Branding Environmentalism for TV: The Rise and Fall of Planet Green

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Dedication

For my family.

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the rise and fall of Planet Green, Discovery Communications Inc.'s short-lived multiplatform, environmentalism-themed media brand. Launched in 2008, Planet Green billed itself as "the first 24-hour network devoted to the green lifestyle." It promised to "bring green to the mainstream" with a full lineup of environmentalist lifestyle and reality television, environmental news and documentaries, and two websites with a wide array of eco-games and quizzes, consumer advice, DIY projects, an open-ended discussion forum, and short-form videos. But despite a huge and successful launch and a significant programming budget, by 2012, Discovery announced that Planet Green would be cancelled and replaced with Destination America, a male-targeted lifestyle network aimed at a "between the coasts crown," said Discovery spokespeople. With shows like *BBQ Pitmasters*, *United States of Food*, *Fast Food Mania*, and *Epic RV*'s, the new channel offered a kind of macho celebration of patriotism and consumerist excess that seemed to applaud the very things that Planet Green cautioned viewers against. My dissertation argues that Planet Green's rise and fall must be understood at the place where contemporary branding meets neoliberal governmentality. It was structured by the simultaneous industrial impulses to "govern through television" on the one hand, and to maximize profits in an increasingly competitive cable TV market on the other. When it came to branding environmentalism in particular, these simultaneous impulses were in deep conflict and generated a great deal of anxiety among industry insiders. I show that Planet Green took shape in a manner designed to ease these anxieties through branding. In the end, however, even with Discovery's extensive resources and professed commitment to the environment, Planet Green was unable to overcome the tensions between profits and planet saving.

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Introduction: Branding environmentalism for television

Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a proliferation of brands that positioned themselves as socially and environmentally responsible. Many companies launched "green" lines of products (Clorox's Green Works, and SCJohnson's Nature's Source, for example) in addition to their traditional, non-environmentally friendly ones. Other companies that trade solely on "green" credentials, such as Seventh Generation and Burt's Bees, became what *Advertising Age*'s Jack Neff terms "megabrands" (Neff 2010a). Wal-Mart began publicizing "zero waste" goals and carrying organic foods. And magazines like *Vanity Fair* and *Elle* published "green" issues. We saw the establishment of the Green Effie advertising "effectiveness" awards (Effies Go Green 2007), the "first annual" of a number of green marketing conferences (Neorr 2007), and marketers began to have designated "green budgets" (Sustainable Life Media Editor 2008). Advertisers became interested in consumers in the relatively affluent LOHAS lifestyle cluster ("lifestyle of health and sustainability"), willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly goods and services. Special consumers dubbed "greenfluencers" became a desirable target group, valued for being chatty, networked, and willing to plug green brands and products for free in their everyday lives (Zerillo 2008) and green marketing guides waxed enthusiastic about the complementarity of environmentalism and good business.

Simultaneous with this enthusiasm, however, a struggle raged over the meaning and practice of green itself. Consumers and environmentalists raised concerns over corporate

greenwashing. Marketers worried that consumers would develop "green fatigue" " (Neff 2010b) or that anti-greenwashing activism would cause irreparable damage to their brands. Other industry insiders complained that consumers, failing to "live green" themselves, were holding corporations to unfair standards, as one *AdWeek* reporter put it "a case of individuals outsourcing environmental responsibility to big business" (Dolliver 2008). Since Obama entered the White House, the Federal Trade Commission had begun taking enforcement action against advertisers who made false or misleading environmental claims (Neff 2010c), while industry shot back that voluntary, corporate self-regulation was superior to "unfair" government oversight (Peeler 2008). All the while, global warming, species extinction, ocean acidification and other forms of environmental degradation—and the human activities that produce them—show few signs of abating.

