abuse, we find that things have been getting far worse for more than twenty years, even though consumption has been rising” (1996, p.21). All of these factors point to the negative social repercussions that capitalist ideologies have on human life and the environment.

Representation

I also use Stuart Hall’s theory of representation to examine how environmental discourses are represented within advertising of green products. Hall (1997) defines representation as the production of the meaning of concepts in our minds through language. Using representation means to use language to say something or represent the world meaningfully to other people. Hall’s concept of representation is strongly linked to the concept of ideology. Hall says the power to signify events in a particular way is an ideological power (1982, p.69). This power to signify is not a neutral force, but is a site of struggle. Therefore, ideologies depend on the politics of signification. Levi-Strauss suggested that signification depended not on the intrinsic meaning of terms but on the distinctions of culture (cited in Hall, 1982). This implies that it is the dominant groups in

society that have more resources at their disposal to present their ideological interests as natural and ‘common-sensical’ in ways that function to uphold the status quo. This approach is an important part of my thesis because it helps me to explore the way discourses shape struggles to represent the world. Hall agrees with Eagleton that people are active in their interpretations of ideology and struggle to make their own meaning out of cultural texts/events (Ibid). Meaning making is a constant site of struggle; for example, critics of green capitalism might say that it is not really furthering the environmental movement, whereas supporters could say that although it may not be the best option it is ‘the lesser of two evils’ and will help to reduce consumption of non-renewable resources. Therefore, it is important to note that there are many juxtaposing forces working to shape discourses and in turn our behaviour. However, these theories of ideology serve to explain how the dominant forces (in this case advertising and the media) hold a powerful influence over society by reinforcing, naturalizing, and otherwise promoting capitalist ideology as if there were no alternative.

The theories of political economy, ideology and representation all mesh well with my method of critical discourse analysis insofar as each of them recognize the cultural/political terrain as a site of struggle while, nonetheless, acknowledging that hegemonic discourses are most often shaped by powerful and affluent groups. Most importantly, the animating principles of these approaches contribute to the axiological commitment of critical emancipation and potentially transformative forms of environmental activism, which I contend are necessary to facilitate meaningful change in our interactions with nature. Consumer driven models, such as green consumerism are still part of the economic system, which is rooted in the goal of continuous growth. This is problematic to the environment because “we know that we are rapidly exhausting what

the earth can offer and that if the present growth and consumption trends continued unchecked, the limits to growth on the planet will be reached sometime within the next century” (Jhally, 2000, p.5). Purchasing green products as a form of consumer activism ignores the fact that our earth cannot sustain these continued levels of growth and the massive amount of waste produced as a result of our excessive consumption.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis

I provide a brief overview of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) before further explaining how I use Thomas Huckin's (1997) particular approach to CDA to examine the representation of green products

The earliest forms of CDA are generally associated with the scholarship of Tuen van Dijk and Norman Fairclough as well as others including Wodak, Kress, and van Leeuwen. The basic assumptions of CDA are: (i) that language is a social phenomenon, (ii) institutions, social groupings, and individuals create specific meanings and values which are expressed in language in systematic ways, (iii) texts are the relevant units of language in communication, (iv) readers/hearers are active recipients in their relationship with texts, and (v) there are similarities between the language of science and the language of institutions (Wodak, 2004, p.6). CDA is useful because it brings together political economy and cultural studies/representation; two key approaches within the field of Communication Studies. I believe CDA is the most effective method to explore the representation of the environment and greenwashing practices of corporations since it incorporates the ideas of power, history, and ideology.

As a founding 'father' of CDA, Norman Fairclough believes the goal of CDA is to examine the words used in a text, how they are put together in a sentence, and how interaction between speaker and consumer uncovers power relations in representation (1989; 2003). Fairclough (1989) concisely breaks down CDA into three steps: describe, interpret, and explain. In describing the text one answers a series of ten questions about the text. In the interpreting step one takes into consideration not only the text but also the

context, which involves situating the text historically. Interpreting a text also involves examining the surface of the utterance (phonology, grammar, and vocabulary), examining the meaning of the utterance (pragmatics and semantics), examining local coherence (establishing meaningful connections between utterances), and exploring the text's structure (how it fits together as a whole) (Ibid). The last step of explanation is intended to “portray a discourse as part of a social process, as a social practice, showing how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 163).

According to Ruth Wodak (2004), Critical Discourse Analysis regards language as social practice. Most important to CDA is the relation between language and power, and specifically how social inequality is expressed, signaled, constituted, and legitimized through language use (or discourses) (Ibid). Hegemonic discourses are typically structured by the dominating forces, are historically and culturally produced and interpreted (situated in time and space), and are made legitimate through the ideologies of the powerful interests (Ibid).

My Use of CDA

For this thesis, I employ Thomas Huckin's approach to CDA and I do so for two major reasons. First, many early proponents of CDA focused almost exclusively on written texts while Huckin accounts for visual representations/images that often accompany written/spoken text. Therefore, Huckin's version of CDA is more useful in examining advertisements—in my case television ads—because it facilitates a multimodal form of CDA that addresses the use of text, image and sound in conjunction

with one another. Second, Huckin provides a thorough step-by-step template that can be applied to the advertisements that I have chosen to analyze.

Thomas Huckin describes CDA as a “highly context-sensitive, democratic approach, which takes an ethical stance on social issues with the aim of improving society” (1997, p.1). He distinguishes CDA from other types of discourse analysis in six ways: (i) texts are context-sensitive because they are produced and read in some real-world context, (ii) CDA tries to unite the text, the discursive practices that create and interpret the text, and the larger social context – showing they are interrelated, (iii) CDA takes into consideration the larger societal issues including cultural, political, social, and other facets, (iv) CDA is action oriented and attempts to draw attention to power imbalances, social inequalities, non-democratic practices and other ethical problems, (v) CDA takes a social constructionist stance, and tries to show how the dominant structures in society construct their own versions of reality, and (vi) CDA tries to be readable and clear to a broader audience (Huckin, 1997, p.1-2).

Huckin’s model provides a good layout for comparative analysis in that it has decisive coding categories and asks specific questions about the text. From this model I have created an analysis chart, which I use in analyzing all three examples (see Appendix A). He discusses the analysis as a two-staged event. First he says one should look at the text as a typical reader - merely trying to comprehend what the text is saying. At this step, using the advertisement’s transcript I provide a general analysis and summarize the commercial from the role of the typical reader. This is fairly simple as it examines only the surface level of what the advertisement is trying to say/do (namely to sell a product).

At the second level, he believes the analyst should step back from the text and look at it more critically, resisting the text at different levels (Huckin, 1997). This step

involves looking at the text on different levels, raising questions about it, thinking about how it could be constructed differently and comparing it to related texts (Ibid). He gives a more detailed description of things to examine at the second level including the genre, framing, visual aids, foregrounding/backgrounding, omissions, presupposition, discursive differences, topicalization, agent-patient relations, deletion or omission of agents, insinuation, connotations, register, and modality (Ibid). I use some of these suggested tools to analyze the texts used in my project.

At a critical level, the reader must first identify the genre to which the text belongs. All three of my texts belong to the TV advertising genre. Huckin says that “advertisements as a genre are usually immediately recognizable by their use of attention-getting language and visual aids, by the way they extol the virtues of some product or service, and by their artificially personal tone – all of which are designed to encourage readers to buy that particular product or service” (1997, p.4-5). Some other things to look for in terms of the genre of the text are how certain statements might serve the purpose of the writer/producer, and most significantly what could have been said but was left out, and why (Ibid). Examining omission is crucial to any critical discourse analysis because it often highlights the hidden intentions of the writer/producer. Omission is a powerful aspect of textualization because when a writer/producer leaves something out, it does not often enter the reader’s/viewer’s mind and therefore it is not subjected to their scrutiny (Huckin, 1997, p.5). This is a major way that advertising discourses serve to distract the reader from what is really important.

Next, framing examines how the context of the text is presented, and from what perspective. Frames are often presented as narratives or stories with universal themes, such as good versus evil. Another powerful way of framing a text is through the use of

visual aids (Huckin, 1997), which is especially relevant to my analysis of advertising texts. The next step in analysis is to look at the foregrounding and backgrounding of the text; this includes which concepts are emphasized by the writer/producer and which are marginalized or omitted. Writers/producers can also use presupposition to influence readers/viewers, which Huckin defines as “the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative” (Ibid, p.6).

Lastly, in looking at the text as a whole, the reader/viewer must keep in mind the discourse or register of the text. This usually takes into account the tone and formality of the text, and whether or not the voice is presented as an expert or typical user. Depending on the purpose of the text these different voices can be used to manipulate the reader/viewer. For example using a voice of a typical user can make the reader/viewer feel compassion or connectedness to the ordinary citizen, whereas using an expert voice emphasizes the authority and expertise of the writer/producer.

The next step of the analysis involves examining the language used in the text. The reader must first construct the basic meaning of each sentence, and should topicalize the sentence by identifying the grammatical subjects (Ibid). The agent-patient⁴ relations are also important to identify because they can often uncover the intended power relations behind the text. This includes asking the questions: who is the agent, who is doing what to whom, who is initiating actions, and who are passive recipients (Ibid)? It is also important to recognize the deletion or omission of agents often through the nominalization and use of passive verbs. The reader should then identify any presuppositions and insinuations at the sentence level as well. This is important because

⁴ Agent refers to the person carrying out the action, where patient refers to the participant in the situation upon whom the action is carried out.

“[p]resuppositions are notoriously manipulative because they are difficult to challenge: many readers are reluctant to question statements that the author appears to be taking for granted” (Ibid, p.7).

The reader must then break the text down even further and examine the words and phrases. This involves taking note of connotations in individual words through labels or metaphors. The modality of the text is also important to examine at this level; modality being “the tone of statements as regards their degree of certitude and authority” (Ibid, p.8).

Lastly, according to Huckin (1997) one should analyze the role that auxiliary embellishments, such as visual aids and sound, play in representing the text (Ibid, p.10). Since television advertising is primarily a visual medium (and not just an auxiliary embellishment), I supplement this area of examination with the use of Katherine Frith’s levels of meaning in advertisements, which further accounts for the ad in its entirety, including text, image, and sound.

Levels of Meaning in Advertising

I use Katherine Frith’s (1998) analysis of the levels of meaning in advertising, as a method specifically designed to examine ideology and representation through the medium of advertising. Frith says we must learn what an advertisement ‘means’ by deconstructing it (1998, p.3). The first level of meaning is similar to Huckin’s (1997) cursory reading of the text, or looking at the text as a typical reader. At the surface level, meaning is based on the overall impression a reader gets from quickly looking at the ad (Frith, 1998, p.5).

