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**Reclaiming the Environmental Debate**

The Politics of Health in a Toxic Culture

edited by Richard Hofrichter

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## Selling "Mother Earth": Advertising and the Myth of the Natural

Robin Andersen

A television advertisement for Kitchen Aid opens with spectacular vistas of purple mountains framing a desert landscape. A foregrounded spire juts heavenward, rising from scarred hills cut by centuries of water runoff. Mist hangs between the barren ranges. This image fades to an oven framed by kitchen counters decorated in the same sun-washed shades as a voice intones, "Kitchen Aid ranges mirror nature in surprising ways." The camera moves across another exquisite desert view. This time the camera is closer, the hills are smaller, and sparse desert flora cover the dry earth. The camera moves over ancient hills rounded by centuries of wind erosion; superimposed are the words "Kitchen Aid."

These desert contours morph into the visually similar curved forms of twisted bread baking inside the oven. The voice adds, "with even warmth." Next, as the camera glides high above the protruding formations, it moves toward us and passes over a sheer, free-standing rock face. The image transposes from the sun-washed rock wall to the off-white oven door, moving upward to close. The voice assures, "strength that endures." Next, "a mystery that unfolds," reveals, through time-lapse photography, cactus flowers opening. With the same pacing, the image turns into a rising soufflé. "The fire of creation" fills the screen with the desert sun's warm golden glow. The golden circle fades into the lit stovetop burner, then into a circular skillet sautéing vegetables, "all someplace a little closer to home. Kitchen Aid freestanding ranges, built-in ovens and cook tops," the ad continues.

Inside the kitchen now, a woman moves around the appliance-laden, picture-perfect room. She wears a long Earth Mother, printed gauze skirt, and as we hear, "because we took a cooking lesson from Mother

Nature," the image moves back to a panorama of the desert with "Kitchen Aid" slashed across the hot, dry landscape. Throughout the ad, the female voice, soft and low, mixes with continuous new-age spiritual humming that rises to an inevitable crescendo as the commercial ends.

There is no essential, authentic, or inherent connection between the desert and the oven. A pristine ecosystem bears little logical connection to a manufactured appliance. They are both hot, though not comparable in degree, but the sensuous analogy establishes a connection. More important, however, stunning visual juxtapositions and editing forge a powerful and compelling association that unites the natural world with the commodity. They become indistinguishable; our social constructions and commonsense conceptions of "untouched wilderness" are now compatible with the highly materialistic lifestyles of first-world consumer culture.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how corporate consumer culture creates enchanting and persuasive advertising messages, using both visual and textual strategies, that celebrate the environment while their own business practices continue on a path of ecological destruction. Left unexamined, such influential messages help facilitate corporate environmental destruction, especially in the absence of information and public debate about the destructive consequences of consumer culture.

The Kitchen Aid ad inserts the oven into the untarnished landscape through the use of a highly persuasive mode of visual language. Visual persuasion uses symbolic, associative terms that lack "propositional syntax", that is, they do not explicitly indicate causality or other logical connections.<sup>1</sup> This syntactical indeterminacy is one important aspect of the persuasive uses of images of nature in advertising.

The symbolic landscapes of consumer culture, including visually enhanced images of the natural world, allow advertisers to make insinuations about their products without explicitly claiming anything. To state openly that an oven is like nature because it is hot, and because a rising soufflé can be made to look like the opening of a cactus flower, would sound ridiculous. However, because the visual implications have not been stated plainly, they are not logically rejected. Such stunning associations make powerful connections between the natural world and the world of products; pleasing aesthetic representations and feelings about awe-inspiring natural landscapes are united with the product. The sense of

psychic pleasure and inspiration is linked to the Kitchen Aid freestanding ranges. Kitchen Aid used these techniques in a series of ads for their appliances.

