
6.2: Kleer-cut(ing) Downtown

Kleer-cut(ing) Downtown: The Visual Rhetoric of Greenpeace's Quest to Save the Boreal Forest

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Greenpeace has long been known as an action-oriented environmentalist group whose use of images and staged acts of protest have raised public awareness of issues such as whaling, nuclear testing, seal hunts, and so forth. As Kevin DeLuca points out, "Greenpeace is arguably the first group working for social change, and certainly the first environmental group, whose primary rhetorical activity is the staging of image events for mass media dissemination" (3-4). I am interested in Greenpeace's continued use of image events, more than 30 years after they initiated their use, and how image events are employed differently today compared to the past, even as they remain part of an ongoing articulation agenda for environmental consciousness-raising. The case study for my analysis will be Greenpeace Canada's campaign to highlight the problem of boreal deforestation. The origin of this campaign was an image event staged in downtown Toronto in November 2004. This image event served as an opportunity for further visual appeals that constituted Greenpeace's subsequent (and ongoing) boreal campaign. My critical analysis of this image event will compare it to the tradition of image events that preceded it. It will specify the particularities of the boreal image event and situate them in the context of visual rhetoric, highlighting the content, the context, and the audience for boreal claims-making. Contrary to more traditional notions of image events, boreal image events ultimately suggest a set of actions that ordinary people can take up as a daily practice to improve ecological conditions. Ultimately, this poses new challenges for our understanding of image events and the implications of visual rhetoric.

Introducing the Boreal Problem

Greenpeace considers the boreal forest "the Amazon of the north." It is "the largest remaining North American ancient forest, representing 25 per cent of the world's ancient forests. It is home to 40 per cent of North America's waterfowl and provides habitat for lynx, grizzly bear, wolf and woodland caribou, a species at risk" (3). As a result, the boreal forest has become a controversial site for logging and obtaining pulp for paper products. Greenpeace accuses Kimberly-Clark Corporation, the world's largest manufacturer of tissue products, of using little recycled content relative to its competitors and procuring virgin pulp from the ancient boreal ecosystem. Consequently, the U.S.-based Natural Resources Defense Council and Greenpeace Canada campaigned to raise public awareness of Kimberly-Clark's policies and their products sold under the Kleenex brand in Canada and as Scott, Cottonelle, and Viva products in the United States.

In November 2004, Greenpeace Canada launched its campaign to save the boreal forest with an image event specifically designed to highlight Kimberly-Clark's ancient forest logging practices. The image event consisted of a large cube van full of activists dressed up as a giant Kleenex box and driven in Canada's three largest metropolitan centers: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Greenpeace appropriated the logo of Kleenex and altered it to read "Kleercut," thereby challenging people to think differently about their everyday use of paper products derived from clearcutting ([Kleercut](#)). This image event was an attempt to co-opt the image of Kleenex and to spread resistance to the brand. Greenpeace's recontextualizing of the Kleenex logo sought to subvert the brand and re-situate Kimberly-Clark paper products as old growth forests in danger. Having captured people's

attention with the giant Kleenex box, Greenpeace activists then proceeded to spread their message about the importance of recycled fiber in paper products and the “forest crimes” being committed by Kimberly-Clark. Ultimately, audiences for this image event were meant to identify against Kimberly-Clark and go away with greater knowledge of what one could do to carry on the fight against boreal deforestation. So, while the campaign targeted a corporation to get it to use significantly more recycled paper in its products, it is also designed to convince citizens to change their consumption habits. Through dramatic images (and words), Greenpeace warned the public that simply by using these products, consumers are complicit in the forest crimes conducted by Kimberly-Clark.

Reading the Image Event as Visual Rhetoric

Image events are exemplars of a trend indicated by Barry Brummett: “One might say that rhetorics of popular culture are moving from the order of the word and logos into orders of aesthetics and kinesthetics. Hence the ways in which social issues are struggled over move at least in part onto that new nonverbal ground” (149-150). Through its nonverbal, imagistic appeal, the boreal image event was first and foremost a means to gain attention for the social issue of boreal deforestation as envisioned by Greenpeace. The problem highlighted by Greenpeace—the destruction of the boreal forest and the need to influence viewers’ opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and even behavior—requires rhetoric. It entails using images (and words) in an attempt to change people’s minds about consumer products and get people to think differently about the environment. The boreal campaign is consistent with the larger rhetorical purpose of the organization: “Greenpeace literally attempts to manipulate values, norms, and modes of discourse; it seeks to alter people’s conceptions of reality. Greenpeace hopes that in so doing, people will undertake actions that are more respectful of the ecological integrity of the planet” (Wapner 50). Greenpeace long ago recognized that people could be affected by images even more powerfully than speech. The boreal image event exemplifies this attitude and demonstrates how “effective rhetoric is . . . a two pronged strategy of verbal/visual persuasion, showing while it tells, illustrating its claims with powerful examples, making the listener see and not merely hear” (Mitchell, quoted in Faigley et al. v).

