

**MEDIA EDUCATION**  
FOUNDATION  
STUDY GUIDE



Challenging media

**ADVERTISING & THE END OF THE WORLD**

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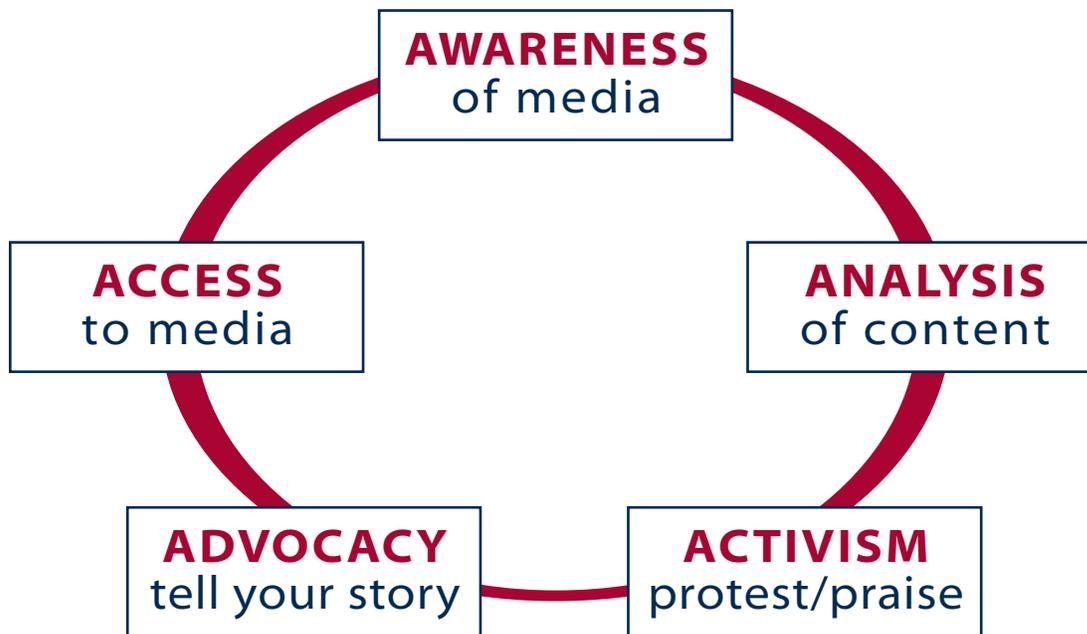
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# USING THIS VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

- » View the video prior to showing it to your students.
- » Review the study guide and choose which exercises you will use with your students.
- » Use the previewing activities to help your students prepare for the ideas presented by the video.
- » Encourage *active listening*. Because the content of this video is likely to elicit emotional responses from the students, it is important that the students engage with each other in ways that ensure everybody has the opportunity both to speak and to be listened to. It is advised that you set guidelines or norms to ways to “actively listen” in advance of classroom discussions. Check out MEF’s handout, *Techniques for Active Listening*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/ActiveListening.pdf>)
- » Have the students keep a journal. It will be an effective place for them to explore their own attitudes and opinions and to record their observations about the media.
- » Review and discuss the handout *How to be a Critical Media Viewer*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/CriticalViewing.pdf>)
- » Incorporate activism and advocacy into your media literacy study. They are an important part of empowering students.

# THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT<sup>1</sup>



## THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT EXPLAINED

### **AWARENESS**

Students learn about the pervasiveness of the media in their lives.

### **ANALYSIS**

Students discuss the forms and contents of the media's various messages as well as the intent of most media to persuade an audience.

### **ACTIVISM**

Students develop their own opinions about the negative and positive effects of the media and decide to do something about it – this can be in the form of praise for healthy media, protest of unhealthy media, or development of campaigns to educate others with regard to the media, to change media messages, etc.

### **ADVOCACY**

Students learn how to work with media and use their own media to develop and publicize messages that are healthy, constructive, and all too often ignored by our society.

### **ACCESS**

Students gain access to the media – radio, newspaper, internet, television, etc. – to spread their own message. This in turn leads to further awareness of the media and how it works, which leads to a deeper analysis and so forth.

1. Diagram and explanation adopted from E.D.A.P.'s GO GIRLS! Curriculum, (c) 1999 (<http://www.edap.org/gogirls.html>)

## OVERVIEW

Advertising is everywhere and impossible to ignore. Yet despite the prevalence of commercial appeals, and the vast amounts of money, time, and creative energy invested in them, we often dismiss advertising content as trivial. In *Advertising and the End of the World*, **Sut Jhally** does just the opposite: he turns a critical eye on the world of advertising to consider its impact on our society and our lives. In the end, the film challenges us to critically engage with advertising, to recognize its powerful cultural role – its ability to mold the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, shaping the way we behave, our values, our desires, even our identities.

We are destroying the planet and we know it – so why do we keep doing it? *Advertising and the End of the World* reveals the connection between the social role of advertising and the consumer culture that fuels a way of life this planet cannot sustain. The West, particularly North America is consuming irreplaceable resources at an alarming rate. However, this unsustainable behavior makes sense in a marketplace that requires us to consume to keep the market going. Advertising is the mouthpiece of the capitalist market; its job is to convince us to consume. Using examples from the world of ads, Jhally illustrates how advertising does its job and does it well – by connecting the dead world of things with real human needs and desires for the social elements of life.

Sut Jhally's analysis poses three questions to the world of advertising. First, "How do we become happy?" Advertising answers this question very simply – consume. Using extensive research data Jhally argues that beyond a certain level of poverty and comfort commodities do not make us happy. What makes us happy – things like love, family and friendship – the marketplace cannot deliver. The analysis continues by asking, "What is society?" Advertising does not address societal issues like education, health care, poverty, the environment. Yet it still tells us something about society – there is no such thing; there are only individuals and their families. In a society-less world discussion of societal issues becomes impossible. The third question asks, "How far into the future can we think?" We cannot. Advertising tells us the future is now, live in the present, don't worry about the future. Yet as Jhally illustrates we have reason to worry. Not only are we destroying the planet, we are engaging in wars over access to limited resources. Though the job of advertising may be to get us to consume, its social power is far greater. It creates and sustains a consumer culture that does not deliver on its promise for happiness, that leaves many people both at home and abroad in suffering, that is destroying the planet, that will obliterate our future.

