
6.2: Signing Resistance

Signing Resistance: Big Tobacco in the Era of Social Marketing

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The event: In the early hours of September 29, 2002, 1,200 **truth**® volunteers board buses and head for the front door of a major tobacco company. The number of volunteers is significant as statistics showed that year that some 1,200 people died each day as a result of tobacco-related disease. The aim of the volunteers was simple: they would stand in the street outside of the tobacco company and “drop dead” in one scripted and simultaneous motion. Helicopters, news cameras, and photographers captured the spectacle as the volunteers repeated the process throughout the morning and into the afternoon, thereby ensuring the necessary images and video footage for production artists to reconstruct the live event as an image event. The **truth**® campaign against the tobacco industry and its marketing strategies in the United States was in full swing. [Similar image events](#) accompanied this one in the Drop Dead Day campaign.

By staging an event such as that portrayed in the “Drop Dead Day” event, the **truth**® campaign has affected the tobacco industry in extraordinary ways. The monolithic tobacco industry that hid behind the commodity fetish for decades is called to account in such image events by making the viewer bear witness to the human toll resulting from its products. Furthermore, the corporate structure that made “big tobacco” an anonymous monolith is embodied—we see people looking out from behind glass windows and building facades to the street where the “victims” of tobacco lie “dead.” Through a fragmented argumentative claim, these corporate faces are implicated in the 1,200 “deaths” that take place just outside in the streets and on the sidewalk.

In conjunction with the event, [the truth](#)® website presented Polaroid pictures of the 1,200 participants (those who volunteered for “Drop Dead Day”) and a corresponding “victim” number between 1 and 1,200: 353/1200, 459/1200, 1191/1200. Most often, the photographs were of smiling teens—the kind of photos one might expect at a funeral or eulogy for a young man or woman whose life was cut short. This device of showing the faces of the “dead” is perhaps best categorized as epideictic rhetoric, as it lays blame on the tobacco industry. Simultaneously, it humanizes the death toll. One thousand two hundred is no longer a statistic; the figure has a human face. It is one death, plus one death, plus one death, and so forth to 1,200 per day. This toll—otherwise arbitrary—and its parade of individuals functions rhetorically in that it fulfills an effect we have come to associate with memorials like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and its Tower of Faces or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and artifacts such as boots, dog tags, and photographs that visitors leave behind at the memorial’s wall. Viewers of such memorials are struck by the enormity of human loss. In the case of the **truth**® campaign, the online “memorial” points to the source of the loss: Big Tobacco and tobacco products.

Months after the launch of the Drop Dead Day campaign, Philip Morris fought back against the **truth**® campaign’s “subvertisements” such as the one described above. A young woman took to the airwaves sharing her personal story of survival in television spots. She told of her move from life in an abusive relationship to living a life of independence, and she attributed the transformation to Philip Morris who funded the battered women’s shelter that took her in when she left her husband. This battered woman’s body bore witness to the social responsibility valued by the tobacco industry, the industry that ostensibly saved her life, thus countering the

subversive discourse of the **truth**® campaign.

This woman's body, together with those 1,200 bodies in the streets on Drop Dead Day, signifies a shift in the dynamics of the debate between Big Tobacco and its opponents. The **truth**® campaign subverted the tobacco industry's use of the commodity fetish—a practice that reaches as far back the cigar store Indian of the 1700 and 1800s. Indeed, the **truth**® campaign “subvertisements” imbue the product with history by creating an image event that exposes the corporate entities responsible for tobacco and its ill effects upon actual human bodies. Philip Morris's corporate social responsibility campaign—what we describe here as a “revertisement”—attempted to reverse the exposure of the **truth**® campaign by harnessing the historicity resulting from the campaign's image events. This historicity associated with “real people” allowed Philip Morris to present a rehabilitated body, a body that has been “saved” by the corporation accused of killing and destroying millions of other bodies.

These subvertisements and revertisements emerge out of a nexus formed by time, history, and human bodies around which the American tobacco industry and the anti-tobacco movement have marketed their products and ideas to the American people. In what follows, we will trace the dynamics within this nexus to examine the effectiveness of the **truth**® campaign's subverts and Philip Morris's corporate social responsibility reverts. We will focus on the television-based media of both the **truth**® campaign and Philip Morris, while understanding this media as part of an inter-media campaign strategy that integrates print, television, and web-based media in its address to readers, viewers, and users. We will attempt, in the end, to address the question: do media activist campaigns such as the **truth**® campaign effectively expose the functioning of corporate capitalism, or do they instead destabilize the media image of corporate capital and ultimately provide the tools for recuperation? More specifically, by presenting image events that focus upon the bodies affected by tobacco, has the **truth**® campaign presented the material—the bodies—for recuperation of the corporation?

