

Re-framing the scene: appropriating familiarity for cultural change

presentation by **Gillian King** (Sustainable Jill)
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[COVER SLIDE]

Thank you. It's a delight to be here in this session [on trade mark law, consumer law and climate activism].
I was particularly interested in the comments about greenwashing.

Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting, the Ngunnawal people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending this session.
We might find it useful to draw upon their wisdom during the course of our discussions today and tomorrow.

[OUTLINE SLIDE]

[INTRODUCTION SLIDE]

[SLIDE 4 - ABOUT ME]

I have a long-term interest in climate change.

I am particularly interested in systemic change, game-changers, communication
- the cultural changes necessary for us to survive in the face of climate change.

In this talk I'm going to focus on the long tradition of activists and others appropriating what is familiar to us, particularly through parody and culture jamming, and how that can lead to cultural changes.

[SLIDE 5 – EXHAUSTED EARTH]

Because cultural change is what is needed if we are going to survive with climate change, the greatest problem that has ever faced humanity.

It is *not* just another discreet economic or political or environmental problem.

It is a systemic crisis of this planet's ability to support life as we know it, because we have exceeded some of the biophysical limits of this Earth to support us.

And we are seeing this in climate change.

In short, our Earth is exhausted because most of the people involved making decisions that affect our Earth and most of its inhabitants do not seem to understand the urgency and magnitude of the changes needed for life on Earth to survive.

[One place where we see this very clearly is in the negotiations under the UNFCCC.

It can be argued that the way the negotiations have been working has limited cooperative action as well as effective action by individual countries, companies and other organisations.]

Why?

Because, in a delightful analogy I heard very recently, the negotiators, and the interests that have had most sway with governments, have been focussing on the intricacies of the waves breaking on the sea-shore rather than taking notice of the rising tide.

They have missed the big picture, the overarching goal that should be guiding all our decisions: that is, survival.

And that requires a major change in the dominant culture that has led to this crisis.

This transformation will need to reassert the biophysical realities within which we live and promote a culture which is sensitive to and respects nature and its limits.

So, how is that going to happen?

[SLIDE 6 – CULTURE & COMMUNICATION]

That's where culture and communication come in.

[SLIDE 7 – CULTURE & COMMUNICATION detail]

No matter how you define it,
culture is about communication.

Culture is our way of life
and it's passed from person to person,
from one generation to another
by communication.

It's about *what* we communicate
and *how* we communicate it.
And that communication may be verbal or non-verbal.

The emotions we attach to communication help give it meaning.

Advertisers and activists alike use this knowledge to influence
our behaviour, thinking and culture.

[SLIDE 8 – EFFECTING CHANGE VIA ADVERTISING &
MARKETING]

Now I'd like to look at how advertising and marketing effect change.

[SLIDE 9 – EFFECTING CHANGE]

There is quite a body of work on how to go about this...

It mainly comes out of psychology,
advertising and marketing

With some coming out of project management and campaigning,
including grass roots campaigning.

It comes from professionals and from volunteers.

A lot of research and experience is published –
and there's a lot of experience that's shared via a variety of other
avenues.

[SLIDE 10 – WHY ADVERTISERS & MARKETERS?]

Advertisers and marketers are in the change industry –
effecting change is their bread and butter.

They use psychology to influence behaviour and thinking.

Their work is evidence-based.

They are creative.

And they can be *very* effective.

And now the long tradition of people who parody other people's
work, including activists, are making use of that knowledge.

[SLIDE 11 – ADVERTISERS, PSYCHOLOGY & SYSTEMS THINKING
1]

Let's have a brief look at what advertising, psychology and
systems thinking bring to the influencing table and how it's
relevant to parody and culture jamming.

You may be familiar with the idea that our brains have a filter, so we can concentrate on the things that matter most to us. But that seems to relate only to the conscious brain, that part that we use for active thinking.

The idea that everything our senses pick up makes an impression on our brains was demonstrated in 2001.

Zajonc showed that we like something simply because it is more familiar to us – whether or not we are aware of it. He called it the ‘mere exposure effect’.

[Zajonc, R. B. 2001. Mere exposure: A gateway to the subliminal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(6): 224-8]

Heath showed that every time we see an ad it makes an impression on the brain

[Heath, R. F. 2001. *The Hidden Power of Advertising*. Admap Monograph no. 7, Helney-on-Thames: Warc]

From that, we can deduce that every time we see a picture, hear a story or read words, it makes an impression on our brains.

