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**ADVERTISING & THE END OF THE WORLD**

# ADVERTISING & THE END OF THE WORLD

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## INTRODUCTION

*[Montage of Television Advertisements]*

### ADVERTISING AS CULTURE

**SUT JHALLY:** If we were to look at advertising as telling something about modern America, we would have to presume that normality has taken a holiday. This is a world where normal social and physical arrangements simply do not hold. Winter turns into summer. A simple shampoo brings intense sexual pleasure. Spells are cast by love potions in perfumes. Futuristic suburban daughters return home from an intergalactic date wearing eye-popping jeans from another planet. Ballpoint pens wearing sunglasses leer at inviting bikini-clad women. Things are for instant access to the world of desire, eroticism, and sometimes even love. Nerdy young men on the beach, through the wonders of video rewind, can constantly call up beautiful women walking by. An entire and intense experience of a lifetime is encapsulated in the gaze across an elevator. Old women become magically young, offering both sex and beer to young men.

If an anthropologist from Mars were to look at this society, where messages are everywhere, they'd conclude that this society is dominated by a belief in magic.

The cultural theorist Raymond Williams, one of the first people who paid careful attention to advertising, actually called it the “magic system” where goods were held to have incredible power. In fact, what goods promise in advertising is immense. They can capture qualities of the natural world. They can perform feats of bewitchment and transformation. They can bring instant happiness, and gratification. They act as a passport into a world of fantasy and desire. Some products can even capture lady luck in the flesh.

So an anthropologist most probably would see a similarity to older traditions and beliefs around notions of magic and objects. If we asked an economist to look at contemporary society, they would most probably see our differences from what appeared before industrial society. Industrial capitalism is a very different type of society than the agricultural feudalism that preceded it, just in terms of the number of objects that are produced.

An economist, then, would point to the quantitative dimension in looking at the differences: the number of things that are present in everyday life, and the number of things that capitalism can produce. One economist actually says that what distinguishes capitalism from what came before is its ability to produce “an immense accumulation of commodities.” In fact, no other society

in history has been able to match the immense productive output of capitalism. And this fact, capitalism's productivity, can be seen everywhere in the daily landscape of life. Objects are everywhere in the daily lives that we all live. In that sense, capitalism is truly a revolutionary society dramatically altering the social landscape in a short time, like no other society before had been able to manage.

Now, of course, once the immense accumulation of commodities are produced, they must also be sold. You can't just produce things and not sell them. For commodities to lead to profits for producers, they have to go through the circuit of production, distribution, and consumption. The problem for capitalism is how to convert the investment goods back into money and into profit. The problem of capitalism is not production, but is actually the problem of consumption. And so central is the consuming element of this society that capitalism invents a new industry to deal with the consumption of commodities. At the end of the 19th century it invents the advertising industry.

The function of the advertising industry would be to recruit the best creative talent of the society, and to create a culture in which desire and identity would be fused with commodities. In fact, to make the dead world of "things" come alive with human and social possibilities. And in fact, there has never been a propaganda effort to match the effort of advertising in the twentieth century, in the history of the world. More thought, more effort, more creativity, more time, more attention to detail has gone into the selling of the immense accumulation of commodities than any other campaign in human history to change public consciousness. The amount of money spent on this has increased throughout the century. This is not just a constant amount that is spent every year; it has increased as the century has progressed. Today over \$175 billion are spent every year in the United States to sell things. This is unprecedented in human history.

It shouldn't be surprising that something this central, and with so much money being spent on it, should be an important part of social life. And in fact, advertising has taken up more, and more space in the culture. It has colonized the spaces of the culture. It has driven out other things, in the favor of commercial discourse. In the studies done in the 1980's it was discovered that the average person was exposed to about 1500 commercial impressions a day. When those same studies were done recently, the number had risen to 3600 commercial impressions a day, 3600 times that we are appealed to as consumers. That should tell us something about how commercialized our lives are becoming. That it's not just constant, but here is a sort of pattern and logic to this. In fact, our media systems are dominated by advertising. If you look at television and radio, 100% of their revenues come from advertising. If you look at magazines the ratio is about 50% from advertisers, and 50% from customers. If you look at newspapers the ratio is about eighty-twenty in favor of advertising. So what we've done is turn our media systems into vehicles for

selling product, and you simply cannot understand media content without understanding its relationship to advertising.

