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It's Just Muzak: Music, Activism, and Advertising.

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It's Just Muzak: Music, Activism, and Advertising.

Avery Brzobohaty

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It's Just Muzak: Music, Activism, and Advertising.

Avery Brzobohaty

A thesis submitted to the College of Creative Arts
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Musicology

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Keywords: Music; fashion; advertising; commercials; identity.

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ABSTRACT

It's Just Muzak: Music, Activism, and Advertising.

BRZOBOHATY, AVERY ANN

This thesis builds on recent scholarship explaining the relationships between music, advertising, and society through a series of focused case studies in the clothing industry. Globally ubiquitous and reaching all socioeconomic strata, the fashion industry offers a useful focus because, in addition to products, it also sells identity. Fashion is a means for individuals to create and express identity by associating themselves with certain brands and styles that help express social, political, economic, and ethical standings as well as gender, sexuality, race, and religion. This thesis considers the ways that sound and music influence the aesthetic and mood of recent fashion industry commercials. Focusing mainly on North American commercials and video advertisements (including those airing on television and across internet streaming services), it explores the various methods and approaches to contemporary commercial music that the fashion industry uses to craft careful messages about environmental sustainability, social power dynamics, and contemporary politics, explaining the ways that these issues are linked. Eschewing an Adornian critique of the culture industry and instead considering all music and sound to be important, regardless of how utilitarian or commodified it may appear to be, this thesis suggests that music plays a key role in linking social issues to music in fashion industry commercials.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The average American watches just over five hours of television a day, and with advertisements now included in many popular streaming services, commercials remain a large, if often unnoticed, part of modern life.¹ With ads sometimes as short as five seconds, advertisers must use increasingly eye- and ear-catching methods to communicate as much information as possible to motivate consumer action before potentially unengaged viewers click away. To be effective at this, commercials often function as a sort of modern *gesamtkunstwerk*, combining onscreen images, sound effects, voiceovers, and music to create an overarching aesthetic that drives consumer action.

This thesis builds on recent scholarship explaining the relationships between music, advertising, and society through a series of focused case studies in the clothing industry. Globally ubiquitous and reaching all socioeconomic strata, the fashion industry offers a useful focus because, in addition to selling products, it also sells identity. Fashion is a means for individuals to create and express identity by associating themselves with certain brands and styles that help them express social, political, economic, and ethical standings as well as gender, sexuality, race, and religion.

Considering the ways that sound and music influence the aesthetic and mood of recent fashion industry commercials I focus mainly on North American commercials and video

¹ John Koblin, "How Much Do We Love TV? Let Us Count the Ways," The New York Times, June 30, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/business/media/nielsen-survey-media-viewing.html>.

advertisements (including those airing on television and across internet streaming services). I also explore the various methods and approaches to contemporary commercial music that the fashion industry uses to craft careful messages about environmental sustainability, social power dynamics, and contemporary politics and highlight the ways that these issues are linked musically through fashion.

Advertisers often align their products and brands with popular societal trends to influence audience perception of the company. Due to their placement within larger forms of media, I believe that video advertisements are brushed off as capitalist clutter rather than as cultural objects with thoughtful and artistic intent. Being overlooked also offers advertisers easier opportunities to influence audiences using the seemingly subliminal powers of music. Eschewing an Adornian critique of the culture industry and instead considering all music and sound to be important, regardless of how utilitarian or commodified it may appear to be, this thesis suggests that music plays a key role in linking social and political issues to capitalist consumer culture.

Literature Review

The following literature review brings the fields of design and marketing research into dialogue with musical and ethnomusicological scholarship with special attention paid to the growing field of ecomusicology. I highlight the common themes that are found in these areas, acknowledging the differences in language used for similar topics, and review the wide array of methodologies that are available for such analysis. Over the course of this review, these methodologies are described and placed in contrast with one another in ways that highlight their individual strengths and weaknesses to better demonstrate the benefits of interdisciplinary

approaches. While most of the literature included relates generally to ecomusicology or advertising research, fashion scholarship is also considered because while the fashion industry has a prominent impact on culture and society, it perhaps has the greatest impact on the environment.² Within the past five years, consumers have pushed back against unsustainable practices such as fast fashion and single-use plastics. This shift in culture has had a direct effect on the ways that fashion is advertised and subsequently has changed the ways music is used to advertise it. Ecomusicology, a rapidly growing field of study, provides a point of reference for how environmental music outside of an advertising framework.³ Additionally, examining the role of fashion advertising through an ecocritical lens opens up the analysis to critical discussions on other topics present like gender, sexuality, race, and class. Although tempting to define the field of ecomusicology as the study of our surroundings through the medium of sound and music, it is not as simple as that. As Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe write, there is not one specific field of study, but many relevant areas.⁴ Edited collections and colloquies, as well as the work of study groups in the American Musicological Society and Society for Ethnomusicology, showcase the possibilities and provide a map for this growing field, but no single resource offers a succinct and comprehensive overview.⁵

Ecomusicological scholarship incorporates research conducted in other ecocritical fields such as geography, anthropology, and literary studies. Ecocriticism was developed initially in the

² Anika Kozlowski, Michal Bardecki, and Cory Searcy, “Environmental Impacts in the Fashion Industry: A Life-Cycle and Stakeholder Framework,” *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, no. 45 (2012): 17–36.

³ Aaron S. Allen, “Ecomusicology: Ecocriticism and Musicology,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 391–94.

⁴ Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe, “Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature,” ed. Jacob A. (Reviewer) Cohen, *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 74, no. 1 (2017): 83–86.

⁵ “Volume 64 Issue 2 | Journal of the American Musicological Society | University of California Press,” accessed May 14, 2020.

field of literary studies to provide reflections on nature and our connection with it. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's collection of reprinted essays, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, offers a wide range of ecocritical viewpoints while providing an overview of ecocriticism in literature, while offering suggestions about the future directions of the field.⁶ In musical studies, R. Murray Schafer's "The Music of the Environment" heavily influenced the development of ecomusicology, introducing the concept of the sonic environment and its effect on humanity, emphasizing the need for acoustic preservation. Using historical evidence, Schafer traces the continued degradation of the soundscape and its effects on the way that we perceive and interact with sound.⁷ This and other writings by Schafer, inspired by his work on "The World Soundscape Project," have been pivotal to ecologists within and outside of musicology. Schafer's work forms an important foundation for contemporary ecomusicologists. However, the field is infantile, and most scholars continue to acknowledge the need for further discussion and development to help solidify the field. Environmental music often does not bear obvious connections to the music found in commercials, but both seek to inspire audiences towards action, spending money or preserving the environment, using similar musical tactics to do so.

It may be easy to disregard the music of commercials as trivial or as having little effect in society, but it would be a mistake to do so.⁸ Advertisements permeate modern culture at an astounding rate and have drawn on all aspects of humanity to inspire action. As music theorist David Huron writes,

⁶ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1996), 415.

⁷ R. Murray Schafer, "Music of the Environment," in *Audio Culture*, 1973, 29–39.

⁸ David Huron, "Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm," *The Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (January 1, 1989): 557–74, 560.

At one time or another all of the most esteemed values of a society have been tapped by advertisers to assist in product sales. These values include, among others: nationalism, international brotherhood, religion, family, nostalgia, friendship, motherhood, fatherhood, health, beauty, youth, adventure, elegance, mystique, humor, economy, quality, security, love, sex, and, most important, style.⁹

Fashion, music, and the study of both generally operate in similar ways, drawing on the above topics and more to elicit a reaction or effect listeners on a deeper level. Scholars such as Huron and Linda Scott acknowledge these similarities. Huron examines the similarities between advertising agencies and the humanities, as practiced in contemporary U.S. universities asserting that, although motivated by capital gains, ad agencies pour money into researching social meanings to better understand how to communicate with their target audiences. Throughout the course of his article “Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm,” Huron also points out that the careful manufacturing of advertisements means that “Ad agencies are, in essence, research institutes for social meanings” likening the relationship between advertisers and humanities scholars to that of industrial and academic scientists.¹⁰ He reinforces the polished, and ever evolving nature of advertising by asserting that, “it is arguably style which holds the greatest unconscious sway, and music is arguably the greatest tool advertisers have for portraying and distinguishing various styles.”¹¹ All of these carefully crafted advertisements, of which 75% include music, are broadcasted to North America over a billion advertising hours each year.¹² Huron cautions readers against assuming that consumers passively receive these advertisements and their intended messages, pointing out the trend in which “over periods of time, consumers become sensitive to the means by which advertisers establish authority. As viewers become more

⁹ Huron, “Music in Advertising,” 560.

¹⁰ Huron, “Music in Advertising,” 560.

¹¹ Huron, “Music in Advertising,” 560.

¹² David Huron, “Music in Advertising.”; Linda M. Scott, “Understanding Jingles and Needledrop: A Rhetorical Approach to Music in Advertising,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 17, no. 2 (1990): 223–36.

cognizant of the means of appeal, advertisers are forced to seek new techniques to overcome viewer skepticism,” in which style is essential.¹³ Huron goes on to argue that consumers are sensitive to the ways that advertisers promote their messages, forcing them to develop new techniques to better establish authority and subvert skepticism. This constant development has made advertising music what Huron describes as “perhaps the most meticulously crafted and most fretted-about music in history.”¹⁴ As such, this music constitutes a social artifact, reflecting the culture it is created in and I believe that by studying it, we can better understand music’s complex role in society.

Drawing Meaning from Sound

At the heart of the discourse around using music to disseminate ideas to audiences inevitably comes the question of how music functions semiotically and how to streamline its connotations for audiences to better capitalize on its communicative ability. Across the literature, scholars attempt to understand how musical meaning is developed based on the context in which it has been used or based on the themes, places, and people that the music references. Almost all the literature deals with music that calls for action, music that is used for the purpose of inspiring the listener to take some form of action whether capitalist or ecological. Understanding the ways that musical meaning is understood by scholars increases the possible approaches to analyze the music of video-advertisements. In his foundational book, *Music, Image, Text*, Roland Barthes expands upon the terminology interpretive codes, and narratives over the course of thirteen essays to isolate music’s semiological factors in an advertising context. Like Huron, he identifies the basic units of narrative analysis and notes that narratives that begin mid scene can only be

¹³ David Huron, “Music in Advertising,” 569.

¹⁴ David Huron, “Music in Advertising,” 572.

understood in reference to what has come before, similar to Scott's assertions, going on to suggest that music helps to create this framework. Barthes strengthens this claim by making a clear distinction between denotation, referring to a singular meaning, and connotation, referring to associations gathered around a word. Understanding narrative function is essential in the analysis of music in video-advertisements as it will be contributing to that narrative. Barthes is not an exception in striving to define and contain the ways that music is able to transmit, to "speak" volumes to listeners.¹⁵

In ecomusicology, scholars have turned to individual musical works to determine how meaning is created through the relationships between people and the environment throughout history. These authors suggest that sound and meaning do not have infinite possibilities of meaning and instead are restrained to a specific place or time, from which musical associations are created and can be drawn on by composers to create meaning. Daniel M. Grimley's study of Sibelius's *Tapiola* demonstrates ecomusicology's potential to address specific aspects of a landscape and the musical response to it. By analyzing the "place" markers like weather and movement in a piece that seems particularly attuned to the environmental factors of the place itself, Grimley confirms that the act of engaging with nature in music is an act of representation.¹⁶ Holly Watkins's "Musical Ecologies of Place and Placelessness" dissects the perceived place markers in music, examining how music can constitute both a virtual environment and relate to actual locations, drawing on specific works to show how environmental change is reflected in music. Watkins theorizes that our ability to understand and create the sense of being within a certain time and place relies on musical associations

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

¹⁶ Daniel M. Grimley, "Music, Landscape, Attunement: Listening to Sibelius's *Tapiola*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 394–98.

interpreted according to the listener's historical perspective, meaning that analogical perceptions differ alongside changing soundscapes. This amplifies the importance of awareness of the environmental connections within music, and as scholars must be conscious of the soundscapes at the time of composition and their own modern sound associations to interpret the composition as accurately as possible.¹⁷ Mark Reybrouck acknowledges Watkins's assertions that perceptions of sound varies but suggests that the lack of uniformity in the environment allows for the interpretation of musical "place markers," listeners must rely on context to interpret the sounds correctly. Reybrouck combines ecomusicology with biosemiotic research to explain how music acts as a sounding environment, and investigates communal individual perceptions of sound, determining that place symbolism in music is possible because humans have infinite meanings for finite sounds.¹⁸¹⁹ Eric Clarke demonstrates this phenomenon by giving the example of a chip bag rustling, without seeing the bag, the listener could interpret the sound in multiple different ways, such as leaves rustling or a fire crackling.²⁰

The meanings of sounds and music are not fixed and often change over time in response to changes in the environment and its soundscape. In "Subjectivity, Soundscapes, Motorbikes, and Music," Philip Tagg traces the use of sonic anaphones, musical signifiers with specific sonorities commonly used to represent things such as motion, water, or romance, particularly those that are industrial, in music.²¹ He interacts with Schafer's concepts of hi and lo fidelity and

¹⁷ Holly Watkins, "Musical Ecologies of Place and Placelessness," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 404–8.

¹⁸ Mark Reybrouck, "Music as Environment: An Ecological and Biosemiotic Approach," *Behavioral Sciences (Basel, Switzerland)* 5, no. 1 (March 2015): 1–26.

¹⁹ Mark Reybrouck, "Music as Environment: An Ecological and Biosemiotic Approach," *Behavioral Sciences (Basel, Switzerland)* 5, no. 1 (March 2015): 1–26.

²⁰ Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).; Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*.

²¹ Philip Tagg, "Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music," in *Soundscapes: Essays on Vroom and Moo*, ed. Helmi Järviluoma (Institute of Rhythm Music, 1994), 48–66.

claims that the rise of louder soundscapes has prompted a musical response. Tagg asserts that in order to be heard in lo-fi urban settings and to dominate the soundscape over new technologies like amplifiers, electronic instruments, and vehicles, music had to become louder and more aggressive. The author credits this trend with the creation and rise to popularity of the “urban” genres of rock, hip hop, and rap. To further demonstrate the connections between industrial sounds and the increased musical aggressiveness, Clarke notes similar tendencies and analyzes the repurposing of “noise” into these urban genres directly and in the form of sonic anaphones, both authors giving the example of the gunfire imitations in Jimmy Hendrix’s performance of *The Star Spangled Banner*.²²

While musicologists examine musical meaning, advertising researchers attempt to define the limits of that meaning, demonstrating that when combined with different visuals, musical meaning, as interpreted by audiences, can be altered to varying degrees. Theo Van Leeuwen acknowledges the work done in the fields of advertising studies and musicology and he calls for the creation of a unified system of musical semiotics to aid in the analysis of music’s rhythms, tropes, intervals, tempos and their effects on advertising. He bases this desire off social semiotic and literary theories envisioning that the system draw on field of cultural meaning in which musical styles, borrowing, and imitations obtain their own culturally significant meaning through repeated use.²³ Also written from the field of advertising studies, Kineta Hung’s 2000 paper on the use of congruent and incongruent meaning in advertising incorporates cinematic and literary theory to further explore music’s ability to operate as a semiotic system. The author notes that music never operates as a solo component of the advertisement and is always in conjunction with

²² Eric Clarke, *Ways of Listening*.; Tagg, “Subjectivity and Soundscape.”

²³ Theo Van Leeuwen, “Music and Ideology: Notes toward a Sociosemiotics of Mass Media Music,” *Popular Music and Society* 22, no. 4 (1998): 25–54.

some other element whether that be vocal or visual. Like Van Leeuwen she asserts that the relationship between the elements, whether arbitrarily coupled or not, provides a framework from which meaning is created. Hung's qualitative and quantitative method of research indicates that meaning is also drawn from the viewer's cultural experiences and context, which provide a point of reference. She concludes that music in congruent ads, or music that seems to match the image thematically, reinforces the cultural stereotypes and produces a more "direct" meaning in the advertisement. Adversely, when the music and image do not have obvious connections audiences are required to draw on alternate contexts to discern the ad's meaning thus muddying their interpretations.²⁴ This is a deciding factor in what music is included in an advertisement in order to communicate the message as directly as possible and with smallest possibility for misinterpretation. In contrast, Oscar Santacreu Fernandez and Antonio Alaminos Chico's 2004 study on the performative effect of music in advertising asserts that music can transmit coherent information by itself, without other channels of support. Doing so by analyzing this effect in relation to cognitive structures and examines their coherence between the music and the advertisement.²⁵ Furthermore, Joanna Love's close reading of Michael Jackson's song "Choice of a New Generation" in Pepsi's advertising campaign demonstrates how the coupling of emotionally charged music with incongruent images can beneficially diffuse the affective experience of the music alone. In this article she seeks to bridge important conversations among disciplines about preexisting popular music's role in commercials using musicological inquiry. Love asserts that the use of Jackson's music was crucial to the campaign and that the song's controversies were diffused when paired with Pepsi's overtly positive image. This case study

²⁴ Kineta Hung, "Narrative Music in Congruent and Incongruent TV Advertising," *Journal of Advertising* 29, no. 1 (2000): 25-34.