[SLIDE 12 – NAME THESE OUTLINES]

For example, how many of these outlines can you recognise and name?

How many of you recognise the brands on the left?

How many of you recognise the leaves on the right?

Even though the leaves on the right are from the northern hemisphere plants, they grow in Australia.

Yet, these days we are bombarded with the images on the left and so they are more familiar to us.

[SLIDE 13 – ADVERTISERS, PSYCHOLOGY & SYSTEMS THINKING 2]

In fact, the more we are exposed to something, generally the more we will like it,
even if we do not develop any specific beliefs about it.

That's the mere exposure effect.

[Perner, L. Attitudes.

http://www.consumerpsychologist.com/cb_Attitudes.html
, viewed 17 February 2015.]

I think that is critical to what is driving our culture and how cultural transformation might be effected.

Advertisers, marketers, other influencers – including activists - now apply that knowledge, the mere exposure effect, to catalyse social changes.

In particular, advertisers and activists appropriate what is familiar to us in order to influence us.

Parody and culture jamming is one way this happens.

And it's an essential part of activists' armoury.

They look at the images, stories and words we use.

Then they look at how they might be used or replaced to fit the message with which they want to influence their audience.

[SLIDE 14 – PARODY & CULTURE JAMMING FOR CHANGE]

And that's where culture jamming comes in.

[SLIDE 15 – SELLING CHANGE – WHY?]

Parody and culture jamming is an important component of catalysing social change

because it is all about framing.

And reframing is, I think, the key element in changing culture.

As George Lakoff says, reframing *is* social change.

[Lakoff, G, 2004. *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know your values and frame the debate*. Introduction by Julia Baird. Scribe Publications: Melbourne. 121pp]

It opens people's eyes to alternatives to their current ways of living and thinking.

[SLIDE 16 – CULTURE JAMMING]

Culture jamming can be defined as activities that draw attention to, and at the same time subvert, the messages and images of others, and particularly things with which we are familiar.

Tick Yes says:

'culture jamming is the act of subverting mainstream media, political or advertising agendas to promote a (usually) anti-consumerism message. More than simple parody, it involves taking the elements of a popular advertisement or media statement and using them to highlight its hypocrisy, or to twist the message in order to make a social comment.'

[Tick Yes, 2012. 'A brief history of culture-jamming', *The Message by Tick Yes*, 8 February 2012, <http://blog.tickyes.com/a-brief-history-of-culture-jamming/>]

Traditionally it is a form of political and social activism that uses means such as fake advertisements (or subvertisements), hoax news stories, pastiches of company logos and product labels, computer hacking, and parody to subvert the power of the media, governments and large corporations, particularly in how they use that power to control and distort the information that they give to the public.

[jazz it up, 2010. 'Culture jamming', Week 5. Tutespark.', *All Things Jazzy*, 30 August 2010,

http://allthingsjazzy.blogspot.com.au/2010_08_01_archive.html]

More recently, commercial interests are using these tactics. We see this in the mass-production and commoditisation of counter-cultural statements and images and in guerrilla marketing.

[Tick Yes, 2012. 'A brief history of culture-jamming', *The Message by Tick Yes*, 8 February 2012, <http://blog.tickyes.com/a-brief-history-of-culture-jamming/>]

[SLIDE 17 – SIMPLY DIVEST]

This is an example of classic parody – but used as part of a cultural transformation campaign.

[Sutton, T-], 2015. *Simply #Divest - Global Divestment Day - Adelaide*, 13 Feb 2015, <https://youtu.be/zwhvoBfOmM4>]

[SLIDE 18 – CULTURE JAMMING – LEGAL ISSUES]

Digitalbazaar wrote an excellent summary of legal issues facing culture jammers, and Adbusters in particular.

The main legal issues seem to be fair use and the 'legal right to buy [advertising] under the same rules and conditions advertising agencies do'.

[SLIDE 19 – CULTURE JAMMING 'MAINSTREAMED']

Adbusters was involved in some landmark legal cases in Canada dealing with issues we have seen in Australia very recently.

Adbusters argued that it was 'absurd a public interest group can't buy space on public airwaves.'