Visuality is tied to rhetoric because “a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing—a focus on object A involves a neglect of object B” (Burke 49). Yet just as seeing is not always believing, beholding Greenpeace’s image event does not entail adopting their environmental point of view as one’s own. What, then, does it mean when one sees what appears to be a giant Kleenex box in downtown city streets? What are we meant to see (and not to see)? What are we meant to think? To analyze this image event (and the larger campaign it spearheaded) as visual rhetoric, a number of questions must be asked: What is the meaning of this image event? What is it meant to do? What is its intended message? How is this message interpreted by audiences? In a review of visual rhetoric literature, Sonja Foss suggests that studies of visual objects tend to address these questions by focusing on one of three areas—nature, function, or evaluation (307). Nature deals with the components, qualities, and characteristics of visual artifacts; function concerns the communicative effects of visual rhetoric on audiences; evaluation is the process of assessing visual artifacts. To understand Greenpeace’s boreal image event, we must examine each of these constituent elements of boreal visual claims-making.

The Nature of the Boreal Image Event

Following Marguerite Helmers, we should pay attention to three things when viewing the rhetorical power of images (or image events): the spectator, the space of viewing, and the object that is viewed (65). The meaning of the image event, then, is not to be found in the staging of the event alone. Nor is the meaning to be generated solely by audiences for the spectacle of the image event and their pre-existing dispositions. The meaning of the image event is derived from the transactional process of viewing the event, essentially an interplay of the content of the image event, the context of its reception, and the audience for these visual appeals. First, let us deal with the content of the rhetorical appeal itself. “The nature of the visual rhetoric involves attention to two primary

components: Presented elements and suggested elements. The former involves naming its major physical features, such as space, medium, and color. The latter involves discovering the concepts, ideas, themes, and allusions that a viewer is likely to infer from the presented elements" (Foss 307).

The Boreal Content

The nature of all image events depends on the presentation of "staged happenings. . . . With its sensationalist rhetoric of action, Greenpeace has successfully manipulated the media into covering stories that would be [otherwise] ignored" (Killingsworth and Palmer 195). Image events are key elements of Greenpeace's dramatic approach to a rhetoric of resistance. In classic fashion, activists present a spectacle of themselves fighting against a perceived injustice and suggest the need for others to engage in similar struggle or at least engage with the concepts that inspired such action. The idea of "bearing witness" is crucial to this. Weyler notes how early Greenpeace activism was informed by the Quaker idea of "bearing witness," which meant not only witnessing events but also speaking out, bearing witness to others. The Quakers believe that a witness to atrocity becomes an agent of change (28). By engaging in direct protest actions and constructing powerful images of these protests that were subsequently disseminated to the media, Greenpeace engages the wider public in their struggle. Essentially, they disseminate images of not just wrong-doing but of staged interventions against that wrongdoing. As a result, they expose these acts to a much wider audience who, once they apprehend these environmental injustices, can no longer plead ignorance of them. Image events are designed to make the otherwise invisible become visible and turn what could otherwise be private concerns into public issues. All who encounter the image event could now be said to bear witness. The principle behind this meant that "having observed a morally objectionable act, one cannot turn away in avoidance. One must either take action to prevent further injustice or stand by and attest to its occurrence" (Wapner 50). Fundamental to the image event is the notion of not only protestors bearing witness but also having this intervention exposed and circulated to the wider world via media coverage. "The witnesses would themselves be witnessed" (Purl 27).

Image events get disseminated via media coverage because they are dramatic. Greenpeace attained a high profile for the organization's ecological agenda via reports "enlivened by the daredevil antics of personable young protestors who win converts to their cause through their playfulness as well as their daring and personal commitment" (Killingsworth and Palmer 197). This is the first truly striking element of the nature of the boreal image event: unlike traditional image events, it wasn't that dramatic. The spectacle of the image event was not derived from civil disobedience, collective action, or any real sense of immediate intervention in Kimberly-Clark's business. It was, rather, a kind of symbolic action akin to culture jamming as Greenpeace volunteers brought attention to a truck designed to look like a giant Kleenex box, a visual synecdoche meant to invoke Kimberly-Clark's ecological irresponsibility. This event was consistent with Greenpeace's efforts to challenge the discourse of industrialism, but it was not as newsworthy as previous events that featured ordinary (and therefore heroic) activists risking their own lives to take on leviathan-like ecological violators.