The Origins of **truth**®

The legal origin of the **truth**® campaign dates back to the November 1998 Master Settlement Agreement involving 15 tobacco companies and 46 states across the country. [1] The settlement's aim was financial recovery for those states' Medicaid programs and excessive costs for tobacco-related illness and disease. Specifically, payments would total \$206 billion through 2025. [2] In addition to this monetary settlement, the tobacco industry was to dismantle the Council for Tobacco Research, the Tobacco Institute, the Council for Indoor Air Research, and virtually eliminate its time-tested advertising practices. In particular, the settlement required a ban on most outdoor advertising, including billboards, signs and placards in arenas, stadiums, shopping malls, and video game arcades; it limited advertising outside retail establishments to 14 square feet; it banned transit advertising of tobacco products; and it allowed states to substitute, for the duration of billboard lease periods, alternative advertising which would discourage youth smoking. Additionally, beginning July 1, 1999, a ban on the distribution and sale of apparel and merchandise with brand-name logos was set into place. The Master Settlement Agreement marked a milestone that would for a time compromise the tobacco industry's marketing agenda.

Compounding the effects of this settlement, participating tobacco companies—Philip Morris (Marlboro/Kent), R.J. Reynolds (Winston/Camel), Brown & Williamson (Kool/Carlton), Lorillard (Newport/Kent), Liggett Group (Eve/L&M), and Commonwealth Brands—would pay each year for ten years \$25 million to fund a charitable foundation which would aim to reduce teen smoking and substance abuse. [3] Specifically, the American Legacy Foundation, established with these funds in March 1999 and housed in Washington, D.C., would: 1) carry out a nationwide, sustained advertising and education program to counter youth tobacco use and educate consumers about the cause and prevention of diseases associated with tobacco use; 2) develop, disseminate and test the effectiveness of counter advertising campaigns; and 3) commission studies, fund research and publish reports on factors that influence youth smoking and substance abuse ([Attorney General](#)).

As its mission, the American Legacy Foundation “develops national programs that address the health effects of tobacco use through grants, technical training and assistance, youth activism, strategic partnerships,

counter-marketing and grass roots marketing campaigns, public relations, and community outreach to populations disproportionately affected by the toll of tobacco” ([American Legacy](#)). Working toward prevention and cessation, the Foundation’s adult programs include Circle of Friends, a program aimed at supporting women who wish to quit (or help others quit) smoking, and Great Start, a program launched in 2001 for pregnant women who hope to stop smoking for the health of their unborn child. Additionally, the American Legacy Foundation began efforts targeting younger audiences.

One of the key outreach vehicles developed by the Foundation was the **truth**® campaign, which since its launch in February 2000, has become the largest youth smoking prevention campaign in the country. It is widely recognized among members of its targets audience (adults between the ages of 15 and 35), and has helped reduce youth smoking rates. In February 2005, an evaluation of the **truth**® campaign was published in the *American Journal of Public Health*. The study found that 22 percent of the overall decline in youth smoking during the first two years of the campaign (2000-2002) is directly attributable to **truth**® (equivalent of 300,000 fewer youth smokers in 2002) (Farrelly, et al. 427).

How then did **truth**® become successful and influential in such a short time? Its advertising campaigns largely focused on image events, and the American Legacy Foundation has worked to involve advertising strategies similar to those found in commercials for products designed for teens and young adults. Part of their goal has been the creation of a counterbrand through the use of subvertisements such as the Drop Dead Day described at the opening of this essay. Toward this goal, the Foundation hired Arnold Worldwide out of Boston, Massachusetts, an advertising group consisting of seven advertising agencies made up of creative teams that began work simply by talking to young people. [4] According to Arnold’s executive vice president, Lisa Unsworth, the creative teams honed in on the willingness of teens to rebel, to take risks, and to assert themselves in defiant ways (i.e., to make their voices heard). Whereas cigarettes have seemingly filled such needs in the past, Unsworth pointed out that “we needed a badge that was even more rebellious” (ABC News, October 23, 2000). Simultaneously, the campaign has emphasized a young adult’s desire to fit in. Using the same imagery tobacco companies employ, not to mention quick-cut editing techniques for their television spots (a technique traditionally associated with MTV and the music video industry), **truth**® has managed to inspire its own version of “brand loyalty.” Regarding this brand identity, Arnold Worldwide’s website boasts that “For people who share or aspire to the Sensation Seeker mindset, truth is the only brand that understands that if you tell teens not to do something, they’ll do it. . . . Emotionally, **truth**® is about being rebellious, risky, intelligent, empowered, independent, and tolerant” ([Arnold Worldwide](#)).