²⁵ Antonio Alaminos and Oscar Santacreu. "Let the Music Play the Feelings: The Performative Effect of Advertising Music," 2004.

reveals that music can also function coherently in advertisements when it is not parallel in theme or message with the visuals.²⁶ Examining the ways that musical meaning is created also opens the dialogue to post-colonial discourse. Building on Hung's study, Irene Nexica examines the non-uniformity of culture, examining cultural tropes, hybrids, and crossovers in music. In the course of the paper she notes that in the music industry marketing world there is a strong division between the Western, white, and the other and an expectation that each should stick to their own "traditional" music. She calls out this compartmentalization of musical styles stating that, "The music industry seems unable to step outside of stereotypical and monolithic identity, even if that means portraying the same artist differently to different audiences."²⁷ Although this study does not directly relate to the music used in commercials, similar fragmentation has occurred in the advertising world, leading to the increased use of musical tropes and stereotypes to easily represent the non-White and non-Western other, and "diversify" brands.

Emotion, Memory, and Nostalgia

Musical meaning does not draw only on references to extra musical places and things, it communicates meaning through the evocation of an emotional response in listeners. The work done by advertising scholars helps confirm this relationship through participant surveys and isolate emotions to specific musical elements or genres to demonstrate how the music influences

²⁶ Joanna K. Love, "From Cautionary Chart-Topper to Friendly Beverage Anthem: Michael Jackson's Billie Jean and Pepsi's 'Choice of a New Generation' Television Campaign," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9, no. 2 (2015): 178–203.

²⁷ Irene Nexica, "Music and Marketing: Tropes of Hybrids, Crossovers, and Cultural Dialogue through Music," 1997, 68.

audiences. Kristen Stewart and Elizabeth Koh's 2017 study on the effect of music tempo on attitudes and the mediating role of consumers' affective responses and by using a series of four varied surveys and controlled interviews, the authors investigate how tempo influences brand attitudes focusing on the evocation of emotions by advertisers amidst the clutter of advertising. They then concluded that music tempo in commercials does affect consumers' emotional response to the ad, arguing that if the tempo evokes an emotional response in the audience it has a greater effect on their decision to purchase the product.²⁸ However, evoking emotion through music is not as simple as combining the correct musical elements. Mohamed Morchid's research on a combined thematic and acoustic approach for music recommendation in TV commercials theorizes that an automatic system could be developed to process text, visual, and auditory features to select the most appropriate and relevant music for the commercial. Surprisingly, the system results were ultimately underwhelming and only scored slightly higher than their human counterparts.²⁹ As Morchid's study clearly shows, musical meaning is more complicated than it might seem on the surface. However, it does suggest the possibility of a presence of a formulaic method of choosing music that is emotionally coherent with the visual. Paul Christiansen's article "'It's Morning Again in America': How the Tuesday Team Revolutionized the Use of Music in Political Ads" examines the history and use of the popular song "Prouder, Stronger, Better" commonly known as "Morning in America," produced for Ronald Reagan's re-election. Using this as a case study, Christianson demonstrates changing intersections between auditory

²⁸ Stewart and Hyeseung Elizabeth Koh, "Hooked on a Feeling: The Effect of Music Tempo on Attitudes and the Mediating Role of Consumers' Affective Responses," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 16, no. 6 (November 2017): 550–64.

²⁹ Mohamed Morchid, Richard Dufour, and Georges Linares, "A Combined Thematic and Acoustic Approach for a Music Recommendation Service in TV Commercials," *Collected Work: Proceedings of the 15th Conference of the International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR 2014)*. Published by: S.l., Canada: International Society for Music Information Retrieval, 2015. Pages: 465-470.

and visual elements in advertisements stating that, “by 1984 ads were [...] starting to elevate style over substance, with music as one of the key agents of creating the style” and that “ad creators use a type of shorthand to convey their intended meaning, partly in the interest of time, and partly to fix the message in viewers’ minds.”³⁰ In light of these changes Christiansen asserts that music became a stronger force, setting the tone for the entire advertisement and unifying the visuals, texts, and voice overs. Christiansen also notes music’s ability to transmit a subtle nonverbal poetic argument. This ability to transmit ideas, arguments, and histories subtly and instantaneously to the audience makes music a powerful tool for advertising and engaging the audience around an environmental cause.³¹

Musicians and ecomusicologists have furthered this discovery by using nostalgia to advocate for change and awareness around ecological issues and debates. The work done by these scholars demonstrates music’s ability to accumulate emotional connotations through connections to specific places and events. Alexander Rehding concerns himself with the tone in which place and ecological issues are communicated and cautions ecologists against using apocalyptic undertones in their implicitly activist work as it might be too abrasive for audiences, instead suggesting that cultural memory in the form of nostalgia may provide the most effective way for environmentalists to communicate as it focuses on what will be lost if no action is taken.³² In Stimeling’s 2014 discussion of the greenwashed advertisements following the Deepwater Horizons oil spill, he shows how southern U.S. musical stereotypes were used in promotional videos to promote the stereotypical “ideal image” of the U.S. South rather than

³⁰ Paul Christiansen, “‘It’s Morning Again in America’: How the Tuesday Team Revolutionized the Use of Music in Political Ads,” *Music & Politics* 10, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.

³¹ Paul Christiansen, “‘It’s Morning Again in America,’” 5, 6.

³² Alexander Rehding, “Ecomusicology between Apocalypse and Nostalgia,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 409–14.

using authentic music from each location advertised, despite each having their own rich musical tradition. He suggests that these musical tropes depict a romanticized South and evoke a nostalgic response in audiences, in turn eliciting a more positive response to the advertisement and to the company behind it.³³ Previously, Stimeling explored similar issues in his 2012 paper on the music surrounding the Appalachian mountaintop mining debate. In the article, he seeks to better understand the role that music and local musicians have in shaping public debate around environmental issues by examining the musical response to invasive mining practices in central Appalachia and the measures taken to control the damage being caused. The author analyzes songs that engage directly with the debate and songs used at protests and rallies on both sides of the debate. A strong pre-existing musical tradition and local identity closely tied to the geography must exist for musicians to create a sense of nostalgia, which musicians use to effectively comment on environmental issues, demonstrating the interrelatedness of sense of self and sense of place. Additionally, the use of musical nostalgia occurs on both sides of the debate, whether for the loss of nature, the sacredness of land, the tradition of miners trying to earn a living.³⁴ Both of Stimeling's articles demonstrate the power of specificity in historical usage and locality that aid in the collection of connotations around a particular genre or style of music. Once these connotations are well established it becomes easy to draw on their associations to carefully craft an emotional aesthetic within an advertisement.

Helen Rees's article "Environmental Crisis, Culture Loss, and a New Musical Aesthetic: China's 'Original Ecology Folksongs,'" links Western literature on ecomusicology, musical

³³ Travis D. Stimeling, "Music, Place, and Gulf Coast Tourism since the BP Oil Spill," *Music and Politics* VIII, no. 2 (Summer 2014).

³⁴ Travis D. Stimeling, "Music, Place, and Identity in the Central Appalachian Mountaintop Removal Mining Debate," *American Music* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 1–29.

sustainability, and nostalgia to explore 21st century China's craze for "original ecology folksongs" as a response to rapid loss and major environmental degradation. Rees breaks down the term "original ecology folk songs" in terms of theory, aesthetic practice, and musician rhetoric. She then links the term with nostalgia in terms of the romanticization of the simple and the rural resonates with classical Chinese poetry that idealizes the natural environment and a reclusive rural life as a form of nostalgia for the past in the face of the country's rapid industrialization.³⁵

The Role of Identity

The inclusion of identity in music is an effective tool in connecting with viewers on a personal or emotional level. In advertising and environmental activism, the viewers are motivated to act if they perceive themselves within the music. The sources reviewed in this section outlines factors that create musical identities for individuals and place and demonstrates how these identities can be utilized in advertisements and activism. Understanding the ways that music becomes associated with particular identities unveils how they are used in advertisements to promote products and brands. Musical representations and evocations of place reveal much about the nature of identities and gender roles at the time of composition. Author's like Jada Watson state that further study through a feminist lens can be given to pre-existing scholarly works, as ecological claims often contain implications for gender.³⁶ Denise Von Glahn examines music from an ecological standpoint as a means of understanding the composer's identity and

³⁵ Helen Rees, "Environmental Crisis, Culture Loss, and a New Musical Aesthetic: China's 'Original Ecology Folksongs' In Theory and Practice," *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 53-88.

³⁶ Jada Watson, "Geography and Country Music: Constructing 'geo-Cultural' Identities," in *Collected Work: The Oxford Handbook of Country Music. Series: Oxford Handbooks, Published by: New York, NY, U.S.A.: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pages: 95-115.*

events of their life, actively incorporating feminist readings into ecomusicology.³⁷ In her article “American Women and the Nature of Identity”, Von Glahn analyzes compositions by women in the “nature writing tradition” to determine the role that women played in society and in relation to nature. The places that women depict in their music reflect their daily interactions with nature around the domestic sphere.³⁸ Brooks Toliver explores how the depiction of nature in music gives insight into the beliefs of the composer and their contemporaries and how they reacted to nature. By analyzing the use of musical borrowings, references, and the use of imagery in Grofe’s *Grand Canyon Suite*, Toliver traces the emergence of early environmentalism in America and the changing attitudes, whether to celebrate nature or to conquer it. By doing so, the author begins to understand how natural geography contributes to a nation's identity.³⁹ In advertising, James Annesley also suggests that the lives of creators, in this case directors, also manifest through their creations. Analyzing Spike Jonze’s commercials in relation to his films and adding in biographical details, Annesley suggests that the commercially beneficial synergy he found occurring across Jonze’s media helps us to better understand Jonze as a director and that ultimately the distinctions between the film, advertisements, and other media are increasingly meaningless.⁴⁰ Turning away from an individual level, Von Glahn expands her claims to assert that understanding the attitudes conveyed through the commemoration of place in music reveals the shared values and beliefs of larger groups of people, even entire nations.⁴¹ Christopher Brown’s 2012 article examining the depiction of heterosexual men in the 1977

³⁷ Von Glahn, *American Women*.

³⁸ Denise Von Glahn, “American Women and the Nature of Identity,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 399–403.

³⁹ Brooks Toliver, “Eco-Ing in the Canyon: Ferde Grofé’s *Grand Canyon Suite* and the Transformation of Wilderness,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 2 (2004): 325–68,

⁴⁰ James Annesley, “Being Spike Jonze: Intertextuality and Convergence in Film, Music Video and Advertising,” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 11, no. 1 (March 2013): 23–37.

⁴¹ Von Glahn, *American Women*.

Levi's commercial "The Swimmer" applies a similar methodology, analyzing the visual cues in the film as symbols for youthful, masculine virility. Using memoirs from the actor and director of the film Brown suggests, much like Von Glahn, that the advertisement functions as a lens for viewing both the actor's life and cultural ideals about masculinity and the male body. Amidst this discussion, Brown highlights the struggle that was occurring over the depiction of male bodies between the forces of culture and nature during the 1970s.⁴²

Absence of Identity

The previous section demonstrates the importance of the presence of specific identities when trying to create music and content that resonates with audiences on a personal level. Using music to associate a brand or product with a specific identity or lifestyle is a popular method used by advertisers. However, containing as little identity as possible is another strategy used to mediate the message being transmitted in such a way that people of diverse identities can identify with it. This trend in targeting a generalized audience suggests that music with little identity, emotion, or reference to external circumstances has become more prevalent in video-advertising. The shift from identity focused advertising to identity-absent marketing is seen most clearly in Apple's iPod dancing silhouette campaign. Justin D. Burton expands on the benefits of an absence of identity in his article examining the emergence of iconic iPod silhouette commercials released in 2003 and 2004. Burton begins with an account of the original iPod commercials that feature a strong heterosexual white male identity before highlighting the changes that the company made resulting in the "dancing silhouette campaign." Although Burton

⁴² Christopher R. Brown, "Mad About the Boy? Hollywood Stardom and Masculinity Subverted in The Swimmer," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 29, no. 4 (July 2012): 356–64.

notes that the silhouettes still maintain identifying gendering and racializing features, they functioned as “shadowy voids that invite viewers to project themselves into the commercials” and that, “they offer viewers the freedom to step into new and alternate identities by simply plugging into an iPod.”⁴³ In this case study we see two distinct elements of advertising: the visual and the auditory. In this case the Apple has attempted to obscure the visual identity signifiers while maintaining the auditory ones in the form of genres; however, they do integrate a multiplicity of these musical “identities” into the commercial to make up for the lack of visual identities.⁴⁴ S.N. Sadheo Kunal’s research on the effects of music on consumer buying in the service sector emphasizes the importance of genre as a factor of influencing consumer behavior. In a survey of 300 patrons Kunal concludes that, “appropriate music in advertising can truly influence the patrons’ stay as well as consumption in a restaurant.” Kunal then shows that the patrons spent the most money when listening to popular music, followed by: classical music, local music, and no music.⁴⁵ The author does not make assertions about the reason for this trend, however, from consulting Kate Galloway’s article “Ecotopian Spaces: Soundscapes of Environmental Advocacy and Awareness” in which she analyzes music performed at conscious activism events, she asserts that the artists performing do not function as actively advocating for environmental change through lyrics that explicit reference environmental issues, but that they still help to spread awareness, and the soundscape that the events create impacts the perception and acceptance of the message, benefiting the cause in the long run.⁴⁶ Mark Pedelty’s work on

⁴³ Justin D. Burton, “Dancing Silhouettes: The Mobile Freedom of iPod Commercials,” in *Collected Work: The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies, Vol. 2. Series: Oxford Handbooks, (Number of Volumes: 2) Published by: Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pages: 311-336.*

⁴⁴ Justin D. Burton, “Dancing Silhouettes.”

⁴⁵ Kunal Sinha and N Sahdeo, “Music in Advertising: An Empirical Study of Its Effect on Consumer Buying Behavior in Services Sector,” *International Journal of Engineering, Business and Enterprise Applications (IJEBA)*, March 4, 2015.

⁴⁶ Kate Galloway, “Ecotopian Spaces: Soundscapes of Environmental Advocacy and Awareness,” *Social Alternatives* 33, no. 3 (July 2014): 71–79.

environmental music of the Salish Sea explores musical performance as an advocate for environmental movements and encourages ecomusicologists and musicians to promote and engage with sustainable practices themselves. The author documents and analyzes activist musicians and their ecological articulations, giving insight into the musician's life, cultural context, creative process, and performance strategies before suggesting how they might be more effective in communicating their messages. If communication occurs on a global or national scale the ability to use a sense of regionality is somewhat negated, and instead musicians communicate general environmental issues, encouraging people to live a more sustainable lifestyle through the active reduction of their carbon footprint. This article highlights the possibility for the lack of specific identity within music for environmental activism something that Pedelty does not identify as an either positive or negative.⁴⁷ Stimeling's 2014 work on the Gulf Coast Deepwater Horizons oil spill demonstrates the ways in which the advertisers neglected specific, traditional and local musical practices in favor of stereotypical music, which I argue constitutes an artificial facade of identity rather than an authentic identity based on local experience.⁴⁸

Among the environmental advocacy video advertisements, I have encountered in my research, few in the past five years draw on local connections to time and place. With the exception of companies like Patagonia which arguably markets to an older demographic, companies like H&M and Adidas that have launched campaigns to promote their new "environmentally friendly" products using non-pre-existing minimalist and electronic music to accompany images featuring actors from a wide array of racial, gender and sexualities, and

⁴⁷ Mark Pedelty, *A Song to Save the Salish Sea: Musical Performance as Environmental Activism* (Indiana University Press, 2016).