Next, the analysis of the advertiser's intended meaning examines the writer/producer's intended sales message, which can be directly related to the commodity, but can also sell the reader/viewer a lifestyle or image (Ibid). This can be related to Huckin's (1997) discussion of genre, and specifically characteristics of the advertising genre as serving the purposes of the writer/producer. This is also related to Stuart Hall's (1974) level of 'encoding', where advertisers place meaning in the text, which audiences 'decode' based on cultural referent systems.

Lastly, Frith's (1998) third level of meaning addresses the cultural or ideological dimensions of advertisements. This is closely related to Huckin's (1997) critical in-depth analysis of the text. Frith says this level relies on the cultural knowledge and background of the reader, and is based on common beliefs about our culture (1998, p.5). These beliefs are ideological in nature, as they appear to be 'common sense' but are not actually universal beliefs or truths (Ibid). This is the most important level to examine in ads because "[i]n order to really begin to see how advertising works to support and reinforce certain ideological beliefs it is important to deconstruct the deeper meanings of ads and learn how to take apart the cultural or ideological messages" (Ibid, p.6). Frith further contends that "[a]dvertising manipulates symbols to create meaning and in our society, the values expressed in advertising mirror the dominant ideological themes" (Ibid, p.13). Frith's levels of meaning are an important complement to my use of Huckin's approach to CDA because TV ads are mainly visual, and typically CDA is not primarily focused on the visual elements of the ad. Although Huckin's version of CDA accounts for analyzing a multimodal text, I use Frith's 'levels of meaning in advertising' as a complimentary approach specifically developed to analyze advertising discourses.

Critical discourse analysis and the levels of meaning in advertising strongly complement the theories of eco-Marxism, ideology and representation because all take into consideration the ongoing power struggle as well as the historical context of discourses. Both eco-Marxism and CDA seek to examine how dominating forces shape hegemonic discourses that are ideologically and culturally produced and interpreted, and made legitimate through the ideologies of powerful interests. I selected the three examples discussed below for my thesis because of their explicitness in defining themselves as ‘green’ products. All of these products have strong customer approval, and are said by many consumers/reviewers to be the best of their kind⁵. Critical discourse analysis, along with eco-Marxism, ideology, and representation in relation to the environment help to explain how we have ended up at this point in history, as well as how we can work together to enact the critical change that is needed for humanity to survive and thrive.

Examples

My first example is the Clorox Green Works line of cleaning products. I look at this line of products because of its mass popularity and connection to the well-known brand Clorox. Green Works is perhaps the most well known ‘environmentally friendly’ cleaning product, and is used in 17 million homes (Green Works, 2011). At the time of selection the “Green Works Naturally” commercial was the most recent in this series (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011). This thirty-second commercial focuses on Green Works all purpose cleaner, but also on promoting an overall awareness of the Green Works line of products.

⁵ www.consumerreports.org

My second example looks at the 2009 Ford Escape Hybrid. I examine this particular sports utility vehicle because it was named the Greenest SUV in 2010 by several consumer reports and websites including Forbes (Hinch-Ownby, 2010), Autotropolis (Alexander, 2010), and The Daily Green (Motavalli, 2010). The one-minute and thirty-second commercial entitled “Steering Towards the Future” discusses the ways in which the Ford Company is committed to the environment and how the Ford Escape Hybrid factors into this commitment (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009).

The third example I consider is the 2010 Toyota Prius “Harmony”, “Solar” and “MPG” commercials (ToyotaUSA, 2009b). I look at this particular vehicle because consumer reports rated it the Greenest Car in 2010⁶. This series of commercials, each thirty-seconds long, depicts a world in which humans represent nature (i.e. the grass, trees, water, clouds, etc.). The world only comes to life as the Prius drives through it. A “Making of the Prius Harmony Commercial” was particularly helpful in discussing the intentions of the writers/producers and added a new dimension to my analysis (ToyotaUSA, 2009a).

I chose these particular examples because I want to examine green products from the perspective of a typical consumer. For a typical consumer, all of these products are familiar, easily accessible, and promote themselves as being ‘environmental friendly’ and a better alternative than their chemical counterparts. I want to analyze products that not only depict their connection to nature and creating a better world, but that explicitly define themselves as being ‘green’. These are well-known, mainstream products that I believe are representative of the discourses I am studying. Additionally, the Clorox,

⁶ www.consumerreports.org

Ford, and Toyota companies all have well known brand recognition and are major players in the corporate world. Since the focus of this thesis is on the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses, I chose these *mainstream* corporate brands (and not less known/alternative brands) because their very dominance in the market means that they are important players in discursive struggles. Also as I will further mention, the Ford Escape was the top selling crossover SUV in 2009⁷, and the Toyota Prius was the top selling hybrid electric vehicle in 2009. Therefore, I also examine these particular examples because of their importance in the market.

⁷ Ford also became the top selling automaker in North America in March 2011 (Macaluso, 2011).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DIRTY TRUTH ABOUT ECO-FRIENDLY CLEANING PRODUCTS

Clorox Green Works

According to the company's website, Clorox Green Works products are used in 17 million homes, which provides evidence that they are supported by consumers (Green Works, 2011, Why Natural). The representation of Clorox Green Works in its advertising is similar to the corporate responsibility initiative on the company's website, focusing on the product being 'natural', and therefore environmentally friendly (The Clorox Company, 2010). The commercial says,

[f]rom nature comes Green Works. Natural plant based cleaners without harsh chemical fumes or residue. Since Green Works products are made by Clorox, they clean with the power you'd expect, and they're made from natural ingredients. Now there's new Green Works natural dishwashing liquid. It removes grease and baked on food, leaving your dishes clean and shiny. Green Works, naturally (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011).

At the first level of analysis, what Frith (1996) calls the surface level, we see a commercial for Green Works all-purpose cleaners that shows a mother and son going about their daily routine, and shows how they implement Green Works products into their daily life. The commercial also explains how the product works to remove baked-on food, and shows its effectiveness in comparison with another leading brand in a side-by-side shot of both products (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011). The visuals in this advertisement are images of nature including flowers, plants, oranges, coconuts, and lemons.

At the level of the advertiser's intended meaning (Frith, 1998), and what Huckin (1997) calls reading the text as a whole, the general analysis derived from this

commercial is that Clorox Green Works products are connected/in touch with nature. The ad intends to show that these products are safer for consumers, their families, and the environment, because they are 'all natural'. The commercial persuades the reader/viewer to believe these products are unlike other cleaners and better because they are as tough as other cleaners but without the harsh chemicals. The images in the commercial portray a mother and son in their family kitchen. The mother is using Green Works products to clean the kitchen while the son is working on schoolwork. This represents the idea that not only will these products clean your home efficiently and without the chemical residue, but they will also keep your family happy and healthy. Therefore, one discourse presented in this commercial is 'if you wish to keep your family safe and healthy you should use these products'.

As previously noted, Huckin claims that the advertising genre encourages people to buy a particular product or service by using an artificially personal tone, attention grabbing language and visuals, and by praising the quality and characteristics of a product or service (1997). This text conforms to the TV advertising genre in several ways. First, the language takes on a personal tone using words such as 'you', and 'you're', attempting to put the reader/viewer in an active role, using this particular product. It also plays on the connection of consumer brand loyalty by saying, "[s]ince Green Works products are made by Clorox they clean with the power you'd expect" (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011). However Huckin (1997) asks the critical reader to examine not only what is said in the text, but also what could have been said but was left out.

The ad foregrounds the concepts of natural, powerful and clean, but backgrounds and omits the larger societal issues such as health, safety, and mass consumption. Similarly, ideology works to foreground certain values by promoting and legitimating the

interests of certain groups as dominant social powers (Eagleton, 1991, p.29). Further, this example relates to my theoretical framework and shows how advertising discourses and capitalist ideology often omits the larger societal or collective issues involved, since they serve to question the legitimacy of corporate modes of production.

Another thing that could have been mentioned, but was omitted in the ad, is whether the product's packaging is environmentally friendly. Huckin describes omission as a manipulative form of backgrounding because "[i]t is difficult to raise questions about something that is not even there" (1997, p.5). It appears that the product's bottles are made from plastic, which in some instances is recyclable but not necessarily environmentally friendly. In accordance with the Natural Products Association (NPA), the Clorox website claims that "products must use biodegradable ingredients with environmentally sustainable packaging *as much as possible* [emphasis added]" (Green Works, 2011, Why Natural), an arguably vague statement.

This ad for Clorox Green Works commits the greenwashing sin of vagueness by claiming that the product is made with 'natural' ingredients, without ever naming the ingredients used. The sin of vagueness contends that the product's claims are "so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer" (TerraChoice, 2009). For example, many things are naturally occurring but are still not safe or good for humans, consider arsenic, uranium, mercury and formaldehyde (Ibid). After further research on the company's website, many of the Green Works product ingredients are actually safe for consumers (Green Works, 2011, Products: Ingredients); however, several ingredients are synthetically produced, such as sodium lauryl sulphate, dyes and a petrochemical preservative (Vasil, 2009).

Huckin says that writers/producers can manipulate readers/viewers by using tactics such as presupposition, which is “the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative” (1997, p.6). The pre-supposition insinuated in this advertisement is that many natural products are not as strong as chemical products. However, Green Works products are presented as being as strong as other cleaners, which we see in the statement “[s]ince Green Works products are made by Clorox, they clean with the power you’d expect, and they’re made from natural ingredients” (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011). However, this glosses over the idea that people can make their own cleaners from household ingredients (i.e. baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice) that work just as well as chemical cleaners. Capitalist ideology and advertising discourses have appropriated the idea of cleaning with chemicals and corporate products as the only way to be ‘truly clean’. Green consumerism consequently alienates consumers because it promises to re-connect them to nature by consuming products and natural resources, which only further destroys the environment. This ideology operates in favour of corporations (and not citizens) because, as previously noted, green consumerism is an opportunity for corporations to turn the crisis they generate through their accumulation of capital (from the exploitation of nature) into profit and investment revenue (Kahn, 2009).