**[Movie: *Independence Day*]** *See that Coke can on top of the alien craft? Think you can shoot that thing off? Do it. Shoot it.*

**SUT JHALLY:** The movies have been turned over to advertisers. They, through product placement, reach captive audiences. You can zap an ad in the middle of a movie in a theater. The prime function of many Hollywood films now is to sell commodities, not tell a story. For example, in *Goldeneye*, James Bond for the first time drives a non-British car, a BMW. He seduces with Bollinger champagne, listens to an Alpine car stereo, flies British Airways, and uses IBM computers. More and more movies are tied in with other advertising campaigns.

**[TV ad: VISA]** *... use a VISA check card! It automatically deducts from your checking account everywhere VISA's accepted. See Tomorrow Never Dies.*

**SUT JHALLY:** Professional sports are no longer independent. They were at one time, but are now totally integrated into the marketing effort. A good example of this, if you wanted to see it, would be to look at baseball and how the ads behind home plate have colonized spaces that at one time were free of commercial influence.

Even those institutions thought to be outside of the market are being sucked in. Schools now are selling their students to advertisers. Commercials flood classrooms, school buses, and school hallways and cafeterias. Advertisers have deeply penetrated into public education. New technologies are swallowed up by this. The Internet, it was thought, would be outside of the commercial mix, but it is now fully integrated into the advertising system. In the modern world everything now is sponsored by someone. The latest plans even involve the commercialization of the sky.

**[NBC News]** *The idea was to launch a rocket, send it two hundred miles into orbit, deploy a Mylar billboard, and inflate it with compressed gas. The Mylar billboard would measure approximately two-thirds of a mile across, and a quarter mile tall. From Earth it might appear one-half the size of the moon, the company originally said, and envisioned charging twenty to \$30 million to whatever corporation might care to buy space.*

**SUT JHALLY:** Our culture has simply become an adjunct to the system of production and consumption. Its job is to sell us things, and as it does that it impacts how we think about the world and ourselves. For example, if you think about the ritual surrounding courtship and marriage, and the role of diamonds in those rituals. The idea that “diamonds are forever,” and are connected to engagement, is now almost universal in the West. Yet, where did this idea

come from? Well, it emerged as an ad slogan in 1947 from Madison Avenue. So “diamonds are forever” is perhaps the most famous advertising slogan ever invented. That slogan, that idea that comes out of Madison Avenue, now defines the way that we think about rituals that define our most personal activities, marriage and courtship.

**[TV ad: DeBeers]** *The diamond engagement ring.*

**SUT JHALLY:** In fact, DeBeers, the company that has a monopoly on the global trade of diamonds has set its sights on more than just engagement rings.

**[DeBeers Promotional Video: Message to Retailers]** *Let’s start with your bread and butter, the support behind the rites of passage, the diamond engagement ring, the diamond anniversary band, and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary diamond. Our goal is to make diamonds a cultural imperative for all these important occasions a woman’s life. That’s why we are continuing to support these segments. So that newer products like the diamond anniversary band, and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary diamond will become as obligatory as the diamond engagement ring, bringing your customers back again, and again. That’s what we’re here for, to respond to your requests, and help you sell more diamonds.*

**SUT JHALLY:** In that sense commercial culture is now inside our intimate relationships. It is inside our homes, it is inside our heads, inside our identities. So overwhelming has the commercial takeover of culture become, that it has now become a problem for advertisers who now worry about clutter and noise. That is, how do you make your ads stand out from the 3600 commercial impressions that people are exposed to? So if you’re Pepsi, you’re not just competing with Coke anymore. You’re competing with every other advertiser who wants our attention. As advertising takes over more and more space in the culture, the job of the individual advertiser gets harder and harder. More care and thought goes into the ads than any other type of message. Much more so than the programs that you see on television. In fact, network ads can cost anywhere from a few hundred thousand dollars to millions of dollars to make.