Perhaps most significant is their refrigerator advertisement. The aerial camera glides through clear, blue skies over a high-mountain forest covered in pure, white snow. As we hear the words "crisp, freshness," the image cuts to a refrigerator vegetable compartment. And with "brilliant light," another snow-covered peak and a dazzling bright-white mountain meadow are transfigured into the refrigerator's interior. The voice proclaims, "The refrigerator designed with a blueprint from Mother Nature, by Kitchen Aid." The last shot is a high-mountain lake luminous with the reflection of snow-covered peaks, as a woman's voice whispers, "For the way it's made." But what *about* the way it's made?

Advertising's symbolic culture inserts the product into the natural world, removing it from the context of its production. The ad never explains how it is made, who made it, or the effect on the environment, either during its production or during its use. The remarkable juxtapositions silence those realities and hide the social and environmental relations of the production and use of the commodity.

However, there is much to say about the "way it's made." The primary industrial cause of ozone depletion is the gases associated with refrigeration. Chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (CFCs and HCFCs), widely used as refrigerants and insulating foams, destroy the ozone layer by releasing chlorine in the upper atmosphere. Refrigeration, however, no longer requires ozone-depleting gases. Over one million "greenfreezes" have been sold in Europe, but such environmentally friendly refrigerators are not available in the United States. A campaign by Greenpeace encourages American manufacturers to offer nonozone-depleting refrigerators to the American public. The campaign targeted Whirlpool, the parent company that manufactures Kitchen Aid, because it is a huge company that produces parts for the greenfreeze sold in Europe. Whirlpool actually sells compressors to some leading manufacturers of the greenfreeze. However, the attempts have failed. U.S. companies will not make them here.

Instead, Whirlpool chose to respond with a slick advertising campaign. Even as Whirlpool capitalized on persuasive portraits of natural beauty,

it refused to invest in the new technology available for making environmentally safe refrigerators, creating a symbolic culture that seemingly reveres the environment as it helps destroy it. This public relations strategy has been referred to as "greenwashing"; it has become a cornerstone of American corporate promotional culture.

Instead of creating popular support by moving toward sustainable resource management, less toxic ingredients and manufacturing, waste reduction and reusable packaging, corporations rely on perception management through advertising as a major feature of their strategies. Perception management creates symbolic associations that evoke a sense of well-being. Since the advertising taps directly into psychic associations using the language of art, poetry, and the unconscious, the logical mind does not reject absurd representations about "taking a cooking lesson from Mother Nature," because as psychoanalysts Haineault and Roy argue, such impressions are psychologically pleasing.<sup>2</sup> Rejecting them would require a degree of distress the psyche seeks to avoid. The destructive qualities of the product and its negative environmental effects are successfully hidden. In an age when the public is bombarded with 1,500 advertising messages a day, and when corporate ownership and advertising influence successfully block information about environmental destruction by corporations, it is difficult to nourish citizen awareness and action.

Such false connections exist in a media environment that offers little information to counter advertisers' representations. With a few notable exceptions, major advertising clients have been successful in putting direct pressure on editors and producers not to contradict the messages of their advertising campaigns in programming content.<sup>3</sup> The only way the impressions created by advertising culture can persist is in an atmosphere devoid of contradiction.

There is another aspect of advertising's appropriation of nature that also makes it a powerful tool for greenwashing and, more broadly, an enchanting and influential celebration of capitalism as a social system. In addition to the visual persuasions and the lack of information are the underlying belief systems and commonsense conceptions of nature that much advertising successfully mines. How can we accept the assertion that Whirlpool "took a cooking lesson from Mother Nature," or that

ideas about the industrial design of appliance manufacturing "flowed from Mother Nature"? Why do these and other absurd presentations, even without direct information on ozone depletion, sound acceptable to a public willing to revere nature but at the same time participate fully in consumer culture?

### Media Representations and Cultural Conceptions of Nature

In large measure, the visual constructions of nature in advertising can be linked to, and have been appropriated from, some key conceptions of the environmental movement. The advertisements are effective because they do not contradict the "commonsense" understandings of the natural world shared by many. These compatible portrayals, rooted in ideological assumptions about nature, must be examined and redrawn in order to foster public awareness and citizen action and achieve sustainable social and environmental ecosystems.