In examining the language use, when the commercial says, “Clorox Green Works cleans with the power you expect” (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011), it presupposes (Huckin, 1997) that the consumer has previously used Clorox cleaners and believes them to be powerful. Further, the text is presented as a narrative, with a third person omniscient view. It keeps a friendly tone, promoting the product as for the good of nature, and for the good of one’s family. However, this text contains more than one style of discourse, as

it promotes both a friendly typical register, while at the same time emphasizing the authority and expertise of the Clorox Company. Huckin says these discursive differences can be exploited to manipulate the reader/viewer (1997, p.6). The statement “[s]ince Green Works products are made by Clorox, they clean with the power you’d expect”(GreenWorksCleaning, 2011) asserts authority and places Clorox in the role of expert, which can deter consumers from questioning these statements. This representation promotes the idea that natural cleaners are better than chemical cleaners. It does not address the environmental or health aspects in this particular representation but they are insinuated. They are not addressed on the company’s website either, but are insinuated in vague statements such as “for you it’s powerful, for them it’s gentle”, next to a picture of a young girl and boy (Green Works, 2011, Home).

When examining the language used in this ad the concepts of ‘nature’, ‘natural’, ‘naturally’ and ‘Clorox’ are all topicalized, which is a type of foregrounding at the sentence level (Huckin, 1997, p.6). In fact, all but two sentences mention the above concepts, while the other two briefly explain how the product works to remove grease.

In this example, Clorox is seen as the agent, initiating actions by creating these green products, and thus exerting power. Readers/viewers however are not just passive recipients in their role as patients - they must purchase these green products in order for change to be made. Commodity fetishism is relevant here, as the writer/producer is investing these green products with magical qualities not inherent in the products themselves, such as the ability to enact social change.

Several insinuations are evident in this advertisement including the use of double meaning with the word ‘naturally’. When the commercial says, “[f]rom nature comes Green Works” there is the implication that this product comes directly from nature, when

in reality it uses several naturally derived ingredients combined with synthetically produced ingredients to make the product. Also the last sentence of this commercial says, “Green Works, naturally”, which could imply this product is made naturally, or could also insinuate that *obviously* you should choose this product over others.

At the words and phrases level (Huckin, 1997) the word ‘natural(ly)’ connotes that these products are better for you and your family, are safer, and are more environmentally friendly. An informal register with a low degree of technicality is used, as often seen in advertisements that serve to attract an audience with a broad range of understanding. And lastly, the modality, which refers to “the tone of statements as regards their degree of certitude and authority” (Huckin, 1997, p.8), is indicative through phrases such as “they clean with the power you’d expect” (GreenWorksCleaning, 2011). It reports the product’s abilities in a factual tone with no trace of uncertainty, to provide the overall effect that there is no question these products are made ‘naturally’ and clean to the consumer’s standards. At Frith’s (1998) level of cultural and ideological meanings, we see how advertising discourses function to naturalize capitalist ideologies and monopolize cultural life to a point where “[t]here is no space left for different types of discussion, no space at the center of the society where alternative values could be expressed” (Jhally, 2000, p.5).

In this ad for Green Works, the visual elements play a significant role in contributing to the greenwashing of this product. The advertisement begins with a close-up of a flower in a meadow. As the camera pans out, a petal from the flower floats away. The camera follows the petal, which floats through a window into the kitchen of a typical suburban home, and lands on a bottle of Clorox Green Works all-purpose cleaner. A woman picks up the cleaner and uses it to clean her stove. Other frames in this ad include

a shot of the Green Works products against a white background, surrounded by different fruits such as oranges, lemons and coconuts. The fruits fade out and are replaced with other Green Works products. The ad never discusses the ingredients used in the product, and only says they are ‘natural’, connecting this thought to the images of the fruit. These visual representations further serve the overall theme that Clorox Green Works is ‘from nature’, ‘powerful’ and ‘all natural’, which again falls under the greenwashing sin of vagueness.

The music in the commercial helps to set the overall tone to represent the beauty, peace and tranquility of nature. At the level of the advertiser’s intended meaning (Frith, 1998) this could help to imply that if we use these ‘natural’ products we will in turn achieve an inner peace and connection to nature. At the ideological level (Ibid) more broadly, green capitalism also works to promise this connection to nature through the consumption of ‘green’ products.

Another element that is noteworthy in this ad is the bright, appealing colours. Vibrant primary colours such as yellow and green are contrasted against clean white surfaces. The composition seems to attempt to appeal particularly to a female audience by using floral/feminine imagery (See Figure 1). At Frith’s (Ibid) ideological level of meaning, this could tie into a marketing strategy aimed at females that reinforces stereotypical gender ideologies by placing women in domestic roles such as cooking and cleaning. This stereotypical gender ideology is reinforced on the company’s website, which is directed toward ‘moms’, and states “[w]e knew that moms like us were looking for ways to live a more natural lifestyle — and we made it our mission to help them achieve this goal” (Green Works, 2011, About Us).

Figure 1: Floral images in Clorox Green Works Commercial



Overall this representation really plays on the ‘natural state’ as ‘clean’, and therefore tells us that we should be clean to be natural. However, this is in contradiction to the actual state of nature, since there is no acknowledgement of contemporary environmental degradation, to a great extent caused by corporate polluting.

Clorox Green Works’ earth friendliness actually lived up to many of its claims, and when tested against other ‘green’ all-purpose cleaners, was given a 4 out of 5 rating for its effectiveness (Vasil, 2009). Although the product contains a few ingredients that are not earth friendly such as sodium lauryl sulphate, dyes and petrochemical preservatives, it passed testing by the Organic Consumers Association and was supported by the Sierra Club (Ibid, p.30).

The biggest problem with Clorox Green Works is not necessarily in the actual makeup of the product but in the brand’s overall contribution to environmental

discourses. Although the Clorox Green Works line seems to be fairly environmentally friendly, the Clorox Company is still a major producer of chemical cleaners, which contributes to the overall detriment of the environment. Some environmentalists would argue against supporting a company whose products are responsible for many caustic chemicals being used, while others would say that buying from a company like Clorox encourages other big companies to offer environmentally sustainable products (Ibid).

One thing that I find problematic about the Green Works brand is the deliberate division of these products from their chemical counterparts at Clorox. For example Clorox has completely separate websites for its chemical products and Green Works products. This shows a deliberate division in its target marketing groups. Rather than including Green Works as part of its overall line of products, Clorox separates the 'green' ideology to target a specific market. This reinforces my argument that through advertising discourses, neo-liberal/capitalist ideologies have appropriated the idea of environmentalism to suit corporate needs and marginalize collective interests.

On the Clorox website the corporate social responsibility promoted is to keep families healthy through use of their chemical disinfecting products such as bleach. This website claims that “[f]or generations The Clorox Company has been committed to making products that promote a cleaner world and healthier homes” (The Clorox Company, 2010, Our Story). However, the Green Works website is directed both towards an awareness of the effects of cleaning products on the earth and our health. It claims that the Green Works products are “at least 95% naturally derived and clean with the power you’d expect from the people at Clorox” (Green Works, 2011, Products: Ingredients). If this claim is true and the Green Works products are as tough on dirt as their chemical products, then Clorox should begin to completely transition into an environmentally

friendly line and make their chemical line obsolete. This would have much less impact on the environment and if the products live up to their 'tough' claims then consumers should continue to be satisfied with the Clorox brand. However, natural cleaning products can cost as much as 100 percent more to make than regular cleaners (Casper, 2011). Green Works products range in price from \$2.99 to \$3.59, which makes them as affordable as their chemical counterparts (Ibid). This seems to point to lower profit margins for Clorox on the sales of their Green Works line, which indicates that the traditional products are likely subsidizing the Green Works line. This would explain why Clorox has not transitioned to a solely environmentally friendly line of products. The Green Works products contribute to the overall image of corporate responsibility for the Clorox brand, while merely offering a token way of showing their environmental support without cutting into their profits.

Overall the representation of Green Works products serves to further the corporate agenda of green capitalism. Rather than addressing the deeper environmental issues, Green Works offers the consumption of its products as a solution to the environmental issues we face. This type of discourse does obfuscate the domination of nature by capital by appropriating the idea of 'natural' products and green consumption as for the good of the environment and our health. Nonetheless, Green Works products do live up to many of their claims; therefore, I would classify this type of discourse as pseudo-environmentalism as the products do not necessarily contribute to the larger environmental social justice movement but neither do they vastly contribute to the detriment to the environment in comparison to other products.

CHAPTER FIVE: CAR CULTURE AND OUR DEPENDENCE ON THE PRIVATE VEHICLE

In general, the discourses of personal vehicle use and driving are naturalized in many car commercials. This is especially problematic when in the United States alone, personal vehicles account for five percent of the world's total carbon emissions, which are a major contributor to climate change (Fuller, 2008). A theme found in many car commercials claiming the car's environmental efficiency is the harmony between humans, nature and machine. However, driving is damaging to the earth - from the paved roads, to the production and distribution of cars, to the emissions produced by personal vehicle use.

The overuse of personal vehicles is clearly evident, when the average fuel consumption rose by 13 percent between 1987 and 2004 (Suzuki & Taylor, 2009, p.140). According to Statistics Canada although there are over 26 million registered vehicles, there are only 21 million licensed drivers (Transport Canada, 2011). Also Transport Canada boasts, "Canada has nearly 900,000 kilometres of road — enough to circle the globe 22 times" (Ibid). The capitalist discourses that surround personal vehicle use achieve legitimacy through the device of universalizing and 'eternalizing' themselves, which conditions society to believe it is inevitable and there is no alternative. As previously mentioned in relation to the concept of ideology, Eagleton discusses how these time and space-specific values and interests are projected as the values of all humanity (1991, p.56). Since these discourses are naturalized, society forgets other options and corporations continue to represent their products as if there were no alternative.

Another problematic social implication of our heavy reliance on personal vehicles is therefore our dependence on oil - a limited resource that is said to have peaked, while our dependence on it increases (Silverthorn & Greene, 2005). While many people believed the global environmental crisis would weaken international tensions, as the world began to recognize the need for our interdependence to ensure collective security and our future, it has actually shown us that the New World Order will be based around the struggle for scarce resources – as evident through the Persian Gulf War (Jhally, 2000, p.7) and basically every other war that has taken place since. In North America, we will stop at no cost, even if it means the death and destruction of the Third World, to keep our automobile culture thriving (Ibid). Advertising and commercially dominated ideology in our culture reinforces this idea of individualism and personal greed and “reminds us powerfully everyday, we need ours and we need it now”(Ibid). And even further we hear the message that “[a]s the world runs out of resources, the most powerful military sources will use that might to ensure access”(Ibid). Advertising discourses serve to reinforce and naturalize our feelings of greed and unbridled need for these products by ignoring the alternatives.