**[TV interview: Michael Jacobi, VP Sales & Marketing/Timex]** *We decided to do it on location in Eilat in Israel on the Red Sea. We hired a director in London, and some set builders from the London Theatre District who built a watch approximately the size of a two story colonial home. We choreographed it from a yacht that we had specially equipped so that we could see them underwater, and in a day’s time we would get about four or five seconds of film. It took us about two weeks to film it.*

**SUT JHALLY:** Ads are actually, if you want to compare them with anything, ads are made like big Hollywood blockbusters. That’s how much money is expended on them. That’s how much care goes into them. If you strung

together an hour and a half of TV ads they would cost more than the biggest Hollywood film. So the influence of advertising in that sense is immense. We normally pay a lot of attention to those big Hollywood films that come out every summer, but if we think about the time and effort that goes into them as going into all the advertising that we see, that we are exposed to, I think the influence of advertising in that way, becomes pretty immense.

So there's two results of this. Firstly, advertising is everywhere, and secondly, huge amounts of money and creativity are expended on these ads. I think that if anyone wants to understand our culture and our society, they'd better come to terms with the role and power of commercial images. This will involve clarifying what we mean by the power and effectiveness of ads, and asking the right questions. For too long we've asked the wrong questions trying to figure out if advertising has an impact on our culture. The wrong question is "does an ad campaign make people buy that product?" For example, does watching a Pepsi ad make people buy Pepsi? If you're Pepsi-Cola that is an interesting question. But if you're interested in the social power of advertising, the impact of advertising on society, that is the wrong question. 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 culture it is the stories of advertising that dominate the cultural field. Advertising, in fact, is the main storyteller of our society. The right question to ask is not whether this or that ad sells what it is advertising, but what are the consistent stories that advertising tells as a whole about what is important in the world, about how to behave, and about what is good and bad? In fact it is to ask the question of values. Which values does advertising stress? And that's not just one ad, but across the whole range of advertising.

That's what I mean by saying we should treat advertising as a cultural system; a system that impacts how human beings make sense of the world, how we understand its meanings. So the images, the values, the ideas of advertising are lodged inside us because that's the way all culture works. To not be influenced by advertising would be to live outside of culture, and no one lives outside of culture. We are all influenced by advertising to some degree.

If we accept this cultural approach to advertising then the question is how do we make sense of the vast field of advertising messages? How do we understand the consistent stories that advertising as a whole tells? And, how do we get at them? I think we can do that by posing a series of questions, and then asking how advertising answers those questions. Questions like "What does advertising say is the way to achieve happiness? How does advertising define what society is? What binds us together in some way? How does advertising encourage us to think about the future?" Those questions could be

posed at any culture, and if you could answer those questions in regards to any culture, that would tell you a lot about that culture. I think that if we address those questions to advertising, which is one of the main aspects of our culture that will tell us a lot about advertising's cultural power.



## HOW DO WE BECOME HAPPY?

**SUT JHALLY:** Every society has to have a story about happiness, of how we can become happy, what we should strive for to be happy. And the advertising system gives a very specific answer to that question for our society. Advertising tells us that the way to happiness and satisfaction is through the consumption of objects. Commodities will make us happy. In one sense, that's what every single ad tells us. And when consumption is so central to the way that the economy functions, that shouldn't come as a surprise. The immense accumulation of commodities has to be sold, and it is sold through the story of goods bringing happiness.

**[TV ad: Herbal Essence]** *The moisturizing lather, the silky smooth skin. Never has getting clean been this much fun.*

**SUT JHALLY:** Economic growth is not simply needed to provide jobs, but because it will give access to more things which will make us happy. So that's why we need to produce more. In fact, I'd say that it is this story, that happiness comes from the market, from economic growth, that is the major motivating force for social change on a global scale as we head into the twenty-first century.