Though the situation may seem desperate *Advertising and the End of the World* holds out hope for the future. Jhally's analysis shows that the consumer culture shaping the way we look at the world today is predominant because a vast amount of time, money and creative energy is spent on maintaining this perspective. *Advertising and the End of the World* challenges us to be part of creating a culture that can support other ideas about what is important, that can stress values other than those available in the marketplace. It calls us to engage with advertising, to recognize its power yet insist on the possibility of a different, better future.

# PREVIEWING QUESTIONS

## FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

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1. Does advertising have any effect on you?
2. Why do you think advertising and public relations are such big business these days?
3. Do you feel that you have everything you need? Do you have everything that you want?
4. What factors influence your decision to buy something new?
5. Think of the last thing you purchased. Why exactly did you buy it? If you needed it, why did you need it? If you wanted it, why did you want it?
6. What makes you happy?
7. How do you picture your life 10 years from now, 20 years from now?
8. Make a list of the top 5 things you want in life.
9. The title of this video is "Advertising and the End of the World." What do you think about this title?
10. Agree or disagree with the following statement: *I am very concerned about the destruction of the environment.* Discuss.

# ADVERTISING AS CULTURE

## KEY POINTS

- » Advertising presents us with a world disconnected from reality – a simple shampoo brings intense sexual pleasure, old women morph into young, beautiful models offering beer to young men, perfume acts as a love potion. Things give us immediate access to the world of desire, eroticism, even love.
- » If an anthropologist from Mars analyzed these ads they might conclude that our culture is dominated by a belief in magic.
- » Advertising has been called a “magic system” in which products are held to have incredible powers.
- » An anthropologist would note the similarities between today’s consumer culture and older societies’ beliefs around the magical powers of objects.
- » An economist would point to the differences between today’s culture and those that came before. The major difference is capitalism’s ability to produce an immense accumulation of commodities.
- » No other society has been able to match the vast productive output of capitalism. Its products can be seen everywhere in our daily lives. In this sense capitalism is truly revolutionary. It has, in a very short period of time, dramatically altered our social landscape.
- » Commodities must be sold for profit and so go through a cycle of “production, distribution, and consumption.” The industrial revolution rectified the problems of production and distribution, but what about consumption?
- » At the end of the 19th century capitalism invented advertising to deal with the problem of consumption – the need to get people to buy this immense accumulation of goods. It became the job of the advertising industry to recruit the best creative talent to create a culture where desire and identity fused with commodities, to make the dead world of things come alive with human and social possibilities.
- » There has never been a propaganda effort to match the effort of advertising in the history of the world. Advertising’s mission to convince people to consume requires incredible effort, creativity, time, attention to detail and money.
- » The amount of money spent on advertising has increased dramatically over the years. Today over \$175 billion per year is spent on advertising in the US.
- » It should not be surprising that something this central, with so much money being spent on it should be an important part of social life.
- » Advertising has colonized the spaces of our culture. It has driven out other things in favor of commercial discourse.
- » In the 1980’s the average person was exposed to 1500 commercial impressions per day, in 1996 that number had more than doubled to 3600 per day.
- » Our media systems are dominated by and dependent upon advertising. 100% of television and radio revenue, 50% of magazine revenue and 80% of newspaper revenue comes from advertisers. Our media systems have become vehicles for selling products.
- » Advertisers can also be seen at the movies, or rather in the movies, where product placement changes the prime function of movies from storyteller to product pusher.
- » Professional sports, schools, the Internet – have all been integrated into the advertising system. Even the sky has been targeted – there seems to be no space off-limits to the world of advertising.
- » Our culture has become an adjunct to consumerism. Its job is to sell us things. As it does this it changes how we think about the world and ourselves. Take for example the role diamonds play in our rituals

# ADVERTISING AS CULTURE

surrounding courtship and marriage. The idea that “a diamond is forever” and is connected to engagement is almost universally accepted in the West. Yet this idea emerged from a 1947 DeBeers ad campaign with the slogan “a diamond is forever.” DeBeers uses its advertising campaigns to link love with the purchase of diamonds – the diamond engagement ring, the diamond anniversary band, the 25th anniversary diamond. Our love relationships are being used as a vehicle to sell diamonds.

- » Advertising is now inside our relationships, our homes, even inside our heads.
- » Advertisers are now faced with the problem of “clutter and noise” – the bombardment of ads each advertiser must compete with for our attention. As advertising colonizes more and more space in our culture the job of the advertiser becomes increasingly difficult – to convince us to buy their product it is essential that they stand out in a very big crowd.
- » And so more time, care, creativity and money goes into advertising than any other type of message. An hour and a half of TV ads strung together would actually cost more than a Hollywood blockbuster.
- » Because advertising is everywhere and huge amounts of money and creativity are expended on these ads, to understand our culture and society we must acknowledge the role and power of commercial images.
- » When we talk about advertising it is important to ask the right questions. We must clarify what we mean by the power and effectiveness of ads. For a long time we’ve been asking the wrong question – “does an individual ad campaign make people buy a product?” This is only an interesting question if you are selling that product. But the answer cannot tell us anything about advertising’s social power. The right question would ask about the cultural role of advertising, not its marketing role.
- » Culture is the place and space where a society tells stories about itself, where values are articulated and expressed, where notions of good and evil, of morality and value, are defined. Every society has a cultural field that talks about these things.
- » In our society stories of advertising dominate the cultural field. Advertising is now our culture’s main storyteller.
- » We must ask then, what are the consistent stories advertising tells us about ourselves? About our values, about what is important, about how to behave, about what is good and bad?
- » These questions require us to look at advertising as a cultural system. A system that helps us to make sense of our world. We internalize the values and ideas of advertising because that is how culture works. We learn what is valuable, what is right and wrong, how to behave. We cannot help but be influenced by advertising. To not be influenced by advertising would be to live outside of culture; no one lives outside of culture.
- » So how do we identify and analyze the consistent stories advertising tells us? To do this, to understand advertising’s cultural power, we ask a series of questions and discuss how advertising answers each question:
  1. How do we become happy?
  2. What is society?
  3. What is the future like?