Ford Escape Hybrid

We see countless representations of SUVs as being ‘one with nature’ and connecting us to nature by allowing us to explore deeper into the wilderness with the vehicle’s off-roading terrain features. This is extremely problematic because SUVs are actually a huge contributor to the destruction of nature, emitting two and a half times as many emissions as cars (Andersen & Strate, 2000). In fact, many SUV commercials are

built on contradictions since “SUV advertisements assure buyers that the best way to relate to nature is to run over it” (Ibid, p.163).

The environmental imagery associated with these commercials is stunning, bringing audiences to places in the wilderness they could never explore with a regular car. However as Andersen and Strate note,

[t]he inspiration of nature, its solitude, the escape it offers from urban environments, and the opportunity it affords to see large intriguing animals are all essential to the persuasive messages that surround 4x4s. Through the quality of ‘iconicity’, (Messaris 1997) the visual messages create powerful associations, using a representational mode of communication whose persuasive powers are augmented by a grounding in subjective experience. In one sense, then, nature is the denotative referent, effectively provoking a desire for the experience of awe that wilderness landscapes afford (2000, p.160).

Further, nature is represented in these commercials not only as beautiful, but also as intimidating, threatening, unpredictable, and a force to be conquered in your SUV (Ibid). This can be associated with neo-colonial ideologies of dominance and power. These types of representations depict nature as a force to be controlled and dominated. This emphasizes an anthropocentric way of living, and fails to recognize the centrality of the earth in our very existence (as an eco-centric approach does). Meister (1997) also points out that

[w]hen nature becomes a commodity the emphasis is always on the gratification of human needs, without any attention paid to the non-human needs of nature. Such needs are transformed into human needs/greed’s and apparent through images of consumer environmentalism. We can shop at the ‘nature store’. And in owning the Jeep Cherokee, park nature in our suburban driveways (cited in Andersen & Strate, 2000, p.165).

Not only are SUVs dangerous to the environment, but also to other drivers and passengers due to their heavy weight (Ibid). The features touted in ads for SUVs are, for the most part, completely useless in the owner’s typical day-to-day driving. Our car

culture, and more specifically the increasing popularity of SUVs, further emphasizes capitalist discourses where vehicles represent a lifestyle and symbol of status and happiness rather than focusing solely on their intended function (Goewey, 2005). More broadly, the ideological purpose of the cultural system of advertising is to tell us that “[t]he way to happiness and satisfaction is through the consumption of objects through the marketplace” (Jhally, 2000, p.2).

The Ford Escape Hybrid is the first vehicle that combined the features of an SUV with hybrid technology (Scraba, 2010). Its sales peaked in 2007 with 21,386 units sold in the U.S., accounting for six per cent of total hybrid electric vehicle (HEV) sales that year (U.S. Department of Energy, 2011). Most recently in 2010, 11,182 Ford Escape Hybrids were sold in the U.S, which accounts for four per cent of the HEVs sold that year (Ibid).

In a 2009 advertisement for the Ford Escape Hybrid, it is evident that Ford is attempting to target the vehicle to green consumers, claiming the car’s efficiency and Ford’s commitment to sustainability. The commercial says:

[t]he world we live in is clearly changing, and Ford is changing with it. Everyday the decisions we make have an impact on the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the animals that inhabit the lands around us. We have an obligation to this world: to defend it, to fight for it, to save it. We at Ford are people too: we have children, siblings, families. And in an effort to change this world, we ourselves are changing: learning, adapting, evolving, creating new alternatives -- cleaner ones, safer ones, real ones. Ones that won’t change the way we live, but rather the impact our lives have on the environment around us. Introducing the 2009 Ford Escape Hybrid. The world’s most fuel efficient SUV. We haven’t sacrificed our toughness or grit. We’re just helping write the next chapter. Ford, Steering Towards the Future (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009).

Based on Huckin’s (1997) first stage of critical discourse analysis, and similarly Frith’s (1998) surface level and advertiser’s intended meanings, I first examine this text as a typical reader. One theme emphasized in this advertisement is the idea of change.

Ford says that as we change, they also change and adapt to us. This commercial empowers the reader/viewer by putting change into the hands of the consumer. It makes us believe we have the power to make decisions that will affect the world and that we have an obligation to make the right decisions in order to protect the world. Ford says that they are making good decisions and adapting to standards, therefore we should choose Ford products to ensure protection of the world. According to this ad, we do not have to change the way we live to make a change in the environment. If we purchase Ford products - in this case the Ford Escape Hybrid - we will be contributing to this change without having to change our lifestyle or habits. Ford claims the Escape Hybrid is setting standards as the world's most fuel efficient SUV without making sacrifices to its toughness or grit. The overall message, or advertiser's intended meaning (Frith, 1998) is that we can change the future of the environment by purchasing Ford products.

Visual elements in this example include images of nature such as planet earth, a sunset, mountains, a lion, bears, ducks, horses, trees with their leaves changing colour, whales, streams, monkeys, icebergs, polar bears, camels, a gorilla, and footprints in the sand. These images are juxtaposed with images of industry including a factory, old-fashioned cars, a city landscape, and a Ford Escape Hybrid vehicle. These images seem to intend to represent the possibility of harmony between industry and nature.

After stepping back from this ad and critically examining the text as a whole (Huckin, 1997) and the cultural and ideological meaning (Frith, 1998), it is evident that in this representation capitalist discourses are naturalized, and several sins of greenwashing are occurring. This commercial discusses the effects that our personal decisions have on the earth, however it completely ignores any discourse around the impact that the automotive industry - from the assembly line, to oil extraction, to fuel emissions - has on

the earth. This is because the discourses of driving have become normalized in capitalist society, and we no longer question these actions as contributing to the larger environmental problems we face. In our society, personal vehicle use is seen as a need rather than a privilege. There are many contradictions evident within this representation, such as preaching that the decisions we make have an impact on the earth and that we have an obligation to defend the earth, while at the same time saying that the changes we need to make will not change the way we live, only the impact our lives have on the environment. According to the theoretical framework of eco-Marxism, in order to make a real impact on the earth we need to question the way we live and act to make significant changes (Foster, 2000; 2002). This can also relate to the disconnect that exists between humans and nature, and our need to factor the environment into all things (Suzuki & Taylor, 2009; Menzies, 1999). Also, this advertisement focuses on the individual's responsibility (Wallism, 2010; Rogers, 2007; Jhally, 2000), rather than on the corporate responsibility of Ford in changing its production practices or the government as regulators, and even further the collective responsibility of society to re-examine our current values and beliefs regarding the environment. As previously discussed, eco-Marxism questions the ideological underpinnings of capitalism and advertising that have led to this alienation of humans from nature (Foster, 2010).

Following Huckin's (1997) analysis, I next examined the text's genre. The text's advertising genre is evident through the use of personal and passionate language. It uses words such as *we* and *us* to personalize the commercial to each individual consumer. It also stirs up a call to action from the consumer by saying things such as 'the decisions we make have an impact', 'we have an obligation', 'we are changing', etc. The images are particularly effective at pulling the viewer in emotionally because to varying degrees they

are images of things we are part of everyday (even in an urban experience), which sparks an empathetic, compassionate emotion in the viewer. A personal connection between the Ford brand and the individual is also highlighted when the ad says, “[w]e at Ford are people too. We have children, siblings, families” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009).

This commercial promotes Ford’s role in changing the earth, and then more specifically offers the Ford Escape Hybrid as a solution to meeting the sustainability challenges we face as a society. The text says “[i]n an effort to change this world, we ourselves are changing, learning, adapting, evolving, creating new alternatives – cleaner ones, safer ones, real ones, ones that won’t change the way we live” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009). This particular statement extols the virtues of the Ford Company’s commitment to changing the environment. Huckin says this type of statement is “designed to encourage readers to buy that particular product or service” (1997, p.4). Of course, the automobile’s role in creating detrimental effects on the environment is never mentioned in the commercial, nor does the commercial question the normalization of driving as a contributor to environmental destruction.

The ad is framed (Huckin, 1997) as a narrative, and foregrounds ideas of immediacy, change and impact. Furthermore, the ad takes on the perspective that we can make change in the world by purchasing Ford products, putting action into the hands of the individual. The commercial frames the ‘change’ we are experiencing in the world as a positive thing. At the same time there is an implication that the commercial is discussing environmental change (since it is marketing a hybrid vehicle, and showing images of nature); however, it completely ignores/omits a discussion of the negative changes we are experiencing in the environment. This works ideologically by signifying

ideas and beliefs, which help to legitimate dominant interests by distortion and dissimulation (Eagleton, 1991). This ad is also guilty of excluding rival ideas and thoughts, and obscuring social reality in ways convenient to itself (Ibid, p.6). By hiding reality, through fabricated capitalist ideologies, dominant powers legitimize their discourses as being the 'truth'. These ideological functions are precisely what critical discourse analysis serves to uncover.

There is plenty of backgrounding and omission in this ad, two tactics that Huckin (1997) says work to de-emphasize certain concepts. He further says that omission is often most powerful because "if the writer does not mention something, it often does not even enter the reader's mind and thus is not subjected to his or her scrutiny" (Ibid, p.5). Omission occurs in this ad since it does not discuss any of the collective environmental problems we are experiencing or the larger societal context of why, but merely says, "the world we live in is clearly changing" (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009). It does not discuss these changes as problems, nor does it question the so-called 'needs' of individuals as contributing to these environmental changes, but rather implies that we can keep living our lives the way we want without having to make sacrifices because Ford is there for us "steering towards the future" (Ibid).

There is also a lot of presupposition taking place in this advertisement, which functions to encourage us to take certain ideas for granted (Huckin, 1997). This ad definitely normalizes the discourses of personal vehicle use and driving as the only means of transportation. It also normalizes the idea of green consumption as a way to change the world, as if there were no other alternative (Ibid). This is another function of capitalist ideology, because corporations have realized the potential of green capitalism to

make them *seem* socially responsible, while at the same time still making large profits (Kahn, 2009; Rogers, 2007).