**[TV ad: Clinique]** *Shout hallelujah, c'mon get happy! We're going to the Promised Land... It's the new fragrance for women: Clinique-Happy, wear it and be happy!*

**SUT JHALLY:** In the stories of advertising not only happiness, but political freedom itself is offered by access to an immense accumulation of commodities. There's a famous Wendy's ad that featured the Soviet fashion show that illustrated that what was wrong with Communism was that there was no choice in consumption.

**[TV ad: Wendy's]**

*Next: Daywear. Next: Swimwear. Next: Evening Wear. Very nice.*

*-- Having no choice is no fun. That is why at Wendy's every hamburger isn't dressed the same.*

**SUT JHALLY:** These are very powerful stories that equate happiness and freedom with consumption, and advertising is the main propaganda arm of this view.

**[TV ad: Revlon]** *Top Speed: speed drying nail color.*

*-- Sets you free in ninety seconds!*

**SUT JHALLY:** The question we need to pose at this point, that is normally not asked, is "Is it true?" Does happiness come from material things? Do we get

happier, as a society, as we get richer? As we have access to more things? In general, the answer that question is no.

There were a series of surveys done in the United States in 1945 called the “Happiness Surveys.” In these surveys what the researchers wanted to find was how people thought about their own subjective happiness. And what they found was, despite the fact that we have gotten richer in that time, that we have access to far more commodities, that our standard of living is undoubtedly higher, the number of people who have reported themselves as very happy has remained remarkably stable. So we have access to more wealth, but are no happier as a society. Why should that be?

Well, when you start to look at the whole issue of happiness and satisfaction more closely, it actually starts to become clearer. There are other surveys that have been done that are called “Quality of Life Surveys.” People are asked about what they want out of life, and what is important to them and people normally with non-material answers. That is, on the whole, people do not normally say, “I want a big house or a BMW.” What people say they want is a level of autonomy and control in their lives, they want to feel good about themselves, and be valued for their own properties. They want good self-esteem. They want warm family relationships. They want leisure time that is free of tension and stress. They want romance and love. They want warm and close friendships. That is, people reply with the *social* elements of life.

If you were to divide up the elements of satisfaction into social values and material values, and social values included things like love, family, and friendship, and material values included things like economic security and success, what the research reveals is that social values outrank material values in terms of what people say they want. Now, that’s not to say that material values aren’t important, of course they are. But, above a certain level of poverty and comfort, material things stop giving us the kind of satisfaction that advertising insists that world can deliver.

It’s one of the great ironies of our market system. The market is good at providing those things that can be bought and sold, and it pushes us, via advertising, in that direction. But the real sources of happiness, social relationships, are outside the capability of the marketplace to provide. The marketplace cannot provide love. It cannot provide real friendships. It cannot provide sociability. It can provide other material things and services, but that is not what makes us happy.

The advertising industry has known this since at least the 1920’s, and in fact, have stopped trying to sell us goods based on their material qualities. If you look at advertising at the end of the nineteenth century, and the first years of the twentieth century, you can see that advertising talked about the properties of goods, what they did, and how well they did it and so on. But starting in the

1920's, the advertising industry shifts into talking about the relationships of objects to the social life of people. They started connecting commodities, the things they have to sell, with the powerful images of a deeply desired social life that people say they want.

No wonder then that advertising is so attractive to us, so powerful, so seductive, because what it offers us are images of the real sources of human happiness: family life, romance and love, sexuality and pleasure, friendship and sociability, leisure and relaxation, independence and control of life. That is why advertising is so powerful. That is what's real about it in one sense.

The cruel illusion of advertising, however, is in the way it links those things, which we want to a place that by definition cannot provide it—the market and goods. The falsity of advertising is not in the appeals it makes, which are very real, but in the answers it provides. We want love, and advertising points the way to it through objects.

**[TV ad: Dreft]** *Dreft, a clean you can trust.*

**SUT JHALLY:** We want friendship, and advertising points the way to it through objects.

**[TV ad: Gallo of Sonoma]**

*Who makes it?*

-- Gallo.