# ADVERTISING AS CULTURE

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

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1. Why is advertising referred to as a “magic system”?
2. What would an economist say is the major difference between today’s culture and those that came before?
3. Explain the cycle commodities go through. Where does advertising fit in this cycle? What is the purpose of advertising?
4. Sut Jhally gives evidence of the vast amounts of time, money and creativity spent on advertising. Were you aware that so much effort went into advertising? Why do you think so much time, money and creativity is spent on advertising? If so much is invested in advertising why do you think we sometimes dismiss advertising as irrelevant?
5. What is the relationship between advertising and our media systems?
6. Sut Jhally says that advertising has colonized out culture. What does this mean?
7. In the video what is the example of the DeBeers “a diamond is forever” slogan meant to illustrate? Had you ever thought about diamonds in this way before? If you were getting engaged would you want to get or give a diamond ring? Why?
8. What does Jhally say is a major problem facing advertisers today? Explain that problem.
9. What does Jhally say is the wrong question to ask if we want to look at the influence of advertising on our society? Why is it the wrong question?
10. What is “culture”? Why is it important?
11. What is a “cultural system”? What does Jhally mean when he says we must look at advertising as a “cultural system”?

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. In this assignment the goal is to analyze advertising to look for evidence of the “magic system” Sut Jhally talks about in the beginning of the video. Remember in the magic system products are given incredible powers. Start by watching and if possible recording your favorite television program. (*Recording the program will be useful as you will have more time to write while watching if you can pause the recording, you will refer to this recording again in Part B*).

- a)** List the advertisements shown before, after and during your favorite television program. Note the following:
- » What product is being sold in the ad?
  - » Is the world presented in the ad real, in other words could what is being shown in the ad really happen?
  - » Does the ad give the product being sold any “magical” properties?

Choose two of the ads to analyze further:

- » Do you see any contradiction between the magical qualities given to the product and the reality of that product?
- » What would happen if in the real world you used the product the same way it is used in the fantasy world of advertising?
- » Why do you think the advertisers have chosen to sell this product in this particular way?

**b)** In this section the purpose of the assignment shifts a little. Now the task is to look for evidence of how advertising has colonized spaces outside of the more traditional commercial time slots between programming. This time closely analyze the television program you recorded. If you were not able to record this television program watch your favorite television program again but this time concentrate

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on the program rather than the ads alternatively you can watch your favorite movie. Answer the following questions:

- » Can you find any products embedded in your favorite television show/movie? Note the products.
- » Why do you think companies would want to have their products embedded in a particular show/movie?
- » Compare and contrast the two types of advertising. How is embedding a product in a television show or movie different from the more traditional television ad form?
- » Keeping in mind Sut Jhally's explanation of the "magic system" of advertising consider whether or not embedding a product endows that product with any magical qualities. Explain.

**2.** Sut Jhally uses the example of the DeBeers ad campaign slogan "a diamond is forever" to illustrate the extent to which advertising has infiltrated our culture. Diamonds have become so linked to our rituals surrounding courtship and marriage that a diamond engagement ring has become obligatory. Culture has become an adjunct to consumerism – its job is to sell us things.

This assignment asks you to write a 5-10 page research paper on conflict or blood diamonds.

The following online resources might help you get started:

- » <http://www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/>
- » [http://web.amnesty.org/pages/ec\\_kimberley\\_process](http://web.amnesty.org/pages/ec_kimberley_process)
- » <http://www.un.org/peace/africa/Diamond.html>
- » <http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/?id=DIAMOND.UAR>
- » <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/82feb/8202diamond1.htm>

- » In your paper explain what conflict or blood diamonds are and why we should be concerned about them.
- » Include an analysis comparing the diamond world presented to us by advertisers and the diamond world of the conflict diamond. The following online video, which uses the format of a popular DeBeers ad to talk about conflict diamonds in Sierra Leone, might assist you in this task:  
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/d4.html>.

**3.** Sut Jhally says that advertising has colonized not only our space but also our lives – it is inside our heads, our relationships, our identities. The example he uses, as mentioned above, is the role the diamond engagement ring now plays in our love relationships. "A diamond is forever" is no longer just an ad slogan, it frames how we think about and act out engagement and marriage.

- » Find another example to illustrate this same point; an example of how advertising has leached out from its role as mouthpiece for the selling of products to mouthpiece for how we should think, interact, live. This may take quite some reflection. When advertising infiltrates the culture in this way its job is to influence our desires in a way that makes us think they are precisely that – our desires. It is difficult to separate advertising from culture because advertising becomes culture, but it is your mission to try to do just that!
- » Present your example to the class. Using a poster and/or video clips analyze real advertisements to illustrate how the example you've chosen has infiltrated our culture to such a degree that the line between advertising and culture becomes blurred.