The advertisement claims that the Ford Escape Hybrid is “the world’s most fuel efficient SUV” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009); however, the ad omits (Huckin, 2007) its fuel efficiency in comparison to other vehicles. Claiming that an SUV is ‘environmentally friendly’ and ‘fuel efficient’ can be linked to the greenwashing sin of being ‘the lesser of two evils’ (TerraChoice, 2010), since an SUV is likely inefficient compared to other means of transportation. In the case of the Ford Escape Hybrid it claims a fuel efficiency of 36 miles per gallon (mpg) city. In comparison to the Ford Escape (non-hybrid) or the smaller Ford Fusion car, which both claim a fuel efficiency of 23-mpg city, the Ford Escape Hybrid is quite fuel-efficient; however, in comparison to a smaller hybrid car such as the Ford Fusion Hybrid, which gets 41-mpg city, it is less efficient. Furthermore, none of the aforementioned vehicles are very fuel-efficient in comparison to the Toyota Prius Hybrid, which claims a fuel efficiency of 51-mpg city.

The discourses presented in this commercial have a semi-formal assertive register (Huckin, 1997), since it uses typical language but also places the Ford Company in a dominant role of power. It gives the consumer a sense of empowerment to make the “right” decision (i.e. purchasing a Ford product); however, there is also a characterization of the Ford Company as a ‘saviour’ of the planet, which we see in phrases such as “Ford, Steering Towards the Future” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009).

When critically examining the language in this representation, the advertisement uses the word ‘we’ interchangeably to refer both to Ford and individuals or society. This creates a bridge in the agent/patient relations by portraying consumers as active participants in change. The agent/patient relationship is a common form of manipulation

that often works subconsciously (Huckin, 2001). Ford is portrayed as initiating actions by saying that they “have an obligation to defend, fight, and save the world”, and that they are “changing, learning, adapting, evolving, and creating new alternatives”, and “helping to write the next chapter” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009). They also include the reader/viewer as having a role in carrying out these actions by using the word *we* to refer to both the Ford Company and society. This makes the consumer feel as if they have control and power over the environmental situation, and enables them to act in order for change to (supposedly) occur. This is how the discourses of green capitalism operate -- as part of neo-liberal discourses -- to make the consumer feel that they are contributing to the environmental movement through purchasing green commodities.

There are several presuppositions (Huckin, 1997) taking place within this advertisement. First when the commercial says “the world we live in is clearly changing” (Ibid), it does not address what the changes are and whether they are positive or negative. Another presupposition occurs when the commercial says, “[w]e haven’t sacrificed our toughness or grit” (Ibid), because this suggests that the viewer is familiar with Ford products and views them as being tough and durable.

At the word and phrases level (Huckin, 1997), labels and metaphor are used to connote Ford and Ford consumers as heroes. When the commercial says, “[h]ere at Ford we are people too. We have children, siblings, families...” (Ibid), this connotes that Ford is just like us, and further, that they want to do what is in our best interest because it is also in their best interests.

The register of a text refers to its level of formality and degree of technicality (Huckin, 1997, p.7). In this ad a semiformal, assertive register is portrayed with a low degree of technicality to the text (Ibid). This is because the text uses language familiar to

the reader/viewer, while at the same time placing Ford in a dominant position of authority. In this ad the modality, which looks at the tone of statements in terms of their authority and certitude (Ibid, p.8), is a present tense, indicative mood. The representation uses a factual tone with a high degree of certitude and authority, which is evident in phrases such as “clearly changing”, “we have an obligation”, and “we haven’t sacrificed” (Ibid). This has the overall effect of normalizing corporate discourses, by presenting the solution of green capitalism as beneficial to the environment.

As with most advertisements, the visual elements play a key role in the overall effect of the commercial. At the surface level (Frith, 1998) the commercial begins with an image of the earth from space with a bright sun peeking out from behind it. A Ford logo is shown in the top right corner as the image pans out. Next is a close up photo of a cloudy sky with the sun shining through the clouds. A series of still images are shown of various aspects of nature, including a mountain landscape, a desert landscape, a lion, a factory landscape, a man standing next to an old Ford automobile, a mother bear and her cub, two ducklings, three horses running in a field, a bare tree in a winter landscape, a tree with colourful leaves falling from it, a mother whale and its calf, a mountain landscape with a stream running through it, a monkey, tall trees in a forest landscape, icebergs, a polar bear cub, a panda bear, a city landscape with tall buildings, two Ford Escape Hybrids in a mountain setting with a tent and people around a fire, camels, a gorilla, footprints in the sand along a beach, and a red sunset. At the advertiser’s intended level of meaning (Frith, 1998) these images have a strong emotional effect because they are beautiful, pure images of nature that make us feel connected to it rather than using images of the problems or challenges we are experiencing such as pollution or smog.

Hansen and Machin (2008) in their research study, *Visually branding the environment: climate change as a marketing opportunity*, also use critical discourse analysis and a version of qualitative content analysis to examine how environmental discourses are shaped through the use of images in green marketing. More specifically, they analyze the environmental images found in Getty Images, an image database intended for use in advertising, editorials, and promotions (Ibid). This particular example is useful for my research because it connects to Frith's (1998) cultural/ideological level of meaning as it analyzes how environmental images convey particular kinds of scripts, values, and identities, and what kinds of social relations these favour. This particular project characterizes how "the destruction of the ecosystem and its consequences by certain practices, are recontextualized in the name of the interests of marketing and branding" (Hansen & Machin, 2008, p.781).

Hansen and Machin discuss three ways that images of the environment are recontextualized to serve corporate interests including; (i) the substitution of details and complexities of activities with generalizations and abstractions, (ii) adding elements including legitimization, purpose and reactions, and (iii) evaluation of the social practice according to the goals, values and priorities of the presenters (2008, p.780-781).

Hansen and Machin conclude from their analysis that

Getty will provide pressure groups with further competition to define the discourses and scripts that define precisely what such problems are and how we are to deal with them. Getty's images are designed in the first place to foster greater consumption of products and services. What can be said with the Getty images is that the environment is beautiful and tender, that we should seek union with it, that this is a kind of spiritual journey, and certainly a feel-good one. Yet how this is done is itself abstracted and recontextualized through the corporate consultancy language of 'vision' and 'innovation' rather than depicted in concrete logical terms (2008, p.16).

These generic images can be purchased by corporations and used for advertising

purposes. From reviewing some images in the Getty Image bank, I find there are many that are similar or could even be used interchangeably with those in the Ford Escape Hybrid ad.

The images in the Ford Escape Hybrid commercial also fall into the categories discussed by Hansen and Machin (2008), which serve corporate interests. For example, by using generic images of nature such as close-ups of animals, beautiful landscapes, etc., they are substituting details and complexities with abstractions (Hansen & Machin, 2008). The combination of these images with the text adds elements of legitimation, purpose and reactions (Ibid). The use of phrases such as “we have an obligation to this world” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009) in combination with the images of the landscape and animals, serves to add purpose to the meaning of the text. The images work to justify what the text is saying in relation to the environment. Without the images it would not be clear that the ad is referring to the environment, since it is not until half way through the ad that the text even mentions the environment.

Also, the discourses in this ad present the social practice of choosing a vehicle and driving according to the goals, values, and priorities of Ford (and the automotive industry) and not society as a whole (Ibid), further reinforcing capitalist ideologies. There are no images of the real crisis that is taking place, such as pollution or mass waste. Instead, generic images are used, which “[t]hrough their repeated use these images replace other possible representations, particularly those that locate and connect such issues in actual concrete processes such as global capitalism and consumerism” (Ibid, p.3).

Of course negative discourses are rarely presented in advertising because an advertiser’s job is to sell us a product and make a profit without concern for the larger

social implications. These images work ideologically as *signs* of social representation and convince us that the way things are is how they ought to be (Nichols, 1981).

The Environmental History of Ford

Although the Ford Escape Hybrid might be considered a reasonable vehicle in terms of its carbon footprint, Ford has a deep-rooted history of disregard for the environment. The social theory of Fordism marked a new epoch of capitalism. Characterized by “the decomposition of tasks, the specialization of tools, the assembly of tools into the machine, and even of machines into the machine system...” (Clarke, 1990), Fordism broke barriers in technological innovation with the introduction of the assembly line, but was also an important extension in the alienation of people from both production and consumption. Fordism, named after Henry Ford, is a socio-economic system of mass production and consumption. Fordism marked an important point in the history of industrialization and contributed to the exacerbation of environmental problems.

Discussing the implications of advertising and capitalism as a threat to the environment, Michael Lowy asks us to “consider the iconic commodity of so-called “Fordist” capitalism, the private automobile, whose harmfulness to the general environment – by air pollution, paving over green spaces, and above all forcing climate change through carbon dioxide emissions – needs no demonstration” (2010, p.5). A recent example of Ford’s inclination towards profit over environmental concern was cited in 1999 when the Philadelphia Inquirer raised environmental concern regarding Ford’s

more recent SUV, the Excursion, that has a gas mileage cited at a dismal 12 miles to the gallon (Akre, 1999 cited in Andersen & Strate, 2000).

According to Corporate Watch, an organization dedicated to corporate accountability “Ford’s cars are the worst carbon emitters of all the major makes...” (Lubbers, 2002). Ford came under scrutiny by Corporate Watch after working with global public relations company Hill and Knowlton to greenwash their activities, which included producing posters promoting a partnership with ‘Earth’s 911’ (an environmental hotline), as well as buying almost 40 per cent of advertising space in *Time* magazine’s Earth Day 2000 edition (Ibid).

Despite Ford’s contribution to environmental destruction, they may appear environmentally friendly in the public eye because of their ties to conservation groups such as Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and the Natural Resources Defense Council (MacDonald, 2008). This is because non-profit organizations are often so desperate for funds they are turning for financial support to the very corporations that are causing environmental damage. For example, Conservation International’s Centre for Environmental Leadership in Business was started with a \$25 million donation from Ford Motor Co. (Ibid, p.69). Ford is also connected financially to research groups that support the corporation’s political positions in relation to the environment. For example,

[t]he leading role of the research group Resources for the Future in the discourse out of which U.S. federal environmental laws arose is clear, and this group, made up primarily of economists, was funded for years by the Ford Foundation - one of the Foundation’s many contributions to furthering elite planning and management (in the sense of political control) of looming popular political issues. Whether as a result of theoretical myopia or of strategic choice, the professionals who serve the institutional environmental movement as its theoreticians accept the liberal

conception of the state, and their sense of possible environmental agendas is limited by this accommodation (FitzSimmons et al., 1994, p.204-205).