*They're really something lately.*

-- I like this.

**SUT JHALLY:** We want sensuality, and advertising shows us how we can get it through objects.

**[TV ad: ici]** *Ici, the fragrance for women. Put it wear you want to be kissed.*

**SUT JHALLY:** Ad executive Jerry Goodis puts it this way, he says, “advertising doesn’t mirror how people are acting, but how they are dreaming.” It taps into our emotions and repackages them back to us connected to the world of “things.” That is a very powerful process.

Now, even saying that advertising reflects our dream life is a little simple because advertisements do more than just reflect; they create our dream life. They translate our real desires for love, family, for friendship, for adventure, and sex. They translate those desires into our dreams. Advertising is actually sort of like a fantasy factory, taking our desires for human social contact, and re-conceiving it, re-conceptualizing it, connecting it with the world of commodities, and then translating it into a form that can be communicated.

*[TV ad: Old Spice] Old Spice, it puts the wind in your sails.*

**SUT JHALLY:** The great irony is as it does this it draws us further away from what really satisfies us, meaningful human contact and relationships to what doesn't, "things." In that sense, advertising reduces our capacity become happy by pushing us, cajoling us, to carry on in the direction of "things." If we really wanted to create a world that reflected our desires, then consumer culture would not be it. It would look very different. A world that stressed and built the institutions that would foster social relationships, not endless material accumulation.

## WHAT IS SOCIETY?

**SUT JHALLY:** A culture dominated by commercial messages that tells individuals that the way to happiness is through consuming objects, gives a very particular answer to the question “What is a society?” What is it that binds us together in some kind of collective way? In fact, Margaret Thatcher, the former conservative British Prime Minister, gave the most succinct answer to this question from the viewpoint of the market. She said, “There is no such thing as society. There are just individuals and their families.” That is, there is nothing solid that we can call society. There are no group values, no collective interests. Society is just a bunch of individuals acting on their own. And, in fact that is precisely how advertising talks to us. It addresses us, not as members of a society talking about collective issues, but as individuals. It talks about our individual needs and desires. It does not talk about those things we have to negotiate collectively, things like poverty, like health care, like housing and the homeless, like the environment.

The market appeals to the worst in us- greed, selfishness- and discourages what is the best about us, things like compassion, caring, and generosity. Again, this shouldn’t surprise us. In those societies where the marketplace dominates there will be more stress on what the marketplace can deliver. Advertising is the main voice of the marketplace. In that sense, advertising systematically relegates discussion of key societal issues to the peripheries of the culture- to the margins, and talks in powerful ways of individual fantasy, of individual pleasure, and comfort.

## HOW FAR INTO THE FUTURE CAN WE THINK?

**SUT JHALLY:** The consumer vision that is pushed by advertising, and which is conquering the world, is based fundamentally, of course, on a notion of economic growth. More consumption requires more production. So it is pushing industrial production. Now, industrial production has costs. It requires resources, raw materials, and energy, and there is now broad consensus among environmental scholars that the Earth simply cannot sustain present levels of economic expansion. Especially as more and more third world nations transform their economies to industrial economies. We simply cannot keep going the way we have.

Look at resource depletion. We are running out of vital supplies, and if we project into the future, we can anticipate when we may run out. That is if we take what we know we have, known reserves, and we generously anticipate what we may be able to find, and we correlate that with what we will need based on predicted levels of economic growth, then we have a time table for when we will run out. An important study using these methods put it the following way: "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 one hundred years."

This is because industrial production uses up resources and energy at a rate that had never before been imagined by previous populations. Since 1950 the world's population has used up more of the Earth's resources than all the generations that came before. In fifty years we have matched the use of thousands and thousands of years. The West, and especially Americans, have used the most of these resources, so we have a special responsibility for the approaching crisis. In another hundred years we will have exhausted the planet.