[digitalbazaar, 2009. Marketing and Advertising on the Net. 'Culture jammers: the case for free speech', 25 February 2009, <https://digitalbazaar.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/culture-jammers-the-case-of-free-speech/>]

The Yes Men were a culture jamming activist duo and network of supporters.

They have used what they call 'Identity Correction', 'impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them, and otherwise giving journalists excuses to cover important issues.'

[<http://theyesmen.org>]

They have been operating more recently as Yes Lab, and focussing more on strategy and training to help 'progressive organizations and activists carry out media-getting creative actions around well-considered goals.'

[<http://www.yeslab.org>]

Greenpeace is also excellent at culture jamming. It used Lego to call on Lego to end its co-promotion with Shell because of Shell's leadership in drilling for oil in the Arctic – something that is only possible because of global warming and that will make it worse. As a result of the campaign, Lego ended its partnership with Shell.

[SLIDE 20 – GREENPEACE'S RED LOGO CELEBRATION GRAPHIC]

Greenpeace used this parody graphic to celebrate.

[<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/oct/10/greenpeace-lego-shell-climate-change-arctic-oil>]

[SLIDE 21 – EARTH RUN OVER]

This spoof ad by Adbusters sums up what is wrong with our current dominant culture, and most major corporations in particular.

Our current culture does not show an understanding of and respect for the processes of life upon which we are entirely dependent.

Adbusters says it 'is a not-for-profit, reader-supported ... magazine concerned about the erosion of our physical and cultural environments by commercial forces.'

[<https://www.adbusters.org/about/adbusters>]

It describes its website as a 'Culturejammer's Headquarters'.

[SLIDE 22 – ORGANIZED CRIME AD]

This is one of Adbusters' graphics that sums up much of its work.

The theme running through major corporations is organised crime.

[SLIDE 23 – CORPORATE AMERICA]

And this graphic gives voice to what many think about America: that it is run by corporations

[SLIDE 24 – CATASTROPHIC CLIMATE CHANGE?]

This is a subvertisement from Adbusters.

It uses the type of ad that the motor vehicle industry uses to highlight how our culture – and the motor vehicle industry – denies our role in depleting the environment.

[SLIDE 25 – YOU WOULDN'T BUY OUR SHITTY CARS]

This is another Adbusters subvert using, this time in the context of the bailout of the big car manufacturers during the Global Financial Crisis.

[SLIDE 27 – THE KICK IS IN THE DETAIL]

The kick is in the detail:

the car manufacturers were struggling because people were buying imported cars because, amongst other things, they had better fuel consumption – which is better for the environment than what the US manufacturers traditionally offered.

[SLIDE 28 – NATURE...IT'LL GROW BACK]

Adbusters' big car theme continues, focussing on the damage that vehicles cause.
Note the brand name.

[SLIDE 29 – SOME PARODIES OF THE BP LOGO]

Parodying of corporate symbols is related to the amount of damage they are perceived to be doing.

Despite a long history of having a strong learning culture and of being willing to confront environmental issues BP came under fire after its oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

This gallery shows some of the parodies of the current BP logo that Greenpeace and others made.
Most of them draw attention to the dangers of oil spills.

These anti-ads and culture jamming serve to disrupt the visual stream of advertising that we are subject to daily.

[SLIDE 30 – PETROL GUN AT THE HEAD]

This 2011 spoof by Adbusters alludes to damage BP causes beyond oil spills:

- BP has us captured – we 'have' to use oil.
- And to ensure that flow of oil, we go to war – which results in some of us being killed.
- Further, the ongoing use of oil threatens our survival, because of climate change.

[SLIDE 31 – ESSO \$ SIGN]

This sign comes out of Greenpeace's "Don't buy Esso, Don't buy Exxon/Mobil" campaign that started in 2001 and ran for over 2 years. (Exxon/Mobil trades under the name Esso in many parts of the world.)

[SLIDE 32 – ESSO \$ LOGO]

Greenpeace developed this parody of Esso's logo with a double dollar sign: E\$\$O

Esso took Greenpeace to court for copyright infringement, claiming that Greenpeace's 'Stop Esso' website would 'confuse customers' into thinking they were at a real Esso site.