The boreal image event was focused on garnering attention for the perceived "forest crimes" of Kimberly-Clark and convincing the public to rally against the company's consumer products and production practices, but the drama consisted in the knowledge of ever-depleting natural resources, not in confrontation. Initially, this form of whimsical protest seems to contravene one of the classic understandings of the image event. As early Greenpeace member Paul Watson noted, "the more dramatic you can make it, the more controversial it is, the more publicity you will get" (quoted in DeLuca 4-5). Publicity is necessary in order that the symbolic action of the protest can carry on long after the direct action stops. With the boreal image event, there were no dangerous risks taken; there were no exciting acts such as boats sailing into waters designated for nuclear testing. Instead the visual rhetoric of the giant Kleenex box served as an excuse for Greenpeace activists to further circulate the organization's verbal rhetoric. Nonetheless, insofar as it was novel, new, somehow extraordinary, the boreal image event also satisfies the three conditions that define newsworthy journalistic

content (Hall et al.): It is dramatic, unexpected, and described (or at least invoked) negative consequences associated with boreal deforestation. The dramatic nature of one's appeal need not be contingent on conflict or militant action. Though these might be more newsworthy, the content of the boreal image event underscores the argument that "image events are a form of postmodern argumentative practice, a kind of oppositional argument that creates social controversy, and animates and widens possibilities for debate" (Delicath and Deluca 315).

In fact, there may be a good reason for the shift in the nature of this image event's content: "The news value of 'novelty' is eventually expended; through repetition the extraordinary becomes ordinary" (Hall et al. 72). So, the confrontational content of Greenpeace image events may once have ensured their news value. However, Greenpeace now confronts a contemporary scene in which it has already entered the mass consciousness and in which even the targets of Greenpeace's campaigns use novel, unusual, spectacular visuals for their own causes. Interestingly, even as Greenpeace employs its "Kleercut/Kleenex van," Kimberly-Clark has created their own dog-themed bus to help market their brand of Cottonelle toilet paper from city to city. Certainly, a giant kleenex box seems sufficiently bizarre to warrant at least the attention of those whose gaze would otherwise be preoccupied with the mundane business of everyday life.

However, there are serious questions about the effectiveness of these persuasive appeals given the context of where this oppositional argument took place. Ultimately, audiences for this image event didn't bear witness to an objectionable act being carried out by Kimberly-Clark. Instead, they viewed the curious culture-jamming efforts of Greenpeace activists in an urban centre. They witnessed Greenpeace's curious spectacle, rather than the morally objectionable acts of environmental offenders, brought to them via Greenpeace.

The Context of the Boreal Image Event

With boreal-themed image events, Greenpeace activists didn't record their protests within the actual boreal forest, facing down loggers, for instance. Rather, the protest in Toronto took place in front of Union Station, the largest commuter hub in Canada's largest city. In this manner, the visual impact of the image event is still a tactical skirmish that takes place on hostile territory. The hostile territory in traditional image events meant a specific ground (site of whaling, nuclear tests, deforestation, etc.), immediately obvious because of the presence of protestors seeking to subvert the activity that typically takes place there. However, the "enemy" in the boreal protests, is not solely Kimberly-Clark, but also corporate and consumer culture that has spawned a demand for cottony-softness in the tissue products one uses to wipe one's nose and derriere and which is, in Greenpeace's eyes, environmentally irresponsible. So, while Greenpeace is concerned for the boreal forest and is hostile to Kimberly-Clark (and actually took the Kleercut truck to Kimberly-Clark's 2005 annual meeting), boreal-consciousness-raising image events occurred in downtown city cores and in front of shopping centers, grocery stores and in institutions that use Kimberly-Clark products. One could posit, then, that the boreal campaign (and the image events upon which it depends) is too removed from hostile territory to make the object of hostility sufficiently clear without verbal rhetoric to accompany the imagistic.

Obviously, the space of viewing the image event affects the meaning taken from it. This refers to both the physical environment of the protest and to the media through which the images are circulated and ultimately consumed. Fundamental to the nature of the image event is not just that the event is captured, but that such images are meant to be circulated in wider media campaigns. As Doyle suggested, "carefully choreographed made-for-TV stunts are Greenpeace's signature tactic" (111). Still, one must distinguish between the role of media in the traditional image event and the use of new media in the boreal image event. "Increasingly, web-based media might serve to give context, visual interest and information that is difficult to convey in speech or written text" (Smith 304). Yet, the context of the image event shifts as its means of viewing changes. The boreal image event seems to be used as fodder for further imagistic discourse. It is a form of public relations more than a confrontation. Through the use of their own website, images and accounts of Greenpeace activist efforts get posted online immediately and are archived there and easily accessible for as long as Greenpeace wishes.