It was in this milieu that Discovery Communications Inc. launched Planet Green, its environmentalist US cable network and multiplatform media brand. Announced in 2007 and going live in 2008, Planet Green debuted with a full lineup of eco-TV shows to be aired 24 hours a day 7 days a week on the channel that, until this point, had been Discovery Home. (Discovery also launched Planet Green programming blocks in its Latin American, China, Asia, and UK markets (Discovery Globe 2008).) Discovery commissioned all-original programming for the new channel, which ranged from environmental news (*Focus Earth* 7/12/08-1/3/10) to lifestyle and consumer advice (*G Word* 6/4/08-12/15/08) to celebrity-studded competition reality shows (*Battleground Earth* 8/3/08-10/12/08). A docu-series chronicled the green rebuilding of the tornado-

devastated Greensburg, Kansas (*Greensburg* 6/15/08-5/3/10) and comedian Tom Green hosted a game show (*Go for the Green* 11/8/08-2/21/09). There were cooking shows that instructed viewers in the preparation of organic and local dishes (*Emeril Green* 7/14/08-6/21/10*, Supper Club with Tom Bergeron* 6/4/08-10/23/08) and home design and renovation programs covering topics like energy efficiency, green building products and techniques, salvaging materials, and eco-design (*Total Wrecklamation* 9/30/08-4/21/09, *Renovation Nation* 6/4/08-2/18/10, *Greenovate* 6/6/08-10/3/08, and *World's Greenest Homes* 6/6/08-2/20/10). There was a green Hollywood gossip and fashion show (*Hollywood Green with Maria Menounos* 6/4/08-9/25/08) and a "high stakes" drag racing program that pitted green vehicles against their eco-unfriendly counterparts (*Mean Green Machines* 6/4/08-7/15/08).

The Planet Green brand extended beyond the TV network to include partnerships with environmental nonprofits, scientific explorations, standards-based K-12 educational resources for schools, and two expansive websites, PlanetGreen.com and TreeHugger.com. PlanetGreen.com was a brand new site wholly aligned with Planet Green's television component. On it, users could play eco-games, take green quizzes, get consumer advice, and find recipes and DIY tips. They could read about Planet Green's shows, learn how to volunteer with Planet Green's nonprofit partners, read short digests of environmental policy, and participate in open-ended discussion forums. TreeHugger.com was an existing environmental news, lifestyle, and technology site that Discovery had acquired in 2007. Discovery tweaked TreeHugger's brand image, populated it with Planet Green info- and advertainment, and cross-linked the sites

extensively to co-brand and position TreeHugger as a "sister site" to Planet Green. Planet Green also had iTunes and YouTube channels, branded DVDs (from the shows *Alter Eco*, *Greensburg*, *Emeril Green*, *Renovation Nation*), a Facebook page and a Twitter feed.

But despite a huge launch effort, Discovery's existing brand recognition, a generous programming budget, a few big advertisers, a gaggle of celebrities, and some of the industry's top programmers, Planet Green started flailing not long into its existence. Much of the original slate of shows was not renewed. Some shows were renewed for a second season but then canceled before their third. New shows were introduced, but they became less and less environment-themed as time went on. Eventually Planet Green's lineup came to be dominated by reruns from other Discovery-owned channels—shows about aliens, the supernatural, and human sexuality, among other topics. On Memorial Day, 2012 Planet Green's demise became official as it was replaced by Destination America, a network "dedicated to the bigness of America in all its forms" (Ito 2012) celebrating meat, white masculinity, and capitalist excess (shows included *United States of Bacon* and *Epic RVs*, for instance).