Indeed, Ford makes many promises for a future of sustainable cars; however, they rarely carry out their promises. From their own website they claim:

[w]e recognize climate change is a significant global challenge that must be addressed. To do our part, we're pursuing multiple technological paths and working with partners to find new, more meaningful solutions that are affordable for customers and in line with Ford's plans to create safer, more fuel-efficient, quality products that customers desire and value (Ford Motor Company of Canada, 2011).

While many automobile companies continue to expand their environmental innovation, the most recent contribution claimed on Ford's website was back in 2008 when they improved the Ford Focus highway fuel gain by three per cent. Perhaps this has something to do with the minimal profits Ford makes from their hybrid vehicles. Henry Ford II, explained that they prefer to make large, gas-guzzling vehicles simply because "minicars make mini profits" (Foster, 1999).

It is through the discourses of green capitalism that Ford is able to legitimize itself as an advocate of the environment, when in reality the company is a key player in the auto industry's contributions to environmental degradation. The discourses represented in the Ford Escape Hybrid commercial obfuscate the domination of nature by capital by ignoring any detrimental effects driving has on the environment, and by naturalizing personal vehicle use. This representation offers the solution of consumption as a means to help the environment, when in reality consumption (and especially personal vehicle use) is a primary factor in environmental degradation.

Toyota Prius

The Toyota Prius sold 140,928 units in the United States in 2010, accounting for fifty-one per cent of hybrid electric vehicle (HEV) sales (U.S. Department of Energy, 2011). Also peaking in sales in 2007, the Prius sold 181,221 vehicles, making up 51 per cent of the HEV sales that year (Ibid). As of 2008, over 11, 051 units were sold in Canada, and more than 1 million were sold world-wide (Hamilton, 2008). To date, the Prius continues to be the best selling vehicle in its class of hybrid mid-sized sedans (U.S. Department of Energy, 2011).

The advertising discourses represented in the Toyota Prius ad are a perfect example of green marketing at its best. At the surface level of examination (Frith, 1998) the commercial begins with a cheerful song with the lyrics “[t]here’s a reason for the sunshine sky. There’s a reason why I’m feeling so high. Must be the season. So let your love fly. Let your love go”⁸ (ToyotaUSA, 2009b). The dialogue in the commercial says, “[y]ou get more power and more space. The world gets fewer smog forming emissions. The third generation Prius: It’s harmony between man [*sic*], nature and machine” (Ibid). The specifications on the Toyota Prius are also worth pointing out, including a 51-mpg city rating and solar panels that power the air conditioning system. Based on these statistics this car *appears* to be the most fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly car I have yet to find in my research.⁹

⁸ The lyrics/song is a cover of the 1976 song “Let Your Love Flow” by The Bellamy Brothers

⁹ After reviewing the claims that the Prius makes on paper, the British based show *Top Gear*, put it to a real life test against a BMW-M3 to find out which car was more economical. The Prius, with a 1.5 liter 4 cylinder engine had to drive ten times around a track as fast as possible, while the BMW-M3 with a 4 liter V8 engine had to keep pace. The results showed that the Prius drove 17.2 miles per gallon, while the BMW-M3 drove 19.4 miles per gallon, actually making the BMW more economical on fuel (Wilman,

However, even with such a high efficiency rating in comparison to other cars, and a corporate social responsibility initiative touting the company's image as environmentally friendly, Toyota recently opposed a fuel standards bill in the United States Congress which would impose more stringent minimum fuel mileage requirements (Miller, 2007). This seems to highlight the common view of the auto industry and other corporations, which are looking for a hands-off approach from government toward environmental regulation. This hands-off approach is part of a neo-liberal paradigm that opposes government regulation of the private sector. These companies claim environmentally friendly corporate responsibility, and continue to market their products as 'earth-friendly' and 'green', but oppose any regulation that would assure citizens of their product's claims.

From a general analysis of the advertiser's intended meaning (Frith, 1998) this commercial tells us that the Prius will give you more power and space with less smog forming omissions, which implies that the car owner does not have to make sacrifices in order to be more environmentally friendly. The visual imagery in the commercial makes it seem as though the Prius makes nature come to life (See Fig.2). In bringing nature to life the Prius makes it more beautiful and colourful. Other images that are shown in the commercial are a city landscape, a bridge, a stream, mountains, trees, and flowers. Although these images are things we may interact with to some degree at some point in our lives (even in an urban landscape), these particular images are actually humans

2008). While these results are fairly close, based on the engine sizes the BMW was expected to have a much worse fuel economy than the Prius. However, the host of the show concluded that it is not the car you have but how you drive it that will determine its fuel economy (Ibid).

dressed in costume to represent these elements of nature. These images are so bright, colourful and animated that they appear cartoon like.

Figure 2: The Prius Bringing Nature to Life



Looking at the text as a whole (Huckin, 1997), and the cultural/ideological meanings (Frith, 1998), we can see a discourse representing the harmony between humans, nature and machine, which is problematic because although the Prius seems to be more fuel-efficient than similar cars, the ad still naturalizes the idea of green capitalism and consumption as a way to save the environment. It creates a false sense of harmony through the use of the language and imagery of humans dressed as things from nature, when in reality cars are only leading to further destruction of the earth, no matter how ‘environmentally friendly’ they claim to be. This sort of advertising discourse functions ideologically, since the discourses of green capitalism are naturalized, whereby we see “false or deceptive beliefs as arising from the material structure of society as a

whole” (Eagleton, 1991, p.30). It is in capitalism’s best interest to continue promoting the consumption of vehicles, regardless of the implications for our environment.

Following Huckin (1997), who states the importance of comparing similar texts/representations, it is important to note that many other car commercials celebrate the wonder of wildlife and nature. Similar to the Toyota Prius ‘Harmony’ commercials, Andersen and Strate describe an imaginative television scenario for the Nissan Pathfinder where

a 4 x 4 drives through a landscape that morphs into great, powerful animals. The magical transformations take place as the truck passes over the terrain; an elephant’s dry surface materializes out of a desert landscape, and cactus branches become the horns of an antelope that takes full form and turns to look at the viewer. The animals become visible only with help of the truck, as if the tires of the SUV have brought them to life. In the last scene a huge grizzly bear rears up out of the wilderness (Andersen & Strate, 2000 p.160).

This similar example shows the history of representing the harmony between humans, nature and machines in car commercials. The brilliance of the Prius commercial is that it does this explicitly in everything from the artistic elements to the car’s slogan “[h]armony between man [*sic*], nature and machine” (ToyotaUSA, 2009b).

Since this text conforms to the TV advertising genre by using “attention getting language and visual aids” (Huckin, 1997) there is always a pleasant and happy tone to what is being said. At the next step of analysis, Huckin says to examine omission, or what could have been said but was left out (Ibid). The initial ‘Harmony’ commercial never really explains or addresses how the Toyota Prius is environmentally friendly. Later commercials, ‘Solar’ and ‘MPG’, address the solar panel cooling function, and the miles per gallon rating that the car gets. Even in these later commercials the environmental features are never fully explained. The ‘Solar’ commercial says, “[w]hat if we could use the sun to help keep us cool? Solar powered ventilation. To help cool you.

Available on the third generation Prius. It's harmony between man [*sic*], nature, and machine"¹⁰ Further, the 'MPG' commercial says, "[i]t gives the world fewer smog forming omissions. It gives you a 50-miles-per-gallon rating. The third generation Prius. It's harmony between man [*sic*], nature and machine."¹¹ I should also note that these commercials commit the greenwashing sin of 'vagueness' because the terms used in the commercial are so poorly defined they could confuse readers/viewers (TerraChoice, 2010). They also commit the sin of 'no proof' because after further research there is no third-party verification to support these claims (Ibid).

This commercial series is framed as a narrative of the harmony between humans, nature, and machine. At the ideological level of meaning (Frith, 1998), it takes on the perspective that we can live harmoniously with nature without changing our daily habits, such as excessive driving, by merely purchasing green products such as the Toyota Prius. However, the theoretical framework of eco-Marxism argues that we must question the very basis of the capitalist system and the destruction it has on the earth through the commodification of our natural resources (Foster, 2010; Kovel, 2007). By using the term 'harmony', these commercials ignore the role that cars and driving have in the ongoing destruction of the earth. This is because under green capitalism, environmentalism is ideologically tethered to the capitalist system, and ideology serves to promote and legitimate the interests of dominant groups (Eagleton, 1999). When these same ideological messages are repeated they become deeply ingrained in us, so much so that we become alienated from our natural instincts and desires.

¹⁰ Link no longer available. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeOE4Vg7Cq0&feature=channel>

¹¹ Link no longer available. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7vI-L4Lfmc&feature=channel>

The concepts of harmony, peace, and serenity are foregrounded in both the language and the visual imagery of these commercials. The Prius advertisement's visual elements make the earth seem like a fantasyland where everything is perfect, and then put the Toyota Prius in the centre of a perfect world.

The next step when analyzing the text as a whole is to examine the presupposition, which is the "use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative" (Huckin, 1997, p.6). The continuous use of the word 'harmony' serves to ignore any destruction or damage that the act of driving causes on the planet. The language in the text places the words 'you', 'the world', and 'harmony' as the grammatical subjects of the sentences. This works to foreground these concepts and "[i]n choosing what to put in the topic position, writers create a perspective, or slant, that influences the reader's perception" (Huckin, 1997, p.6). In this commercial Toyota is given status as the agent, initiating action by implementing the innovative technologies found in the Prius.

Presupposition occurs in the sentences "[y]ou get more power and more space" and "[t]he world gets fewer smog forming omissions" (ToyotaUSA, 2009b), because it does not mention what the power/space or fewer omissions is relative to -- it assumes that the vehicle the person is currently driving is not powerful, is small, and causes a lot of smog. By using the directives 'you get' and 'the world gets' the suggestion is that we all get what we want in the Prius, without making sacrifices. This language also contributes to the greenwashing sin of 'no proof' and the sin of 'vagueness', because nowhere in the ad or on the Toyota website do they elaborate on how greatly smog forming emissions are reduced, nor do they explain what this statement really means. Also, interactive features on the Toyota website demonstrate the environmental features of the Prius, but do not

adequately explain how the features work, or why they are environmentally friendly compared to other cars without those features (Toyota Canada, 2011).

Since the Prius commercials are very brief, the language used is very explicit and without labels and metaphors¹². In other words, the language in the commercial plainly says what it intends for the audience to interpret. The register of this commercial is friendly and conversational with a low degree of technicality. Huckin says that “writers can deceive readers by affecting a phony register, one that induces a certain misplaced trust” (1997, p.8). The modality of the text exerts a high degree of certitude carried out through the phrases ‘you get’ and ‘the world gets’, which has the effect of making the reader/viewer believe that these things will be achieved through purchasing a Toyota Prius.