The success of the **truth**® campaign gained national recognition in 2003 when it was awarded the Gold and Grand EFFIE, the Oscar of the advertising industry, for the effectiveness of its “Infect **Truth**®” campaign and its success in driving down youth smoking prevalence to the current historic lows. The award, only the second given to a nonprofit organization in its 35-year history, came from the New York chapter of the American Marketing Association and acknowledged both the campaign’s objectives, design, and corresponding achievements ([American Legacy](#)).

The Tobacco Wars

To fully understand the transformation that the **truth**® campaign brought about, how it was able to produce this rebranded identity around anti-smoking, it is necessary to understand the history of the tobacco wars. The **truth**® campaign follows in a long legacy of anti-tobacco movements in the United States that date back to Puritan anti-tobaccoists of the early colonial era who claimed the Devil himself was responsible for a litany of bodily inflictions signaling the impurity of the tobacco user’s soul. It was at this time as well that the body of the Native American was first evoked as a signifier for tobacco within the trade as the cigar store Indian. Two bodies emerged in the colonial era to signify tobacco—the inflicted body of the tobacco user who had an impure

soul and the Native body of the American Indian whose body signified the authenticity of tobacco through popular associations of the indigenous body with nature.

The duality of iconographic bodies carried through to the Progressive Era anti-tobacco movement when the icons of good and evil became associated with youth, gender and sexuality. On one side were young boys who were seen as the targets of the growing tobacco industry; on the other side were female seductresses who sought to addict them to tobacco; between them were female activists who sought to free the young men from the vice of the tobacco seductress. For example, in anti-tobacco pledge cards used by such activists as Lucy Page Gaston, a skeletal figure with long flowing hair grabs at the neck of a male smoker, while a motherly female figure listens to a young non-smoking male explain why he is a member of the anti-tobacco group. Between the young convert and the matronly activist emerged a new “authentic” body signified here as a deadly seductress, and signified in tobacco advertising of the era as an exotic female, usually depicted as a Turkish seductress. Drawing upon the popularity of Orientalism in early 20th Century American culture, both the industry and the anti-tobacco movement established a new timeless icon of tobacco through the Orientalized female body.^[5]

In the early colonial and Progressive eras, then, both the tobacco industry and the anti-tobacco movement fostered development of bodies as icons of tobacco either to sell or to discourage use of the product. And in both cases, the movements ultimately lost ground while the tobacco industry continued to flourish. By the early 1900s, the tobacco industry had become one of the largest corporate-driven industries in the world, and it began to use modern advertising to counter movements against tobacco by presenting the possibility of social change through the purchase of commodities. As Helen Woodward, leading female ad copywriter of the era described, social change would be “the most beneficent medicine in the world to most people,” but “To those who cannot change their whole lives or occupations, even a new line in a dress is often a relief” (qtd. in Ewen 86). Stuart Ewen describes the broader relationship of advertising to modern mass culture and social movements in his classic study of early American advertising, *Captains of Consciousness*: “Through the creation of a spectacle of *change*, frustrations and boredom within the context of industrial society might be mobilized to maintain and sustain that order. . . . Within the symbolic spectacle, the passivity and acceptance of the marketplace was shown to be more favorable for the consumer than other, more radical conceptions of change” (Ewen 87).

Early 20th Century advertising harnessed discourses of social change toward consumption, and this had a direct impact upon the effectiveness of the anti-tobacco movement. This can be seen in the play of images in tobacco advertising and anti-tobacco discourse during the 1910s to 1920s. When America entered World War I, tobacco companies began shipping cigarettes overseas to support American troops. Tobacco companies advertised their good deed by presenting the body of the soldier as the beneficiary of its philanthropy. Ads claimed to have helped these young men win the war.

Such commodity fetishism contributed to the mid-Century claim by Guy Debord and other Situationists that modern culture is based upon a “society of the spectacle” in which conformity to the ideals of consumer culture is the basis for social acceptance. They claimed that even artistic movements such as surrealism that had attempted to challenge the normative strains of modern culture had become bankrupt and the only way to challenge the stranglehold of corporate hegemony was to undo its ontology, to create “situations” in which the seamlessness of consumer culture is undone. In terms of the history of the tobacco and anti-tobacco movements, the dynamic of signification and resignification through iconography of the human body could not be effective because it would prompt an endless play that continues to support the commodity fetish. History needed to come into play to challenge the tobacco industry—the industry itself needed to be called to answer for the ills of tobacco thus undoing the commodity fetish that shields the corporation from the selective eye of the consumer that it has so well cultivated for over a century. It is within this domain of historicity and resignification through “situations”—or what we are calling image subvertisements through image events—that the **truth**® campaign emerged.