In the wake of online publishing avenues of the web, fewer resources are now required to seize the political spotlight. Consequently, though, the spotlight doesn't shine as bright, and the audience is more fragmented than the audience for image events circulated via the mass media. So, while the image event in Toronto generated very little mainstream media coverage, it provided the foundation for subsequent acts of boreal protest. Greenpeace employed the boreal image event as one form of visual rhetoric and marshaled it as a constituent element in another form of visual rhetoric—the kleercut website. The Internet, in this capacity, isn't used for protest, per se, but to support and encourage further image events. The original boreal image event is used to inspire “mini-actions” as smaller-scale image events with a boreal-themed message are encouraged across the country.

Greenpeace's site serves to publicize individual activists' salvos of oppositional rhetoric, all of which contribute to and constitute the boreal forest campaign. Now, with the internet and a network of various supportive bloggers, facebookers, twitters and so forth, Greenpeace does not need to appeal to the organizational or aesthetic sensibilities of other media outlets. Thus, apart from the change in the nature of the information available to the public about the image event (and its object of protest), the boreal image event alerts us to the use of new media and how disintermediation affects the image event model. The boreal image event suggests a more 'rhizomatic' and less 'hypodermic' approach to public awareness.

While attracting media coverage is important, it is even more crucial to reach out to already committed individuals and provide them with the resources to continue their struggle or the encouragement to join local initiatives. This approach depends upon a loose affiliation of connected individuals who can be counted upon to create further instances of image events or protest and keep the (boreal) message circulating in the public consciousness. Thus, the organization does not need to foster relationships with sympathetic journalists. It only needs to appeal to the sympathies of its already existing constituency. Archived online, these images aren't pushed at audiences in order to persuade them; rather, people who are likely to already identify with Greenpeace's cause seek them out and pull the images and their surrounding discourse into their pre-existing repertoire. The danger of this, however, is that boreal-themed image events will only preach the gospel to the converted, instead of reaching out in a provocative fashion to non-believers.

Of course, these image events do not only exist online; all boreal-themed events (of which images are reproduced online) engage with individuals in local and real-world settings. Subsequently, people who consume these images and learn of these events because of their online media habits may spread the word both online and off. Because of these factors, it is perhaps wise to not isolate the original boreal protest that was the Toronto image event and instead view it as inspiration for subsequent boreal-themed image events, all of which combine as constituent parts of an overall campaign of awareness building and advocacy training. Therefore, Greenpeace should not worry that only a smaller and an already committed audience tunes into their own website appeals compared to those that might stumble across their image events when broadcast via mass media. While such protests may still attract mass media coverage, they do not depend upon it. The boreal campaign has become almost viral as mini-image events are recorded and uploaded by participants rather than reporters. Each event posted to the kleercut website subsequently instructs fellow likeminded individuals how to conduct an event of their own while the website serves as a central clearing house for such information. The image event seamlessly transforms into images/events as the ability to intervene in the lives and consciousnesses of the uninformed or even uncaring individuals (which was one of the hallmarks of the traditional image event) is massaged into new forms appropriate to new forms of information consumption.

Audience Engagement with the Boreal Image Event

“Audiences are famously active and cannot be assumed to roll over and accept the formal offerings of the poet,” or, in this case, the activist (Brummett 19). What is the nature of the boreal image event if the audience for it is (a) smaller and more factionalized than audiences for mass-mediated spectacles of previous image events

and (b) potentially already dedicated to the cause? If “the visual is above all rhetorical when one examines its situatedness (how it is targeted at a specific audience to elicit a specific effect)” (Blair 52), then it follows that the nature of the audience’s participation is qualitatively (and quantitatively) different when the image event is encountered online. Even without considering the Internet, some have been quite critical of who is actually being addressed by Greenpeace’s claims: “Like many contemporary institutions, Greenpeace deals very much in constructing ‘phantom’ images of the public. . . . Greenpeace’s ability to mobilize miniature environmental dramas for the media does not necessarily have to speak to the public so much as merely make politicians think it is speaking to the public” (Doyle 130). Boreal image events are an effort to directly speak to the public. How many people are reached by this visual appeal (much less converted to a similar way of thinking or convinced to engage in similar actions) will always be a question. What seems self-evident, however, is that boreal-themed image events demand a different imaginative labor of audiences than traditional image events.