Many environmental writers regard the space missions as key cultural markers in our contemporary conception of nature, the Earth, and the need for conservation: "It is almost commonplace to note how the first pictures of Earth from Space in 1966 made evident the frailty of the planet and sparked a global ecological consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Ecofeminist Chaia Heller (1993) writes, "Awareness of the ecological crisis peaked in 1972 when the astronauts first photographed the planet, showing thick furrows of smog scattered over the beautiful green ball. 'The planet is dying' became the common cry. Suddenly the planet, personified as Mother Earth, captured national, sentimental attention."<sup>5</sup> The mass media presented pictures of the Earth as well as representations of the significant environmental issues of the last 30 years, from protecting endangered species around the globe to preventing the destruction of the rain forests and saving the whales.

Indeed, even though most people have not been to the moon, or the faraway wild places they become concerned with, television creates critical impressions. As DeLuca observes, "in particular PBS documentaries, I learn of and become concerned about the Amazon rainforests."<sup>6</sup> However, television and other media representations are just that, (re)presentations. They are stories of nature, not the Earth made real. We

know Mother Nature through the stories we tell about her. Our cultural narratives help shape our perceptions.<sup>7</sup> Ecosystems, wilderness areas, and wild things are most often unknown to us without the framing of such cultural texts. And those texts will affect not only our perceptions of nature but also the way we act in and upon the natural world.

Heller argues that we tell a particular type of cultural narrative about Mother Nature. This narrative features characters and relationships borrowed from the medieval romanticization of women as depicted in passionate love poetry: "The metaphors and myths of this eco-drama are plagiarized from volumes of romantic literature written about women, now recycled into metaphors used to idealize nature."<sup>8</sup> The medieval narrative drama of romantic love plays out in the wistful longings of a man for an idealized, pure woman whom he vows to protect, for his love can never be consummated. Rooted in Platonic dualism, the ideal love is unpolluted by physical contact. She is powerless and in need of protecting. The lover realizes his romantic fantasy only through noble self-control and heroic acts of protection and sexual self-restraint. The beloved is deserving because she is pure and chaste.

Heller argues that the imagery of the contemporary ecology movement finds its ideological roots in this cult of the romantic. Mother Nature takes the role of the helpless beloved, and those in the ecology movement vow not to defile her. "In our modern iconography, nature became rendered as a victimized woman, a Madonna-like angel to be idealized, protected, and saved from society's inability to constrain itself."<sup>9</sup>

Procter & Gamble's advertising campaigns display similar iconography and the same sentimentalized message. In soft focus, a little girl drinks water from a beautiful indoor sink. In the next picture a deer drinks from a pond in an idealized outdoor setting. The caption reads, "everybody deserves a clean home." This series also includes images of a baby girl playing with a little yellow duck, while fuzzy little yellow ducks swim in a placid soft-focus lake in the picture next to her. Helpless and idealized, Mother Nature must be protected from all those who would destroy her.

The sentimentalized renderings of romantic ecology raise many questions. For example, whom does Mother Nature need to be protected from? This category is always vague and sweeping, but the implied for-

mulation is often "human nature," as with Devall and Session's formulation in *Deep Ecology*:

Excessive human intervention in natural processes has led other species to near-extinction. For deep ecologists the balance has long been tipped in favor of humans. Now we must shift the balance back to protect the habitat of other species.<sup>10</sup>

Condemning all of humanity as equally responsible for environmental degradation ignores oppressive social and economic relations, as well as the unequal distribution and use of natural resources and wealth. Certainly "failing to expose the social hierarchies within the category of human erases the dignity and struggle of those reduced to and degraded along with nature."<sup>11</sup> The exploited laborers of the third world who toil in extreme conditions in sweatshops making commodities for first world consumers are not equivalent to the ravages of global capitalism.