Subvertisements as truth®

What has made the **truth**® campaign so successful is that it has changed the ways in which the tobacco wars are being fought. The **truth**® campaign, unlike prior anti-tobacco campaigns, creates image *events* that undo the commodity fetish by calling to account the “absent” corporations that produce tobacco products. Rather than battle the bodily icons of the product, the **truth**® campaign battles that which has been rendered inhuman/e

through industry and anti-tobacco iconography. Take for example the first **truth**® campaign television ad in which a young woman approaches a marketing executive in the lobby of Philip Morris's headquarters, asking her to take a lie detector test since she "said smoking is addictive and then that it isn't." Here, two bodies collide—the body of the young activist and the body of the Philip Morris executive. The encounter is presented in a journalistic mode that utilizes tropes of documentary realism such as a shaky, handheld camera and poor sound quality to present the encounter as a seemingly unplanned, unmediated event. The realism of the video style brings a sense of immediacy and historicity to the two bodies at the center of the encounter. Here we do not have icons of tobacco and anti-tobacco; we are presented with two "real" people and a request for honest communication (a lie detector test). The image event depicted within the piece undoes the commodity fetish by calling to account a representative of the corporation previously shielded by advertising.

Kalle Lasn, founder of the culture jamming *Adbusters* magazine, describes the power operating in this "subvertisement" as "grounding" the corporation. He remarks that, "A corporation has no heart, no soul, no morals. It cannot feel pain. You cannot argue with it. That's because a corporation is not a living thing, but a process—an efficient way of generating revenue. . . . When a corporation hurts people or damages the environment, it will feel no sorrow or remorse because it is *intrinsically unable to do so*. (It may sometimes apologize, but that's not remorse—that's public relations.)" (Lasn 157). These **truth**® campaign activists argue in a sense with the corporation as embodied in the executive. By calling upon the body of a corporate executive, the **truth**® campaign activist also calls upon the corporation to be responsive.

Philip Morris's response to this subvert was swift and illustrates the danger for a corporation being forced to "come to life." Philip Morris claimed that the spot and other subverts aired on television and the **truth**® campaign's website were aimed at "vilifying" the tobacco industry and conflicted with the requirements of the legal agreement that funded the American Legacy Foundation. The very notion that an industry, specifically the Philip Morris corporation, could be "vilified" speaks to the anthropomorphic challenge produced by the image events. The flip side of vilification is individual accountability for corporate decision-making. The **truth**® campaign challenges the very definition of a corporation, rhetorically performing the same act as the 1885 *Santa Clara County vs. Southern Pacific Railroad* Supreme Court decision that declared corporations to be "natural persons" under the U.S. Constitution. A long forgotten (or ignored) decision, this invocation of the bodies that form corporations is perhaps the most powerful threat to corporate capitalism. It moves beyond *detournement* to challenge the legal construct of the corporation.

The other type of subvert produced by the **truth**® campaign focuses on the bodies affected by tobacco use and creates image events that bring historicity to these individuals who have been rendered a mass market by more than a century of tobacco advertising and anti-tobacco rhetoric. We would like to analyze one particular subvert from the 2004 Truth Campaign to see how such image events are constructed. Entitled "Voice," the subvert begins with images of individuals rushing among New York City crowds to create a set in front of a "major tobacco company," which is Philip Morris. The shaky hand-held camera documents the rapid construction of two podiums, one with "Q" on it, the other with "A" on it, both with folding chairs flanking the podium in the form of a press conference or debate. Behind the "Q" podium, they unfurl a billboard size image of a Virginia Slims campaign ad that encourages women to "find your voice." We see the production team hastily assembling a sound system, which squeals with feedback as images of the "A" podium reveal empty seats and the corporate high rise looming behind it. A young woman takes to the "Q" podium to explain, "Tobacco companies have been targeting women for the past 70 years, asking us to find our own voice. Today, my friend Grace has a question for you guys." With the second sentence, the young woman looks up to the Philip Morris skyscraper, then steps aside so Grace can take to the podium. A 50-something woman then places the microphone on her throat and asks in the synthesized voice of a person who has gone through major throat surgery, "Is this the voice you expected me to find?" while looking up at the Philip Morris towers. The camera cuts to an extreme low angle shot

of the corporate tower and then pans down to the “A” podium with its empty seats. Cuts back and forth between Grace standing silent at her podium and the empty “A” podium illustrate the absence of bodies from the corporation. A final shot of the “A” podium is accompanied by another squeal of feedback from the speakers and a subtitle “ask questions” that encourages the viewer to engage the absent corporation as well.