# HOW DO WE BECOME HAPPY?

## KEY POINTS

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- » Every society has to have a story about how we become happy.
- » Advertising's answer to the question "How do we become happy?" is very simple: consume. Commodities will make us happy.
- » This should not come as a surprise as consumption plays a central role in a capitalist economy. The immense accumulation of commodities produced must be sold.
- » Not only will economic growth provide jobs, it also gives us access to more and more things – we can produce more and buy more – and that will make us happy.
- » The story that happiness comes from economic growth has become the major motivating force for social change around the world today.
- » According to advertising access to an immense accumulation of goods also makes you politically and personally free. A famous Wendy's ad comments that the problem with Communism was that it offered people no choice in terms of what they could consume, in contrast to Wendy's where you are free to choose how you want your hamburger.
- » These are very powerful stories that equate happiness and freedom with consumption.
- » The next question we must ask is "Is it true?" Does happiness come from material things? Do we get happier as a society as we get richer? Generally the answer is no.
- » Since 1945 a series of studies called "The Happiness Surveys" have tracked the general level of happiness in the U.S. These surveys asked people how they felt about their own levels of happiness. The surveys found that although over time we've gotten richer, have access to more commodities, and have a higher standard of living the number of people who report themselves as being "very happy" has remained the same. Why?
- » Other surveys called "Quality of Life Surveys" ask people what they want out of life and what is important to them. Generally people reply with non-material answers. What they do want is:
  - autonomy and control
  - good self-esteem
  - warm family relationships
  - relaxing leisure time
  - romance and love
  - close and meaningful friendships
- » These are the social elements of life.
- » Social values include things like love, family and friendship; material values include things like economic security and success. Overwhelmingly social values outrank material values in terms of what people say they want. While material values are important, above a certain level of poverty and comfort the world of commodities offered by advertising does not make us happy.
- » This is one of the great ironies of our market system. While it promises to make us happy it cannot provide us with the social elements of life that really do make us happy. It can only offer us those things that can be bought and sold.
- » The advertising industry knows it cannot make us happy.

# HOW DO WE BECOME HAPPY?

- » If you compare ads from the late 1800's and early 1900's to today's ads, you find that ads no longer talk about the properties of the goods being sold. Starting in the 1920's advertisers began to link the object being sold with powerful images of the deeply desired social life people say they want.
- » Advertising is so attractive to us, so powerful and seductive because it offers us images of the real sources of human happiness. The appeals made by advertising are very real, they tap into our emotions and desires, but the answers it provides are false. Advertising links the things we want, the social elements of life, to a place that cannot provide it – the market and goods.
- » Advertising taps into our emotions and repackages them back to us connected to the world of things.
- » Advertising both reflects and creates our dream life.
- » Advertising can be thought of as a “fantasy factory”; taking our desire for human social contact and re-conceiving it, re-conceptualizing it, connecting it to the world of commodities and translating it into a form that can be communicated through ads.
- » Advertising actually hinders our happiness by pushing us to seek out happiness in the world of things that cannot make use happy.
- » A world that truly reflected our values and desires would not look like the consumer culture we have today; it would be a world that stressed and built institutions to foster social relationships, not endless material accumulation.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

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1. According to the world of advertising how do we become happy? Is that true? Why or why not?
2. According to Sut Jhally how do we really become happy? What makes you happy?
3. What are “The Happiness Surveys” and what information have they found?
4. What are “Quality of Life Surveys” and what information have they found?
5. What are social values and material values?
6. What are some differences between advertising of the late 1800s, early 1900s and the advertising of today?
7. According to Jhally why does advertising appeal to us?
8. What do you think Jhally means when he suggests advertising can be thought of as a “fantasy factory”?
9. Sut Jhally says that advertising can actually reduce our capacity to be happy, how does it do this? Do you agree or disagree with his analysis? Why?
10. Do we live in a world that reflects our desires? Explain.

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Choose to do **a** or **b**.
  - a) Create your own “Quality of Life” survey. Do some research into how to create and conduct a survey. Devise at least 15 questions, your questions should be designed to test the theory that generally people value the social elements of life more than material elements. Choose a sample population to work with. Your sample should include at least 20 people. Review your surveys and compile the data you've obtained for presentation to the class. Your presentation should answer the following questions:

# HOW DO WE BECOME HAPPY?

- » What do your participants say is important to them?
- » What do they say they want?
- » Are your survey results similar to those quoted in the video?

When analyzing your survey data note any interesting trends that you see. Do you see any similarities in peoples' responses, and differences? What, if any conclusions can you draw from your research?

**b)** Survey research is called quantitative research. It is also interesting to do qualitative research. Do some research into methods of qualitative research. Choose four people with whom you will do open-ended interviews. Again you should devise a series of questions designed to test the theory that people value the social elements of life more than material elements. Ask your participants about what they want out of life and what is important to them. How do they think they can be or become happy? Record your interviewees' responses for analysis. Review and analyze your interviews and prepare to share your results with the class. Your presentation should answer the following questions:

- » What do your interviewees say is important to them?
- » What do they say they want?
- » Are your interview results similar to those quoted in the video?

When analyzing your interview data note any interesting trends that you see. Do you see any similarities in peoples' responses, any differences? What, if any conclusions can you draw from your research?

**2.** Advertising tells us that the way to happiness and satisfaction is through things. But do advertisers really want us to be happy? Why would we buy anything new if we were already happy and satisfied with what we have?

For this assignment consider the following:

- » When a new product comes on the market advertisers must convince us to buy that product, one way to do this is to convince us that what we already have is not good enough – we must become dissatisfied customers who they can then satisfy.

You may be familiar with the following example: the "Swiffer Wet Jet" is a relatively new product. The premise of its advertising campaign is that other, older methods of cleaning your floor are dissatisfactory because first, they're not as fun and second, the floor doesn't get clean enough, as illustrated by the dirt on the bottom of your socks. Of course if you become dissatisfied with your old method of cleaning the floor there is a better chance that you will buy into another method.

Find three more examples of ads that work in this way, ads that require you to be a dissatisfied customer whose needs their product can satisfy. Prepare some notes explaining how each ad works to convince you that what you have is dissatisfactory and that the only way to satisfaction is to buy the product. Present your ads and analysis to the class.

**3.** According to the video advertising draws us away from what really makes us happy – the social elements of life, and pushes us towards what doesn't – things. What would advertising look like if it did push us towards what really makes us happy? Could an ad answer the question, "How do we become happy?" with some aspect of the social elements of life? If an ad is not selling us anything that we can actually buy is it still an ad? Or is it perhaps a spoof-ad?

# HOW DO WE BECOME HAPPY?

This assignment asks you to create an ad that is not actually selling anything but is instead answering the question of how we become happy truthfully. Be creative.