Overpopulation must certainly be a concern, not only for environmental organizations, but for all of the globe's peoples. Yet some would put the central responsibility for the problem squarely on the shoulders of women—human mothers defiling an idealized Earth Mother. While women own and control only about 1 percent of the Earth's wealth, they account for 80 percent of human labor power. United Nations population studies demonstrate that in countries where women have become less economically exploited and more educated and socially empowered, the birth rate has declined.

The first world consumes almost four times more of the Earth's resources than its third world counterparts. Those who are victimized by and struggle against the ravages of global capitalism are not to blame for the ecological crisis, corporate global practices are. Habitually emphasizing birthrates out of context only facilitates capitalism's ravages of the Earth.

The idea that every person is equally culpable of defiling the Earth conceals the role of corporations in ecological degradation and distracts attention from the production, use, and disposal of resources. Public service announcements and advertising campaigns often suggest that solutions to environmental problems are the private responsibility of individual consumers. "We recycle" and recycling logos on many products are omnipresent, but such campaigns help manufacturers prevent

mandatory deposit and recycling regulations. As long as manufacturing does not make recycling, especially of plastics, more effective, recycling will have little positive impact. The romantic narrative focus on individual responsibility and such socially constructed stories place corporate responsibility outside their discourse.

In this cultural ecodrama that we present, and read ourselves into, how are the characters drawn? What is the nature of this relationship between the beloved Mother Nature, and the protective ecoknight? As Heller points out, the romanticization of nature is "based on the lover's desires, rather than on the identity and desires of the beloved." The role of nature as the beloved is to offer emotional well-being to dedicated environmentalists and consumers alike. Some "daily affirmations" of new-age environmentalism begin to sound very similar to advertising messages. "I hold in my mind a picture of perfection for Mother Earth. I know this perfect picture creates positive energy from my thought, which allows my vision to be manifest in the world."<sup>12</sup>

An advertisement for Evian water mirrors these sentiments. Evian's campaign features healthy people delighting in pristine natural settings. On the left half of a two-page ad, a man runs across a blurred, cold, dark-blue background. Across his chest are the words, "In me lives a wildcat who chases the moon and races the wind and who has never measured his life in quarterly earnings." The opposite page is an image of the French Alps, rendered in soft beige tints. The perspective places us on one of the mountains, peering over, but within, the snow-covered, jagged peaks. The caption claims, "In me lives the heart of the French Alps. Pure, natural spring water perfected by nature. Untouched by man, it is perfect for a wildcat."<sup>22</sup> On the left page the word "wildcat" stands out in boldface, and on the right page "heart" appears in boldface. This graphic design unites the two pages; at a glance the viewer sees **wildcat heart**.

As with many ecologically posed ads that feature the natural world, this one constructs an alternative sense of place, a pure, untouched environment offered to the ecoknight turned consumer as an escape from the unpleasant realities of modern industrial life. The goodness of Mother Nature is generally depicted in advertising by what she can do for us and most often by the way she can make us feel. Turned into a commodity,

nature promises a return to a state of emotional well-being from the strain and stress of urban and social life.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, the absence of a social presence in the renderings of wild places reinforces a solitary, individual relationship to nature that negates collective action. In the Evian ad, the heart of Mother Nature nurtures the wildcat, the human spirit supernaturally transformed and empowered. This is what Mother Nature can do for us. Such ideas are compatible with a new-age environmentalism based in the romantic tradition. However, once turned into a commodity through advertising, romantic attainment can only be realized through the possession of the product tied to those sentiments. With all those wildcat spirits consuming water sold in plastic bottles, what happens to the environment?

### The Costs of Consumption

Over the last decade the marketing of bottled water has vastly increased sales of the product. Instead of relying on municipal water supplies, especially when away from home, it has become popular to buy and carry individual water bottles made of plastic. Plastic is made from nonrenewable fossil fuels and manufactured from fractions of crude oil or natural gas changed into solid form through the use of different chemicals. Many of these chemicals are highly toxic, such as benzene, cadmium and lead compounds, carbon tetrachloride, and chromium oxide. They are used as solvents, for coloring, and as catalysts in chemical manufacturing. Over the past two decades, the production of synthetic chemicals has almost tripled, and much of this increase is attributed to the manufacture of plastics. Synthetic chemicals released into the environment create dioxins and other toxins.