Here, the commodity fetish is undone by placing Grace in front of the Virginia Slims ad, but the media activist endeavor does not end at this act of resignification. Instead, the corporation is asked to answer for the deceptive advertisement. The lack of bodies present from the corporation accuses the corporation of a lack of accountability because it attaches accountability to individuals through the presence or absence of their bodies. It requires the corporation—signified through the skyscraper—to become human in order to answer Grace’s question.

What makes this subvert particularly effective is its use of documentary-style practices to create an image event. This is accomplished at three levels—*mise en scene*, performance and editing. First, the *mise en scene* presents the public space of the sidewalk outside of a midtown Manhattan skyscraper. While not noted in the subvert to be the Philip Morris headquarters, the skyscraper is indeed the headquarters. Regardless, the presentation of lived experience in the shadows of corporate architecture undoes accepted norms of urban behavior fostered by Modern Era urban planning. Leaders of Modern Era urban design such as Le Corbusier developed urban architecture that towered over the city streets and often replaced former communal walkways with direct transit lines, thus diminishing urban space as a place of community encounters. The valorization of private space as the domain for interpersonal communication in the Modern Era went hand-in-hand with the valorization of consumerism as the new form of individualism. It validated the notion of the corporation as the entity that guides and develops such social “progress.”

Situationists were horrified by these developments within the urban environment and set out to challenge them by creating possibilities for playfulness and obstruction of Modernist form. [6] The **truth**® campaign’s subvert picks up upon the Situationist challenge by posing its “debate” with the corporation at the front door of the corporate headquarters. Like other Truth Campaign subverts, “Voice” defies urban order in which the corporation is shielded from public inquiry by its steel and glass tower. It undoes the norm of privatized culture by calling the corporation to come out of its tower and engage in dialogue with the victims of its product. It establishes the city as a lived space where authenticity occurs in the street, not in architecture. And in so doing, it undoes the ahistorical nature of the corporation as an entity beyond human thought and decision-making. It undoes the skyscraper fetish that correlates with the commodity fetish that houses its product.

The performance further supports this image event by presenting the event as seemingly illicit—the teams of people jumping out of the truck to rapidly set up the platforms for the debate, the snapping of the Virginia Slims banner as it unfurls behind the “Q” platform, the canted camera angles as camera persons move quickly to document the activity, and the squeal of feedback from a sound system that is being rapidly tweaked, all present the event as something that must be accomplished quickly, ostensibly before some authority prevents it from taking place. This performance adds a sense of immediacy and historicity to the event documented. It also positions those staging the event as the “underdogs” fighting against an invisible authority that could stomp them out—end the image event—at any moment. Thus accomplishing the event becomes a process of undoing authority, signified by the absent corporation.

The individuals accomplishing the event then become the agents of this historical moment. The first young woman who presents the history of Big Tobacco’s marketing to women stands before a growing crowd of passersby to turn this grand history into an embodied history. She introduces Gloria, who speaks truth to power by speaking in a voice that embodies the history as one of personal destruction. Gloria’s voice is misaligned with the suggestion of the Virginia Slims ad that hangs behind her, suggesting that the corporation is not a liberatory entity providing freedom to individuals through consumer choice, but an authoritarian entity that limits personal freedom through destructive practices.

Finally, the editing positions the viewer as part of the image event, thus offering the possibility for the event to extend beyond the television screen (or Internet browser, as the case may be) and into the lives of the viewers. The handheld cameras first follow the producers of the event as they set up the platforms, podiums and sound system. As a member of the community of event producers, the cameraperson participates in the creation

of the event. As a conduit to the viewer, the camera then positions the viewer as a member of the event team and establishes the viewer as a participant in this historical undoing of corporate power. As the event begins to unfold, the camera moves into the growing street crowd and documents the actions from the perspective of a spectator at the actual event—moving as one would move his or her head or eyes to follow the action. Thus, the viewer becomes a member of the spontaneous community experiencing the event as well.