- » To begin, ask yourself “how do I become happy?”
- » Make a short list of your answers.
- » Choose one answer, one thing that makes you happy, to base your ad on.
- » Remember to keep your objective in mind: to answer the question “How do we become happy?” truthfully.

The following web site might help you get started: **[www.adbusters.org/creativeresistance/spoofads/printad](http://www.adbusters.org/creativeresistance/spoofads/printad)**

Present your ad, or non-ad to the class.

Once everyone has completed their alternative ad consider doing one or more of the following to get them seen:

- » Hold a gallery showing of the class’s alternative ads, open to the public.
- » Post the alternative ads around your school.
- » Have some or all of the ads featured in the school newspaper.

# WHAT IS SOCIETY?

## KEY POINTS

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- » In this section we ask, what is a society? What is it that binds us together in some sort of collective way?
- » Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, has answered this question in the same way advertising and the marketplace would answer it. She said, "There is no such thing as society. There are just individuals and their families." We have no group values, no collective interests.
- » Advertising talks to us in exactly this way. We are not addressed as members of society interested in collective issues, but as individuals acting on our own.
- » Advertising talks about our individual needs and desires not about the things we have to negotiate collectively like poverty, health care, housing, the homeless, and the environment.
- » The market appeals to the worst in us – greed and selfishness, and discourages the best in us – compassion, caring, generosity.
- » This should not surprise us as in societies where the marketplace dominates the focus is only on those things the marketplace can deliver – an immense accumulation of goods.
- » Since advertising acts as the main voice of the marketplace, we can say that advertising systematically relegates discussion of key societal issues to the peripheries of the culture, to the margins.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

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1. How does advertising answer the question what is society?
2. Do you agree with Margaret Thatcher's thoughts about society? How do you answer the question, what is society?
3. Why does advertising address us as individuals rather than as a society?
4. Sut Jhally says advertising appeals to the worst in us – how does it do this? Do you agree with his assessment?
5. What happens to important societal issues in a culture where advertising acts as the main storyteller? Explain.

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Advertising talks about our individual needs and desires not about the things we have to negotiate collectively like poverty, health care, housing, the homeless, and the environment, or does it? Do you think advertising sometimes addresses these concerns if they think it will sell more products? One example may be auto ads in which a car or SUV is presented in a beautiful natural setting, or presented as being like a wild animal. In the ad the automobile is presented as being one with nature and wilderness, ignoring the fact that pollution from auto-use is actually a major source of environmental pollution and destruction.

In this assignment you are asked to seek out ads that seem to address societal issues in this way. Choose a number of these ads to create a poster for presentation. Your presentation should include a critical analysis of each ad. For each analysis consider the following:

- » How has the advertiser linked its product to a particular social issue?
- » Why have they done this?
- » Does this linkage mean that the advertiser is now talking to us as a society rather than as an individual?
- » Does this linkage in anyway trivialize the social issues important to us or does it mean that the advertiser cares about these issues too?
- » Why do advertisers spend money trying to look like they care about social issues?

# WHAT IS SOCIETY?

- » How else could that money be spent?

In addition to analyzing each ad be sure your presentation includes an introduction and conclusion.

The site <http://www.corpwatch.org/campaigns/PCC.jsp?topicid=102> might give you some ideas of what to look for and assist you with your analysis.

**2.** When former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared, “There is no such thing as society. There are just individual men and women and there are families” in 1987 she met with a great deal of negative media attention, and her words continue to evoke much political criticism many years later, see for example the following article from 2000 at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4083123,00.html>.

Yet according to Sut Jhally, Thatcher was simply telling us exactly what the market tells us about society everyday – there’s no such thing.

In his inauguration speech of 2001, President George W. Bush said, “A civil society demands from each of us good will and respect, fair dealing and forgiveness.”

In this assignment you are asked to compare and contrast the above mentioned quotes. Write a paper (*about 5 pages*) in which you consider the following:

- » Is Bush’s definition of society very different from Thatcher’s?
- » Is Bush’s statement contradictory to market values?
- » In the context of each quote who is held responsible for our societal problems?
- » How does each quote tell us we should deal with societal problems such as housing, homelessness, poverty and the environment?

In the final section of your paper respond to the following:

- » If you were a governmental leader how would you define what society is?
- » What would the role of your government be in this society?

**3.** The following article by Sut Jhally reiterates and expands on the ideas presented in the video, “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse” available online at <http://www.sutjhally.com/onlinepubs/apocalypse.html>. Read the section titled *There is No Such Thing as ‘Society’* (you may find it helpful to read the entire article but for this assignment be sure to at least read this section).

Jhally includes the following quotation from Barbara Ehrenreich,

“Television commercials offer solutions to hundreds of problems we didn't even know we had – from ‘morning mouth’ to shampoo build-up – but nowhere in the consumer culture do we find anyone offering us such mundane necessities as affordable health insurance, childcare, housing, or higher education. The flip side of the consumer spectacle... is the starved and impoverished public sector. We have Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, but no way to feed and educate the one-fifth of American children who are growing up in poverty. We have dozens of varieties of breakfast cereal, and no help for the hungry.” (Ehrenreich 1990 p.47)

Write a paper that considers the following – do we want to live in a society that can effectively deal with our societal problems – with poverty, health care, housing, the homeless, the environment? And if we do, why do we spend so much time, energy and money on things that will not help us address these problems?

When writing this paper keep in mind the specific arguments Sut Jhally presents in both the video and his article, “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse”, and the Ehrenreich quote cited above. Ensure that you present your thoughts in a reflective, well-argued, well-organized manner.

