

proper propaganda

ideological manipulation as a tool for ecological change

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context

Our society is rapidly approaching a major turning point. We are rapidly coming to the point of peak oil, and we face the growing threat presented by climate change, shortage of resources, and the consequential increase in the number of failing states and global instability. As these points are reached and the long-term effects of our lifestyle become apparent, it is necessary to reexamine the models that we have for so long taken for granted.

The current driving motivation of unlimited economic growth is becoming obsolete as we begin to truly understand the finite nature of our planetary resources. Our population is expanding exponentially, and without major changes in how we live, and a shift to a lifestyle that is more in harmony with our world, our civilization may not be able to weather the next 50 years intact.

With that in mind, it is my belief that strong actions on the part of governments worldwide will be necessary to administer the requisite changes in a timeframe that will be able to counteract some of the damage done before it is too late. The focus of the environmental movement to date has been largely on the actions of the individual and the choices they make, this has proven ineffectual, given that acting in the interest of the commons usually involves a diminished return for the individual.

motivations

In considering my belief that government action will be required to institute lasting change to how we live, and our impact on the environment, I was driven to ask how it could be feasible to convince people to accept a massive ideological shift, even if it is in their long-term interest. We have had the technology and knowledge for decades to allow us to see the inherent flaws in our economic models and industrial systems, yet the status quo has remained the same. People seem to have a natural resistance to change that conditions us to accept an inadequate solution for as long as is possible. When this is combined with a high level of self-interest and self-involvement, it allows people to overlook huge problems by dismissing them as someone else's problem and go on with their lives as if nothing is happening.

A personal interest in the design methods applied in wartime propaganda from the World War Two era came together with my emerging interest in environmental issues last year. After reading a number of books that discussed our current situation in the face of climate change and economic issues, I came across one that, amongst other things, advocated a shift to a war-time mentality in approaching the current crises. The book cited an example in WW II when the government of the United States approached the auto manufacturing industry in the country and requested a massive number of planes, tanks, etc, be built for the war effort. The auto industry responded by saying that the order would be impossible to fill, as it would divert too much of their manufacturing capacity away from making cars. When they heard this, the government retaliated by passing a law banning the production of automobiles for a certain period of time, thus the auto industry had no choice but to repurpose their factories to the production of war materials.

With a society-wide shift in ideology, combined with, and backed by strong government legislation to enforce it, a move towards utilizing more sustainable resources and technology may be quite attainable. There is a need for something to drive this ideological shift, and that is where the motivation behind this project lies. The use of propaganda has been highly effective throughout history in encouraging mass shifts in belief and political and social change. While there is a tendency to immediately reject the idea of coercion by one's government, I feel it is necessary to reevaluate the subjective morality of that practice in the context of working towards a common good.

research goals

In order to complete the project to its fullest potential, substantial research will be required in two primary areas.

Ecological Research

As the topic of climate change and sustainability is quite broad, it will be necessary to narrow the focus down, in order to avoid getting lost in the sea of potential for change, and keep the message from getting polluted. As the project will be more ideologically driven than information driven, the research will focus on distilling environmental issues down to their essence, and weeding out extraneous overly technical and specific data.

Since there will be a strong emphasis on the need for government intervention in issues of ecology, the applicable issues will be identified in part by cross referencing the changes that must be made, with the key areas where government legislation would have the most effect.

Propaganda Research

Throughout the years, there has been a rich variety of approaches, motifs, and distribution methods used in the dissemination of propaganda materials. These range from subtle psychologically manipulative techniques to bolster patriotism, to brash and blatant attempts to create fear, hate, and racial inequality. In order to best select propagandist methodologies suited to my intended goal, a comprehensive review of traditional methods and their underlying psychological motivating factors will be required.

Once an overview is gained, a selective process will be applied to determine the most relevant approaches, given the framework and context of the project. This research will also heavily inform the visual techniques which will be used to implement the project.

design objectives

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1. Promote and fuel discussion on what lifestyle and ideological changes will be required of people moving into the years following peak oil and climate change reform.
2. Demonstrate the need for concrete and strict government legislation and controls in order to ensure compliance with a sustainable model for living.
3. Revive the notion of the importance of individual actions in the collective interests of a society.

frameworks/approach

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Theoretical/Speculative

The context for the project is a period approximately ten years from now, in a time where very strict government legislation has forced a mass adaptation to a new way of sustainable life. This legislation is imposed with a strong hand and harsh penalties for the deviation from them. This sets the framing of the deliverables as a campaign rolled out by the government of the time in order to help direct the population to accept these new restrictions in the interest of the common good.

Given the speculative nature of this approach, the piece would be intended primarily to promote discussion as opposed to providing information, as such, the visual approach and language of the campaign would be quite overt, ala Orwell's 1984 messages "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength" albeit without the doublespeak.

Applied/Contemporary/Personal

The context for the presentation of the project is our current time and place, and capitalizes upon the unique opportunities that exist for us today to shape the next stage of our society's evolution. More than perhaps any time in human history, the decisions we make now will have a great impact on the coming decades.

With this in mind, this contemporary campaign would approach people through propaganda materials in order to persuade them to adopt choices, within their individual lives and in the larger societal context, which would create a more sustainable living condition for the future. The application would entail a covert propagandist approach to subtly influence choices and decision-making on a personal level. The final form would resemble a public information campaign, but with a more concrete objective.

Applied/Contemporary/Collective

The context for the presentation of the project is our current time and place, and capitalizes upon the unique opportunities that exist for us today to shape the next stage of our society's evolution. More than perhaps any time in human history, the decisions we make now will have a great impact on the coming decades. It can be difficult or overwhelming to contemplate addressing these issues on one's own, however.

With this in mind, this contemporary campaign would approach people through propaganda materials in order to persuade them to turn to the government to lead the way on a new initiative that would reshape our interaction with the world, with the end goal create a more sustainable living condition for the future. The application would entail a covert propagandist approach to reinforce/create the belief amongst the populace that there is a need to support the government's actions in response to issues such as climate change, despite potential sacrifices that may be required on the part of the individual. The final form would resemble a public information campaign, but with a more concrete objective.

deliverables

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Regardless of the framework the project would operate in, the final deliverable would consist of an integrated public campaign utilizing print, film, and web based media, with a particular sensitivity towards emerging contemporary approaches to advertising distribution, ie viral campaigns, online marketing, etc.

Due to my inexperience with film techniques, any of these materials would likely be presented in storyboard form.

The visual forms will be highly influenced by the need for achieving a balance between “soft” and “hard” techniques appropriate to the intended messages. The carrot and the stick, as it were.