Thermoplastics, the soft type of plastic, such as polyethylene, are used for everything from milk jugs and margarine tubs to pipes and tubing. Polystyrene is used to make styrofoam, other packaging material, and tiles. The most toxic plastic is polyvinyl chloride (PVC), and it is used for pipes, shower curtains, and insulation, and as Greenpeace points out, many children's toys and accessories. Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) is used to make plastic bottles.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) home pages on the World Wide Web, in 1994 only 4.7 percent of all plastic was recycled in the United States. Recycling is difficult because of the mix of plastics that cannot be degraded together. Incineration reduces the plastic headed for the landfill, but it also releases toxic pollutants, including heavy metals, into the air and through the remaining ash. These pollutants also enter the groundwater and contaminate the water supply. The EPA recommends what is called "source reduction" for plastics, to reduce the amount of plastic purchased and thrown away.

Instead of reducing the use of plastic, however, the marketing and distribution of bottled water has led to a dramatic increase in its use. The development of polyethylene terephthalate (PET), the lightweight, durable yet malleable plastic, allowed the manufacture and distribution of smaller, individual containers which continue to proliferate. Portable plastic, huge advertising budgets, and a profit margin of 40 to 45 percent (compared with 30 to 35 percent on soda) have led to an increase in the sales of bottled water by an amazing 144 percent over the past decade.<sup>14</sup>

Thus we have come full circle. The concept Mother Nature helps associate bottled water with purity and inspiration and compels people to express their love for nature by buying individual plastic containers, a substance that degrades the environment, presents hazards to public health, and ultimately has the potential to contaminate our drinking water.

Such uses of mythic nature help cloud judgment, as well as the knowledge and understanding of how consumer culture actually affects the environment. Nature is perfect purity, undefiled, "untouched by man," waiting there, after centuries, just to quench the spiritual thirst of the running man in the Evian ad. As with many advertisements, nature exists to provide solace and satisfy the spiritual longing of those who love her. Like all myths used to reinforce ideologies, this idealization of pure, untouched nature has been drained of any essential meaning. Nature exists only as it is reflected in the needs and desires of the Evian runner.

Loss of any true knowledge of the beloved is another consequence of grounding our love of nature in romantic mythology. "The romantic's love depends on his fantasy of his beloved as inherently powerless and good as he defines good."<sup>15</sup> This type of "knowing" nature is unidimen-

sional and is "wedded to ignorance. Certainly the romantic does not know his lady to be a woman capable of self-determination and resistance."<sup>16</sup> Just as the true qualities of the beloved are never known to the lover in romantic poetry, when romanticized, nature itself remains a mystery. As long as nature is made myth, is docile and willing to give, she is deserving of love and protection.

However, this is a selfish love indeed. For once Mother Nature challenges the ego, refuses the needs, or engages in self-expression and determination, anything can be done to her. These points are borne out in the most common representations of nature in advertising today, those promoting sport utility vehicles (SUVs).<sup>17</sup> While the male would-be drivers are invited to experience the wild world of jungles, forests, deserts, and even underwater ecosystems to gain a sense of inspiration and adventure (again, nature making the hero feel good), nature can also be unruly and anything but docile.

Nature is often depicted acting up, creating bad weather and rough roads. She will burn you, she will freeze you, she will try to blow you away, as one 4×4 ad threatens. This invites the worst kind of treatment, and nature must be tamed. SUVs are most often depicted off-roading; Mother Earth flies out from under the tires that are tearing up wildlands, disturbing wildlife, and breaking down river banks as the 5,000-pound vehicles cleave through them. Domination and mastery over nature is the result when she steps out of line.

However, simply portraying nature as female is enough to invite a certain behavior. In a Wrangler ad for jeans, a man is given a pink cake by his wife. In the next scene, he is shown smashing through the now huge pink cake in a forest, expressing a distinctive adolescent male rebellion.