# HOW FAR INTO THE FUTURE CAN WE THINK?

## KEY POINTS

- » The consumer vision pushed by advertising is based on economic growth. More consumption requires more production.
- » The industrial production needed to satisfy our rates of consumption has huge environmental costs requiring resources, raw materials and energy. The earth cannot sustain present levels of economic expansion.
- » We are running out of vital supplies. Projection studies have determined a timeline for when we will run out. "If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next 100 years" (*The Limits to Growth*).
- » Industrial production uses up resources and energy at an alarming rate. Since 1950 the world's population has used up more of the earth's resources than ALL of the generations that came before. In fifty years we have matched the use of thousands and thousands of years.
- » The West, especially Americans have used most of these resources. We have a special responsibility for the approaching crisis.
- » The depletion of the ozone layer is a clear indication that the way we produce is having an effect on the ecosphere of the planet. In 1985 a huge hole, the size of the continental US, was discovered over the South Pole. Ultra-violet radiation is damaging or lethal to many life forms and this gaping hole dramatically increases our exposure to it. The activities of humans are changing the very make-up of the earth.
- » In his book, *The End of Nature*, Bill McKibben reminds us that "we have done this ourselves... by driving our cars, building our factories, cutting down our forests turning on our air conditioners." All the changes in the history of the world are dwarfed by what we have done in the last fifty years.
- » 1,700 of the world's leading scientists, including a majority of noble laureates in the sciences have issued the following appeal: "Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. If not checked, many of our current practices 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" (*Union of Concerned Scientists*).
- » The catastrophe is not immediate. We've done a lot of damage but the real crisis will not hit until sometime in the next 100 years. However, to avoid the catastrophe we must act now.
- » A useful metaphor is that of an oil tanker heading for a crash onshore. Because it is so huge, because of the momentum that has been built up, to stop from crashing the oil tanker must turn well before it reaches the coast. Turn too late and a crash is inevitable. To avoid catastrophe we must start changing our course now.
- » We must act collectively to make fundamental changes in the way we organize ourselves, in how we live and produce and in what we stress in our economy if we want to avoid catastrophe 60, 70, 80 years from now.
- » This generation has a unique responsibility in human history. It is literally up to this generation to save the world, to make the changes we need to make.
- » The real effects of these changes may not be felt until we are dead. It is difficult to connect with a future and future generations we will not be around to see. This task is made even more difficult given the context of the market and stories of advertising.

# HOW FAR INTO THE FUTURE CAN WE THINK?

- » Corporations, the institutions that dominate the market system, think about their profits now, possibly even a year from now but they do not and cannot think 70 years down the road about society's collective issues.
- » Advertising, which forms the background on which we have to develop new ways of thinking, talks about the future in the same way. The future is now or possibly one week from now but certainly not 70 years from now. Advertising cannot think long term.
- » The present-orientated nature of advertising will only increase as advertisers vie for the attention of a cynical audience that tries its best to avoid advertising.
- » As advertisers try to stand out amidst increasing clutter and noise, they will speak to us more through our bodies than through our heads – something you feel, not necessarily something you think.
- » Sexual imagery will become even more powerful, more shocking because sex is one way of cutting through the clutter and noise. While the male body is sometimes used to this end, the predominant way that sexuality will be translated into visual form is through male fantasies of the female body. Not just sex but a particular version of sex will dominate.
- » In the move from the cognitive to the emotional any emotion that cuts through the clutter and noise, however unpleasant, will be employed.
- » This move to the visceral will not stress the values of a collective long-range future. The prevailing values of the commercial system provide no incentives to create bonds with future generations. We don't care about the future.
- » At one time it was thought that the environmental crisis would lessen international tensions. That as we recognized that we could only survive collectively the world would come together to cooperate to save the earth. This has not happened.
- » As the Persian Gulf War made clear, the new world order of the 21st century will be based on international conflict over increasingly scarce resources. As President George Bush said, "American troops are being dispatched to the Gulf to make possible our way of life." This requires cheap oil and if the cost of that is one hundred thousand Iraqis well so be it. We need to keep driving our cars and using our appliances – that's our way of life.
- » As the world runs out of resources the most powerful military forces will use their might to ensure access to depleting resources. The Third World will simply be seen as enemies who are making unreasonable claims on our resources.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING**

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1. What does advertising say about the future?
2. Why is this century unique in terms of resource use?
3. What does Bill McKibben mean when he writes that we've brought imminent environmental destruction upon ourselves?
4. Why does Jhally say Americans have a special responsibility to stop future environmental crisis? Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. Do you think North Americans are doing enough to live up to this special responsibility? Why or why not? Could we be doing more?

# HOW FAR INTO THE FUTURE CAN WE THINK?

6. What does the metaphor of an oil tanker headed for a crash onshore illustrate?
7. Jhally says that to avoid environmental destruction we must act collectively not individually. Does this mean that individuals cannot make a difference? Explain.
8. The results of changes we make to the way we live now, will probably not be felt until many years from now and it is possible that we may even be dead when their full effects are felt. Even if the world is going to end in chaos and despair we probably won't be around to live through it so why should we care? Do we care? Give evidence to explain.
9. As advertisers try to stand out amidst increasing clutter and noise how does Jhally say advertising will change? Have you seen any evidence of this change?
10. At one time it was thought that the environmental crisis would lessen international tensions as the nations of the world worked together to save the planet. Has this happened? What has happened? Why?

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. One of Jhally's main arguments in this section of the video is that we are running out of vital resources. He says that we have used more resources in the last century than in all the thousands of years that came before. In this assignment you are asked to choose a resource and write a research paper about it. Keep the following questions in mind as your research and write your paper:

- » Why is that resource important to people?
- » Are we using this resource in a sustainable way?
- » Is this resource under threat of serious depletion? Are any steps being taken to combat the depletion of this resource? Is it too late?
- » Are there any alternate resources available? Are we using these alternate resources?
- » Does your research support or contradict Jhally's argument that we are using up our vital resources at an alarming rate?

Be sure to give evidence to support your arguments.

Some suggested resources to research:

- » Water
- » Oil
- » Forest
- » Fish, see for example the following piece about the depletion of ocean fish at:  
**[http://www.cbc.ca/storyview/CBC/2003/05/14/fish\\_decline030514](http://www.cbc.ca/storyview/CBC/2003/05/14/fish_decline030514)**

2. Jhally says that the methods used by advertisers to sell products have changed since the early days of advertising and that these methods will continue to change as advertisers devise new ways to compete with clutter and noise. The present-orientated nature of advertising will increase as advertisers speak more to our bodies than to our heads, our feelings rather than our thoughts.