The song in the commercial plays a big role in setting the mood and tone. The lyrics and melody help to set the calm, relaxed mood of the overall commercial, the main discourse of which is to promote the idea of harmony between the elements of the commercial. The commercial’s visual imagery is designed using human beings dressed as parts of nature. As the Prius moves through the scene, the people (as represented components of nature) come to life (See Fig.2). This is definitely not a typical car commercial. The artistic components and textures of the human landscape are used to elicit a feel good emotion from the viewer. Humans are dressed in elaborate costumes to represent every component in the scene including the grass, clouds, trees, water, bridges, etc. Through carefully planned choreography, hundreds of people move together in sequence to make the elements appear as if they are real and moving. The blue-screen

¹² Labels often carry unavoidable connotations (i.e. pro-life). These connotations are often carried out through metaphors which are figures of speech that attempt to explain one thing in terms of another (Huckin, 1997).

special effects and the literal personification of nature make the parts come together to truly appear as natural and in harmony.

This can be connected to Hansen and Machin's (2008) analysis wherein they discuss how images of the environment are appropriated to serve corporate interests, and specifically in this case, how details and complexities are substituted with generalizations and abstractions. In fact, the entire landscape of the commercial is very abstract, since it was shot on a blue-screen, using humans to represent the natural elements (See Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Humans Dressed in Costume to Represent 'Grass'



A video clip showing “The Making of the Prius ‘Harmony’ TV commercial” is very useful to help understand the advertiser’s intended meaning (Frith, 1998) and motivations behind the making of this commercial series. The dialogue explains the reasoning and intent behind the Prius commercials. Creative Director, Andrew Christou states “[w]e wanted to put the Prius in a world that was exclusively made out of people; really capturing the harmony between man [*sic*], nature, and machine. We’re all

connected” (ToyotaUSA, 2009a). We also see Hansen and Machin’s (2008) second category of the recontextualization of images to serve corporate discourse, in this segment, as this behind-the-scenes footage shows interviews with the commercial’s director, choreographer, and costume designer (Ibid). Since the voice over/dialogue in the actual ad is brief, this “Making of the Toyota Prius ‘Harmony’ Commercial” clip is helpful to my analysis because it helps to explain and legitimate the function of the images in the ad (Ibid).

Prius as Global Car

Fordism, as an approach to production, completely changed the way we produce cars as well as other commodities. With a focus on technology and the role of the machine in the assembly of products, we see the alienation of humans from their labour. There is also now a disjuncture within the product itself since parts are made in various places and shipped to one location to be assembled – global Fordism, as it were.

With respect to production issues, the British based car show, *Top Gear*, argues that to make the Prius as economical as possible, the environmental damage caused in the production of the Prius battery is actually far worse than that caused by a Land Rover Discovery (Wilman, 2008). This is because a special nickel that is mined in Canada is used to make the battery - from there it is shipped to Europe where it is refined, then sent to China where it is turned into a foam, and lastly sent to Japan where it is put into the battery and into the car (Ibid).

The Impact Lab (2007), further claims¹³ that the energy it takes to build and drive a Prius exceeds a Hummer by 50 per cent. Also problematic is the environmental damage caused by the plant that mines and smelts the nickel for the battery. The Impact Lab claims that “this plant has caused so much environmental damage to the surrounding environment that NASA has used the ‘dead zone’ around the plant to test moon rovers” and that “[t]he area around the plant is devoid of any life for miles” (The Impact Lab, 2007, para.9).

However, the Pacific Institute, a nonpartisan research institute¹⁴ that works to advance environmental protection, economic development, and social equity, has published its own report that claims the “Dust to Dust” article is based on “faulty methods of analysis, untenable assumptions, selective use and presentation of data, and a complete lack of peer review” (Gleick, 2007, p.1). They argue that the data is flawed mainly because of the low lifetime miles credited to the Prius (Ibid), which makes it seem as if the Prius would last a third of the expected miles compared to a Hummer. However, they do not deny the aforementioned production process of the Prius battery, just claim that this process is not as environmentally damaging as the overall use of a Hummer.

The question of the overall implications of extraction, production, distribution, use, and disposal of a product is a complex one (and beyond the scope of this thesis). However, what this debate highlights is the importance of discourses in shaping knowledge, and the way that environmental discourses are appropriated to fit the needs of the producers. A typical reader/viewer would not be aware of the environmental

¹³ Based on a report “Dust-to-Dust: The Energy Cost of New Vehicles from Concept to Disposal” by the CNW Marketing Research Inc. (Spinella, 2007).

¹⁴ Although it has the same name, this not the Pacific Institute affiliated with the Fraser Institute

implications of this product - I had to search to uncover these things. This relates to my theoretical framework, in that we must consider the way ideology works to promote the interests of the elite over the common good (Eagleton, 1991), and the need to implement eco-socialism as a way to question the dominant values of our capitalist system (Foster, 2000).

Through the language, sounds, and visual composition, the Prius advertisements very cleverly show the 'harmony' between humans, nature, and machine. When looking at this text as a typical reader/viewer, the innovative elements are very exciting and attention grabbing, making you believe that the Prius is truly an environmentally friendly car. However, after taking a deeper more critical look at the ad it is clear that the elements further support our disconnect from nature by reinforcing capitalist ideology through green capitalism. As with the other products I have analyzed, the neo-liberal agenda is at play; this is evident in the focus on individual behaviours within the market as a solution to environmental issues. Even further, after investigating the production of the Prius battery and its detrimental environmental effects, it is evident that the discourses presented in the ad serve to obfuscate the intricate complexity of how capital operates in its domination of nature.

The Toyota Prius example shows that it is difficult to take into consideration the global impact of the product as a whole. This seems to be the case with many products that claim to be environmentally friendly. Advertising reinforces this type of short-term thinking by constantly promoting the present and "does not encourage us to think beyond the immediacy of present sensual experience" (Jhally, 2000, p.7).

The Prius 'Harmony' commercial reinforces environmental stereotypes aligned with corporate interests. The appropriation of capitalist discourses is evident in this representation, seen in the naturalization of personal vehicle use, offering the solution of green consumerism/consumption as a solution for the environmental problems we face, and most unmistakably, offering the promise of 'harmony' with nature through the consumption of a product.

Conclusion

Both the Ford Escape Hybrid and Prius examples have reinforced environmental stereotypes and capitalist ideology by offering the solution of consumption as a means to save the environment. While these vehicles may be fairly environmentally friendly in comparison to similar non-hybrid vehicles, they still operate within the capitalist system, which is primarily concerned with making profits rather than addressing environmental problems. Also, the discourses represented in these commercials obfuscate the damaging effects that personal vehicle use and driving have on our environment. It is evident that we have become far too dependent on our personal vehicles, and that our obsession with the private automobile is unsustainable (Suzuki & Moola, 2010). Although this type of discourse has been naturalized by capitalist modes of thinking, it is important to remember that "[w]e take our cars for granted, but really they haven't been a part of our human culture for that long, and they needn't be an essential part forever" (Ibid, p.2).

Advertising has sustained this disconnect from nature by promoting discourses that support individualism over a concern for the collective, encouraging the endless consumption of products with no concern for the quantity of waste produced, and

persuading us to always think about the present rather than having concern for our future (Jhally, 2000). It is important to the environmental movement for citizens to critically deconstruct advertising messages that tell us the only way to save or connect to nature is through the consumption of products. Using an eco-Marxist framework, an analysis of the discourses presented in these ads/representations and the broader environmental movement points to the need for citizens to shift their focus from an anthropocentric view, to an eco-centric approach in which the environment is at the centre of our concern.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Sut Jhally calls citizens to action to rectify the corporate assault on the environment by saying,

[t]he present generation has a unique responsibility in human history. It is literally up to us to save the world, to make the changes we need to make. If we do not, we will be in barbarism and savagery towards each other in 70 years time. We have to make short-term sacrifices. We have to give up our non-essential appliances. We especially have to rethink our relationship to the car. We have to make real changes not just recycling but fundamental changes in how we live and produce. And we cannot do this individually, we have to do it collectively. We have to find the political will somehow to do this and we may even be dead when its real effects will be felt (2000, p.6).

Using three examples, this thesis has shown how the discourses of environmentalism are appropriated by corporate interests, and has highlighted the implications that this has for our environment. Advertising discourses are important to the neo-liberal agenda in that they encourage individualism, greed, and consumption, all of which undermine collective social issues and social justice. I have argued that we need to question our dominant social institutions and ways of thinking in order to make the critical changes that are needed to save the environment.

Corporations have appropriated the notion of corporate social responsibility through the discourses of green capitalism in order to seem proactive and caring in the public eye, when many times their actions contradict their messages. This proactive approach takes the focus off corporations causing pollution, and off the government as regulators, both of which undermine notions of collective activism. Using corporate social responsibility initiatives, capitalist ideology is naturalized by approaching environmental issues through the mechanism of green capitalism. However, as I argue, green capitalism is not a viable solution since it operates within the capitalist mode of

production and does not critically interrogate mass consumption, which is a key contributor to contemporary environmental degradation. The Ford Escape Hybrid ad was especially effective in appearing concerned and caring, as seen in phrases such as “[w]e have an obligation to this world, to defend it, to fight for it, to save it” (Ford Escape Hybrid Commercial, 2009). However, as a major player in the automotive industry, Ford has done very little to counterbalance its effects on the environment, as seen historically in the anti-environmental sentiments of the Ford Company. The Ford Escape Hybrid commercial presents the Ford Company as socially responsible, while its actions contradict these discourses.

In addition, many products that claim to be ‘green’ are actually greenwashing in order to appear environmentally friendly in the public eye. Coupled with the fact that purchasing a product often does nothing to improve our environmental situation, when these products are not truly a better alternative (compared to similar products), citizens often get lost and confused among the glossy images that overwhelm advertising. This is precisely how corporations have appropriated the discourses of environmentalism by shaping ideology to reflect corporate interests, rather than the interests of the public. For example, the Toyota Prius advertisement aligns the discourses of personal vehicle use/driving with environmentalism by promising the reader/viewer a connection or ‘harmony’ with nature by purchasing the vehicle. I have argued this is problematic because our dependence on the personal vehicle including the environmental effects of vehicle production, consumption, distribution, and disposal, has significantly contributed to global warming.