This “inside/outside” perspective offered up to the viewer allows for the possibility of identification to form at the level of participant and observer, or put another way, producer and consumer. This is perhaps the most critical aspect of the **truth@** campaign’s image events. By positioning the viewer as both producer and consumer, it encourages the viewer to move beyond the passive role of consumption under a traditional advertising model. The viewer is encouraged to take part in the activism being produced within the media event and then reconfigure consumption as an active role in the economy of mass culture. [\[7\]](#) Thus, the Truth Campaign’s image events not only undo the commodity fetish of tobacco advertising, but the very nature of consumer culture.

Philip Morris Fights Back

In the age of corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaigns where Revlon gets major corporations to “race to fight breast cancer,” American Express encourages card holders to “charge against hunger,” and Liz Claiborne and the Backstreet Boys join forces to battle domestic violence, has the **truth@** campaign inadvertently provided Big Tobacco new, more powerful tools for recuperating the corporation and consumer relations? Put another way, does the old adage “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” work for Philip Morris? It seems this is the effort that has been underway since 2000 when Philip Morris launched major CSR and corporate image campaigns that present the “bodies” of the corporation as socially responsible persons taking actions to benefit humanity. We would like to examine the Philip Morris’s “Working to Make a Difference” campaign to see how this is happening.

The campaign presents the good works of the “people of Philip Morris” in order to recuperate the corporation’s public image through what we describe here as “revertisements” on television, print and the Internet, Philip Morris presents the “everyday” people of Philip Morris as the bodies that make up the corporation—ostensibly the bodies that are presented as absent in the **truth@** campaign’s subverts. The worker is configured as the lifeblood of the corporation, and the corporation is presented as financially supporting culture, the arts, and social programs such as domestic violence programs. The bodies of workers are presented as parallel to the “victim” bodies of the **truth@** campaign’s subverts—they invoke the “authentic” public of which the viewer is a part, a parallel community that cannot be vilified as distanced or absent corporate executives. The workers’ bodies are juxtaposed against images of farmlands, windmills producing natural energy, ballerinas and other icons of nature and beauty, thus adding notions of purity and idealism to the bodies and the corporation that they form.

In the “Working to Make a Difference” campaign, Philip Morris “comes to life” as a corporation, but defines the corporation not as a collective of executive bodies making evil decisions, but as a collective of workers’ bodies making a difference within their community. Kenny Bruno of CorpWatch describes the endeavor as a new form of “Greenwash,” which are corporate campaigns that utilize nature to wash over environmental wrong-doings in corporate ad campaigns. Bruno calls these new Philip Morris reverts “bluewash,” standing for the color of the collar from the workers who are invoked in the reverts. Bruno points out that the reverts do not make connections between the corporation’s products and good works: “It’s as if they recognize that the dissonance in mentioning Marlboro and philanthropy in the same breath would be too harsh. Yet at the same time, it allows them to get the Philip Morris name back on TV, even though cigarette ads are banned. Pretty clever” ([Corpwatch](#)).

More than just a ploy to advertise tobacco without advertising tobacco, we contend that the “Working to Make a Difference” campaign is about recuperating the body of the corporation and reconfiguring the producer-consumer relationship to generate a sense of socially responsible consumerism. If the **truth@** campaign’s image events accomplished an exposure of the corporation as an entity of faceless, unaccountable human beings, then the Philip Morris revert campaign embodies those human beings to present the body of the

corporation as a generous, good, pure body. Philip Morris is presented as one of “us,” thus a decision to support the **truth@** campaign and not to support Philip Morris becomes a decision against oneself and one’s community.

This is most evident in their revert entitled “Laura.” This revert aired shortly after the first **truth@** campaign subverts hit the airwaves in 2000. In it, a battered woman, Laura, thanks Philip Morris for their generous funding of the battered woman’s shelter that she took refuge in to escape her abusive husband. A partial storyboard of the revert available on the CorpWatch website illustrates how bodies are used in a parallel way to the worker’s body in order to recuperate the corporate body of Philip Morris ([Corpwatch](#)). It begins with the story of Laura at nine months pregnant, showing the image of a woman’s hands lying gently upon a pregnant belly. The words “based on a true story” are superimposed across the image, indicating to the viewer that this is the true story of the individual and the corporation. A close-up of Laura’s face and body shows wounds from her husband who beat her, thus presenting her body as the victimized body and the absent husband as the body worthy of vilification. Cut to a close-up of an infant child sleeping in his mother’s arms and we hear the voiceover explain, “Thanks to Philip Morris, one of the largest supporters of battered women’s shelters, women and children are starting new lives.” Here the body of a newborn signifies innocence, an innocence that the corporation fosters and protects. The final image of a title sequence explains: “Working to make a difference. The people of Philip Morris.” The people—the body—of the corporation are saving lives, saving bodies, not killing them, as the **truth@** campaign claims.