In this assignment you will be researching and collecting advertisements from the early twentieth century through to today to illustrate Jhally's point.

- » Find a sampling of advertisements from the beginning days of advertising to the present. Create a poster, using poster board or a large sheet of paper, to visually map the world of advertising chronologically.

# HOW FAR INTO THE FUTURE CAN WE THINK?

» Using your poster as a guide and in the context of Jhally's argument about the way advertising works on us, write a 5-page paper analyzing the way advertising has changed and what, if anything, has stayed the same.

**3.** When talking about the destruction of the environment many people cite overpopulation as a major contributor to the destruction of the earth. Yet at the same time in the West a great deal of research money and time is devoted to infertility treatments and many couples spend thousands of dollars trying to conceive a child.

Research the problem of overpopulation. Write a paper that takes the following questions into consideration:

- » What countries are overpopulated? On a global scale what percentage of the world's resources do these countries use?
- » What theories can you find that answer the following: why are so many of the world's poorest countries overpopulated? What is your theory?
- » What countries spend the most money on infertility and related research and treatment? On a global scale what percentage of the world's resources do these countries use?
- » Is the West overpopulated? What countries have problems with population decline?
- » Is the West's special responsibility for approaching environmental catastrophe shifted when we focus on the problem of overpopulation?
- » What might we do to effectively deal with the world's overpopulation problem?

**4.** In this video Sut Jhally cites the 1991 Gulf War as an example of how environmental destruction has not brought the world together to work towards saving the earth. Instead we are pitted against one another in an effort to secure access to depleted natural resources. Jhally calls the Gulf War a sign of what is to come. In March of 2003 President George W. Bush declared war on Iraq, again. Is this war about access to oil? There are many opinions on this issue. It is your job to form your own opinion, make a judgement and present the reasons for why you've arrived at your decision.

Gather as much information as you can. Make sure your sources of information are varied. Consider all sides of the issue before you make your judgement.

Write a paper in which you either agree or disagree with the following statement: The war on Iraq, declared in March 2003, is a war about access to and control of scarce natural resources.

Ensure that you support your judgement with considered arguments – what evidence do you have to support your judgement? It is a good idea to discuss and answer a counter-argument in your essay. Considering and then explaining why you reject a counter-argument strengthens your own argument.

The following Internet sites might help you with your search for information about the war in Iraq but you are by no means limited to these resources:

- » PBS: [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/iraq/road\\_war.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/iraq/road_war.html)
- » U.S. Department of Defense: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/dodnews.html>
- » The Media Education Foundation: <http://www.mediaed.org/btf>
- » The Canadian Broadcasting Company: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/iraq/>
- » List of different news sites around the world: <http://www.cursor.org/>

# IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE

## KEY POINTS

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- » The destructive aspects of capitalism – its short-term nature, its denial of collective values, its stress on material life – have been referred to as “the capitalist threat.”
- » Culturally speaking advertising is the main voice of that threat. It pushes us towards material things for satisfaction and away from the social values that truly make us happy; it insists upon the increased economic production driving environmental destruction; it only discusses our individual needs, relegating collective issues to the margins; and it talks only about the present, making thinking about the future difficult. To the extent that advertising does all this it is a major obstacle to our survival as a species.
- » Getting out of this situation, coming up with new ways to look at the world may seem like a hopeless task. But we must remember that creating and maintaining the present structure of our consumer culture takes enormous work and effort.
- » Consumer ways of looking at the world predominate today because the ad industry and increasingly the PR industry spend billions of dollars daily to maintain this perspective. In this way consumer capitalism can be thought of as a house of cards that could just as easily collapse as hold together.
- » If there are other ideas as pleasurable, powerful, fun and passionate with which people can identify, people will be motivated to believe in a different future.
- » Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned by Benito Mussolini for his fight against fascism, used the phrase “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” Meaning we must acknowledge the reality of our present circumstances, analyze and understand the vast forces we are up against, but we must also insist on the possibility and moral desirability of social change.
- » Consider the lone Chinese man who stood in the way of the military tanks headed to Tianamen Square. We must ask ourselves, if we believe in the future, if we want to create a humane and peaceful world, what stand are we willing to take?
- » Because advertising seems to be about trivial things, it is easy to dismiss it as mundane or vulgar. But if it is now occupying the main parts of our culture, influencing how we think about ourselves and the world, then the stakes are simply too high for us not to engage with it.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

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1. In the video Sut Jhally refers to what one billionaire turned philanthropist calls “the capitalist threat”. Jhally says advertising is the main voice of that threat. Why, according to the video, might we see capitalism and advertising as a threat?
2. Jhally says that although it may seem impossible to change the make-up of our current consumer culture the task is not impossible. Why does he have hope for the future?
3. How does Jhally explain Antonio Gramsci’s quote “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”? What do you think of this quote?
4. The visual image of the Chinese man standing in front of the tanks at Tianamen Square is very powerful and grabs the viewer’s attention, it cuts through the “clutter and noise” yet it is not selling us anything that we can buy. Discuss this with the class.
5. Advertising seems to be about trivial things so it is often easy to dismiss it as unimportant. Jhally says that we cannot afford to dismiss advertising as trivial. What evidence has he given throughout the video to support his argument that we must take advertising seriously? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment? Give evidence to support your own arguments.

# IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE

6. Earlier in the video Sut Jhally said that we are all influenced by advertising, to not be influenced by advertising would be to live outside of culture and no one lives outside of culture. What evidence has he given throughout the video to support his argument that we are all influenced by advertising? Keeping Jhally's arguments in mind, do you feel that advertising influences you personally? Why or why not?

7. This video is titled "Advertising and the End of the World." Why do you think that title was chosen? What do you think of the title?

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Read the following two articles. Sut Jhally's "Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse" available at <http://www.sutjhally.com/onlinepubs/apocalypse.html> and Naomi Klein's "Fences of Enclosure, Window of Possibility" available at <http://www.nologo.org> by clicking on the *fences/windows* icon.