Project overview

This dissertation chronicles the rise and fall of Planet Green. It takes the elaborate and extensive multiplatform environmental media brand as a case study for understanding a particular kind of green branding in contemporary culture. I situate Planet Green as an example of what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) calls the "branding of

politics"—a process by which a social issue, like environmentalism, is transformed into a platform for selling products and adding brand value. Branding environmental politics was a strategy that Discovery perceived to be commercially useful at a particular moment in time. Discovery launched Planet Green at the same time that the company became publically traded for the first time in its history. Facing increased pressure to generate short-term profits for its shareholders, Planet Green must be understood first and foremost as a commercial strategy. Planet Green promised to help Discovery "break through the clutter" of proliferating cable channels and online content delivery platforms, thanks to the contemporary promises of brands as a means to differentiate a channel and draw in a valuable "niche" of viewers by offering them a sense of belonging in a larger brand community. With content that fully integrated sponsors' brands into television narratives (for example, when General Motors donates a fleet of hybrid vehicles to help Greensburg's rebuilding effort), Planet Green promised to overcome consumer ad-skipping technologies, such as DVRs. With its extensive online, video-on-demand, and interactive content, Discovery hoped Planet Green would draw young and media savvy consumers to sponsors' brands in an era of consumer "migration" away from the television set toward other content delivery platforms. Thanks to its international spin-off brands, websites and programming blocks, Planet Green would be part of Discovery's internationalization efforts, as it sought out untapped markets to grow the company despite a "saturated" US cable market.

I also argue, however, that while this explanation is a crucial part of the story, it leaves two key issues unexplored. First, it ignores the instability of the Planet Green

project: that Planet Green's success in delivering valuable consumers' "eyeballs" to advertisers in an era of ad-skipping, media "clutter," viewer "migration," and US market saturation was never guaranteed. Instead, as I will discuss, the branding of environmentalism unfolded as a struggle, rather than an easy achievement, that was carried out by a range of industrial decision makers attempting to make environmentalism "work" for television. This resulted in programming that was often contradictory from an environmental standpoint and often "unsuccessful" by normative standards of television business (i.e., advertiser dollars, ratings, renewal, etc.). I argue that examining instability of the Planet Green brand—its environmental contradictions and its ongoing work to over come these contradictions for the ends of brand value—offers unique insight, not only into Planet Green's particular failure, but also into the limitations of branding environmentalism in contemporary culture.

Second, understanding Planet Green's "strong," multi-platform niche marketing and branded entertainment as simply a product of the "cable crisis" tells us little about the implications of green branding in particular. Planet Green must also be situated in the context of the deregulation, defunding, and devolution of environmental governance that has occurred in the US since the 1970s, along with the concomitant dispersion of such governance across the population and the private sector with the rise of "voluntary" corporate self-regulation and incentivizing of "green" consumer choices with labeling schemes like Energy Star. Planet Green was organized by a governing impulse on the part of media decision makers that was intimately related to this broader tendency in environmental governance. The promotional discourse surrounding Planet Green avowed

a will to "[bring] green to the masses" (Campbell quited in Ahrens 2007a) wherein "green" was a form of self-governance involving volunteerism, consumer choice, personal responsibility, and enterprising appeals to the private sector to solve a range of environmental problems from climate change to ocean acidification to toxic dumping. I argue that this governing impulse arises within a particular class formation—one which includes the liberal-leaning media professionals and elites who worked on Planet Green—and is rooted in a structure of feeling that is evident not only in the discourse surrounding Planet Green's launch, but also, as I will show, in the discourse of Green Capitalism more broadly. In the case of Planet Green, this was a governing impulse fully entwined with efforts to cultivate consumers who would pay extra for environmentally friendly goods and services and self-realize through brands.

This dissertation argues that Planet Green's rise, its actualization on television, and its eventual fall were all structured by two tendencies. First, they were structured by a governing impulse seeking to cultivate green consumer citizens for what I call a "new environmentalism" that situated brands as authorities and enabling actors in a privatized form of planet saving in a manner that would double as profitable branding in a cluttered and competitive media environment. I call this environmentalism "new" to highlight its alignment with forms of privatized public service that proliferate in the context of neoliberalism. While there is nothing new about the involvement of the private sector, including large media firms, in how environmental issues get addressed (Andrews 1999/2006, Gottlieb 2005, Hoffman 2001), what is new, or, at the very least specific to contemporary US neoliberalism, is the degree to which the state's central purpose is to

ensure the "freedom" of the market and, with this, the extent to which government has become reliant, not only on a citizenry that is self-governing and a corporate sector that is self-regulating, but also on the voluntarism of these same entities to help overcome the environmental contradictions of a radically free market.

