



Is there a *qualitative* change in what we demand from advertisement in the wake of the pandemic? Has this period affected our sense of what is fake and real? Have our judgement and appetites been affected? In short: Was there an *environmental footprint* left in us, during the social isolation we endured?

In the image above, you see an historical example—from Norman Potter—of might be called an 'existential reaction' to the removal of a cast-in Aga logo with surrounding ellipse: which he suggests in an example of *fake modernity*. Above: the Aga water-heater from which he has removed the new Aga-logo.

Can we, as people working in the design field, develop a *public sensitivity* to what is *removed* an *added* in commercials, that can help us to make green-washing more *readable* in our contemporary culture? Are there tools in *actor-network theory* that may help us to this end? Is our *know-how* relevant today?



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#o6 Theory 1

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As I am writing this flyer, we are now in the situation where we have to take a stand on this question: will we be able to commit ourselves to the topic of 'advertisement critique'—as laid out in flyer B—and initiate a collaboration with the Consumer Council, by giving attention to *greenwashing* next term?

I will use this flyer to determine what I see as the theoretically *interesting* challenge, at this point: which is how we determine something as real vs. fake. If we see it from that angle, the topic of *greenwashing* can be raised at a different level, than what we see in [NGOs hacking corporate interests](#).

It means that we are not—at least not only—looking for corporate agents who are lying about their environmental responsibilities, based on fact-finding. But that we are looking out real vs. fake as cultural categories: that is, as something we read, or fail to, in our [proximal](#) cultural environments. Such as ads.

Evidently, we cannot solve the problem of green-washing by turning ourselves into the arbiters of good environmental practice, in the corporate sector. But can we *do our bit* by helping to drawing public attention to how we *read* ads, by applying the *observation* skills that we possess and cultivate in design?

What we can do—as people working in the design field—is to look at the *communication* in ads, and *deconstruct* it. This may draw positive attention to design. We can pinpoint what *escapes* the attention of people who do not have our training. Not to look down on anyone, but in order to help.

The elephant in the room is of course the *growing* presence of advertisement in our culture, while we either have to develop skills of pretending it is not there, or *pay* the price it costs to use services *free* of advertisement. There is a huge blind spot growing by the share *amount* of ads. A cultural blindness.

So, when we say to the public: *take your time to look at advertisement*, we are sure to *go against the grain* of contemporary mass communication. This is invariably what it means to think and operate as *critical agents*. Not as politicians, but as concerned citizens in an (ideally) *democratic* culture.

Here, it would seem appropriate to focus on *voice*: when we talk about the public we are regularly assuming a *silent majority*, who are muted. We do not speak for them, but we may address them. *Express yourself before ads. Talk to other people about it!* The [theatre of the oppressed](#) (Boal) is *one* remedy.

We can *also* ask the flip question: does the advertisement give voice to local workforces on which they depend? Not their work-conditions, but their views and practices of environmental care. When we see landscapes with tea yards, not knowing where they are: are we out of this world? Is it a dream factory?

This is the "voice" of the advertisement itself. [Where are we?](#) Are we extra-terrestrials, asks Bruno Latour? Then he asks: which agents are involved? Both human and not: technical and environmental. Finally, he asks: is there an idea? Is it supported by knowledge? Is this knowledge critiqued? Do the claims on know-how stand tested? Do we need/want [brand documentaries](#)?