Esso also claimed that the modified logo made them look like Nazis, on the basis that the two dollar signs together were similar to the stylized Nazi SS symbol.

Most interestingly, Esso claimed that Greenpeace's parody of their logo would damage their "good reputation."

To quote Greenpeace:

'This is the company that has done more than any other corporation to undermine the science and policy debate on global warming. This is the company that donated massively to George Bush's election campaign, and was rewarded with the US withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol. This is the company that despoiled the pristine Alaskan coastline with an oil spill the effects of which are still with us today. This is the company responsible for [5 percent of all greenhouse gasses](#) on the planet. This is the company which has been branded environmental criminal #1 and been targeted by activists all over the world in a massive "Don't Buy Esso" campaign. If Esso was really worried about its reputation, it might try doing something for our planet and our children's future instead of using its gargantuan legal resources to try and stamp out the wildfire of dissent.'

In 2004 a French court rejected Esso's claims of trademark infringement and ruled that Greenpeace's parody of the Esso logo was within acceptable limits of freedom of expression.

[Greenpeace International, 2004. 'Greenpeace wins against oil giant', 5 February 2004,

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/greenpeace-wins-against-oil-gi/>]

[SLIDE 33 – CULTURE JAMMING VENN DIAGRAM]

Cartoonist Hugh MacLeod drew this Venn diagram to illustrate businesses' post-advertising use of culture jamming but I think it could apply to any organisation using culture jamming

[MacLeod, H. 2011. 'Culture Jamming: America's next big industry?', Gaping Void blog, <http://gapingvoid.com/cj/>]

[SLIDE 34 – BEYONCE SPOOF – ALL THE CARBON ATOMS]

Perhaps the longest tradition of parody comes in the form of taking an existing work of art and tweaking it.

New technology such as the internet and YouTube have made this much more elaborate and influential.

[generationzeron's channel, 2012. 'Beyonce Single Ladies - Climate Change ETS spoof', 29 October 2012, https://youtu.be/qyC92W_NOCk?list=FLqh7ogdnQw9_Z1yCf61D7lg]

[SLIDE 35 – DANKESCHOEN PARODY]

Parody is not just used by activists seeking change.

It is also used by their opponents.

[stuviever, 2013. 24 September 2013, 'Climate Change? - Dankeschön – parody',

https://youtu.be/lqCSkPyZYN0?list=FLqh7ogdnQw9_Z1yCf61D7lg]

[SLIDE 36 – 2 EARTHS 34 YEARS APART]

So, here we have a graphic illustration of how much planet Earth warmed in the 34 years between 1978 and 2012.

Sad, isn't it?

[SLIDE 37 – GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK SPOOF AD]

That's why we need to have spoof ads like this one from Adbuters – drawing attention to the greenwashing of the big oil companies.

[SLIDE 38 – CHOICE OF SPILLS]

And why culture jamming like this is needed.

It gets you looking at things in a different way.

Which of these spills would you prefer?

*Original source of picture missing, so used secondary source
(where I found the pic)*

[SLIDE 39 – SUMMARY 1]

To recap:

Culture is about communication.

Language, stories and images that resonate with us emotionally are the key.

Psychology and marketing can provide invaluable help with transforming culture.

A bold, vivid and clear alternative that engages us emotionally is the key to change.

[SLIDE 40 – SUMMARY 2]

The science and art of marketing is about changing attitudes and behaviour.

As such, it offers a useful tool for effecting the social changes our societies need to survive climate change.

Advertisers and activists alike use evidence and creativity to influence our behaviour, thinking and culture.

In doing so, they often appropriate what is familiar to us.

Parody and culture jamming is just one method.

It can be creative, legal, and very engaging.

[SLIDE 41 – A SIMPLE LOVE POEM]

I leave you with a slightly different appropriation of the familiar for influencing action on climate change.

At the UNFCCC conference in Paris in December, world leaders will make critical decisions about the future of life on Earth as we know it.

In the UK earlier this year, The Climate Coalition released this beautiful video for its #showthelove campaign for leaders to take strong climate action.

I think that Shakespeare would be proud to have his Sonnet number 18 used to encourage people to send the most important Valentine ever and #showthelove for planet Earth.

[The Climate Coalition. 2015. A Simple Love Poem
#showthelove, 10 February 2015,
<https://youtu.be/psxr2m3puzg>]

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