

Confronting Advertising – the elephant in the bus shelter

Tim Hollo

Confronting advertising's increasing omnipresence provides a critical strategic intervention to both undermine the existing economy and usher in the new. Limiting advertising is vital if we are to build a more equal and ecologically sustainable economy, and it targets a weak spot in the corporate, capitalist, consumerist economy.

Adbusters describes advertising as “the hostile takeover of our psychological, physical and cultural environments by commercial forces”.

By creating desires, moulding cultural norms, fostering discontent and misdirecting emotional responses, advertising enables the corporate economy to maintain its hold over us. It keeps us as willing participants in our own oppression. Both deliberately and incidentally, advertising strengthens extrinsic values of wealth, power and achievement and suppresses intrinsic values that are critical to building a more equitable and environmentally friendly society.

The current economic model, reliant as it is on growth, requires advertising to continually colonise new space and open new markets. But advertising is an unpopular, unwanted, un-asked for intrusion on public and private space, ever more so as it extends itself, with online targeted advertising, television screens in train stations, and increasing blurring of the boundaries between editorial and advertorial.

Taking on advertising is an ideal way to address consumerism without blaming the consumer. Instead, it makes corporate interests and their links to government the target, aiming to reclaim public and private space for human communities and the natural world, and to close loopholes through which we subsidise corporations to sell us products.

In practice, a campaign could work to:

- Limit public space advertising, targeting local governments, public transport operators, etc;
- Remove tax deductions for advertising and sponsorship;
- Ban advertising targeting children;
- Explore ways to regulate cash for comment / live read / “native advertising” arrangements; and
- Promote adblock and other tools as a first step in tackling online advertising.

Conference Themes: Care, exchange, our relationship with the natural world.

Bio:

Tim Hollo, BA Hons 1 / LLB (UNSW), MEL (USyd), is Executive Director of the Green Institute, and founder and CEO of Green Music Australia. He was previously Communications Director for Greens Leader Christine Milne, has been both a board member and campaigner at Greenpeace Australia Pacific, and has worked for 350.org, Lock the Gate and others. His writing on environmental, social and political issues has been widely published, including at the Guardian, ABC, Huffington Post, and Crikey. His published academic research focuses on the role of music in social change.