⁴⁸ Stimeling, *Music, Place, and Gulf Coast Tourism since the BP Oil Spill.*"

religious identities. This is a reversal of what is shown in Burton's study of the dancing iPod silhouettes in which the visual was obscured and identity was expressed through the music as it is the inclusion of as many identities as possible. Timothy Taylor in his book *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* examines the history of music and advertising calls this an appeal to the "new petite bourgeoisie" (NPB) who favor the new, hip, and trendy. Taylor also points to the NPB's abhorrence of music they perceive as commercialized, which could account for the lack of pre-existing music in these more recent commercials.⁴⁹

Genre and Brand

Following the previous discussions on identity and the increasing lack of it in the music of video advertisements, I turn now to a growing discourse surrounding brand, genre, and style that has been occurring both in advertising studies and musicology. Many of the authors do not offer a specific definition of style, but many make it explicitly clear that style is crucial in every element of branding and advertising. While this section is perhaps the least extensive in this literature it opens a discourse on style and its role in music and advertising that leads to further discussion of musical and visual aesthetics and the way that they impact advertising. Scott weighs in on the issue of style, stating that it is "no mere frill but a necessary and omnipresent attribute."⁵⁰ Huron relays its importance stating that, "It is arguably style which holds the greatest unconscious sway, and music is arguably the greatest tool advertisers have for portraying and distinguishing various styles."⁵¹ Cultivating a unique style or aesthetic sets an

⁴⁹ Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism*.

⁵⁰ Scott, "Understanding Jingles and Needledrop," 297.

⁵¹ Huron, "Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm," 569.

artist, product, or company apart and I argue that musical genre contributes to this, helping to carve out a larger more commodified identity. Janice Miller, in her book *Fashion and Music*, also demonstrates the draws similar connections between genre, identity, and style exploring how musical artists use the visual signifiers of their fashion choices to communicate their genre identity to the audience. Music-fashion literature tends to focus on popular music stars like David Bowie and Lady Gaga who are known for their notable and unique fashion choices, analyzing how these artists utilize their style to define and promote themselves. Miller argues that this constitutes a form of branding, and that it, if done successfully, gives the viewer visual cues about the type of music the artist associated with.⁵² Returning to the idea of folk music as a genre commonly used for environmental advocacy, Galloway, in her discussion of the Panda Ball, notes the stylistic similarities between the groups performing at these events, pointing out that many of them fall into the folk or acoustic genre.⁵³ This is no coincidence as these are typically considered nostalgic genres and reflect Allen's emphasis on the use of nostalgia as an effective tool for motivating the audience to act.⁵⁴ The ecological use of folk music as activism has been studied by many scholars like Pedelty, Helen Rees, Watson, Von Glahn, and Stimeling who have shown how folk and other genres draw on significant connections to a specific real or perceived place and/or time to connect with audiences in a meaningful way.⁵⁵ Timothy Taylor examines the altering effects that neoliberal policies and practices have had on production, distribution and consumption of music in the last few decades.⁵⁶ He explores how the music

⁵² Janice Miller, *Fashion and Music*, (Oxford; Berg Publishers, 2011).

⁵³ Galloway, "Ecotopian Spaces."

⁵⁴ Allen, "Ecomusicology Between Apocalypse and Nostalgia."

⁵⁵ Pedelty, *Songs to Save the Salish Sea.*; Rees, "Environmental Crisis, Culture Loss, and a New Musical Aesthetic."; Watson, "Geography and Country Music."; Von Glahn, *American Women and Society.*; and Stimeling, "Music, Place, and Identity in the Central Appalachian Mountaintop Removal Mining Debate."

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Music and Capitalism.*

industry itself was commodified and looks at the newfound importance of self-marketing and branding, particularly how musicians began trying to align themselves with major brands. He then connects this to the modern ideology of a star and the star as brand, ultimately emphasizing the importance of identity in the neoliberal era through the consumption and display of goods.

Consumer Agency

With all of this in mind, though, it is important to remember that consumer agency is an essential part of this equation. It is easy to paint advertisers as maliciously manipulative corporations and consumers as sheep that mindlessly buy into the campaigns; however, the relationship is far more complex. We cannot overlook the billions of dollars spent on advertising and researching advertising each year. Think of the hours invested researching and implementing design, packaging, marketing and product displays meant to persuade consumers to purchase the product.⁵⁷ Advertising targets the fledgling identities of the consumer and attempts to anticipate and cultivate the need to solidify that identity through the purchase of commodities that will make us happier and help us achieve our personal goals.⁵⁸ Fashion leans heavily on the marketing of identity, entreating us to buy and wear the most up to date trends to fit in, further solidifying our consumer-oriented identities and perpetuating the cycle of supply and demand. While this cycle seems perpetual, individuals must constantly be persuaded that they continually needed new products and despite all the efforts to anticipate consumer behavior, there are still unanticipated gaps in human behavior that research cannot account for.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Gordon R. Foxall, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Consumer Choice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁵⁸ Douglas Kellner, "Fashion, Advertising and Identity in the Consumer Society," In *Consumer Culture, Modernity and Identity*, edited by Nita Mathur, 168-203. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2014.

⁵⁹ Gordon R. Foxall, "Introduction."

Conclusion

Across time clothing has been used and commodified to express social, political, economic, and ethical standings as well as gender, sexuality, race, and religion. This industry is a useful space to consider music's role in consumerism because aside from just selling products it also sells identity. Focusing mainly on North American video advertisements, I seek to demonstrate the various methods and approaches to contemporary commercial music in the hopes of sparking further discourse about the environmental sustainability and power dynamics of the fashion industry. Examining the music of video advertisements using an ecocritical lens allows for a better understanding of the ways that large clothing industry corporations have responded to backlash against "fast fashion," unethical labor practices, and the environmental damage with a supposedly new sustainable means of production, and heavily advertised "recycling" programs touting their new environmentally "ethical" practices. By incorporating studies on the curation and creation of musical meaning in combination with the understand that the goal of advertisements we can point to the rationale for using musical tropes and stereotypes and begin to problematize the extensive exoticization of the non-white other. I do not overlook the cultural value of this music, eschewing an Adorno-oriented critique and instead considering all music and sound to be important, regardless of how utilitarian or commodified it may appear to be, addressing a specific theme that represents the complex relationship between society and capitalism. By analyzing the music of video advertisements around overarching themes, I hope to increase awareness of the importance of these audiovisual compositions and open it up for further study and critique. The remaining three chapters focus on individual case studies of fashion advertising to explore the ways that music functions to sell product, identity, and ideology as part of an audiovisual package.

Chapter 2, “\$\$\$ A Different Type of Green \$\$\$: Greenwashing the Fashion Industry,” focuses on the backlash that many large clothing manufacturers and retailers have faced in the wake of the global environmental movement, as “fast fashion,” unethical labor practices, and the environmental damage caused by both the cultivation of materials and the process of manufacturing have become key issues for consumers. As consumers began calling out these corporations and demanding a more sustainable means of production, it is unsurprising that companies responded with heavily advertised “recycling” programs touting their new environmentally “ethical” practices. Companies like H&M have taken a wide range of approaches to incorporate this greenwashing into their video advertisements. While some of the music in these commercials draws on nostalgia, using acoustic music to increase viewers’ emotional response, a surprising number of commercials incorporate a minimalistic, electronic, or industrial underscore to accompany the visuals in their campaigns. I dissect the role that nostalgia plays in these commercials, comparing it to the way it is used in musical ecological activism. In this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of what greenwashing is its history within the Western capitalist regime, before problematizing its usage in the fashion industry. Using an ecomusicological framework, I examine H&M’s differing approaches, their effectiveness, and backlash for their campaigns. To gather public opinions, I turn to public responses on social media platforms, as well as relevant news articles and blogs, using these resources to accumulate and analyze a wide range of opinions on the company’s ethical standing before and after the greenwashing. I demonstrate why the company’s efforts are not ecologically beneficial and that by including environmental tones and messages in their advertisements, companies increase their profits. I problematize this pseudo-ecology and explore its potential impacts in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 3 examines how music provides a powerful tool to communicate subtle messages to the listener. When used alongside an image, music is pivotal in prescribing meaning to the viewer, adding to the overall aesthetic of the advertisement but also signifying important identifying features. Advertisers often capitalize on music's pre-existing cultural codifications to subtly communicate to listeners. This is perhaps most commonly seen and discussed when classical music is used in luxury vehicle commercials as a trope that connotes status, refinement, and wealth. With the recent push for more inclusive representation across all forms of media, brands have turned to music to easily communicate inclusivity, but with varying degrees of success. In this chapter I provide a brief outline of the different ways that identity has been refined or excluded from advertisements both musically and visually, briefly acknowledging Apple's dancing silhouettes campaign as an important moment of democratizing their target audience through an absence of identity. I also give a brief overview of the use of racialized and exoticized caricatures and signifiers. I then examine the representation of non-white people using racialized genres and musical tropes. I problematize these techniques, highlighting the fact that often they are often employed in commercials that promote diversity and inclusivity. In this chapter I analyze Nike's Black History Month commercial that promotes racial equality within the context of the company's policies and practices. I examine the use of historically black music within this commercial and problematize the company's piggybacking on the Black Lives Matter movement.

Chapter 4 expands the scope outside of the fashion industry to examine Pepsi's 2017 "Live for Now Moments" ad featuring Kendall Jenner. Despite employing the same themes and techniques as case studies in the previous chapters the commercial caused scandal ultimately being taken down from the internet 24 hours after the initial release. Pepsi halfheartedly latched

on to civil rights demonstrations as inspiration but blundering reinforced racial stereotypes. This chapter examines the visual and musical elements of the commercial, highlighting major differences between Nike's Black History Month commercial that ultimately ended in negative public reception of Pepsi's ad.

Chapter 2

\$\$\$ A Different Type of Greenwashing \$\$\$

Without looking do you know what materials your clothing is made from? Do you know who made it and where? What about the environmental impacts of creating these clothes? In this increasingly globalized world, most of us do not give much thought to where our clothing comes from and at what cost. In the wake of the global environmental movement, many large clothing corporations have faced backlash against “fast fashion,” unethical labor practices, and the environmental damage caused by both the cultivation of materials and the manufacturing process. As consumers began calling out these corporations and demanding a more sustainable means of production, it is unsurprising that companies have responded with heavily advertised “recycling” programs touting their new “ethical” and environmentally sustainable practices.⁶⁰ Many companies have taken a variety of approaches to incorporate environmental messages into their video advertisements, drawing on nostalgia through acoustic music to increase viewers’ emotional response, however; a surprising number of commercials incorporate a minimalistic, electronic, or industrial underscore to accompany the visuals in their campaigns.

In this chapter, I situate eco-advertising music within the larger field of ecomusicology and ecological protest music to help better unfold the connections between practical sustainability and initiatives to promote it. I provide a brief overview of what greenwashing is and its history within the Western capitalist regime, before problematizing its usage in the fashion industry, seeking to better understand how a brand’s projected environmental image

⁶⁰ Louise Crewe, “Ugly Beautiful?: Counting the Cost of the Global Fashion Industry,” *Geography* 93, no. 1 (2008): 25–33.

relates to ethical and sustainable business practices, or lack thereof. Through audio-visual analysis I seek to better understand eco-advertising music's relationship to North American clothing industry commercials, examining how environmental messages are transmitted to audiences. Over three case studies, I offer a close reading of the evolution of H&M's approaches to incorporating environmental messages into their brands and sustainability campaigns. The imagery, voice overs, lyrics, music, and sound effects combine to evoke different emotional affects, aesthetics and as I consider each, I turn to ecomusicological, marketing, film, and cultural theories to pinpoint the generation of these effects within each commercial. Using a combination of scholarly discourse and online public opinion, I also consider the responses to these campaigns to help determine their overall successfulness in sustaining an environmentally friendly public image. Ultimately, I seek to problematize pseudo-ecology and explore its potential impacts in the twenty-first century while demonstrating that many of these "eco-conscious" advertisements are not ecologically beneficial and that by including environmental tones and messages in their advertisements, companies increase their profits.

My research focuses on the use of music as a tool for marketing commodities, and as such, it builds upon a large body of work that has scoured and debated the commodification of music itself within the neoliberal capitalist Western society, something Theodor Adorno lamented viewing it as the reduction of art to easily digestible consumer goods.⁶¹ Using techniques adapted from literary theory, rhetorical theory, and reader-response as well as consumer behavior reports on music is essential to understanding the role of music within commercials and the impact that they have on public perception and behavior. Music speaks

⁶¹ Theodor Adorno and Richard Leppert, "Why Is the New Art So Hard to Understand?" in *Essays on Music* (University of California Press, 2002), 127–134.

volumes to the listener and is a necessary and omnipresent attribute of any symbolic vehicle. No message can be crafted without the appearance of style, regardless of the medium, and musical messages are no exception.⁶² By understanding its narrative function a larger discourse opens up about the narratives of the advertising brands themselves.⁶³

Greenwashing and Fast Fashion

When discussing the environmental impact of a clothing retailer there are many factors to consider besides what happens to the clothes after the consumer is done with them. We must consider where and how the material is being sourced; what kind of material is being used; how the resources are being processed and what kind of chemicals are being used; how the waste matter is being disposed of; how the finished products are packaged; how they are transported from manufacturing facilities to retail outlets; and how they are disposed of if they are not sold. When attempting to ascertain the environmental sustainability of a company and its practices, it is more complicated than it originally seems. In my own musings I have often concluded that consumers and perhaps the brands themselves may not even be aware of how they are negatively implemented, due to the increasingly globalized and outsourced nature of business. However the issue arises not from these companies' lack of environmental sustainability, but the false public promotion of a green image that fools consumers into believing that they are making an informed choice.

Greenwashing is the practice in which companies make environmental claims that give the impression that their productions and production methods have a less harmful effect on the

⁶² Timothy D. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism*.

⁶³ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

environment or climate.⁶⁴ This is often achieved through the use of language like “green,” “environmentally friendly,” “gentle,” “sustainable,” and “fair” however, unlike “organic,” and “fair trade” these terms are not regulated or clearly defined and can be interpreted in multiple ways. By touting such language in advertisements and mission statements, companies lead consumers to believe that they are making an informed and environmentally ethical choice without further explanation of their practices. Every country has their own set of regulations regarding advertising, but in the United States of America, section 5 of the Federal Trade Committee Act prohibits deceptive acts and practices in or affecting commerce.⁶⁵ A representation, omission, or practice is deceptive if it is likely to mislead consumers acting reasonably under the circumstances and is material to consumers’ decisions. However, these guidelines also make it difficult to determine if an advertisement is deceptive, especially surrounding the use of ambiguous terms like those listed above, making it difficult to take legal action.

Fast Fashion, also sometimes referred to as McFashion, is a marketing strategy in which retailers deliberately manipulate trends and influence the supply and demand for merchandise. Treating clothing like produce that spoils quickly, these retailers eschew the typical four-season cycle of fashion and instead release new garments and trends on a rolling bi-weekly basis.⁶⁶ Disproportionally affecting young women, this strategy creates a sense of urgency and scarcity by swiftly replacing products to maintain customer interest and strategically limiting items placed on the retail floor, thus making buyers feel compelled to update their wardrobes to stay

⁶⁴ Susie Ekstrand and Kristine Lilholt Nilsson, “Greenwashing,” *European Food and Feed Law Review*, no. 3 (2011): 167–73, 169.

⁶⁵ “Green Guides,” Federal Trade Commission, November 8, 2013, <https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/green-guides>.

⁶⁶ Jana M. Hawley, “Digging for Diamonds: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Reclaimed Textile Products,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 262–75, 263.

current and to do so before they miss their opportunity.⁶⁷ This method of production comes with a heavy environmental toll. The clothing being sold in this model is made cheaply, to facilitate the rapid production, and consumers are expected to wear the items fewer than 10 times. This planned obsolescence, both in terms of quality and stylishness, contribute to and encourage throwaway culture. Jana M. Hawley reported that in America discarded clothing adds up to an estimated 68 pounds per person a year, with most of it ending up in landfills. The environmental impact goes further though.⁶⁸ To facilitate the rate and cost at which items are manufactured in fast fashion synthetic fibers are used, polluting the with hazardous chemicals environment during production practices, making clothing more difficult to recycle, and taking discarded clothing longer to decompose.⁶⁹ Fast fashion is difficult to avoid as it has become fairly ubiquitous amongst brands, not limited to trendy companies like H&M and Zara, who have faced open backlash. For most consumers this is how fashion and clothing more generally exist.