In many ways these two articles are linked. In his article Jhally quotes Barbara Ehrenreich who writes:

"Everything enticing and appealing is located in the (thoroughly private) consumer spectacle. In contrast, the public sector looms as a realm devoid of erotic promise – the home of the IRS, the DMV, and other irritating, intrusive bureaucracies. Thus, though everyone wants national health insurance, and parental leave, few are moved to wage political struggles for them. 'Necessity' is not enough; we may have to find a way to glamorize the possibility of an activist public sector, and to glamorize the possibility of public activism."  
(Ehrenreich 1990 p.47)

In her article Naomi Klein writes that there is more to activism for social change than the broken McDonald's windows we often see on news stories, "...what are reported as menacing confrontations are often joyous events, as much experiments in alternative ways of organizing societies as criticisms of existing models."

In the context of the video and these two articles, with specific reference to the two excerpts quoted above, write a 5-page paper that explores the following:

- » Consider the media coverage of public protests you've seen. Does the media's portrayal of protest for social change have the effect of "glamorizing" public activism? What effect does it have?
- » Does the media's portrayal of social protest make you feel that you can or want to be part of that activism? Explain.
- » Both Jhally and Klein express hope for a different, better future. Where does their hope come from?
- » Do you have hope for a different, better future? How do you envision we will arrive at that future?

2. "Buy Nothing Day" is a campaign run by an organization called Adbusters and is a day when we're asked to buy nothing.

a) Your first task is to familiarize yourself with Buy Nothing Day – what it's all about, when and why it was started. You do not have to write anything formal for this section of the assignment though it will be helpful to take notes; the objective here is to gather background information that will be useful for the rest of the assignment. Information about Buy Nothing Day is available online:

- » The home page of the Buy Nothing Day campaign: <http://adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd/>
- » The tour of Buy Nothing Day is particularly useful. Click the "Take Tour" icon or go to: <http://adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd/tour/1.html>
- » You are also encouraged to find other resources for information about Buy Nothing Day.

# IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE

**b)** Once you are familiar with the concept of Buy Nothing Day

» View the adbusters uncommercial “The Big Pig” by clicking on “The Big Pig” icon at the home page of the Buy Nothing Day campaign or by going to:

**[http://adbusters.org/abtv/movies/uncommercials/buy\\_nothing\\_day/BND2002\\_real\\_high.html](http://adbusters.org/abtv/movies/uncommercials/buy_nothing_day/BND2002_real_high.html)**

» Read the following article about Buy Nothing Day and The Big Pig uncommercial at:

**<http://adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd/toolbox/wsj.html>** or by clicking on the “Wall Street Journal article” link under the uncommercial.

In this part of the assignment you are asked to write a letter to the television stations that refused to run The Big Pig uncommercial. In your letter state whether you agree or disagree with their actions and your reasons for doing so. Share your letter with the class. You may also decide to send a copy of your letter to the television stations you address but this is up to you.

**c)** In this part of the assignment you are asked to work in a group of 3-4 people. As a group plan what you will do to commemorate Buy Nothing Day. For suggestions it may be helpful to explore the Buy Nothing Day Campaign homepage (**<http://adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd/>**) but you are in no way limited to the suggestions found here. Be creative.

» When deciding what your group will do consider the following: what message do you want to get across? Who is your audience? Will you have access to the resources you need to complete your task?

» Plan and write up a strategy detailing exactly what your group is going to do, why, and how you will go about doing it.

» Present your plan and strategy to the class for feedback.

» Carry out your plan. You may choose to do this on November 29, the official Buy Nothing Day or simply choose a Buy Nothing Day date of your own.

» Once your group has carried out its Buy Nothing Day task each group member is asked to write a 1-2 page response sheet. In your response consider the following – how do you feel about your Buy Nothing Day task? What did you like best about it? What, if anything would you change for next time?

**3.** Read the debate between Sut Jhally and James Twitchell available online at:

**<http://stayfreemagazine.org/archives/16/twitchell.html>**. Do you agree with Sut Jhally’s arguments about advertising or James Twitchell’s?

**a)** Choose a side. Write a short paper, 3-5 pages, explaining why you’ve chosen the side you’ve chosen. Which arguments convinced you to side with either Jhally or Twitchell?

**b)** Divide the class into groups of two. Group 1 will be the Sut Jhally group, group 2 the James Twitchell group. For this exercise it does not matter if you actually agree with the side you’re on. If you do not agree with the side you’re on imagine what someone who agrees with that side might argue to make their point. Debate the following statement: Advertisers simply deliver what people want and need.

**c)** In the online debate Sut Jhally asks the following: “The question is whether you want to encourage diversity. Let’s say it’s not popular: So what! Why must popularity drive everything? Why shouldn’t minority views be heard? ...Do you think diversity is a good thing to have in American media? ...Why hasn’t this happened?” Imagine Sut Jhally has asked you those questions. In a letter addressed to Jhally answer his questions.

# POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**1.** A lot of us say, “advertising has no effect on me and the way I live.” Early on in the video Sut Jhally says that we are each influenced by advertising, to not be influenced by advertising would be to live outside of culture and no one lives outside of culture.

Make a list of all the reasons someone might give to prove that s/he is not influenced by advertising.

Using the ideas presented in the video and your own arguments write and/or discuss a response to the list.

## OTHER RESOURCES

“Advertising to children: is it ethical?” article in *Monitor on Psychology*:

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/sep00/advertising.html>

Environmentalism in the media:

<http://www.mediachannel.org/atissue/environment/>

“Ad industry doing its own public diplomacy” from AdWeek.com:

[http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=628&ncid=786&e=3&u=/adweek/20030724/ad\\_bpiaw/adindustrydoingitsownpublicdiplomacy](http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=628&ncid=786&e=3&u=/adweek/20030724/ad_bpiaw/adindustrydoingitsownpublicdiplomacy)

“America is not a Hamburger” by Naomi Klein:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,666821,00.html>

David Suzuki Foundation Nature Challenge:

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/WOL/Challenge/>