Furthermore, the revert utilizes the inside/outside positioning of the viewer fostered in the **truth@** campaign’s subverts. It presents close-ups of Laura’s battered face as she looks directly into the camera and the eyes of the viewer. Laura directly addresses the viewer with her body, forcing the viewer to bear witness to the destruction of her body and self. The act of bearing witness forces the viewer to move outside of a passive role and into an active role that supports resolution to the trauma that incurs the need to bear witness. [8] One must take action if one bears witness, and that action is offered to the viewer in the ensuing resolution of the revert when close-ups of her pregnant belly and hands caressing her unborn child establish the terms of progress within this story. The unborn child—and then newborn in the following shots—becomes the victim whom the viewer must help in order to fulfill the act of bearing witness. Philip Morris, by helping this child and the mother through their support of women’s shelters, becomes the conduit for the viewer to resolve the scenario. The viewer is presented a hero in Philip Morris—the corporation—and the *viewer* is able to *embody* the corporation by supporting Philip Morris. There are no absent bodies of the corporation to call to account in this revert, for the viewer is the body who must account. Supporting Philip Morris by consuming its goods becomes re-established as an individual choice to support social progress.

These reverts are much more than a re-signification endeavor; they are an endeavor to reconfigure the producer-consumer relationship such that consumers see themselves as participants within a corporate social responsibility campaign. Consumers become producers of social good through purchase power. This high-stakes campaign is made clear by the imbalance of funds that Philip Morris has expended for its philanthropic endeavors and its advertising of those endeavors. In 2000, the year that “Laura” aired, Philip Morris spent \$2 million on domestic violence programs and a total of \$60 million on charitable causes in the United States. They spent \$108 million on the advertising campaign to tell the public about it. [9]

Philip Morris’s revert campaign is about the same thing that the **truth@** campaign is about: distribution of information as the tool for consumers to become informed consumers and producers of social good. Of course, Philip Morris and the **truth@** campaign have quite different definitions of what “producers of social good” means, and this is where the final step for Philip Morris’s revert campaign becomes critical. In 2004, Philip Morris reorganized so that it is now an entity under the umbrella corporation of “Altria” (connoting “altruism”, as an opinion piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* so aptly noted in January 2005). At the height of the **truth@** campaign’s success in 2005, Altria presented itself as something of a new-age multinational corporation through television, print, and Internet-based media. The Altria website in June 2005 described the corporation as a “family of companies” that is focused on “responsibility,” which is defined as “listening, learning and evolving” to fulfill

its “commitment” of “meeting society’s expectations” ([Altria](#)). In the opening header for the Altria corporate website, these words are embodied through images of people from different races, genders and ages. At the end of the animated introduction, the user is encouraged to “read more about Responsibility” by following a link to their “Responsibility Overview” portion of the site, which provides the user with information about the lawsuits brought against Altria’s family of companies and the actions the corporation is taking relative to these suits and related court mandates.

“Responsibility” is presented on the surface as landing upon the shoulders of the corporation as an act of full disclosure regarding the history of its family of companies. It is presented as an altruistic endeavor intended to prove the responsible, socially committed nature of the corporation. However, when one moves beyond the rhetoric to the nature of the discourse, it is clear that the “responsibility” in this relationship lies upon the shoulders of the user/consumer. The information is presented in a website that requires the user to actively seek out and read; the consumer is required to *consume* the history of Altria through an interaction that requires entering Altria’s “home.” The user is invited to enter the corporation, here configured not as a skyscraper in midtown Manhattan but a corporate website. The doors are open, and the corporation is ready to communicate, but the onus of communication is on the user, not the corporation. For the corporation to come alive, it is the consumer who must embody and inhabit its space. It is the consumer who must actively seek out and consume information. This again removes the bodies of the corporation from the line of accountability, dehumanizing the corporation and replacing the onus of the industry upon the consumer. This relationship is taken into televisual media in Altria/Philip Morris’s 2004 television spots aimed at informing viewers about the perils of tobacco use. In these spots, the screen is evacuated of bodies and instead filled with statements regarding tobacco use that direct the viewer to the Altria/Philip Morris website for more information. In some, the statements appear as though they are being typed into a computer, with the television screen acting as a computer monitor, thus presenting an “active” corporation producing the communication and requiring the viewer to become active and embody the corporation by entering its corporate website. In this way, social responsibility becomes a process that requires the consumer to engage the corporation as a partner, not an adversary.