The setting for the audience who comes purposefully via surfing to Greenpeace’s website is quite different from the audience for image events staged in the streets or in front of grocery stores. Offline, people randomly encounter urban situations where subversive guerilla images of Greenpeace conflict with the public image of industrialism, commerce, and consumerism. Distributed via the mass media, these images are potentially jarring. Yet apart from rare instances of taking the protest to Kimberly-Clark headquarters or factories, most boreal-themed image events either playfully appropriated the form of Kimberly-Clark products or vilified the products within consumerist settings. As such, the “offline” boreal image events typically lacked the immediacy, verisimilitude, and concreteness that traditional image events have working in their favor when attempting to influence acceptance (Blair 59). Instead of confronting (and stopping) the environmental criminals in their production settings, most mini boreal protests confront consumers in their everyday spaces. Thus, the qualitative nature of the appeal changes. It is more localized insofar as such provocations are designed to target individual citizen consumers where they shop (rather than confronting them with provocative images of boreal protests in the media messages they consume). Also, the longevity of the appeal is shifted when it is reproduced online. Pictures do not merely circulate on one night’s newscast; they exist in cyberspace as long as Greenpeace approves. At the kleercut website, for instance, clicking on the “activism” tab reveals a dizzying array of different local initiatives against Kimberly-Clark. None of these, arguably, has the impact of a “classic” image event. However, cumulatively, they add up to constitute a powerful appeal. Instead of viewing one arresting image or video of protestors endangering themselves to stop perceived immoral acts, the visitor to the kleercut website can’t help but see evidence of both the nature of the boreal problem and ongoing and widespread activism against it.

There is a certain ambiguity in boreal-themed image events based on the absence of an immediate wrongdoer. Through symbolism and subsequent verbal appeals, Kimberly-Clark is invoked as the villain in this environmental drama, but the absence of any concrete danger of confrontation leads to a watered down dramatization of victimization. Kimberly-Clark is still scapegated but through a much more indirect fashion. Traditional image events (such as those meant to stop whaling) are built upon an easily identifiable “Greenpeace adventure” in which “a crew of courageous idealists on a creaky boat . . . interpose themselves to foil the harpoons” (Herron 23). These image events depend upon the sympathetic or emotional responses of an audience. Activists in the shadow of a giant kleenex box handing out information and directing individuals to the kleercut website do not. Unlike other image events, trees are inanimate “victims,” and there were no harpooned whales “crying exactly like a baby” (28).

Consequently, with the boreal image event, Greenpeace did not invite “the risks of pathos” quite as much as image events in the past. These risks arise in situations where one invokes audience emotions in order to “draw them to a concern they have ignored or inspire defensiveness and lead them to deny their neglect and develop rationalizations, justifications, and excuses for their behavior” (Killingsworth and Palmer 71). Greenpeace wants to engender concern and emotional attachment to the boreal forest and the boreal image event is used as a

vehicle to propagate its conservationist ethos. Here, the style of spectacle is used to promote the substance of an environmental message. Pathos, a potential strength of the visual, is subsumed to ethos, the traditional bastion of the verbal, in the wider boreal campaign. At first glance, this may seem reason enough to question the efficacy of the boreal image event as visual rhetoric. However, the choice of an ethical appeal (instead of a pathetic one) is clear when one assesses the wider function of the boreal image event.

How Does the Boreal Image Event Function as Visual Rhetoric?

“The function of a visual artifact is the action it communicates. . . . Function is not synonymous with purpose, which involves an effect that is intended or desired by the creator of the image [event]” (Foss 308). Greenpeace hopes that boreal-based image events function similarly to what “the Situationists called a *détournement*—a perspective that prompts turnabout in your everyday life” (Lasn xvii). The original boreal image event was meant to, ironically, spread the word about Kimberly-Clark’s “forest crimes” and smaller-scale image events deployed by the “forest crimes unit” in local outposts of consumer activity were meant to interrupt the comfortable pattern of buying products without thinking. They’re meant to shock the consumer into thinking differently about their own behavior (even as they’re meant to attract media attention). The purpose of these image events, logically but indirectly, is to induce Kimberly-Clark to stop logging in the boreal forest for its manufacturing of disposable paper products. The function of these image events goes beyond winning publicity for the boreal forest, or even saving it from further logging.