The capitalist system also works to alienate human beings from the earth, from each other, and from our labour at both the level of production and consumption. At the level of production this alienation includes worker estrangement from the products of labour, caused by the concentrated means of production, the division of labour, and much more. Fromm (1955) discusses alienation in the realm of consumption, which he argues is caused by our complete disconnection from and disregard for a product's origin. Although this alienated experience is part of a long trajectory of disconnection from the earth, the Industrial Revolution marked a significant point along this trajectory. Also, the socio-economic system of Fordism significantly changed the way we think about how we produce goods, by enabling production and consumption on a mass scale. In turn, we now have global production of cars and their components, something that can be connected to production of the Toyota Prius battery, an element of that vehicle which arguably weakens the impact of the Toyota Prius as an 'environmentally friendly' car.

An eco-Marxist perspective critiques the alienated experience of disconnection from the earth associated with capitalism. It goes beyond a cultural analysis by considering the political economy of advertising and the impact of mass consumerism on the environment. Eco-Marxists and eco-socialists argue that we must factor the environment into all things, and that green capitalism falls short on its promise of reconnection to the earth through the consumption of products. An eco-socialist perspective focuses on "empowering human agency rather than technocratic tinkering around the edges" (Kovel, 2010, p.14). An eco-Marxist perspective, focusing on the role that capitalism has in causing environmental degradation, gets to the root of the environmental crisis, which is capitalism's capacity to generate unprecedented levels of consumption and mass waste. In combination with the method of critical discourse

analysis, eco-Marxism is a useful framework for analyzing the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses in advertising, since they both seek to examine the underlying power struggles that work to generate ideology.

As Sut Jhally has pointed out, “20th century advertising is the most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human history and its cumulative effects, unless quickly checked, will be responsible for destroying the world as we know it” (2000, p.1). The ads I have analyzed focus on the role of some key players in the green commerce movement. There are many inherent contradictions in connecting green ideology to companies who got their start by causing damage to the environment. For example, the Clorox brand is founded upon caustic chemical cleaners that use ingredients that are damaging to the environment, human health, or both. It would be possible for Clorox to recognize this problem and transition to a completely environmentally friendly line; however, it is evident through the division of the regular Clorox and Green Works brand that Clorox is primarily interested in *appearing* green, rather than changing their overall practices, since ‘green’ products are more expensive to make and would therefore reduce their profits. The discourses presented in the Clorox Green Works’ advertisement work to reinforce the corporate responsibility initiative claimed by Clorox, by presenting the products as ‘all-natural’ and therefore clean and safe. This is problematic though, because Green Works products do use some chemical ingredients, and therefore are not ‘all-natural’. Also the emphasis on the ‘natural state’ as ‘clean’ tells us we need to be clean to be natural.

The vehicle ads I have analyzed help to demonstrate how our obsession with the private automobile is unsustainable. The Ford Escape Hybrid ad was important to examine because it was the first vehicle to combine features of an SUV with hybrid

technology. This example connects the corporate discourses of environmentalism to the lifestyle and status associated with SUVs in our culture. This ad analysis was useful for showing the contradictions that exist in the representation of SUVs, such as the language and visual imagery used to show a connection of humans to nature, versus the actual effect that SUVs have on our planet. The Ford Company, and more broadly the automotive industry, contributes significantly to the world's carbon footprint. This is problematic because Ford attempts to appear green in the public eye; however, at its core it is merely concerned with making the most profits while it further pollutes the planet.

The Toyota Prius ad is effective at creating a feel-good atmosphere, and promoting a discourse of harmony between humans, nature and machine. The artistic feel of this ad, including humans dressed in costume to represent elements of nature, elicits an emotional response from the reader/viewer. At first glance the Toyota Prius seems to meet all of its environmental claims, and appears to be a truly environmentally friendly car. However, the discourses of driving (as in most car commercials) are still naturalized, and presented as if there is no other alternative. In addition, some research indicates that the environmental impact of the production of the Prius battery is environmentally harmful. This further reinforces the way that capitalist ideology, promoted through advertising discourses, urges consumers to think of commodities only in their present state, with no regard for the effects of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal.

It is important to note that all three products examined in this analysis did live up to *some* of their green claims; the Clorox Green Works products did use mostly natural/un-harmful ingredients, the Ford Escape Hybrid seems to be the most fuel efficient hybrid SUV, and the Toyota Prius does have a significantly greater fuel

economy than other cars in its class. Despite this, all three products commit several sins of greenwashing, and most unmistakably the sin of ‘the lesser of two evils’. For example, the Clorox Green Works ad glosses over the notion of cleaning with household ingredients (baking soda, vinegar, etc.), by naturalizing the use of corporate cleaning products, and the Ford Escape Hybrid and Toyota Prius ads naturalize the discourses of driving and personal vehicle use, while ignoring the impact that the automotive industry has on the environment. Furthermore, from an eco-Marxist perspective, the discourses representing green products, and green capitalism in general, are ‘the lesser of two evils’ because they obfuscate alternatives to capitalism.

Contributions, Limitations, and Further Research

Environmental issues are multidimensional and affect basically every aspect of our lives. My research contributes to the overall body of eco-Marxist literature, with a special emphasis on the particular products examined. My goal in this research was to analyze the power dynamics associated with capitalism and advertising and show how the corporate appropriation of environmental discourses obfuscates the domination of nature by capital. The scope of my research has been somewhat limited due to time constraints; however, given more time it would be interesting to do a historical analysis of the same products, noting changes in representation and corporate responsibility initiatives from the peak of the environmental movement until now.

Building on an eco-Marxist theoretical framework and method of Critical Discourse Analysis, I plan to undertake similar research that goes beyond advertising discourses. More specifically I have taken an interest in the corporate misappropriation of our food systems, namely in relation to genetically modified food and transgenic

animals, and the health and social implications for humans. This research could take several forms including analyzing the role of government and institutions in developing policies that facilitate distribution monopolies by agribusiness firms. This could involve examining government policy documents, the role of corporate public relations strategies and free-market think tanks, and/or the representation of genetically modified organisms and agribusiness in the news media. This research area offers many potential opportunities that are both current and momentous for our society.

I am passionate about environmentalism because of its endless possibilities and connections. The environment is the something thing that we universally share as humans, and therefore it is critical that we do whatever we can to protect it. My research contributes to the eco-socialist movement that seeks to bring about meaningful environmental change by raising awareness through ‘on-the-ground’ activist movements rather than the *passive* activism that green consumerism offers.

Not all hope has been lost in the environmental movement. Many environmental activists have made great strides in organizing and implementing active green ideologies. The next step is to bring this type of ideology (aligned with my discussion of eco-Marxism/eco-socialism) to a mass audience in order to critically interrogate and deconstruct the reigning modes of power and social institutions that enable mass consumption and environmental destruction to thrive. We saw some movement on this front in December 2009 at the Copenhagen summit when the largest climate change demonstrations challenged the policies of the world’s largest polluters (Angus, 2010b, p.22). Also on April 22, 2010 the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia brought over 35,000 people together to forge a unity between anti-imperialist movements in Latin America, indigenous activists

around the world, and growing climate justice movement from the north (Ibid). Born out of this conference the “People’s Agreement” stated,

[u]nder capitalism, Mother Earth is converted into a source of raw materials, and human beings into consumers and a means of production, into people that are seen as valuable only for what they own, and not for what they are...Humanity confronts a great dilemma: to continue on the path of capitalism, depredation, and death, or to choose the path of harmony with nature and respect for life (Ibid, p.22).

As Karl Marx famously stated, “every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs” (Ibid, p.24). We can and are beginning to take steps in the direction of effective change - change that needs to be implemented and supported by our government and social institutions at a mass level. As Sut Jhally says, “[h]uman beings and the natural world are on a collision course...Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring” (2000, p.6).

To varying degrees, the Clorox Green Works, Ford Escape Hybrid, and Toyota Prius ads reinforce environmental stereotypes by naturalizing capitalist ideology, and selling the earth as a commodity through the discourses of green capitalism. In addition, all three examples view the environment as an externality (something to be bought and sold) and emphasize pseudo-environmental change, rather than deconstructing the social institutions that haven proven to be at the core of environmental destruction.

It is evident that people do believe change is important given that 90 per cent of Canadians have made some move towards being more environmentally friendly (Vasil, 2009). Green consumerism is not in itself destructive, since there are *some* things we must purchase and consume in order to survive. However, green consumerism is not the final answer. Paired with purchasing green products is the need to drastically reduce our overall consumption. In addition, we must question the naturalization of the neo-liberal

discourses that promote green capitalism as a viable solution to the mass degradation of the environment. Rather than viewing nature as an externality we must begin to live in harmony with the earth and realize that all of our actions have an impact on the environment. This will involve the rejection of the dominant corporate capitalist discourses related to the environment, and the adoption of discourses aligned with an eco-centric world-view.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE ANALYSIS CHART

| Text: | | | Notes |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|-------|
| General Analysis: | Summary | | |
| Critical Analysis: | | | |
| Text as a whole | | | |
| Genre | TV Advertising/Print | How text conforms to genre Statements in text and how they might serve the purpose of producer What could have been said but was left out? Why? | |
| Framing | How the context of the text is presented. What sort of perspective is the writer taking? | Narrative Good vs. Evil? | |
| | Visual Aids | | |
| Foregrounding | Writer emphasizing certain concepts | | |
| Backgrounding | Omission? | | |
| Pre-supposition | Use of language in a way that appear to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative. Insinuations? | Product described in glowing terms – no rival? | |
| Discourse Discursive differences | Voice/Register Typical user/Expert Emphasis? | | |
| Sentence by Sentence | | | |
| Topicalized | Grammatical subjects of the sentence. Form of sentence-level foregrounding – creates perspective | | |
| Agent-patient relations | Who is the agent? Who is going what to whom? Who is initiating actions? Who are passive recipients? | | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| | Deletion/Omission of agents Nominalization/Passive verbs | | |
| Pre-supposition | | | |
| Insinuations | Comments that are slyly suggestive Double meaning. | | |
| Words and phrases: | | | |
| Connotations | Labels Metaphor | | |
| | | | |
| Register | Formality/informality of text, degree of technicality | | |
| Modality | The tone of statements as regards their degree of certitude and authority – carried through words and phrases like may, might, could, will, must, it seems to me, without a doubt, it's possible that, etc. | | |
| Auxiliary embellishments | Sounds, pictures, etc. | | |

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