Nostalgia

Musical nostalgia has existed in a variety of forms, evoking emotion through specific genres, lyrical references, and sonorities. These evocations refer to real or imagined places and times, and personal or collective memory. In environmentalism, musicians and activists have used place-based nostalgia to advocate for change and awareness around ecological issues and debate. Nostalgia is most easily evoked when there is already a strong pre-existing musical tradition and local identity closely tied to place, allowing musicians to effectively comment on environmental issues through emotional inflections of memory. Once strong place-based genre

⁶⁷ Shipra Gupta and James W. Gentry, "Evaluating Fast Fashion: Examining Its Micro and the Macro Perspective - Eco-Friendly and Fair," in *Eco-Friendly and Fair: Fast Fashion and Consumer Behaviour*, ed. O'Reilly Media (London: Routledge, 2018), 206.

⁶⁸ Hawley, "Digging for Diamonds," 264.

⁶⁹ Hawley, "Digging for Diamonds," 264.

connotations are well established it becomes easy to manipulate them or draw on their associations to carefully craft an emotional aesthetic within an advertisement. Helen Rees's article "Environmental Crisis, Culture Loss, and a New Musical Aesthetic: China's 'Original Ecology Folksongs,'" links Western literature on ecomusicology, musical sustainability, and nostalgia to explore 21st century China's craze for "original ecology folksongs" as a response to rapid loss and major environmental degradation. Rees breaks down the term "original ecology folk songs" in terms of theory, aesthetic practice, and musician rhetoric linking it with nostalgia in terms of the romanticization of the simple and the rural resonates with a longstanding tradition in classical Chinese poetry of idealizing the natural environment and a reclusive rural life as a form of nostalgia for the past in the face of the country's rapid industrialization.⁷⁰

As musicologist Alexander Rehding addresses, nostalgia offers a communicative tone that is more palatable to audiences rather than the abrasive and -eco-anxiety inducing overtones that are so often used by researchers, media, and activists.⁷¹ However, nostalgia merely places rose colored glasses on the situation, focusing on the personal experiences that will be lost if no action is taken. Artists like Canadian country musician Corb Lund successfully combine both nostalgic and apocalyptic sentiments. In "'This Is My Prairie': Corb Lund and the Albertan Fossil Fuel Energy Debate," musicologist Jada Watson analyzes three of Lund's songs as a musical response to the current environmental crisis in Alberta caused by the extraction of fossil fuels. The author expands her analysis to include genre consideration and music videos, relevant considerations as she states that Lund's fans were more receptive to the change in style that

⁷⁰ Helen Rees, "Environmental Crisis, Culture Loss, and a New Musical Aesthetic: China's 'Original Ecology Folksongs' In Theory and Practice," *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 53-88.

⁷¹ Alexander Rehding, "Ecomusicology between Apocalypse and Nostalgia," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 409-14.

accompanied his message due to his position on the fringe of the existing country music genres.⁷² While the lyrics of “This is my Prairie” are not overly political, Watson points out the overt politicalness of the music video. Later in her analysis of “Getting’ Down on the Mountain” Watson reveals the apocalyptic undertones in Lund’s apparent anticipation of a fuel-shortage. In this case study, Watson observes how the music of a single artist acts as a vehicle for social commentary on both sides of the debate by drawing on a strong sense of local identity and personal experience while successfully writing apocalyptic and nostalgic undertones. In advertising the connection to place aids in promoting environmentally responsible behavior, as seen in Patagonia's May 2014 advertorial documentary. The short film, released in combination with AEG uses a hiker to tell a personalized narrative, illustrated by Orientalized brush paintings, in which he laments the slow loss of a beautiful glacier which he enjoyed visiting. The hiker appears on screen as sitting somewhere outside, reflected in the soundscape by the sounds of birds and long grass blowing in the wind, and the music that underscores the advertisement is completely acoustic, leaning away from the sounds of technology to further romanticize and evoke nature and naturalism.⁷³

H&M

On September 3rd, 2015 Swedish retailer H&M released a video on their official YouTube Page titled, “H&M Conscious: Sustainable fashion through recycled clothes” with the description “Join H&M on a mission to create more sustainable fashion. Recycle your clothes,

⁷² Jada Watson, “‘This Is My Prairie’: Corb Lund and the Albertan Fossil Fuel Energy Debate,” *American Music* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 43.

⁷³ AEG, “Patagonia on Sustainable Clothing,” YouTube Video, 11:09, May 21, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=xgPSDh3XXpA&t=171s>.

jeans and fabrics of any sort in any one of our stores — together we can close the loop [...].”⁷⁴

The video was an extension of the 2012 release of the new *H&M Conscious*, a line of clothing made up of a “selection of sustainable fashion pieces that make you both look and feel good. Our range of organic and sustainable clothing offer you a variety of new wardrobe favorites.”⁷⁵

As a massive corporation in the global fashion industry H&M has been the focus of immense backlash for their environmental and social impacts, following the increased emphasis on sustainable fashion that has arisen over the past decade.⁷⁶ To better their impact on the planet H&M partners with several environmental agencies and coalitions such as I:CO, Sustainable Apparel Coalition, and Global Fashion agenda, which they proudly display on their website advertising their shift towards a “circular” business model, meant to maximize resources and minimize waste, opening up for new projects like the H&M Group initiative “Take Care.” The company plans to eventually transition to total use of renewable electricity in the hopes of achieving a “net positive” impact on climate by 2020. The company also offers for customers to view their annual sustainability report, a flashy magazine type report filled with trendy infographics filled with facts like, “95% of cotton used by H&M Group is recycled or other sustainably sourced.” All of this was in response to public backlash about the company’s wasteful practices. It should be noted, however, that there are many other brands that unlike

⁷⁴ H&M, “Sustainable Fashion | Women’s Organic & Sustainable Clothing | H&M US,” H&M, accessed January 26, 2020, https://www2.hm.com/en_us/women/concepts/conscious-sustainable-style.html.

⁷⁵ H&M, “Sustainable Fashion.”

⁷⁶ Kristen Leo, “Honest H&M Ad,” YouTube Video, 2:52, April 10, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xb_AENMIPOY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xb_AENMIPOY;).; Teen Vogue, “The Problem with Fast Fashion,” YouTube Video, 5:23, Sept 21, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq0--DfC2Xk>.

H&M do not disclose information about their production practices and therefore do not face the same eco-backlash from consumers.⁷⁷⁷⁸

H&M recycles all the materials brought in by customers through I:CO, a company that deals with the recycling process. I:CO hand sorts the items in factories across 60 countries, evaluating them according to the international waste hierarchy of reuse before categorizing the items of clothing and shoes according to their next best possible use.⁷⁹ The company states that, “from an ecological viewpoint, it is best to reuse clothing and shoes,” and wearable items and sold as second-hand goods.⁸⁰ Some unwearable items remain in a closed loop within the textile industry and can be used for production of new clothes or shoes. I:CO meets the technical and material-specific challenges of this core competency through collaboration with various partners on transformational projects. According to their website “recovered (clothing) fibers are spun into yarn and can be integrated into the supply chains of I:CO’s partners.”⁸¹

Throughout the years H&M has released several commercials to help advertise their *H&M Conscious* line. As our collective understanding of sustainability has evolved, so have the advertisements. The case studies I have chosen are not by any means the only advertisements for

⁷⁷ H&M, “Sustainability Reporting,” accessed February 9, 2020, <https://hmgroup.com/sustainability/sustainability-reporting.html>.

⁷⁸ Lucy Siegle, “Why Fast Fashion Is Slow Death for the Planet,” *The Observer*, May 7, 2011, sec. Fashion, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/may/08/fast-fashion-death-for-planet.>; Jim Dwyer, “A Clothing Clearance Where More Than Just the Prices Have Been Slashed,” *New York Times*, January 5, 2010: An article exposing the wasteful practices of large clothing retailers, specifically the slash and trash method in which retailers ruin unsold, discontinued, damaged, or otherwise unwanted items, often by cutting holes in the items, to ensure that the products cannot be used without purchase. The article calls out H&M and Walmart specifically for incidents where large quantities of warm winter clothes were destroyed and disposed of in cities with large communities of impoverished citizens who could have greatly benefited from the donation. It is important to note that this technique is not unique to the clothing industry and that there are people who salvage much of what they need by driving from dumpster to dumpster to find what they can.

⁷⁹ I:CO, “References,” I:CO, accessed September 11, 2019, <https://www.ico-spirit.com/en/referenzen/>.

⁸⁰ I:CO, “References.”

⁸¹ I:CO, “References.”

H&M Conscious, with the company releasing an additional video in collaboration with rapper M.I.A. for World Recycle Week in 2016. I have chosen these three case studies as they portray three different iterations of H&M's sustainability advertising, each two years apart. Placing the commercials in such close dialogue highlights minute philosophical changes in the company's representation of what it means to be an ethical consumer.

There Are No Rules in Fashion

A futuristic synthesizer warbles while night shots of Tokyo subways and highways flash across the screen in a whirl of motion, interrupted by blurry angular shots of buildings and lights. A foot wearing brown leather shoes emerges from a sleek black car and onto the dramatically lit sidewalk. The other foot quickly follows before the shot shifts to display the owner of the shoes. A trendy young Asian man with an earring, possibly Japanese based on the previous images, walks towards the camera while holding an umbrella before striking a casual pose while the car's lights blink in the background. A male voiceover announces his fashion sin, wearing brown shoes after six, with tongue-in-cheek permissibility, perhaps even encouragement.

Directed by Max Vitali produced by Forsman & Bodenfors in combination with the H&M in-house production team, the 2015 "H&M Conscious: Sustainable fashion through recycled clothes" video on YouTube opens with a modular synthesizer repeating a high ascending arpeggiated motif. This effervescent hypnotic pattern remains in the background throughout the entire advertisement, barely audible under the other musical elements and voiceovers.

The image track shows a variety of thin, young adults in various "hip" urban settings with a handful of older people and children, as well as three people with differing body types from

slimness of the rest of the cast. There are a variety of skin tones, ethnicities, and religions represented, however each body that appears in the commercial is dressed very stylishly, with trendy hair and makeup. Not every person represents the mainstream style, and many are shown sporting daring fashion choices, but upon closer inspection, the people shown on screen are all renowned whether through mainstream channels or social media: Pop icon Iggy Pop, alongside models Tess Holliday and Elliot Sallors, Fashion Blogger Pardeep Singh Bahra, emerging Designer Loza Maléombho, Artist Daniel Lismore, Vogue Writer Karley "Slutever" Sciortino, Boxer Naozumi Tsuchiyama, Eyewear Designer Duo Coco&Breezy, stylists Joe Kazuaki from TokyoDandy and Yuya Nara, Costume Designer Roberta Haze, Hijabista Mariah Idrissi and kimono stylist Nobuko Okubo are all depicted breaking some sort of fashion "rule." These figures help to establish the ideology that the message in the advertisement applies to a global audience, no matter your style, religion, or race: Fashion, specifically H&M fashion, is for the young, global, aspirational wealthy, and trend obsessed consumer.

The use of urban settings aids in creating the sense of globality and metropolitan glamor. Los Angeles, the subways and highways of Tokyo, the London underground, and the Royal Burroughs of Kensington, make up most of the background for this commercial. While most of the shots contain a human figure, some are landscape shots that underscore the urbanness. The few settings that are not distinctly urban are chichly suburban parts of cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco. Many iconic fashion cities across the world are shown either explicitly in the images or are referenced through décor and style, like the Paris-esque café.

The video ends with a black screen and moving block text that mirrors the voice over's words, "there are no rules in fashion, except one:" the screen goes black again for a split second before the text "recycle your clothes." appears as one unit, underlining the voiceover's tone and

the importance of the message. Until this point in the video there is absolutely no indication that the intended message is an environmental one. The music is “artificial” in that it is produced electronically and very few natural elements appear, mainly flower beds and lawns, amidst the many urban and suburban settings.

Bring It On.

Bring it on. The torn stocking. The stained t-shirt. The discolored panties. The lonely sock. The washed-out dress. The thing you never wore. Or this, and this, and that. The thing with the color that wasn't your color. Bring it on. The ruined sheet. The old. The forgotten. The jeans that don't fit anymore. Bring your rags and we will deal with them. Yes. Let's take it on, our mutual bad conscience. Let's load it, drop it, toss it, sort it. Let's squeeze it, stack it, send it off to be worn by someone else. By her, or him. Suck the metals out of it. Rip it, grind it, tear it. Tear it into smaller pieces. Let's shred it into fibers and stitch it into something new. Let's turn your unwearable into cloth or stuff them into car seats. Let's cut your jeans into pieces and make new jeans out of them. Let's collect the very best from your leftovers and press it into cardboard. Just bring it: the useless, the misfits, the redundant. We'll make sure it gets what it deserves. The only thing we will not do, is waste it.⁸²

The "H&M' Conscious: Bring it on" commercial was uploaded to the company's YouTube channel in January 2017. In the description, the company urges consumers to love and care for their garments for as long as possible, but to bring them to H&M when they need a new life. Directed by Crystal Moselle and produced by the company Somesuch & co., the ad was released shortly after H&M "appointed" I:CO to conduct the re-use and recycle process and

⁸² H&M, “H&M Conscious: Bring it on,” YouTube Video, 1:38, January 25, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i4JSzB8VIU>.

pledged any money they earned through garment collection to research and innovation to "close the [textile industry] loop."

Like the commercial explored previously, "Bring it on" also features a poetic voiceover, this time a lower female voice with a posh West-London accent.⁸³ The voice over reads out a series of "non-desirable" clothing items, punctuated by the title line "bring it on." The theme of the text is broken by the phrase "Bring your rags and we will deal with them. Yes. Let's take it on, our mutual bad conscience," imploring audiences to participate in the recycling program by invoking a heavy dose of eco-guilt and anxiety. This strategy affects consumers already prone to these sentiments, while simultaneously holding up the H&M Conscious line as a convenient solution. However, the way that the clothing that the advertisements encourages audiences to bring in is problematic. While some of the items cannot be re-worn or donated such as "the discolored panties," or "the lonely sock," and some of the items listed are "ruined" beyond traditional use like "the stained t-shirt" and "the ruined sheets" many of the items listed are simply undesirable such as "the washed out dress[,] the thing you never wore," and "the thing with the color that wasn't you color." These items in no way need to be recycled for materials, they simply need to be reused. Once brought in to H&M store these items may be redistributed through second-hand markets, however not all second hand clothing is treated equally in this hidden sector.⁸⁴ The consumer is still encouraged to "ethically" discard usable clothing simply because they do not like, relieving them of their guilt. This tactic is good for business and the company's image; however, it does little for the planet, encouraging consumers to completely

⁸³ The voice in question sounds suspiciously like musician, rapper, and activist M.I.A. who had been featured on another H&M Conscious commercial for World Recycle Week in April of 2016. H&M, "H&M World Recycle Week featuring M.I.A.," YouTube Video, 3:37, April 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7MskKkn2Jg>.

⁸⁴ Jana M. Hawley, "Digging for Diamonds," 273.

overlook the “Buyerarchy of Needs”, based off of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which views new purchases as a last resort.⁸⁵ Moreover, this ad throws in another level of activism, aligning the company with the gender equality movement through a pointed moment in which a woman appears on screen wearing a gold sequined dress while the voice over reads, “let’s send it off to be worn by someone else. By her, or him,” and a man then appears on screen wearing the same dress, combining environmentalism with LGBTQ activism. While this dualistic activism makes the company look good, it misleads consumers by simplifying the complex process of textile recycling. While the process does avoid the punitive costs of landfill, provides

The most recent H&M Conscious commercial, released in mid-September 2019, bears many similarities to the previous two: models are shown wearing the most recent trends while a female voice over reads a script with words related to clothing and sustainability.⁸⁶ The commercial is designed in a semi-narrative arc where a young, thin, black woman goes about what the audience must assume is a typical day: meeting a male romantic interest, meeting up with friends on a rooftop patio and, laying in the grass and chatting with a female (romantic interest?). The slender bodies in the commercial are androgynous, with non-binary hair, make up and clothing. The ad is shot in a combination of muted color shots, black and white, and red.

The commercial opens with a grassy park scene where poshly dressed man and woman stroll while the words "Fashion made from recycled bottles*" appear on screen in white lettering. Underneath the words "*at least 50% is made from recycled plastic PET bottles or other

⁸⁵ Laurie Rivetto, “Buyerarchy of Needs: Using What You Have, Borrowing and Swapping,” Michigan State University, April 6, 2015.