Boreal image events are meant to communicate more than the creation of “crystallized philosophical fragments, mind bombs, designed to expand the universe of thinkable thoughts” (DeLuca 6). While boreal image events may succeed in transforming the way people think about ancient forests (and their byproducts), the ultimate function of these image events is to convince people to change their consumption habits. Audiences are expected to identify against Kimberly-Clark and identify with the environmentalist claims, eventually changing their lifestyles and demanding change at a commercial, social, and political level too. People are expected to change more than their thinking about Kimberly-Clark; they’re also expected to change how they think about their own behavior. So, Greenpeace continues to conscript activists for Kimberly-Clark protests that might be dangerous (for instance, stopping business at a Kimberly-Clark factory perched atop seven metre high tripods and blockading Kimberly-Clark freighters while preventing the export of old-growth pulp). It has also been outright confrontational (taking the giant tissue box to Kimberly-Clark headquarters and blocking Kimberly-Clark’s mills). But these are not the mainstays of the boreal campaign. Rather, boreal-themed image events took on a diffuse character and are truly characterized by their use of creative strategies such as adopting grocery stores, staging forest crimes for Kimberly-Clark customers (and retailers), intervening in other consumer(ist) spaces (such as businesses that use Kimberly-Clark products), public spaces where citizens congregate (such as stuffing trees in toilets in front of the San Francisco capital), and even co-opting and undermining the marketing campaigns of Kimberly-Clark ([Youtube](#), [LA Times](#), [Kleercut](#)).

Greenpeace’s efforts clearly mark Kimberly-Clark as a villain whose direct actions threaten the forest. Yet they also target individuals who use Kimberly-Clark products since, by inference, environmental crimes would decrease if people ceased buying their products. Thus, Greenpeace would never claim “Factories don’t pollute. People do,” but there is a shifting of responsibility whereby the public becomes complicit in this destruction of the ecosystem. The producers are not absolved of their role in the endangerment of the boreal forest. After all, without Kimberly-Clark’s actions, there would be no campaign. However, this campaign seems to support the observation that, “environmentalist organizations found that the image of the ecological enemy often had to be rhetorically expanded and intensified” (Luke 117). The connotation of Greenpeace’s boreal campaign is that we, as consumers, are literally ‘flushing away the environment.’ Consequently, “each individual consumer or family household is now the key decisive ecological subject, whose everyday economic activities are either a blow for environmental destruction or a greener Earth” (Luke 118). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that the function of

boreal image events (and the campaign that is based upon them) is to encourage green consumerism.

Luke is highly critical of this variety of environmentalism. He laments how the surly antagonistic spirit of organizations like Greenpeace has been caged and refracted “out into the ghostly moonbeams of friendly green consumerism” (136). This judgment is reinforced by a visit to Greenpeace’s website where one is entreated to avoid Kleenex brand tissue products, educated about products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, and directed to Greenpeace’s guide for forest-friendly products and where one can buy them. Greenpeace doesn’t suggest that it is easy to save the boreal forest, but it does make an argument about how it is easy for everyone to make an individual difference through changes in his or her own behavior, and it argues that, cumulatively, these small changes can be effective. Admittedly, this can be seen as a fairly tame form of environmental reformism, but one that is consistent with the taming-down of the image event in the wake of less-confrontational behavior.

Once upon a time, the image event was a tactic employed by “utopian radicals,” inspired by the ideas of the youth rebellions and the practices of the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s (Killingsworth and Palmer 194, 196; Weyler 69; Johnson). Yet one need not be a radical to be an environmentalist in the cultural climate of the early 21st century. Sutton suggests that Greenpeace is not a radical ecological organization but it makes use of radical arguments in order to enhance its image in the eyes of potential supporters (187). Traditionally, image events have been seen as radical interventionist tactics used by subaltern publics and marginalized groups to break through to the dominant culture. Now, institutions of the dominant order also employ image events and Greenpeace’s versions are no longer as contentious as they once were. Thus, the boreal image event functions to shift the battle to the individual, to make environmental battles more local than ever before. As one is invited to write letters of protest to Kimberly-Clark and to stores that sell their products, Greenpeace enjoins people to think about the environment differently and to put an ancient-forest-friendly eco-sensibility into practice in one’s own life. The supporting materials in Greenpeace’s campaign against Kimberly-Clark reinforce this shift in responsibility. For instance, Richard Brooks, Greenpeace Canada’s forests campaigner suggests, “It takes 90 years to grow a box of Kleenex, but a few seconds to throw away the facial tissue” (Natural Resources Defense Council). This was borne out in early ads by Greenpeace. Later ads develop this focus even further. What, then, are we to make of this shifting of responsibility and the moral attribution of blame?