The romantic gendering of nature has resulted in complicated and contradictory advertising messages that are used for very destructive purposes. Originally, the concept of Mother Nature was borrowed from Native American philosophy and other indigenous cultures. While it may have had a noble purpose, when this concept is lifted from its social and cultural contexts and reinserted within patriarchal capitalist culture, it is turned into a commodity and commercialized in ways that ironically come to support the economic practices that misappropriate the Earth's resources. This new hybrid of Mother Earth is now a woman destined



to be dominated in the same ways that women are subjugated by the legacy of patriarchal capitalist culture.<sup>18</sup> In such a culture, protective paternalism quickly loses its tolerance when those subjugated—women, minorities, or those outside the dominant social order—express rage at their unequal treatment or make demands for self-determination.

This is how we come to such contradictory uses and depictions of nature in consumer culture. For example, studies show that those who purchase SUVs think of themselves as environmentally conscious. They want to enjoy the great outdoors and have adopted a vehicular consumer style that expresses that. At the same time, the ads invite them to dominate nature. Because nature has been portrayed as an unruly female, these two messages are not seen as contradictory.

In addition, a mythicized conception of nature, existing only to please those who admire her, does not invite knowledge and understanding of how humans might best interact with nature. Because of the ways we formulate our love for nature, environmental consciousness can sit comfortably in the cab of an SUV, a machine that uses far more gas than a smaller car. Extracting the greater amounts of fossil fuel needed to run SUVs helps destroy the wilderness areas and animal habitats, such as the last Alaskan wilderness, so lovingly depicted in the persuasive ads for these vehicles. SUVs increase greenhouse gases and therefore global warming because of their lower emission standards. Because of lobbying by the automobile industry, this situation is not likely to change. The same industry that professes a love of nature fights fuel efficiency, emission standards, and public spending on mass transportation while it continues to make as much as \$10,000 gross profit on the biggest and most destructive SUVs.<sup>19</sup> This is greenwashing at its worst.

### The Beauty of Nature and the Cosmetics Industry

If we turn to another major aspect of consumer culture, that of the beauty and cosmetics industry, we find that the advertising of such products often features the globe, the concept or language of Mother Earth, and the natural world. It is common for beauty and hygiene product advertising to extol "natural" ingredients, proclaim the benefits of nature, and in general, associate the Earth's goodness with a wide range of cosmetics

and their ingredients. In cologne advertisements, women sit in fields of sun-drenched flowers, and in hygiene ads they are compelled to douche with fresh, flower-scented liquids. Advertisements feature the goodness of Mother Nature in striking contrast to the depiction of real women's experience of nature.

In a comical essay reprinted in the *Utne Reader* titled, "Forever Fresh: Lost in the Land of Feminine Hygiene," journalist Alison Walsh writes that she was "astonished to discover that most daytime TV commercials have one clear message: women leak, dribble, and smell. . . . Apparently women must buff, douche, diet, gargle, and primp constantly if they are to overcome their basic vileness." Walsh, noting a certain gender imbalance observes that if we are to judge from television commercials aimed at men, "Evidently men are just fine the way they are. They have a small problem with weight gain and graying hair, but mainly they are handsome, playful and successful." She ends her piece with a query as to why there is no masculine hygiene aisle in the drugstore.<sup>20</sup>

However, women have been told, "how not to offend," by the cosmetics industry for a long time. In an essay with the same title, Marshal McLuhan noticed an anxiety-producing message from Lysol in the 1940s. The magazine advertisement features a woman waist deep in swirling water as the words "doubt, inhibitions, ignorance, and misgivings" seem to be pulling her down. Distressed, with her arms raised helplessly in the air, the ad rebukes, "Too late to cry out in anguish. Beware of the one intimate neglect that can engulf you in marital grief. For complete Feminine Hygiene rely on Lysol."<sup>21</sup> Advertising, as McLuhan comments, continues to remind us of "the terrible penalties . . . that life hands out to those who are neglectful . . . left in sordid isolation because they 'offend.'" When a lovely woman "stoops to BO, she is a Medusa freezing every male within sniff. On the other hand, when scrubbed, deloused, germ-free, and depilatorized, when doused with synthetic odors and chemicals, then she is lovely to love."<sup>22</sup> For McLuhan, "the cult of hygiene and the puritan mechanisms of modern applied science" were all part of technological progress. "Fear of the human touch and hatred of the human smell are part of this landscape of clinical white-coated officials and germ and odor proof laboratories."<sup>23</sup> Feminist writers (Gaard 1993) have long noted that the domination of women's bodies coincides historically