The clearest indication of the way we produce as having an effect on the ecosystem of the planet is the depletion of the ozone layer, which has dramatically increased the leak of ultra-violet radiation that is damaging or lethal to many life forms on the planet. In 1985 we discovered the existence of a huge hole in the ozone layer over the South Pole that is the size of the continental United States. The activities of humans are changing the very make up of the Earth. Bill McKibben, in his book *The End of Nature*, reminds us that "we have done this ourselves...by driving our cars, building our factories, cutting down our forests, turning on air conditioners." He says the history of the world is full of the most incredible events that change the way we live, but all those changes are dwarfed by what we have done in the last fifty years. He says: "Man's efforts, even at their mightiest, were tiny compared with the size of the planet. The Roman Empire meant nothing to the Arctic of the Amazon. But

now, the way of life of one part of the world in one-half century is altering every inch, and every hour of the globe.”

The situation is so bad that the scientific community is desperately trying to get the rest of the world to wake up to the danger. 1700 of the world’s leading scientists, including a majority of Nobel Laureates in the sciences, recently issued this 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).

It’s important to avoid the prediction of immediate catastrophe. We’ve already done a lot of damage, but the real environmental crisis will not hit until sometime in the middle of the next century. So we have some time, but not much. To avoid the catastrophe we have to take action now. We have to put into place the steps, which will save us in seventy years time.

The metaphor to think of is that of an oil tanker heading for a crash on the shore. Because it is so huge, because of the momentum that has been built up, to stop crashing the oil tanker has to start turning well before it reaches the coast. We have to anticipate the momentum. If we start turning too late we will smash into the coast. That’s where we are right now. We have to make fundamental changes in the way we organize ourselves, and in what we stress in our economy if we want to avoid the effect sixty, seventy, eighty years down the road. We have to take action now.

In that sense, 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. Because if we don’t, we will be in barbarism and savagery towards each other in seventy years time. We have to make short-term sacrifices. We have to rethink our relationship to the car. It was fun for a while, but now it’s just choking the life out of the planet. We have to make real changes, not just recycling, but fundamental changes in how we live and produce. We can’t 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.

How can we connect psychically to that next generation? Two generation hence, and make their interests our interests? Well, that is a very difficult undertaking, and it will be made even more difficult when the context for it is the market and stories of advertising. The marketplace cannot deal with long-range issues by definition. It’s an institution that is good for dealing with the present. Corporations, the institutions that dominate the market system, think about their profits now, perhaps next week, or possibly even a year down the road, but they do not -cannot- think seventy years down the road about collective interests. And if we think about advertising, which forms the background on

which we have to develop new ways of thinking, it tells a similar story about the future. The time frame of advertising is very short. Its dominant mode is talking about the present. If you're lucky, it may talk about tomorrow. If you're really lucky, it may talk about the following week, but that's about it. It does not encourage us to look a year, two years, ten years, seventy years down the road.

And in fact, the present oriented nature of advertising will increase because of the current situation. First, you have an audience that is cynical about advertising, that tries all it can to avoid it. That's why advertising spreads everywhere, so people cannot avoid it. And as it does that, advertisers are faced with the problem of clutter and noise. In that situation advertising will be even more connected to the present. It will speak to us more through our bodies than through our heads. It will try and bypass thinking and go straight for the gut, straight for our emotions. That's how you cut through the clutter to communicate with a cynical and reluctant audience. You smack them, metaphorically, in the mouth.

### ***[Montage of advertisements]***

**SUT JHALLY:** You make the advertising visceral- something you feel, not necessarily something you think. The best example of that is the Benetton campaign which uses striking images of really emotional scenes- images which you could not just turn the pages from easily, images that you could not zap because they were so emotional.

Sexual imagery will become even more powerful. Sex is one way of cutting through the clutter. We've only scratched the surface so far. Advertisers are looking for even more shocking images to get our attention. And while there are some uses of the male body to achieve this, what's been called the new male objectification, the predominant way that sexuality will be translated into a visual form will be through male fantasies of the female body. Because advertising creativity is almost totally a male dominated field, it's not just sex, but a particular version of sex that will come to dominate, where objectified female bodies will be given the responsibility to break through the clutter and cynicism of the audience. There was a recent ad for Candie's shoes featuring Jenny McCarthy that was impossible to ignore. In this move from the cognitive to the emotional, it's not just pleasant emotions like sexuality that will be targeted. Any emotion, however unpleasant, that cuts through the clutter will be used.