Evaluating the Boreal Image Event

Organizations such as Greenpeace seek to “heighten worldwide concern for the environment. They persuade vast numbers of people to care about and take actions to protect the earth’s ecosystem. In short, they disseminate what I call an ecological sensibility” (Wapner 42). To what extent is this true with the anti Kimberly-Clark campaign based on boreal image events? Image events are unlike other forms of protest, which, “to be considered effective, must not only draw attention to an unethical action but also bring these actions to a halt at least for the moment” (Killingsworth and Palmer 196). Greenpeace’s image events may fail to immediately stop whaling, boreal deforestation, etc., but they can succeed if, aimed at a larger media audience, their appeals encourage people to think differently about the environment. Indeed, there is some evidence that there has been an instrumental shift in public consciousness about boreal and old-growth forests. University campuses have banned Kimberly-Clark products, hundreds of smaller businesses have also declared that they would stop using Kimberly-Clark products. Beyond these examples that Greenpeace cites as evidence of their campaign’s effectiveness, boreal-themed image events can also be placed in a comparative context with a prior tradition of image events in order to evaluate how well they accomplish their apparent function.

Image events involve episodes of agitative rhetoric, broadcast to a wider audience. Such nondiscursive appeals draw attention to an organization’s rational appeals even as they serve as a form of rhetorical argument themselves (Short 1999). Yet boreal image events (both the original “Kleenex box” in downtown Toronto and the subsequent “Kleenex forest destruction tour”) simply agitated enough to compel attention from presumably

otherwise non-concerned or uninformed passersby. They were not meant to disrupt actual logging practices. As such, the rhetorical argument was more curiosity-piquing than ire-raising. This type of appeal definitely "unsettles the appropriateness of social conventions, draws attention to the taken-for-granted means of communication, and provokes discussion" (Olson and Goodnight 250), and in this capacity it is consistent with other image events whose oppositional argument is more obviously an act of protest. However, seeing a giant Kleenex box or encountering a "forest crimes scene" representation in a store are creative incitements that act as more of a means to an end rather than the end of the protest itself. Thus, boreal image events combine the powerful call-to-awareness of classic image events and the ability to propagate information and incite further action that is the hallmark of other forms of protest. Consequently, boreal-themed image events serve as both ends- and means-oriented arguments. The former "deal with the moral issues involved in public decisions [whereas] means-oriented arguments deal with the technical issues. To focus exclusively on moral issues is to drift toward stridency. . . . To focus exclusively on technical issues, on the other hand, is to drift towards [a] kind of mechanistic reductiveness" (Killingsworth and Palmer 76). Whereas image events are frequently dismissed (because of their disruptive qualities) as strident, non-productive advocacy, boreal image events are an excuse to distribute information that focuses on technical issues. All along, however, the spectre of the moral end of boreal deforestation lies in the background. Thus, boreal image events suggest the means by which individual consumers can make a difference, ultimately moving toward the end of a better world through an eco-sensibility.

My discussion of boreal image events raises questions about the conditions for these acts of persuasion and identification. The presented elements and the suggested elements in an image need to correspond for the nature of the image's meaning to be clear. This is not immediately evident with the kleercut campaign. Here, the visual rhetoric does not stand on its own and—in its dependence on verbal rhetoric—demonstrates the paragonal struggle between word and image where images are "destined always as visual rhetoric, whereas verbal rhetoric, or textuality, gets to be just rhetoric" (Finnegan 198). The setting is also potentially problematic in that the environment in question is far removed from the environment of the image event itself. Finally, there are substantial questions about the audience and their reception of meanings of these image events. Because of the ambiguity of the image and the context for these image events, and because of their mode of circulation, the boreal image event may point to an increasingly self-referential circle of environmental discourse, both visual and verbal.

Image events should be able to act as 'synoptic moments' capable of crystallizing complex political positions into a visual signifier (Delicath and DeLuca 326). Although certain images may effectively encapsulate meanings (putting oneself in danger at a whaling or nuclear site, the showdown in an old-growth forest), a giant Kleenex box or the forest crimes unit in one's neighborhood may not. If the impact of image events depends largely on how the audience encounters, assembles, and utilizes the imagistic fragments employed by claims-makers, then the open-ended boreal campaign with its proliferation of mini "image event-esque" interventions and the absence of obvious and immediate pathetic appeals must be acknowledged as one evaluates how these image events communicated the wider boreal message.