Conclusion

In one of the **truth@** campaign’s most recent subvertisements, “Baby Invasion,” battery-operated baby dolls are let loose on a busy city sidewalk to crawl about and cry. All of the dolls are dressed in the same orange shirt that the viewer learns has a quote on the front when the camera provides a close up: “How do infants avoid secondhand smoke? ‘At some point, they begin to crawl.’—Tobacco Executive 1996”. In this piece, the **truth@** campaign allows for the embodiment of Big Tobacco in the quote of an anonymous executive but inscribes his or her words upon the body of a “baby.”

At the opening of this essay, we posed the question: do media activist campaigns such as the **truth@** campaign effectively expose the functioning of corporate capitalism or do they instead destabilize the media image of corporate capital and ultimately provide the tools for recuperation? As “Baby Invasion” illustrates, the answer to our question is “yes” to both effects. As has been made clear by theorists of the resource mobilization approach to social movement, “success” is better measured not by ultimate outcomes but by the ability of movements to maintain an ongoing struggle by adapting to changing contexts and conditions. This adaptability is reflected in the **truth@** campaign’s image events, which maintain central strategies (calling the corporation to account by undoing the commodity fetish) but shift the modes of articulating those strategies in order to generate the *detournement* that responds to transforming contexts and situations (body bags to baby dolls). The emphasis, then, is on the *event* component of the **truth@** campaign’s use of image events, where the event is generated at the nexus of time, history, and human bodies.

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[1] Mississippi, Florida, Texas, and Minnesota settled individually with tobacco companies for Medicaid costs related to tobacco-related illness and disease.

[2] Annual payments began April 15, 2000 with a \$4.5 billion installment. Subsequent payments were to follow: \$5 billion in 2001, \$6.5 billion in 2002 and 2003, \$8 billion each year from 2004 through 2007, \$8.139 billion each year from 2008 through 2017, and \$9 billion each year from 2018 through 2025.

[3] It is important to note that whereas the American Legacy Foundation would, over the years, publish its own literature on the harmful effects of smoking on the body, much of the literature to be disseminated and used as weapons against the tobacco industry would originate from the tobacco companies themselves. The Master Settlement Agreement required, for example, that these companies must 1) open, at their expense, a website that includes all documents produced in state and other smoking/health related lawsuits, 2) maintain the site for ten

years in a user-friendly and searchable format, and 3) add, again at their expense, all documents produced in future civil actions involving smoking/health cases. The Legacy Tobacco Document Library at the University of California, San Francisco is this definitive source for such historical and often incriminating documents.

[4] In addition to designing campaigns for truth, [Arnold Worldwide](#), as of May 2009, holds accounts with a client list including Hershey's Brown Forman (parent company of Jack Daniel's), McDonald's, Timberland, and Volvo.

[5] One need only consider the popularity of Orientalist discourse in early 20th Century American stage and cinema to recognize the popularity and cultural valence of the tobacco industry and anti-tobacco movement's utilization of the Orientalized female body. For more on these cultural practices, see Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Iconography of the Cinema" and Galyn Studlar, "Out-Salomeing Salome: Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism" in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, Matthew Bernstein and Galyn Studlar, Eds., Rutgers University Press, 1997.

[6] For more on the Situationists' endeavors in urban environments, see Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998.

[7] This televisual media event and its dual address to the viewer is supported by and integrated within the **truth**® campaign's larger multimedia activism. The truth® campaign utilizes the Internet as both a major media outlet as well as a cultural signifier of its address to the youth population. Such new media formats are based in interactive relationships between producers and users.

[8] For more on the relationship between bearing witness and image events, see the collection by Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, from Wallflower Press (2007).

[9] In the early months of 2006, truth® struck back against the good deeds of Philip Morris in its "Nobody Likes a Showoff" television advertisement. SCRIPT: Speaker #1 (man on the street holding an umbrella on a visibly rainy day): "Attention everyone, I just wanted everyone to know that I am holding an umbrella up for this lady." Speaker #2 (standing next to a trash can): "Attention everyone, I just threw away a piece of trash that did not belong to me." Speaker #3/Narrator: "A tobacco company once gave \$125,000 worth of food to a charity, according to an estimate by *The Wall Street Journal*. Then they spent well over \$21 million telling people about it. I guess, when you sell a deadly, addictive product, you need all the good PR you can get" ([The Truth](#)).