⁸⁶ H&M, “H&M Conscious Collection 2019: Fashion made from recycled PET bottles,” YouTube Video, 0:32, September 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGic>.

materials that have less impact on the environment" appear in a smaller font before the shot cuts to the couple with their foreheads pressed gently together, inviting sexual tension, and the *H&M Conscious* collection logos appear on the screen while the voice over begins with the words, "crave it," before cutting to a scene of the couple in a private indoor setting where they kiss while the voice over speaks the words, "have it," creating the sense of instant gratification of the thing that was being craved for, both the kiss and the clothing, just a few seconds earlier, inviting customers to buy the thing they have been lusting after. The company strengthens this reading further by including in the YouTube description with which this video was published, "From the checkered suit on everyone's wish list to cozy, oversized knits and bright pops of colour: your new season essentials from our Conscious Collection are here!"⁸⁷

The music is indistinguishable from the previous two commercials seen in this chapter, minimalist, repetitive motives over an electric beat. The only time the background electronic music cuts out when the voice over says, "leave it where it belongs," and an artful close shot of plastic water bottles being crushed is shown on screen with the appropriate plastic crinkle sound effects. The shot of bottles being pushed down is immediately contrasted with another close up shot of a patterned fabric being pulled upwards, accompanied by the expected rustle of cloth before the shot changes to the woman opening her eyes in bed and the music returns while the voice over intones "resurrect it." In actuality, this sequence of sounds and images makes up less than a second on the advertisement; however, it succinctly carries the entire message of the clothing line: plastic goes in, fabric comes out, something that is punctuated sonically both by

⁸⁷ H&M, "H&M Conscious Collection 2019."

the absence of music and the inclusion of sound effects as sonic signifiers. This tactic also proves beneficial for communicating the message of the ad to those who may not be actively watching the visuals

Conclusion

While these case studies may appear insignificant in the ecological battle for sustainability, it is important to note that H&M is the second largest clothing retailer in the world. Their products, business practices, ethics, and ad campaign have a massive global reach and effect and their practices also help set the precedent for the clothing industry. In all three commercials the musical message is clear, "We are modern. We are electric and trendy and hip. Recycling is cool and mainstream." The music strays from the stereotypical acoustic folk trend laid out in other environmental activist songs, removing the brand from the hippie tree-hugger image that often comes to people's mind when they think of environmentalists.⁸⁸

"Crave it. Have it. Spin it. Flip it. Keep it chill. Shake it. If it's been dumped, pick it up. Leave it where it belongs. Resurrect it. Care for it. Wear it and wear it again."

The last three phrases in the third commercial examined in this chapter reveal a shift in H&M's stance on environmental sustainability and how they market it to their customers that I argue is significant to understanding the company's shifting role in environmentalism. The first commercial has practically nothing to do with environmentalism. It could be construed as attempting to rebrand environmentalism as a mainstream for all kinds of fashionistas, but that

⁸⁸ Kate Galloway, "Ecotopian Spaces."

does not count for much in terms of practical change. In the second commercial explored, the viewer is encouraged to discard clothing on a whim because they no longer like it rather than because it is not useful in any capacity. The caveat is that this does not have much of a positive environmental impact if any at all, while giving consumers a boost of the eco-conscious feel goods while still participating in the fast fashion industry. The final commercial shows a real change in advertising mentality, informed by common environmental practices. These small but practical changes of using what clothing you already have, caring for it, and repairing it are important but it is important to note that the substance of what they are asking consumers to care for has not change: the quality is still poor, the ability to alter and recycle clothing is still difficult because of material choices they are making, and the emphasis of trend over style puts an expiry date on them from the moment they are made.⁸⁹

While this transition and growth more closely reflects common tenets of environmentalism, H&M is only aiming to be less bad and still has a long way to go before they can be classified as an ethical or sustainable company. Bente Øverli, the Deputy Director of Norway's Consumer Authority states, “[H&M is not] being clear or specific enough in explaining how the clothes in the Conscious collection are more ‘sustainable’ than other products they sell.”⁹⁰ Ultimately reminding us that at this point we are unable to determine if H&M can truly back up their claims to sustainability with the limited amount of information provided to consumers about how Conscious clothes are manufactured versus other H&M products. That being said, ecomusicologist Mark Pedelty writes that, “developing more sustainable ways of life

⁸⁹ Hazel Clark, “SLOW + Fashion - an Oxymoron - or a Promise for the Future...?,” *Fashion Theory* 12, no. 4 (2008): 427–46.

⁹⁰ Tabitha Whiting, “‘Sustainable Style’: The Truth Behind the Marketing of H&M’s Conscious Collection,” Medium, June 27, 2019, <https://medium.com/@tabitha.whiting/sustainable-style-the-truth-behind-the-marketing-of-h-ms-conscious-collection-805eb7432002>

is difficult. [...] Yet ecological knowledge and consciousness are essential, especially for those with economic power and privilege.”⁹¹ It is not enough to say that H&M is raising awareness about fashion’s impact on the planet through their vocalness on the subject. Just because something is recycled does not make it ecological. This downcycled clothing reduces the quality of the fabric and its production creates harmful toxins.⁹²

It may seem contrived to link environment, music, and commercial advertising but in these instances the three-go hand in hand. Again, to quote Pedelty, “drawing connections between music and environment is not an unnatural act. The unnatural act is assuming that music is somehow separable from the contexts in which it is made and consumed. From acoustics to aesthetics, the places where we live, work, and play influence what music means and how it functions”⁹³ What I have found through close examination of these three commercials is growth towards proper environmental messaging in their advertisements. This gives me hope that eventually the fast fashion empire may fully embrace environmentalism, but for now commercials like these give consumers the impression that the companies and their products are more ‘sustainable’ than they are. as much as H&M attempts to champion environmental sustainability and convey environmental intentions by raising awareness and attempting to mitigate the environmental impact of their production practices, leaving fast fashion still at odds with the environment.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Mark Pedelty, *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment* (Temple University Press, 2011), 201.

⁹² William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*. 1st ed. New York: North Point Press, 2002: 56.

⁹³ Pedelty, *Rock*, 12.

⁹⁴ Pedelty, *Rock*, 2.

CHAPTER 3

Running for Racial Equality

When I first discovered the Nike “Equality” commercial, I was horrified. Filled with the righteous social justice and self-proclaimed wokeness of a white twenty something graduate student, I read many of the visual and musical elements as stereotypical tropes of blackness, an easy and problematic way to evoke race in music. I was fresh out of reading literature on musical meaning and its applications in advertising and knew that while musicologists trace what the music and lyrics reference, scholars of advertising research attempt to define the limits of musical meaning. Advertisers often capitalize on music’s pre-existing cultural codifications to subtly communicate to listeners, something commonly seen and discussed when classical music is used in luxury vehicle commercials as a trope that connotes status, refinement, and wealth. With the recent push for more inclusive representation across all forms of media, brands have turned to music to easily communicate inclusivity, but with varying degrees of success. In this chapter I fully expected to explore the presence and importance of musical identity in commercials and problematize the implicit musical troping and exoticization of the non-white. By examining the ways that people of color are represented musically using racialized genres and musical tropes I had hoped to open up the dialogue to post-colonial discourse, problematizing these techniques and highlighting the fact that often they are employed in commercials that promote diversity and inclusivity. As I dove into the research, I found something different than what I was expecting.

Context

The Nike “Equality” commercial first aired during the 2017 Grammys. It was again shown the next weekend at the National Basketball Association (NBA) All-Star game, kicking off Nike's contract as the league’s official apparel provider for the 2017-2018 season. The advertisement was produced by Wieden+Kennedy, an independent creative company that comprises eight offices across the world. They state that their a core mission as , “building strong and provocative relationships between companies and their customers.”⁹⁵ The commercial is directed by Melina Matsoukas, who has two Grammy Awards for her work on Rihanna’s “We Found Love” and Beyonce’s “Formation.” Matsoukas began her career “shaping powerful brand stories with some of the biggest names in entertainment.” She has directed projects for Jay Z, Lady Gaga, Snoop Dogg, Solange, Pharrell and Rihanna, and was also the first solo female director to receive an MTV award in the Best Video category. Matsoukas has worked frequently with Beyoncé, beginning in 2011, when she was asked to come on as the creative director for the singer’s album, *4*. Melina again worked with Beyonce as the visual architect for the groundbreaking 2016 album, *Lemonade*, and directing the music video for “Formation” music video.⁹⁶ The underlying themes of which are of black agency and messages of hope in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and long traumatic histories, the video “became a powerful rallying message for black people as they faced a divided country in the throes of

⁹⁵ “About WK | Wieden+Kennedy,” accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.wk.com/about/>.

⁹⁶ For more on the video for Beyonce’s “Formation” and the album *Lemonade* please consult “Tinsley Beyonce in formation”; Kevin Ball, “Beyoncé’s ‘Formation,’” *Film Criticism* 40, no. 3 (2016).

tumult.”⁹⁷⁹⁸ Matsoukas’s stylistic and thematic approach to directing is strikingly recognizable with bold and graphic simplicity, and visual indicators of black experience make it very distinct. According to Matsoukas’ website, “Matsoukas’ brand of provocation instead comes from a unique, inherently multicultural point of view that flips existing narratives to normalize the inclusion of women and people of color in spaces where they previously were not represented.”⁹⁹ Despite this, the Nike “Equality” commercial visually appears more similar to another track on the Beyoncé’s 2016 *Lemonade*, the music video for “Sorry” directed by Kahlil Joseph and Beyoncé herself.¹⁰⁰ This video is made of high contrast shots filmed entirely in black and white. Joseph also places emphasis on setting, using a Greek revival mansion on a sugarcane plantation, a real-world place, as the setting but transforming it into “a fantasy space. An opulent estate dedicated to black women’s pleasure and power rather than forced labor.”¹⁰¹ Other similarities exist between the commercial and music video including the presence of tennis superstar Serena Williams. Perhaps Matsoukas drew inspiration from “Sorry.” However, this music video is iconic and became a recognizable symbol for the courage, power, and sexuality of Black women, Nike’s “Equality” can be read as invoking Beyoncé’s “Sorry” and everything it stands for.¹⁰² Besides Williams, this commercial also casually features a number of internationally renowned athletes including NBA star LeBron James, Victor Cruz, Megan Rapinoe, Dalilah Muhammad and Gabby Douglas. Michael B. Jordan, who makes a brief cameo, provides the voiceover. The

⁹⁷ Malina Matsoukas, “Biography,” PRETTYBIRD, accessed March 6, 2020.

⁹⁸ Curious about the politics of race and the effects of Hurricane Katrina? Consult Keith. Wailoo, *Katrina’s Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*, 1 online resource (vii, 209 pages): illustrations vols., Rutgers Studies in Race and Ethnicity (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

⁹⁹ Malina Matsoukas, “Biography.”

¹⁰⁰ Malina Matsoukas, “Biography.”

¹⁰¹ Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Beyoncé in Formation: Remixing Black Feminism* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 105.

¹⁰² Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Beyoncé in Formation*, 109.

commercial also features Alicia Keys who performs a cover of Sam Cooke's famed civil rights anthem "A Change Is Gonna Come."¹⁰³

Video

Black and white shots of a community on the board of a river, massive piles of gravel adjacent to busy roads that frame apartment buildings neatly arrayed to surround a community basketball court as a jazzy piano soulfully plays a few chords to accompany a voice over. The camera shifts to a bird's eye view of the basketball court, the painted lines a bright white amongst the monochrome greys surrounding it. The voice over says, "Here within these lines," emphasizing the importance of the basketball court as a definite space. The next shot cuts to a view of the court from behind a chain link fence and we watch the players as it begins to snow. A man in a black hoodie has his back to the camera but as it continues to snow, he turns and looks directly into the camera through the fence, revealing himself as LeBron James. The location near the river and the close quarters of the housing units invoking the history of African-American transition to crowded urban areas. Tera W. Hunter notes that "by the turn of the century, black residents were jammed together in enclaves on the worst topography of the city," often in flood planes or areas without adequate sewage or water hookups.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ Hunter also notes that the co-habitation of people of color in these enclaves lead to a thriving culture of community that often took place within the communal spaces of the neighborhood, like the basketball court

¹⁰³ For further reading on historical and modern Black Anthems please consult Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (NYU Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Tera W. Hunter, "Sexual Pantomimes," *The Blues Aesthetics and Black Women in the New South.*, in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald M. Radano, Philip V. Bohlman, and Houston A. Baker (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 145–67, 147.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the intersections of blackness and urbaneness consult Hollis Ralph Lynch, *The Black Urban Condition: A Documentary History, 1866-1971* (New York: Crowell, 1973).

in the video. The fence that James looks through can also be read symbolically, harkening back to racial segregation enforced by physical barriers such as a fence or curtain.¹⁰⁶ More broadly fences symbolize division and separation, something that is overcome by the end of the commercial's narrative.

The scene changes to a bird's eye of four identical tennis courts broken into groups of two by a high fence, another symbol of division. The voice over again repeats, "here on this concrete court" as the camera does a sweeping pan on tennis superstar Serena Williams. The shot cuts to the back of a young black woman, dressed in all white playing tennis with a young blond woman dressed in black, her distance from the camera making it impossible to determine her skin color. Again, the camera switches scenes to a shot taken from directly above a soccer field and voiceover reads, "this patch of turf," and we watch the players, white and black uniformed dots from the distance, move around the field. The shot cuts to Megan Rapinoe couching on the field dressed in all black with a white Nike "swoosh," the brand's iconic logo, positioned above her heart.¹⁰⁷ Rapinoe rose to prominence as an American professional soccer player, captain of Reign FC in the National Women's Soccer League and the United States' women's national soccer team. She is also widely known for her open advocacy and support for LGBTQ+ athletes and equal pay as the men's national team following the U.S.' World Cup quarter-final victory over France in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup held in France. The commercial, still in black and white shows a shot of the legs of a dark-skinned soccer player performing feints to

¹⁰⁶ Tera W. Hunter, "Sexual Pantomimes," 147.

¹⁰⁷ A note on clothing: Although this commercial is shot in grayscale and it is impossible to tell what colors are being worn, there is a tendency for those with darker skin to be dressed in light colors which appear white or light grey through the filter whilst light skinned people to be dressed in dark colors which appear black on screen. Obviously, this helps to maintain visual clarity and visual continuity in the high-contrast shots, but there is probably more symbolic value to this choice.

outmaneuver an opponent. The scene cuts to two black youths playing a game of one on one basketball on the street in front of a rundown church with bars on its windows, suggesting it is in a rougher neighborhood. The shot cuts to a wider view of the scene, revealing the church as the Everlasting Truviere Missionary Baptist Church. The youths continue their game and the boy shoots the ball into a decrepit basketball hoop while a black and white police car pulls up from the adjacent alley, coming to a stop near the youths. During this scene the voice over reads, “Here, you’re defined by your actions. Not your looks or beliefs.” The urbanness of the scene invokes the history of black communities in urban spaces as seen above.¹⁰⁸ The police car, represented sonically with the squeak of breaks as it pulls up next to the youths, invokes the long history of racial profiling, police brutality, and antagonism towards to black youths and particularly black men.¹⁰⁹

The next scene is of a black man carrying a can of spray paint walking down the street wearing white athletic hoodie and dark Nike sweatpants. The hoodie in this shot as well as many others seen throughout the commercial have a long and tortuous history and have accrued negative stereotypes through home security commercials in which home invaders are often depicted pulling a hood up over their head before attempting to break into a house.¹¹⁰ More

¹⁰⁸ Tera W. Hunter, “Sexual Pantomimes,” 147.