with the domination of the natural world. Today, the white-coated hygienists of the 1940s and '50s have been replaced with images of Mother Earth, but the message is the same.

Just as the domination of nature often results in its destruction, the advertising imperative that the female body be sanitized, tamed, powdered, and redolent only of perfumes has led to dire health consequences. In "Taking a Powder," journalist Joel Bleifuss documents epidemiological evidence connecting the use of talcum powder with ovarian cancer, the fourth leading cause of death in American women.<sup>24</sup> While talc and other toxins found in cosmetic products pose a serious health risk to American consumers, especially women, the industry is not regulated. A U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) document found on their WWW home pages states, "a cosmetic manufacturer may use any ingredient or raw material and market the final product without government approval." The FDA does prohibit seven known toxins such as hexachlorophene, chloroform, and mercury, but for the remaining 8,000 ingredients used in the manufacture of cosmetics, the industry regulates itself. While the FDA has the power to pull dangerous products off the shelf, it rarely does so, "despite mounting evidence that some of the most common cosmetic ingredients may double as deadly carcinogens."<sup>25</sup>

It is impossible to assess advertising claims of "natural" ingredients of cosmetic products most of the time, but cosmetic products "are often contaminated with carcinogenic byproducts, or contain substances that regularly react to form potent carcinogens during storage and use."<sup>26</sup> Identified as one of the most dangerous toxins by FDA doctors and cancer researchers are nitrosamines, a group of carcinogens found in a variety of products from shampoos to sunscreens. One of these nitrosamines, *N*-nitrosodiethanolamine (NDELA), forms when some common cosmetic ingredients, such as triethanolamine (TEA) and Cocamide diethanolamine (DEA), interact with the nitrites that are used to preserve many products. Vidal Sassoon shampoo, for example, contains the toxin, Cocamide DEA.

Joel Bleifuss also uncovered a number of research reports documenting the toxins contained in cosmetic products.<sup>27</sup> In 1992, tests conducted by the FDA revealed a product that contained NDELA at a concentration of 2,960 parts per billion, but the agency will not publish the brand name.

The European Union does not allow more than 50 parts per billion of nitrosamine-producing chemicals in cosmetic products. In 1992, all 14 products tested that year by the FDA were contaminated with the nitrosamine carcinogens. Individual FDA scientists are speaking out. Drs. Harvey and Chou assert that with the "information and technology currently available to cosmetic manufacturers, *N*-nitrosamine levels can and should be further reduced in cosmetic products. "A social goal should be to keep "human exposure to nitrosamines to the lowest level technologically feasible by reducing levels in all personal care products."<sup>28</sup>

Even as Redkin hair product features a picture of the globe, contrasting heaven (beautiful hair) and Earth (an image of the globe), plastic bottles appear in the lower right corner of the ad. The pervasive plastic packaging used for cosmetic products (with the exception of those made by the Body Shop) usually end up in the landfill (as noted above). In addition, one common general-purpose plasticizer, adipate, or DEHA, used in processing polyvinyl and other polymers, is also used as a solvent or plasticizer in such cosmetics as bath oils, eye shadow, cologne, foundations, rouge, blusher, nail polish remover, and moisturizers. It can contaminate foods wrapped in plastic films. This common plasticizer contaminates groundwater through fly ash from municipal waste incineration and wastewater effluents from treatment and manufacturing plants.