If at one level advertising reflects our dream life, it will also reflect our nightmares as well. There was a recent ad for Merry-Go-Round clothes that focused on the nightmares and embarrassment that people have about being in public spaces naked. This is not about pleasure, but about panic. Panic cuts through the clutter. Unfortunately, in this move advertising will not stress the value of a collective-long range future. The prevailing values of the



commercial system provide no incentives to develop bonds with the future generations. We don't care about the future. There's a real sense of nihilism and despair about the future, and a closing of ranks against the outside.

At one time it was thought, by some people, that the environmental crisis would be the linchpin for the lessening of international tensions. That as we recognize that we can only survive collectively, together, then the world would come together to cooperate to save the Earth. Unfortunately, as the Persian Gulf War made clear, the new world order of the twenty-first century will be based on international conflict over increasingly scarce resources. As George Bush said, "American troops are being dispatched at the Gulf to make possible our way of life." That requires cheap oil, and if the cost of that is 100,000 dead Iraqis, well, so be it. Someone has to pay the cost so we can keep driving our cars and using our appliances. The Gulf War is a review of what is to come. As the world runs out of resources, the most powerful military forces will use that might to ensure access. The Third World will simply be seen as enemies who are making unreasonable claims on our resources.

## IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE

The destructive aspects of capitalism, its short-term nature, its denial of collective values, its stress on the material life, are starting to be recognized by some people who have made their fortunes through the market. The billionaire turned philanthropist, George Soros, in a recent article talks about what he calls “The Capitalist Threat.” And culturally speaking, advertising is the main voice of that threat. To the extent that it pushes us towards material things for satisfaction and away from the construction of social relationships, it pushes us down the road to increased economic production that is driving the coming environmental catastrophe. To the extent that it talks about our individual and private needs, it pushes discussion of our collective issues to the margins. To the extent that it talks about the present only, it makes thinking about the future difficult. To the extent that it does all these things, then advertising becomes one of the major obstacles to our survival as a species. Getting out of this situation, coming up with new ways to look at the world will require an enormous amount of work, and the situation I know appears hopeless. But remember that creating and maintaining the present structure of the consumer culture takes enormous work and effort.

The reason that consumer ways of looking at the world predominate right now is because there are billions of dollars being spent on it every single day. It’s not simply erected and then held in place. It has to be held in place by the activities of the ad industry, more and more by the activities of the public relations industry. They have to try really hard to convince us about the value of the commercial vision.

In some senses consumer capitalism is a house of cards. It is held together in a fragile way by increasing resources, and it could just as soon melt away as hold together. It will depend if there are viable alternatives that will motivate people to believe in a different future. If there are other ideas as pleasurable, as powerful, as fun, as passionate, with which people can identify.

I am reminded here of the work of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian progressive who was fighting Mussolini’s fascism between the wars. The phrase he used which I think describes our current situation was “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” “Pessimism of the intellect” means recognizing the reality of our present circumstances, analyzing, properly understanding the vast forces arraigned against us, but insisting on the possibilities and moral desirability of social change- that’s “the optimism of the will.” Believing in human values that will be the inspiration for us to struggle for our survival. If we wanted an image of this I think of that Chinese man who stood in the way of the tanks that were on their way to Tiananmen Square. Taking a stand in the face of the most incredible adversity. I think the question we all need to ask ourselves is if we

believe in the future, if we want to create a humane and peaceful world for generations to come, what stand are we willing to take?

Because advertising seems to be about such trivial things it is easy to dismiss as mundane or vulgar. But if it is now occupying the main parts of our culture, and is influencing how we think about ourselves and the world, then the stakes are simply too high for us not to engage with it. We have to insist on alternative values that will provide a humane collective solution to the global crisis. We have to ensure for our children, and future generations, a world truly fit for human habitation.