¹⁰⁹ Bernard E. Harcourt, *Against Prediction: Profiling, Policing, and Punishing in an Actuarial Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Stephen Egharevba, *Police Brutality, Racial Profiling, and Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System*, Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies (Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global, 2017); James T. O’Reilly, *Police Traffic Stops and Racial Profiling: Resolving Management, Labor, and Civil Rights Conflicts* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 2002); Kathy L. Hahn, *Racial Profiling* (Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2011); Kris Hirschmann, *Racial Profiling* (Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2006); Deborah. Kops, *Racial Profiling*, Open for Debate (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2007); Noël Merino, *Racial Profiling*, Current Controversies (Farmington Hills, Mich: Greenhaven Press, A part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Linton Weeks, “Tragedy Gives The Hoodie A Whole New Meaning,” NPR.org, March 24, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/03/24/149245834/tragedy-gives-the-hoodie-a-whole-new-meaning>.

recently, the hoodie has become a symbol of racial profiling and police brutality against the black community due to its association with the tragic murder Trayvon Martin in 2012.¹¹¹¹¹²

The next shot shows a young black woman with her hair pulled into loose buns on either side of her head, wearing a dress, and shaking another can of spray paint. She looks down and the camera transitions to a shot taken from above her head to lend her perspective to the audience. She appears to be standing in a tennis court and she walks a few steps across and crouches down, presumably to begin spray painting. The shot then cuts to a close up of the spray can and then expands out to a different scene where a black man dressed in all black, probably LeBron James but, is also crouched, this time on the basketball court from the first scene. The scene jumps forward in time a few seconds to where the man has continued to spray paint a line all the way out the fenced boundaries of the court and up nearby stairs. The commercial then cycles through shots of the other two spray painters before also showing a group of black female cheerleaders, football players celebrating, and a soccer team of both black and white men in a pregame huddle. Then the montage continues, showing the cheerleaders now spray painting the ground, separate shots of Serena Williams and Michael Jordan walking while people in the background are spray painting various surfaces. As the camera switches to a wider shot the audience can see that all the painters have recreated the lines of sports fields on cars, city walls, the highway, and fences. Four cars drenched in white paint drive in a staggered formation, leaving continuous lines of white tire tracks in their wake. The camera cuts to the reverse to show seven female runners dressed in Nike gear, three in shorts and sports bras, two in shirts and shorts, and two wearing long pants and sleeves with hijabs covering their heads. The women run

¹¹¹ Linton Weeks, "Tragedy Gives the Hoodie A Whole New Meaning."

¹¹² Thank you to my advisor, Travis, for pointing this out to me.

behind the cars, using the lines left on the road like lanes on a running track. “Opportunity should not discriminate,” says the voiceover as the camera does a wide pan on the face of a black woman in a white hijab, “the ball should bounce for everyone.” Alicia Keys, who performs the music for the ad, stands in a white suit at a white piano in front of a wall outside a mom and pop grocery store with the words “Equals Everywhere” painted in huge letters on the wall. The use of graffiti and the choice to use spray paint rather than painting the lines with brushes is a significant one. Sonically, it stands out for the viewer of the commercial, but it also invokes a feeling of radical subversives as it is often seen as an illegal act of vandalism. Moreover, it invokes the history of its use by the Black Panthers in the United States, who regarded graffiti as “an appropriate means to articulate a position that, in concerns of media presence, was inferior, but could stand for a much larger number of people.”¹¹³¹¹⁴

Soundscape Equality

The music constitutes an important portion of the commercial. Most prominently it provides a softened affect amidst the high contrast black and white images of gritty urban and industrial settings. Gently piano chords advance the first images. The chords continue slowly, outlining a minor progression that builds immense tension before slipping back down to a resolution. This opening figure mimics a narrative arc, but also creates an air of melancholic tiredness. As the progression resolves, we see the first close up shots of the basketball players and hear the sounds of their movements and the bounce of the ball. As LeBron James turns to

¹¹³ Johannes Stahl, “Graffiti,” in *Protest Cultures: A Companion*, ed. Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth (Berghahn Books, 2016), 228–33, 230.

¹¹⁴ For more on graffiti and politics, including racial politics, consult Jeff Ferrell, *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (Northeastern University Press, 1996); Tyson Mitman, *The Art of Defiance: Graffiti, Politics, and the Reimagined City in Philadelphia* (Bristol, UK ; Intellect, 2018).

look directly into the camera, the right hand of the piano enters with a plucky upwards motive, landing on a Bb that carries across to the next scene where it continues around a lower neighbor figure before resolving briefly back to the Bb. As the music continues over the next set of scenes it becomes less disjunct and begins to blend cohesively into a forward driving melody. At the 0:27 minute mark, the shot where the spray paint can is first seen, the organ is faded into the mix. The use of this instrument invokes the historically black genre of jazz and offers a quasi-religious tone to the images. If we extrapolate this within the context of the commercial, it suggests that the act of creating lines of inclusion rather than exclusion is of an almost divine importance. As the montage of athletes continues the piano crescendos into a driving bass, building momentum that is mirrored on screen by Serena Williams and Michael B. Jordan's striding walk and the increasing numbers of spray painters in the streets behind them. As the music continues to build, the humming voices of a female gospel choir is heard before Alicia Keys enters mournfully with the lyrics, "It's been a long time coming, and I know," at this point there is interplay and overlap with the male voiceover, "and I know, change gonna come." No sooner than she finishes the lines a muted trumpet sounds to double the choir. Incredibly, and although the commercial has been going on for over a minute, the music is still building in both dynamic and through the layering of instruments. Finally, the commercial reaches its musical, thematic, and visual peak (the amount of shots has been irregularly speeding up in time with the music) with the addition of the drum kit.

Jazz is a genre intrinsically linked to the North American Black experience.¹¹⁵ Beginning in the cultural stew of Louisiana with its mixture of European, Caribbean, African, and American

¹¹⁵ McClendon, Alphonso. *Fashion and Jazz: Dress, Identity and Subcultural Improvisation*, Bloomsbury Publishing Place, 2015, 153.

elements served as a birthplace for Jazz amongst other musical hybrids.¹¹⁶ Propelled by the black community and drawing heavily on transplanted collective memory of African cultures, jazz became intrinsically connected to New Orleans's black community, something that "shaped, in turn, the jazz performers' self-image, their sense of what it meant to be an African American musician."¹¹⁷ As the genre grew and started getting traction with white American's Jazz musicians of great skill were listened to through "color blind" ears, an incredibly problematic concept but black musicians took advantage of the platform for wider public audience to which to voice antiracist agendas.¹¹⁸ That today jazz is widely considered to be America's music fails to acknowledge the genre's deep roots in Black culture and community as well as the continued marginalization of that community in American society.¹¹⁹¹²⁰

What I find remarkable about this sonic experience of this commercial is the inclusion of all ambient sounds within the soundscape. I find there to be something immensely raw and unique about the inclusion of the ambient sounds such as the whoosh of the spray paint and the sound of the rolling tires. The sounds help to sonically support the narrative, ensuring that the images are evoked without the need to look at the screen. Moreover, not only has Matsoukas timed them beautifully with the music but the sounds create a grittiness, a realness that helps to ground the narrative in a sense of reality. The sports sounds, that of the basketballs hitting the concrete court and asphalt, the scuff of shoes on various surfaces, the hollow and distinctive thwump of a tennis racquet into contact with the ball, evoke a very personal nostalgia for anyone

¹¹⁶ McClendon, Alphonso. *Fashion and Jazz*, 153.

¹¹⁷ Kevin Kelly. Gaines, "Duke Ellington, 'Black, Brown and Beige', and the Cultural Politics of Race," *Music and the Racial Imagination*, 2000, 600.

¹¹⁸ Kevin Kelly. Gaines, "Duke Ellington," 600.

¹¹⁹ Paul Austerlitz, *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race, and Humanity*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.

¹²⁰ For more on blackness and music outside of jazz please consult *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure* (NYU Press, 1998).

who has been invested in these activities. Because Nike creates sports gear and athletic wear it can be assumed that most of their customers and target audience have had the sonic experiences necessary for the ambient sounds to invoke nostalgia and draw the viewers further in emotionally to the narrative the commercial creates. The voiceover and singers overlap with one another and the ambient sounds of the image track without competing. Doing so had the potential to be a disastrous choice as it risks the muddling of all the sonic signifiers at play. However, Matsoukas has carefully and artfully coordinated the ambient sounds in time with the music, and the music to the voiceover to create a symphony of sound that functions as a whole rather than separate parts. The coordination of the elements is done in such a way that the sonic playing field is metaphorically level, with voiceover, sound effects, and music all easily taking equal precedence without competition, reflecting the inclusive social equality sought after in the commercial.

Conclusion

The commercial ends with a final montage of professional and amateur athletes ensuing, with a notable scene where a crowd is seated on the steps of a courthouse with the words “Equal Justice Under Law” engraved above Ionic columns. They then stand, symbolizing the need for society to “stand up” for equality as the voice over reads, “Work should outshine color. If we can be equals here, we can be equals everywhere” with LeBron James speaking the last sentence on screen and looking directly into the camera, as if addressing the viewer directly. The words “Equality has no boundaries” appear in white block text above a bird’s eye view of a basketball court which is now drawing massive crowds. A final shot cuts to the crowds where we see a young black girl sitting on a man’s shoulders with a white Nike Swoosh positioned in the center of the scene. This final shot drips with nuance: The child invoking the future, specifically the future of Black children and the possibility of a world where they do not face discrimination

based on race (and perhaps gender). The position of this image and its symbolism next to Nike's logo suggests that the company wishes to project the image of being a pivotal element in achieving that future. But does Nike actually play a role in advancing this cause?

This advertisement is part of Nike's ongoing EQUALITY initiative which began in 2017. In that year the company donated \$5 million to organizations that advance equality in communities across the United States, including MENTOR an organization that ensure youth receive quality mentors and connects volunteers to opportunities in their communities, PeacePlayers and the Ever Higher Fund.¹²¹ As part of the EQUALITY initiative, Nike has also launched a program called "Until We All Win" which their website they say that, "Nike is proud to support numerous national and local organizations that provide services to underrepresented youth, including African-American youth, during the year, through mentorship, leadership development, coaching, city league sport programs, and other community initiatives."¹²² The initiative is part of Black History Month, with the BHM logo featured prominently on the top left hand and it should be noted that for Black History month, Nike drops a new collection to celebrate. As far as I can tell, no portion of the sales is donated to their equality initiative partners. However, the Nike 2020 BHM collection also featured this note: "Nike is helping kids reach their greatest potential by creating an equal playing field through community investment. For Black History Month, Nike is recognizing 20 U.S.-based nonprofits that offer play and sport programs, and support education and career development, with a total of \$500,000 in grants."¹²³ Keep in mind that in 2019 alone, Nike's global net income was US\$ 4.029 billion and that Phil Knight, the company's founder and chairman emeritus was listed by Forbes as one of the 20

¹²¹ Nike, "Nike Equality," accessed March 9, 2020, <http://equality.nike.com/#program>.

¹²² Nike, "Nike Equality."

¹²³ Nike, "BHM," accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.nike.com/bhm>.

richest people in America, with an estimated net worth of US\$ 33.4 billion.¹²⁴¹²⁵¹²⁶ At this point in my research, I have been unable to find reports on how much Nike allots per year to philanthropy, however, in 2018 Knight gave almost one billion dollars' worth of Nike shares to charity, representing 0.7 percent of the company's outstanding shares and 3.1 percent of his US\$ 32 billion fortune.¹²⁷ It is unclear to which charities this money went. While Nike does donate to other causes and US\$ 500,000. towards the EQUALITY campaign is far from an insignificant amount of money. If this US\$ 500,000 is split two ways between PeacePlayers and MENTOR, this donation makes up roughly 6.25% and 3.5% of their annual donations each year.¹²⁸ In terms of how far this money goes, it does not even cover the salaries of those employed full time at each organization.¹²⁹ Although everything I present here helps to simplify the finances and the relative impacts on both the donor and the recipient, the world is not this simple and there is always more that we can consider. For instance, these are not the only charities Nike is involved in. They also run the Nike Foundation which in 2017 had total donations of US\$ 24,279,337. The Nike Foundation began in 2004 began investing in adolescent girls as powerful agents of change in the developing world. Their initiative, "Girl Effect", focuses on four key pillars: Ending early marriage, delaying first birth; Ensuring health and safety of girls; Accelerating secondary school

¹²⁴ "Nike's Global Net Income 2005 to 2019," Statista, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www-statista-com.www.libproxy.wvu.edu/statistics/241685/net-profit-of-nike-since-2005/>.

¹²⁵ "Richest People in America 2019," Statista, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www-statista-com.www.libproxy.wvu.edu/statistics/201426/the-richest-people-in-america/>.

¹²⁶ For reference, he came in three spots above Tesla and SpaceX owner Elon Musk (US\$ 22.3B).

¹²⁷ Tom Metcalf, "Phil Knight Just Gave \$1 Billion of Nike Shares to Philanthropy," Bloomberg, October 5, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-05/phil-knight-just-gave-1-billion-of-nike-shares-to-philanthropy>.

¹²⁸ "The National Mentoring Partnership, Inc. - GuideStar Profile," accessed July 24, 2020, <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/52-1674088>.

¹²⁹ "PEACEPLAYERS INTERNATIONAL - GuideStar Profile," accessed July 24, 2020, <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/52-2272092>.

completion and transitions to good jobs. Despite this, Nike Inc. still faces backlash for using sweatshops outside of the United States with grossly underpaid workers.¹³⁰¹³¹

As I discussed in the chapter previous, there are always more layers and connections to be explored ad nauseum to help piece together the puzzle of Neoliberal Capitalism and corporate charity and the ethics of representing that relationship through commercial advertising. As I am writing this preliminary study in 2020, I question if using such a beautifully crafted and emotionally evocative video such as this over-represents Nike's contribution and impact on racial equality. As I have presented this research the question has arose, "But don't these commercials do good simply by raising awareness about the issues they present?" Honestly, I do not have an answer. We cannot forget that they are capitalist businesses whose goal is to make money through consumerism. This commercial makes you feel good about Nike and, more importantly, good about shopping at Nike. While I appreciate the artistry of this video and the narratives within it, I cannot overlook its utilitarian purpose. Is putting activism in a commercial beneficial because it raises awareness? Does it raise any awareness at all? Is this relationship a symbiotic one or parasitic? Is there any benefit to activist-consumerism? Lest you think that I am coming off greener than thou, I am just as caught up in this web as you are and am struggling to find answers at the crossroads of art, advertisement, and activism.

¹³⁰ Marc Bain, "Nike Is Facing a New Wave of Anti-Sweatshop Protests," Quartz, August 1, 2017, <https://qz.com/1042298/nike-is-facing-a-new-wave-of-anti-sweatshop-protests/>.

¹³¹ For more information on this please consult Naomi Klein, *No Logo*. Canada: Vintage Canada, 2009.

Chapter 4

Tone Deaf but Still Tasty

Merchandisers use protests and social movements as a theme to help them connect to specific and often younger audiences. In the previous chapter, I discussed Nike's "Equality" video advertisement and its alignment with the Black Lives Matter movement. The use of this theme is successful for one of three reasons: 1) Subtle representation of protesting or demonstrating 2) Alignment with the merchandiser's brand identity 3) Basis in reality: Nike regularly donates to philanthropies in line with the philosophies expressed in their commercials. In this chapter I turn to a recent Pepsi commercial that also piggybacks on social movements but was entirely unsuccessful. Although this short film advertises a product outside of the fashion industry, but I have chosen to include it in this document for a few different reasons. Firstly, it employs many of the same techniques seen in the previous two case studies: the famous face, this time of Kendall Jenner, to endorse the product; themes of demonstrations and protest, popular styles of music, equality, justice, and police brutality. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, despite these similarities the commercial, company, and Jenner all faced immense public backlash. This chapter digs deeper into what makes the difference between the successful application of a social justice commercial and a flop of one.

PepsiCo., the parent company for the soft drink brand Pepsi, is one of the world's leading food and beverage companies with over tens of billions of dollars in annual revenue. Established in 1965. PepsiCo owns several other well-known global brands including Pepsi, Lay's, Tropicana, Gatorade, Uncle Ben's, Aunt Jemima, and Quaker. From their website,

As one of the largest food and beverage companies in the world, our mission is to provide consumers around the world with delicious, affordable, convenient and complementary foods and beverages from wholesome breakfasts to healthy and fun daytime snacks and beverages to evening treats. We are committed to investing in our people, our company and the communities where we operate to help position the company for long-term, sustainable growth.¹³²

The Pepsi ad titled “Live for Now Moments” was launched on April 4, 2017. It followed in the footsteps of Pepsi’s 2012 “Live for Now” campaign and in the press release that announced the release of the ad, the company stated,

Throughout 2017, Pepsi® is celebrating life’s ‘Live for Now’ moments. Moments when we decide to let go, choose to act, follow our passion and nothing holds us back. ‘Jump In,’ a short film that depicts these moments and stars Kendall Jenner, captures the spirit and actions of those people that jump into every moment. It features multiple lives, stories and emotional connections that show passion, joy, unbound and uninhibited moments. No matter the occasion, big or small, these are the moments that make us feel alive.¹³³

The ‘Jump In’ Pepsi® Moments film takes a more progressive approach to truly reflect today’s generation and what living for now looks like. Kendall is the latest in an impactful line-up of global icons to work with Pepsi® and she exemplifies owning ‘Live for Now’ moments. [...] The creative, which will be seen globally across TV and digital, was produced by PepsiCo’s in-house content creation arm, Creators League Studio.¹³⁴

Attached to the press release were two statements: one from Kendall Jenner, the star of the video, Jenner states,

I am thrilled to join the legendary roster of icons who have represented their generations and worked with Pepsi®. To me, Pepsi® is more than just a beverage — it registers as a pop culture icon & a lifestyle that shares a voice with the generation of today. The spirit of Pepsi® — living in the ‘now’ moment — is one that I believe in. I make a conscious effort in my everyday life and travels to enjoy every experience of today.¹³⁵

¹³² “PepsiCo,” accessed July 14, 2020, <https://veteranjobsmission.com/meet-the-coalition/pepsico>.