The \$20 billion plus a year cosmetics industry relies on a lack of media scrutiny, which was made apparent in 1998 when epidemiological studies and the carcinogenic contents of some cosmetics were identified as important censored news stories for that year.<sup>29</sup> "Few publications put effort into investigating the cosmetics industry, which is not surprising since the industry is a major magazine and newspaper advertiser. This is especially true of the women's magazines. Consequently, there is almost no coverage of the industry."<sup>30</sup>

What is necessary to unveil the toxic substances and environmental destruction hidden behind advertising's compelling symbolic culture? Corporate cultural conceptions of nature must be recognized and transformed. Romantic protection of a mythic version of nature must become obsolete because of the ease with which its appropriation serves the interests of economic exploitation and environmental destruction. Instead, we should strive "to know and care for the resistance of all living things

that dwell in poisoned eco-communities, offering ourselves as allies in resistance to social and ecological degradation."<sup>31</sup>

Authentic love is based on knowledge not myth, and "allied resistance" enjoins citizens to offer their support for the struggles against the global corporate domination that sustains the production and use of toxic substances. Given the power of global corporations, we need to identify and support innovative forms of resistance in our homes around the planet with a unified strategy against industries that pollute the environment, oppress their workers, and promote toxic substances. Such solidarity would demonstrate an authentic love for nature, rejecting the image of drinking water bottled in plastic, or smelling "naturally" fresh with a toxic cosmetic product, or driving an SUV as having any relation to a healthy life or preservation of the ecosystem.

#### Notes

1. Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997).
2. Doris-Louis Haineault and Jean-Yves Roy, *Unconscious for Sale: Advertising, Psychoanalysis and the Public* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993).
3. Robin Andersen, *Consumer Culture and TV Programming* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995); Michael Jacobson and Laurie Ann Mazur, *Marketing Madness: A Survival Guide for a Consumer Society* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995); Matthew McAllister, *The Commercialization of American Culture: New Advertising, Control and Democracy* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996).
4. Kevin DeLuca, "Constituting Nature Anew Through Judgment: The Possibilities of Media," in *Earthtalk: Communication Empowerment for Environmental Action*, Star A. Muir and Thomas Veenendall, eds. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996, p. 60).
5. Chaia Heller, "For the Love of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals and Nature*, Greta Gaard, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1993 p. 219).
6. DeLuca, "Constituting Nature."
7. Ibid.
8. Heller, "Love of Nature."
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 223.
11. Heller, "Love of Nature," p. 226.
12. Ibid., p. 223.
13. See Paul Messaris, "Pristine, Damaged, and Nightmare Landscapes: Visual Aesthetics of American Environmentalist Imagery," unpublished paper, presented at the Seventh Annual Visual Communication Conference, Jackson Wyo. (June, 1993).
14. See the cover story by Corby Kummer, "What's in the Water?" in *New York Times Magazine*, August 30, 1998:41. Ironically, "standards set for municipal drinking water supplies are mandatory and are monitored and tested more often than for bottled water," while the bottled water industry has been self-regulated for years (p. 41). In addition, a good portion of the bottled water sold in the United States is simply filtered or deionized.
15. Heller, "Love of Nature," p. 222.
16. Ibid.
17. Robin Andersen, "Road to Ruin! The Cultural Mythology of SUVs," in *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*, Robin Andersen and Lance Strate, eds. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999).
18. For a discussion of a related position on "cultural essentialism," see Laura Pulido, "Ecological Legitimacy and Cultural Essentialism: Hispano Grazing in the Southwest," in *The Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Environmental Justice Movements in the United States*, Daniel Faber, ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).
19. See Andersen, 1999.
20. Alison Walsh, "Forever Fresh: Lost in the Land of Feminine Hygiene," *Utne Reader* (September/October, 1996):32.
21. Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1967, p. 61).
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 62.
24. Peter Philips (ed.), *Censored 1998: The News that Didn't Make the News* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998).
25. Ibid., p. 30.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 324.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 31.
31. Heller, "Love of Nature," p. 235.