

# The natural environment covers all living media essay

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The natural environment covers all living and non-living things taking place naturally on Earth or some region thereof. It is an environment that encompasses the communication of all living species. There are many arguments to be made about the environment and all that it brings to the proverbial table. This environment, as well as man's place in this natural order, is portrayed by the media in a distinct way. The dominant ways of thinking about the environment are a function of entrenched political, social and economic structures. The dominant ideologies of technology and development are destructive of environmentally sustainable perspectives and policies. Anders Hansen's major focus of research has been and continues to be on media roles in the communication, representation and construction of environmental issues, science and health. In his book *Environment, Communication and Media*, Hansen "examines the ways in which in which communication research has contributed, and can contribute, to our understanding of the role played by the mass media and associated communication processes in making the environment and environmental problems issues for public and political concern" (Hansen, p. 7). A great example of the media playing a role in this process is when television advertisements about global warming were timed to air prior to the release of "An Inconvenient Truth," a documentary film about global warming that features former vice president Al Gore presenting compelling scientific evidence verifying the truth and causes of global warming and the urgency of the issue. Hansen asks why and how one should study media and communication in relation to environmental issues and gives two

observations: that not all environmental problems are publicly recognized as such and that environmental issues or problems, over time, fade in and out of public focus in cycles that often seem to have little to do with whether they have been addressed, resolved, averted or ameliorated (Hansen, p. 14-15). A perfect illustration of this is how little is known about acid rain, a broad term referring to a mixture of wet and dry deposition, or deposited material, from the atmosphere containing higher than normal amounts of nitric and sulfuric acids, among the general public. Acid rain is a serious environmental problem that affects large parts of the United States and Canada, but it flies under the radar because the environmental issues the media tends to talk about are more along the lines of global warming, climate change, pollution, environmental degradation, etc. There is one thing that distinguishes the use of nature in advertising and it is " the seamless way in which, in its predominant use, it blends in ' naturally' (for want of a better expression) and almost unnoticeably" (Hansen, p. 141). Hansen speaks of how the ability of advertising to forge signification links hints at freshness and health onto cigarettes and smoking, and that is the clearest example of the semiotic flexibility and power of uses and nature in advertising. He continues by saying that corporate image advertising succeeds in converting or ' re-framing' a tainted association with pollution, risk, ruthless exploitation, etc. into connotations of responsible sustainability and the image as protector and custodian of the environment (Hansen, p. 141). In turn, a lot of people are led to believe that man's place in the natural order remains at, or near, the top; however, surviving in a natural environment without any sort of man-made shelter, weapons, etc. could be

an undoing of sorts for the human race and would not be as easy the media sometimes portrays. Robert W. McChesney is an American professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign whose work concentrates on the history and political economy of communication, emphasizing the role media play in democratic and capitalist societies. In the book *The Propaganda Society*, McChesney says " a staple understanding for critical communication research is how ostensibly free press system in capitalist democracies favors content suited to the needs of elites wielding disproportionate economic and political power" (McChesney, p. 27). McChesney says that advertising has been a politically controversial issue since the emergence of monopoly capitalism. As has been chronicled, consumer movement of the 1930s and 1940s stimulated around the issue of eliminating or dramatically reforming advertising. In 1938, an investigative committee of the United States House of Representatives was created to investigate alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens, public employees, and those organizations suspected of having Communist ties. In the 1960s and 1970s, consumer activism returned to both great victory and great defeat: victory in the removal of cigarettes from television advertising and defeat in the failed efforts to ban pharmaceutical advertising (McChesney, p. 41). McChesney also talks about advertising and social costs and how it is promoting needless expenditure as well as a culture of waste. He also mentions the de-centering of core social values to values of consumption and profligacy. The " externalities" of advertising are the social costs of advertising not reflected in the commercial transaction made by the advertiser or the consumer when purchasing the advertised product. A large

problem that exists when it comes to some of the other externalized social costs associated with the sales effort is that to convince people to purchase a product, an advertiser has to establish that there is a problem that only the purchase of the advertised product can fix (McChesney, p. 39). For example, take a Snickers candy bar. The company's slogan is " Hungry? Why wait?" They are letting the consumer know that the problem of being hungry can be solved by grabbing a Snickers bar and that he or she should immediately grab hold of one to satisfy that craving of hunger. The company does a great job of advertising its product and it works as Snickers is one of the most popular and most sold candy bars on the market. When it comes to money and economics, McChesney is basically implying that advertising is not about information but rather about commodities and products. The consumer is being told what to think about without realizing that he or she is being compelled to subconsciously. Advertising has become essential to sustaining the current system, creating demand in a dormant economy. In other words, it is the essence to supporting monopoly capitalism. Without advertising, the consumer has no idea what is on the market, and by not knowing what is out there for purchase, companies would struggle to be successful. Take the Super Bowl and its advertisements as an example. Companies look forward to that day every single year so they can show their products to hundreds of millions of consumers, and in doing so, those companies receive a boost in sales (i. e. this year, Go Daddy having its biggest sales day ever after showing the model kissing the geek). Vandana Shiva, an environmentalist activist, says that technology is seen as above society, the solution to all problems in society, but is " rarely perceived as a source of new social

problems" (Shiva, p. 30) in the book *Internationalizing Cultural Studies*. One of the biggest problems she has is with the colonization of the seed. She says that the 'improvement' of the seed is not a neutral economic process; instead, the new biotechnologies follow the path of hybridization in changing the location of power as associated with the seed (Shiva, p. 34-35). In the documentary "The World According to Monsanto" Shiva says of Monsanto, the world's largest seed company, "If they control seed, they control food; they know it, it's strategic. It's more powerful than bombs; it's more powerful than guns. This is the best way to control the populations of the world." One can only hope that what Monsanto is doing comes to an end they start looking at the bigger picture: providing less of an environmental threat to this world as being more important than their own self-benefit. Ashis Nandy, a political psychologist, a social theorist, and a contemporary cultural and political critic, believes that science is seen as a neutral discourse, which is to say, it is not seen as being imbedded in certain power-knowledge equations but rather is seen to serve only the good of society. When it comes to his native India, Nandy says, "Thanks to the media, government-controlled as well as uncontrolled, and thanks to the values propagated by the westernized education system, the Indian middle classes have come to see science as a primarily spectacular technology" (Nandy, p. 5). He says that there are fueling tendencies for mega projects which have no consonance with people's real needs. In a sense it is a sort of false consciousness where one is attaining something he or she wants but does not necessarily need. There is a lot to be said about the environment, and as these authors have shown, it is very important to have an understanding of

what is going on with it because it directly affects the human population. Brushing it off as something that will go away in time is the wrong way to go about the situation. Whether it is the way the media portrays it, the social and economic structures of it or the technological aspect of it, the environment is something that needs to be looked at more and more, and in a myriad of ways, before it is too late.