The classic image event succeeds in gaining publicity for a cause, particularly by circulating "images of slaughters and confrontations between 'good guys' and 'bad guys'" (Harwood 76). While the boreal image event lacks this visual immediacy, it nonetheless still contains "a tremendous ability to inspire . . . [and] get the political process moving" (76). No matter what, though, the boreal image event seems to soften what can be seen as the controversial politics of Greenpeace activism (and its use of controversial image events). This, then, leads to questioning the effectiveness of Greenpeace as an organization that employs image events to inspire action and also uses image events as a source of action-oriented information. Paul Watson, prominent Greenpeace member in the mid-1970s, left the organization and pursued more aggressive confrontations in order to illuminate environmental issues. He has referred to Greenpeace as the "Avon ladies of the environmental movement" (Goldberg) and rebutted critics of his radical tactics by claiming, "There are only two types of organizations—those

that do and those that do mailouts" (Watson).

In less vitriolic fashion, Killingsworth and Palmer critique Greenpeace's direct actions for being "at best indirect. . . . They model commitment and concern, but they do not suggest a set of actions that ordinary people can take up as a daily practice to improve ecological and economic conditions" (206-207). While the traditional image events that preceded Greenpeace's boreal campaign were subject to this criticism, the boreal image event meets this challenge head on. The boreal initiative doesn't just recommend that audiences oppose Kimberly-Clark's practices. It indicates a series of alternative actions (that individuals can initiate in order to bring about a more ecologically friendly future. These range from constructing one's own locally based image events (Greenpeace's recommended tactic of "adopting a store"), to buying only ancient forest-friendly paper products, to starting a campaign in one's own community, school, and so forth. Ultimately, then, the boreal image event does not only succeed in reinforcing "Greenpeace as a consciousness-raising and conscience-forming rhetorical force." It also has "add[ed] an information dispersal function to its primarily rhetorical function as a group devoted to awareness-raising and conscience-molding" (Killingsworth and Palmer 207). Boreal image events demonstrate the creative potential of image events to do more than simply serve as "mind bombs" while still provocatively prompting potential and meaningful changes in attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

While it may be true that the visual rhetoric of image events needs the verbal rhetoric of a larger campaign to sustain and contextualize an organization's claims, it is also true that images have a "unique capacity as constructors of texts" (Gurevitch and Kavoori 415). The field of claims-making about the boreal Forest is expanded because of the presence of image events. No matter their final physical manifestation, image events such as those orchestrated by Greenpeace are ecological critiques performed through spectacle which ultimately animate at least the possibility of a wider ranging public discourse. They enable future argumentation and deliberation. As a previous president of Greenpeace USA said, "People remember the actions. It's the same image that's been going for Greenpeace for 20 years, and it still works." (quoted in Dale 27). Yet my analysis of the boreal image event demonstrates that the image has indeed changed. Society's appetite for spectacle, and our means to reproduce it, has changed. While all image events are forms of argumentative practice, not all image events are created equal. As more groups seek to employ image events to marshal public attention to their cause, Greenpeace itself has changed the way it stages image events.

Conclusion

When it comes to "our environment, what we say is what we see" (Cantrill and Oravec 1). When it comes to the image event, organizers hope that what we see will sway the way we think and ultimately affect the way we act. Though there may be some questions about the effectiveness of image events—especially those such as the boreal event I've detailed (so removed from the original context of moral outrage)—no matter what, Greenpeace's actions give form to the issue of the boreal forest and its depletion. And they use images to send out this message of concern, not just words, even if images themselves do not seem to suffice. As instances of rhetorical activity, image events force theorists to resituate images alongside words and examine the function of disruptive practices in addition to reasoned, rational discourses. In the traditional understanding of image events, the image stands on its own as an event—it can suffice as the end unit of rhetorical activity. Yet images and disruptive practices in the boreal campaign tend to serve as adjuncts to other instances of reasoned, verbal discourse. The imagistic appeal of boreal image events is meant to serve the instrumental purpose of influencing consumer (and ultimately, hopefully, production) practices. but it also functions as a salvo in the larger effort to re-constitute ourselves and our ways of life in a more ecological, ancient-forest-friendly mindset.

Image events need not be reduced to simply attention-getting devices. Like the wider field of rhetoric, image events need not be confrontational. Indeed, though these "events" must be extralinguistic, they need not be nonrational. An image event need not be measured against the ideal of reasoned discourse but can, instead, be seen as a contribution to such discourse. Whether or not, in the end, this undermines image events'

emancipatory potential is another question. Nonetheless, the boreal image event demonstrates how, regardless of shape or form, image events constitute a central device of public discourse. Though the mode of confrontation (and the medium for it) constantly changes, the ultimate goal of challenging and attempting to transform cultural norms, beliefs, and actions still is advanced. Viewed through the lens of rhetoric, the boreal image event, like countless other Greenpeace actions, may be a powerful device in (ironically) getting the “word” out, and challenging (if not changing) public consciousness.

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