¹³³ Kristina Monllos, “Pepsi’s Tone-Deaf Kendall Jenner Ad Co-Opting the Resistance Is Getting Clobbered in Social,” Ad Week, April 4, 2017, <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/pepsis-tone-deaf-kendall-jenner-ad-co-opting-the-resistance-is-getting-clobbered-in-social/>.

¹³⁴ Kristina Monllos, “Pepsi’s Tone-Deaf”.

¹³⁵ Kristina Monllos, “Pepsi’s Tone-Deaf”.

The other statement was from Skip Marley, grandson of Bob Marley and the writer of the song “Lions” that acts as the soundtrack for the ad: “Standing together and being unified in the moment is a powerful experience. This song ‘Lions’ that Pepsi® selected for the ‘Moments’ ad should remind our generation to look at the way you are living and find strength and calm in each moment.”¹³⁶ In these statements those involved in the commercial hoped to capture the spirit of a generation in a single moment and expected the commercial to quickly become an iconic moment for the brand. The ad featured a host of beautiful people marching in the streets, holding up peace signs, smiling and dancing all in the classic red, white, and blue of the Pepsi logo (and American flag). Almost every diversity box was checked: cultural, racial, gender, gender identity, and sexuality. To help entice viewers further America’s “favorite white supermodel” Kendall Jenner played a central role in the narrative arc of overcoming hardship. The advertisement lasted for a total of about 24 hours before being pulled from air by the company after severe public backlash. Within 48 hours from launch the bootlegged video had made it onto all forms of social media as, “to many viewers it was clear the two-and-a-half-minute ad was going to be problematic right from the start.” Twitter and Facebook lit up with people pointing out “just how gauche the whole thing was.”¹³⁷ In that 48 hour window the video had already racked up nearly 1.6 million views on YouTube, with five times as many downvotes as upvotes, and mainstream news outlets had done extensive coverage. How did this highly anticipated commercial that the participants were so excited about bomb so spectacularly with

¹³⁶ Lily Tillman, “Case Study: PepsiCo & Kendall Jenner’s Controversial Commercial,” *astute*, June 17, 2019, <https://astute.co/pepsi-kendall-jenner-commercial/>.

¹³⁷ Katie Serena, “Remembering Kendall Jenner’s Pepsi Ad, Which Lasted 24 Hours Longer than It Should Have |,” *Salon*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.salon.com/2017/04/05/remembering-kendall-jenners-pepsi-ad-which-last-ed-24-hours-longer-than-it-should-have/>.

the public? Finding the answer requires a deeper analysis of the creative elements and the ways they were implemented.

The Commercial

The advertisement opens with a close up shot of someone cracking open a cold Pepsi. The next shot centers around a hipster-dressed Asian man playing a cello on the rundown helicopter pad on top of a tall building with rosy hues of dusk drenching the skyline behind him. The shot cuts suddenly to the same man wildly playing the cello in the pouring rain, virtuosity suggested by his serious expression, a broken bowstring and the lighting flashes that articulate his wild and maestro-like movements and the moodiness of the scene. We then see a woman wearing a multicolored hijab and nose ring as she frustratedly pours over her photographs while an open can of Pepsi sits on the table at her elbow. Intermittently, these two scenes are interrupted with shots of a group of demonstrators, all wearing and sporting signs in Pepsi's red, white, and blue, happily gathering in the streets. In the foreground of the protest scene, a blond Kendall Jenner in a metallic silver dress works a photoshoot. She poses suggestively with both arms above her head before the shot widens, displaying her entire silhouette and revealing the three male photoshoot workers. While they work the shoot, the demonstration grows in the background. Jenner finally notices the protestors, breaking out of the role of model and watching with open curiosity. The audience gets to see more of the diverse crowds of young people holding signs that read, "love" and "join the conversation." Meanwhile, the cellist and photographer both look as though they are experiencing a creative block, him taking a melancholic break from practicing and her crumpling up her photographs in frustration, that leads both to notice the demonstrators literally outside their windows. Separately they both join the movement: the man, still attached to his cello, finding a guitarist to make music with and the

woman with her camera excitedly capturing the protest as if this has been the big political event she needed to boost her creativity and add meaningfulness to her work.

The narrative cuts back to Jenner as she continues to model although she is openly distracted by the crowds of joyous demonstrators now dancing and laughing in the street. The cellist passes her, and they flirtatiously lock eyes before he nods for her to join the march, she smiles suggestively before the shot cuts to a close up out-of-narrative shot of Jenner's face with minimal makeup and her natural dark hair. Back in the protest scene, Jenner takes off the blond wig shaking out her dark hair and joining the protest while wiping off her dark lipstick. Suddenly we see a line of four white male police officers, one in a helmet, blocking the protestors. There is then a montage of the blissful and diverse demonstrators, including trans folk, a young Islamic man in tunic and taqiyah yet somehow in all of this diversity everyone is young, thin, beautiful, and hip looking. Kendall grabs a can of Pepsi from a cooler bucket someone brought to the demonstration and sidles past the cellist as they again make flirtatious eye contact.

Making her way through the crowds, Jenner fist pumps a demonstrator using the hand in which she holds her Pepsi and the shot expands to reveal her body which is now inexplicably clothed in a white shirt, high waisted blue jeans and a utilitarian-esque silk jacket. She finally sees the police and her easygoing joy is replaced with confusion and concern before she smirks knowingly, bouncing on the balls of her feet like a boxer sizing up an opponent before smiling and striding up to a young male officer. The female photographer is seen crouching and documenting the interaction through her camera as Jenner hands the officer her Pepsi. Smiling excitedly at the shot, the photographer takes a picture of the officer accepting drinking the beverage enthusiastically as the demonstrators cheer as if they have won a major victory and commence hugging and high fiving in celebration. The officer turns to look at the officer next to

him in the blockade and smiles and shrugs as if to say, “It’s pretty great” or “What did you expect?” Whether he is referencing the Pepsi, Jenner, or the demonstration is unclear as the screen then fades to black before revealing a fourth-wall breaking shot of Jenner holding a Pepsi as she model-struts towards the camera, leading the cellist, photographer, and other demonstrators as the words “LIVE BOLDER. LIVE LOUDER. LIVE FOR NOW,” appear on the screen ending with the Pepsi logo closing in on the scene like the end of a looney tunes cartoon.

Underneath the commercial plays the song “Lions” by Skip Marley. With lyrics like, “Yeah, if ya won’t let us demonstrate / Yeah, if ya hiding behind a gun / Yeah, if ya hoping we’re gonna run / You’re Wrong” and “We are the movement, this generation.” It is clear why Pepsi chose this song as the backtrack for their protest themed commercial. The timbre of the vocals and lead guitar are dark and gritty, and the song sounds more like a march into battle rather than the blissful block party-esque parade happening in the visuals of the commercial. In the original video Marley along with other young adults appear to infiltrate a smokey room where an old white man who appears to be a politician yells angrily into the microphones of a press podium. Throughout the music video the youths literally fight off armed guards and literally pull down the politician and achieve liberation. The use of this song and affiliation with the music video offer the commercial a much-needed dose of seriousness and reality that is otherwise absent in the visual track. Moreover, Skip’s relation to Bob Marley adds an additional level of perceived authenticity to Pepsi’s ad by invoking Marley Sr.’s own legacy of musical activism for non-violent action.

Inherent Problems

The “Live For Now Moments Anthem” commercial borrows much of its imagery from the Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter movements and was accused of commodifying and trivializing social movements to sell soft drinks and belittling the experiences of minorities facing police brutality. If the moment when Jenner approaches a line of officers seems familiar to you, it is because it probably is. The image of a single person peaceful standing in the face of police can be seen in other protest photographs such, including Marc Riboud's shot of a Vietnam war protester holding a flower in front of armed police, the many photos of the Tank Man (also known as the Unknown Protester or Unknown Rebel), a lone Chinese man who stood in front of column of tanks trying to leave Tiananmen Square on June 5, 1989, More recently, the photo “Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge” taken by Jonathan Bachman for Reuters in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on July 9, 2016. The image features female protester Ieshia Evans, a nurse from Pennsylvania, unarmed and dressed in a long spaghetti strap dress standing against police officers dressed in riot gear during a Black Lives Matter demonstration to protest the shooting of black men by police following the fatal shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile.¹³⁸

The advertisement also fails in its representation of Asians and Asian Americans through the portrayal of the cellist that is reminiscent of a younger, hipper Yo-Yo Ma, thus invoking all of Ma’s artistry and fame by boiling him down to a racialized cellist. Musicologist Mina Yang posits that Ma has become an icon of classical music who portrays himself as a “legitimate mouthpiece for the ‘universal’ language of Western art music” through the downplaying of his Chinese ancestry. By invoking this globally recognizable mouthpiece of musical universalism

¹³⁸ Joshua Berlinger, “Baton Rouge Protests: Photo Everyone Is Talking about - CNN,” July 11, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/11/us/baton-rouge-protester-photograph/index.html>.

Pepsi portrays their beverage and their brand as similarly universal.¹³⁹ However, this is a cheap ploy that to my eyes and ears reinforces stereotypes that Asians and Asian Americans are all gifted classical musicians. Participants in Yang's surveys note how "Asians are expected to have incredibly perfect technique and typically considered to not have musicality of their own." Additionally, "Asians are expected in some degree, to be extremely meticulous and technically proficient, and in some degree to be more mechanical than musical."¹⁴⁰ Yang also points out that this stereotype occurs commonly in film where Asian kids often play in the orchestra and provide nerdy comic relief to a white protagonist.¹⁴¹ While the cellist in the Pepsi commercial does not provide any comic relief he does appear to play second fiddle to Jenner who takes the star role as the white lead in the narrative arc. In this one token character probably cast to create and portray diversity within the commercial and the brand the company reinforces negative stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans within a happy go lucky narrative, seemingly without even noticing the blunder.

Initially Pepsi defended its marketing choices in the wake of the backlash, saying the company felt that, "this is a global ad that reflects people from different walks of life coming together in a spirit of harmony, and we think that's an important message to convey."¹⁴² Later Pepsi amended their position stating that, "Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize. We did not intend to make light of any serious issue." In addition to pulling the ad campaign off the air Pepsi also publicly

¹³⁹ Mina Yang, *Planet Beethoven: Classical Music at the Turn of the Millennium*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 40.

¹⁴⁰ Yang, *Planet Beethoven*, 37.

¹⁴¹ Yang, *Planet Beethoven*, 37.

¹⁴² Kristina Monllos, "Pepsi's Tone-Deaf".

apologized for placing Kendall Jenner into the middle of this situation.¹⁴³ Jenner stayed completely silent during the violent backlash against the commercial as people questioned how Pepsi thought this ad could possibly be ok. Saturday Night Live even did a sketch that humorously depicts what happened “behind the scenes” leading up to this commercial, with a Kendall Jenner look-alike appearing briefly, speaking ditzily into a cell phone saying, “I stop the police from shooting black people by handing them a Pepsi. I know, it’s cute, right?” Jenner can be seen addressing the commercial in the trailer for the 14th season of Keeping Up with the Kardashians, where she can be heard saying: “It feels like my life is over,” and during the first episode of season she tearfully says,

I would never purposely hurt someone. Ever. And I would obviously if I knew that this was going to be the outcome, like, I would have never done something like this. But you, you don’t know when you’re in the moment and like, it was the most like, it was, like it was so, like I just felt so f*king stupid. The fact that I would offend other people or hurt other people was definitely not the intent, and that’s what, that’s what got me the most, is that I would’ve ever made anyone else upset.¹⁴⁴¹⁴⁵

Please note that I do not consider this to be an apology but rather a description of her experience with the fallout of the commercial as part of her family’s reality show. It is important to note that almost all of the negative response to this commercial the media and public was aimed towards Kendall Jenner and Pepsi. The fact that Skip Marley also played a role in the ad was relegated to a mere fun fact about the music that accompanied such a disgraceful image track. In fact, Marley benefited from the buzz and his song “Lions” that was featured in the ad jumped several spots on the charts following the controversy. Some reporters even went so far as to call the song the only

¹⁴³ Pepsi Statement Re: Pepsi Moments Content,” PepsiCo, Inc. Official Website, accessed July 14, 2020, <http://www.pepsico.com/news/press-release/pepsi-statement-re--pepsi-moments-content0405201>

¹⁴⁴ In this instance I use the asterisk to transcribe that the word suck is obscured with the characteristic beep, also known as “bleeped out.”

¹⁴⁵ Entertainment Tonight, ““KUWTK’: Kendall Jenner Tearfully Apologizes for Pepsi Commercial: ‘I Genuinely Feel Like S**t,’” YouTube, December 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G9L9QKTSQM>.

bright spot in the scandal. According to audience perspective Marley is somehow less complicit in this commercial than Jenner despite having also made hype tweets that clearly implicate him as an active collaborator. The uneven levels of response to both of these celebrities' involvement in the commercial are baffling and opens up the possibility for further dialogue about the intersections of gender, race, and economics.

Parade Not Protest: What Went Wrong

Looking away from the inherent issues of this specific case study for a moment, using demonstrations to convey a “world changing” message is uncommon amongst merchandisers, just look at the previous chapter. Soda companies in particular have been taking globalist approaches to their marketing, pitching messages of global unity to coveted demographic for years with perhaps the most memorable of these campaigns being Coca-Cola's enduring "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" campaign, first aired in 1971. Acknowledging this long “world changing” history, why did Pepsi’s advertisement go so wrong? Larry Chiagouris, a professor of marketing at Pace University attribute the backlash to Pepsi being a couple of years "late to the party" with its message about unity, making its ad seem exploitive.¹⁴⁶ However, I suggest that the key lies with the creators of the film and their relationship to the PepsiCo company. At the 2016 Cannes Lions Festival, PepsiCo’s president Brad Jakeman energetically talked up the company’s decision to switch entirely to in house advertising forming the “Creators League Studio.” In house advertising is much cheaper and faster than hiring an ad agency. Jakeman bragged, “Instead of five pieces of content a year, a brand like Pepsi needs about 5,000 pieces of content a year. Instead of taking six months to develop an ad, we have six hours or six days. And

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Hobbs, “Pepsi’s Ad Failure Shows the Importance of Diversity and Market Research,” *Marketing Week (Online Edition)*, April 7, 2017.

instead of it costing \$2m, it needs to cost \$20,000.” It is clear that PepsiCo had total faith that their in-house marketing team, Creators League Studio, had created something “beautiful and socially responsible; something that all people could rally around, believe in, agree with, and that would make everyone want to go out and buy a Pepsi.”¹⁴⁷ The marketing industry rarely seeks diverse voices when creating content, so perhaps this failure is part of a wider industry failing and was due to the lack of people of color and diverse viewpoints within the in-house marketing team. Andy Nairn, Co-founder of Lucky Generals advertising agency states that while he believes that the field of advertising needs to hire more diverse marketers, he is of the opinion the Pepsi controversy would have still happened stating that, “Even if an in-house agency is filled with people of colour then they will still likely become so wedded to the brand, and see things through the lens of the brand, that they fail to spot tone or how the outside world perceives their brand.” Jason Snyder, chief technology officer, of brand experience agency Momentum Worldwide agrees explaining that, “Brands often suffer from myopia when trying to articulate their own value to the marketplace. [...] Being the story and telling the story at the same time is rarely a successful combination. A good agency will provide objective examination, done with real rigor, of how, where, why and when to tell a brand story. And that is a very valuable thing.”¹⁴⁸ Yet even if Pepsi’s marketing team was diverse there are other inherent issues with the use of a protest theme in the advertisement. PepsiCo as a corporation is not known for philanthropy or supporting any activist groups. Fern Miller, the chief strategy officer at global marketing agency, DigitasLBi, believes that this Pepsi advertisement failed because despite their lack of activism history they did not reach out to any protest groups during the creative process.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Hobbs, “Pepsi’s Ad Failure.”

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Hobbs, “Pepsi’s Ad Failure.”

Corporations like PepsiCo need to over-index in how much they worry about the outside world perceiving them yet somehow there's still a sense of tunnel vision. If you get involved with the protest movement in your ad then you need to really engage with these people on the front line and try to understand the nuances of what they are doing. If you don't, well, then you can see what results look like.¹⁴⁹

The reason that the Pepsi ad is so unpalatable in comparison to the Nike commercial is two-fold:

1) The music and image track are linked together through diegetic sound. 2) The ideals being portrayed are specific and closely mirror the brand's projected identity. Throughout the of the Pepsi commercial there are few diegetic sounds: the crisp snap of a can of Pepsi being opened and poured out, camera shutters at the photo shoot, a car door slamming, the woman crumpling her photographs. However, these sounds do not have the expected sound quality, instead they sound resonant and artificial, the effect being that they sound like imposed sound effects rather than sounds naturally occurring within the film world. To be more direct, the sound effects included sound more like how you would imagine them to rather than how they do in real life. This post-production veneer, that bridges on meta-diegesis, creates for the audience a sense of distance, a lack of authenticity, from the narrative that leaves them emotionally detached and unable to buy in to the message of the ad. The Nike commercial incorporates a variety of diegetic sounds that's qualities are believable to bridge the visual track, music, and voiceover together into one cohesive world that draws in viewers and keeps them engaged. The second point listed above also deals with the believability of what is being portrayed, but in relation to the brand rather than to the real world as discussed above. The Nike ad creates a sense of authenticity through reference to a movement that aligns with the brand's publicly stated ideals. They chose a specific movement that many of their consumers can relate to and then incorporated celebrities who embody the movement's ideals and bring their own stories of struggle and triumph to the

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Hobbs, "Pepsi's Ad Failure."

ad. PepsiCo as a parent company is not known for any sort of affiliation with activist movements or not-for-profits. They are not publicly known for their self-catalyzed campaigns or support of meaningful causes and this comes through in the commercial. There does not appear to be a specific reason for the demonstrations, the signs are filled with generic ideals of “love” and “peace” and the police almost appear to be coincidentally at the movement rather than antagonists to the plot. Their choice to draw so heavily on protest themes seems so awkward because it does not align with Pepsi as a brand. They have commodified the protest movement, and by doing so in such close proximity to the heat of Black Rights Matter demonstrations simply through gas on the fire. This ad also features a celebrity, but Jenner’s appearance does not lend the ad authenticity or gravitas. Her whiteness and economic status preclude her from an underdog narrative. To put it simply, she has not had any major obstacles to overcome. The celebrities in the Nike commercial bring their own backstories that in turn adds a level of depth and realness to the ad that highlight the superficiality of Jenner’s appearance.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

When reading this thesis, it is hard not to get overwhelmed at the vastness and complexity of social and environmental politics present within these advertisements. I often feel at the mercy of large corporations and unable to make a meaningful difference when it is so easy to fall prey to the messages advertised in these commercials. I, a zillennial, fashion, and eco-conscious, libertarian, am their target audience and like many young people I acutely feel both the urgency of saving the planet and the desire for massive social reforms. Advertisers and brands know this and actively play on our (read my) fears, hopes, and dreams to keep us complicit in this neo-capitalist system and continuing to support popular companies. I do not hold it against them, their job has always been to use the things that matter to consumers to sell products and from personal experience, it is a lot easier to continue purchasing things, especially from large corporations like Nike and H&M, when my social and eco guilt has been briefly assuaged.

As I sit here writing this conclusion in the spring of 2020, we as a global population are concurrently dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread civil rights protests sparked by the uneven profiling and violence inflicted upon racialized people. I have honestly lost count of the number of personal emails, letters, and statements of care and solidarity that I as a consumer have received from the C.E.O.s of companies, including those that I barely shop at. I feel more like a shareholder than a nameless, faceless consumer that I have been in the past, something that I believe to be a conscious effort on the part of these brands to keep their

communities of consumers. Current issues are no longer being ignored by corporations, likely in response to the trend in which the newest generations of young adults appear to crave meaningful, personal, and ethical interactions rather than the transactional purchases of the past.

I do not presume to speak on behalf of my generation, but I will however note my own tendency to make purchases based on the perceived ethicalness of a product and this is not something isolated to just the fashion industry. For example, take the bottle of hand sanitizer on my kitchen counter: the “pretty” bottle is made of “recyclable, refillable, reusable” aluminum and advertises itself as “sustainable suds,” that are vegan and cruelty free. Moreover on the bottle it is noted that with every purchase the company donates “one bar of soap and one month of clean water to a child in need.”¹⁵⁰ Despite needing hand sanitizer during a mid-pandemic trip to Target, I was ecstatic to find something that fit my self-proclaimed morals so easily available at a mainstream shopping center. Even when writing about H&M I am struck by my own complicity in the fast fashion industry. I continue to shop there, often under the guise of “research,” despite knowing that the most environmentally friendly method of clothing myself is to buy second-hand whenever possible, reusing items rather than purchasing new ones. However, this comes with inherent drawbacks such as being unable to find clothes that are fashionable, fit my ever-changing body, are of a suitable quality to be reworn, and professional enough to teach in or to attend conferences. Some eco-activists would insist that I invest in a small capsule wardrobe made up of ethically sourced and produced garments under the understanding that owning a few pieces of clothing that are well made will last longer, keeping them out of landfills. This seems like a favorable solution, however ethically made clothes are priced astronomically high in

¹⁵⁰ “Hand in Hand Hand Sanitizer Grapefruit - 10 Fl Oz,” accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.target.com/p/hand-in-hand-hand-sanitizer-grapefruit-10-fl-oz/-/A-79797654>.; “Clean Hands Set,” Hand in Hand Soap, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.handinhandsoap.com/products/clean-hands-set>.

comparison to popular retailers like H&M or Old Navy and most young people and people at the lower end of the socio economic spectrum cannot afford to pay upwards of \$US 50 for a cotton t-shirt, especially those in post-secondary education who can barely afford rent each month. Other scholars have pointed out to me that this above statement overlooks the fact that there are now socially and eco-conscious products at lower price points. I stand by previous statement, but I do concede that perhaps clothing should not be as cheaply available as it currently is.

Consumer Agency Revisited

For most people reading this document, the capitalist consumer mindset and the endless choices of products, brands, and services will be familiar and perhaps just a click away.¹⁵¹ Choosing between competing brands to suit our lifestyles and identity is an everyday occurrence. Advertisement and fashion capitalize on our individual sense of identity with by releasing a constant stream of new products, styles and images that keep us in demand of products to help us define and present ourselves as fashionable and up to date to the world.¹⁵² More simply, advertising and fashion do not just sell us products, they manufacture and market identity, promoting the belief that happiness is to be found through consumption.¹⁵³ With this in mind, it seems that consumers are at the mercy of corporations but, as I mentioned in the introduction, consumer choice cannot be fully anticipated or controlled, despite the attempts to influence our

¹⁵¹ Gordon R. Foxall, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Consumer Choice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁵² Gordon R. Foxall, "Introduction."

¹⁵³ Douglas Kellner, "Fashion, Advertising and Identity in the Consumer Society," In *Consumer Culture, Modernity and Identity*, edited by Nita Mathur, 168-203. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2014.

behavior. We must acknowledge that consumers always have a choice in their economic actions and that ultimately without the consumer, the company has no reason to exist.¹⁵⁴

Where we as a society and as individuals run into potential issues is when the assumption is made that company statements of solidarity and donations are all equal and that they are in fact altruistic as opposed to just token gestures meant to convince consumers of ethical company values. I cannot help but think of the biblical lesson of the widow's offering as it is written in the book of Mark in which Christ observes those giving monetary offers at temple and while many of the rich make large contributions a poor widow puts in two small coins. Christ then holds up the widow as an example to his disciples stating that, "The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all."¹⁵⁵ Perhaps this is only my own non-denominational Christian upbringing influencing my judgement, but personally I struggle to find a way to determine the meaningfulness of charitable donations. Does this assign an arbitrary and unnecessarily moralistic criterium on financial support? Is a dollar still a dollar even if the giver has millions or billions more to donate? Admittedly have never been a higher-up in a global company so perhaps I am oversimplifying the amount of money available for philanthropy, but I still cannot help but feel that if you were serious about furthering change you would make a sizable commitment. I do not claim to have the answer of how to separate token gestures of social and ecological altruism from those that are genuine in sentiment. However, I know that the least that one can do in order to make these judgments is to dig deeper into these claims to determine their validity. In chapter three you may have noticed the absence of detailed

¹⁵⁴ Gordon R. Foxall, "Introduction."

¹⁵⁵ Mark 12:41-44 MSG.

discourse on Nike's manufacturing plants and the use of unethical and child labor. This absence is due to lack of space rather than lack of importance because these conflicts of interest add additional levels of complexity to Nike's claims of championing racial equality, a topic worthy of further study and research.

It is easy to read these chapters in the context of other worldly issues and dismiss my concerns as the narrow anxieties of a young woman, and I draw note to my age and gender in the above sentence because I strongly believe that these intersections affect how seriously this scholarship is taken. I experience this resistance and disinterest from peers in the classroom when discussing the intersections of music and fashion, with particular disinterest displayed from male peers. It was Mark Twain who wrote that "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society."¹⁵⁶ and years within the musical institution have taught me the importance of wearing the "right" outfit whether to concerts, lessons or auditions. To those who consider themselves to be anti-fashion, fashion challenged, or you do not care enough to classify yourself; I circle back to the second half of Twain's statement, unless you are going about your day to day life in the nude, this is also your problem. This is your planet and global society as much as it is mine. Clothing is something that we all need to survive, and that music intersects with and is used to influence and our choice of what we use to cover ourselves is important to understand. Moreover, I also believe that it is important to understand the responsibility of consumers to have a better understanding of how the music of advertisements manipulates our emotional response to commercials and the overall perception of a brand. I personally operate under the guiding principle that the primary goal of all advertisements is to create and increase profits. Whole many commercials position themselves as functioning to raise social awareness,

¹⁵⁶ Mark Twain, *More Maxims of Mark* (New York, 1927).

at the end of the day the goal is to sell you something. While I do not claim that the companies studied in this thesis do not care about the causes they advertise, these adverts do everything to placate customer concerns by convincing them that the company's values align with their personal ones, thus maintaining profits.

Reflexivity Statement

It is easy for me to write all of this and claim that the best way to create change in terms of how advertisers represent the ethics and values of the companies they represent is to simply take on extensive amounts of research, diving into the tax files and records of each brand we choose to shop at. Once this research has been conducted each consumer would then need to make a personal decision about whether or not to boycott the companies which do not align with their personal values. This is a problematic solution for a number of reasons. While conducting this research I have learned and hopefully demonstrated, the web of which brands are owned by which parent company which is actually held, managed, or founded by a person (who may act differently than the professed values of the company) is infinitely complex and changing. That is not to say that it is completely insurmountable, just tedious with many switchbacks and dead ends. Sometimes tracing these lines leads to valuable discoveries about the truth behind the curtain of advertising. While I think that this is perhaps the most direct way to determine if a company truly lives up to their ethical claims, it is not feasible to do this for every single store, brand, company that we are forced to encounter. I have tried and have seen many friends, peers and colleagues attempt to do just this and it often ends in a sense of guilt, existential dread, and burnout akin to that of Good Place character Chidi Anagonye. Another issue with the approach that I have only begun to untangle for myself is that more and more brands have been acquired or

are otherwise affiliated with monstrously oversized parent companies like PepsiCo. This hierarchical/ pyramid like structure precludes buyers from many of the brands and everyday items that they are used to. At this point it may seem that the only option to operate "ethically" within this corrupt capitalist wasteland is to assume a monk like existence in which we transcend the need for worldly possessions, or at least this is often a conclusion I come to when I feel overwhelmed. Of course this is not a feasible option either and circling back to Twain we cannot go without clothing, despite the embarrassment that this would cause to most of us, we would also be fully exposed to the elements, a thought I do not relish, especially thinking about winter in Canada. This is something that we all need to consider, and the subject would benefit from further study and perhaps yield better solutions. I do not want to leave my readers with the weight of my social and eco guilt without at least providing some of the solutions that I have found beneficial: 1) If you are able to, buy local. While often pricier than "mainstream" fast fashion brands, the artisans you buy for will likely be able to tell you more about where and how the materials used were sourced. This shortens the threads you need to chase down to have a fully understanding about the ethicalness of the product. 2) Buy second hand: whenever possible turn to secondhand options rather than purchasing new. While this does not solve the overarching problems with the fast fashion industry these small actions do make a difference and they are now easier than ever with online options like Craigslist, Kijiji, or Facebook Marketplace. If you really feel strongly about one issue you can avoid contributing financially to companies whose values do not align with your own by doing the legwork and then boycotting said company.

These solutions are not new, most of us use them to some extent in our daily lives. There are thousands of social and eco warriors on the internet who blog these solutions and many more

to help assuage our guilt and individually distance ourselves from the problem. At this point I would like to turn to a wider discussion of the issue at hand. All of the suggestions made by both me and advocates overlooks the root cause of each of these problems, the corporations themselves. Making small changes to our everyday lives definitely helps to increase our agency by redirecting our capital towards companies devoted to meaningful social and environmental change. I do not want to discredit these small changes because I believe that little by little a little becomes a lot. However, these solutions merely put a bandaid on the problem without addressing the inherent flaws in this capitalist system. Choosing not to participate in something like fast fashion is an excellent first step, but does little to pressure corporations to institute meaningful changes within their company without massive boycotts that the general public does not seem to be willing to participate in. Everything that these companies do centers around increasing net profit, including minute shifts in advertising and policy to satisfy most of those that wish to seem change. In the United States advertising legislation there are few mentions of the word "greenwashing" and as far as I know, none that regulate ties between racialized philanthropy and advertising. Without policies in place to define these terms and determine the validity of claims made to them, corporations will continue to use "ish" language, images, and music to flirtatiously align themselves with political movements that they do not participate in. In short, rampant policy without practice that leads customers to falsely believe that their capital is being allotted to causes they do not believe in without any truth to the claims. Advertising music will continue to be complicit in this systemic problem unless there are calls for top down change and regulations in place to validate environmental and social claims to racial equality.

While it is tempting to discount the value of music used and created specifically for advertisements as un-important due to its commodification, this music reflects culture and has played an active role in shaping trends, cultural values, aesthetics, and ethos.^[15] Roland Barthes points out that music helps to create narrative framework within multimedia projects and that all elements add layers of connotations, thus making the combination a baklava of social, cultural, and political meaning that is understood almost instantaneously without the need for careful dissection by the audience. Consider a masking test, without music much of the emotional content is lost from the visual component. Music influences how we interpret the things being seen on screen by adding unspoken connotations that have been accrued through the use of that particular song, sonority, instrument, or timbre in culture. Musicologists have no problem accepting the validity of the study of cinematic music, and I hope that this research helps to expand the field of film music to include music within commercials. After all, commercials are, at their root, condensed films with a concentrated dose of meaning that often fly under the radar of critical thought due to their perceived glibness. When viewers and scholars engage with commercials, the music used is often overlooked as irrelevant muzak and leaving its role in the persuasion unexplored. I use the word “muzak” ironically here for its duplicity of meaning: colloquially to refer to unimportant background music, and of course referring to the company in the 1970s that specialized in background music meant to evoke and manipulate emotion.¹⁵⁷ The techniques and issues present in the case studies explored here are not unique to the fashion industry, they apply to all consumer products and the ways they are marketed and they are constantly changing as consumers become wise to the techniques. While the topic of musical

¹⁵⁷ Hervé Vanel, “Muzak Incorporated,” in *Triple Entendre, Furniture Music, Muzak, Muzak-Plus* (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 53.

advertising is decidedly underexplored most of us encounter it daily without a second thought when we should open our ears and listen critically to what these commercials are trying to say.

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