Second, Planet Green was structured by profound anxieties about the particular potential for consumer unruliness when it came to environmental branding—for example, viewers might change the channel, scrutinize sponsors' industrial practices, dismiss the channel as "greenwash" or, conversely, "tree-hugging," or otherwise refuse to conduct themselves in a manner that would generate profits for Planet Green and its sponsors. While anxieties about consumer unpredictability perennially haunt television industry, as Discovery worked to sell Planet Green viewers to advertisers, it worked to overcome a host of anxieties specific to environmentalism.

I also argue, however, that the discourse surrounding Planet Green was organized by a cluster of outsized industrial hopes about what "strong branding" could actually do. In Planet Green, "strong branding" promised to achieve the new environmentalism *and* overcome unruly consumers through means that were both, as I elaborate in the next paragraphs, *governmental* and *performative*. It was governmental in that it was aimed at shaping a market and guiding consumer behavior and it was performative in that Planet Green's brand value depended less on what consumers were actually doing than on whether performative statements by Planet Green's spokespeople and its advertising team could sell the "fictive entity" (Ang 1991) of Planet Green's viewership of green consumers to advertisers.

The discourse surrounding "strong branding" waxes enthusiastic about its unique capacity to draw consumers into an intimate relationship with a brand, fold it into their everyday lives and enact their, for example, environmentalist commitments with, as Adam Arvidsson (2006) writes, "the brand in mind." But the process of branding is also highly anxious and uncertain. Success in branding relies wholly upon something that is "*external* to the brand-owning organization": what individuals think and do (7). Throughout its existence, commercial TV industry has been worried about what individuals think and do. Since commercial television depends upon delivering valuable "eyeballs" to advertisers, technologies seeking to know about and predict the behavior of TV audiences (ratings, lifestyle profiling techniques, demographic and psychographic data, and other market research) have enormous appeal. The promise of branding extends beyond knowing or predicting audiences and audience behavior. It also works to guide and shape the conduct of consumers through strategies that have much in common with what Foucauldian scholars call governmentality, a process of "governing at a distance" by offering individuals a range of resources and techniques to aid them in governing themselves in line with the certain goals. In branding, Liz Moor writes, "various aesthetic and cultural themes and signifiers are mobilized to support projects that are essentially about governance" (Moor 2007, 11).

But despite the increasing sophistication of audience research and branding strategies, TV's industrial discourse remains fraught with anxiety about the essential impossibility of fully knowing, predicting, or controlling consumers. There is a great deal of uncertainty about whether TV brands will "work" in the manner intended. Thus,

television spokespeople, brand managers, and advertising teams engage in ongoing discursive work to persuade advertisers that their branding strategies will deliver what Eileen Meehan (2005) calls "bona fide consumers" to commercials and branded entertainment. In other words, the value (or "success") of a TV brand is realized in a continual process that is *performative* (Lury 2004, Moor 2007). It is performative in the sense that statements and media content—about, for example, what a brand will do, what kinds of consumers it will attract, what these consumers will in turn do and think with the brand, and how commercially successful the brand will be—are performed for advertisers, multi-system operators and shareholders. These communicative processes do not so much access or reflect a pre-existing "reality," but rather produce a reality in this performative process; the brand's very realization (the way it accrues or loses value, for example) is an outcome of this performativity.

I understand the Planet Green brand as performative in this sense. The brand was realized in an ongoing process that drew upon the strategies of strong branding to assure advertisers that, despite the highly risky terrain of environmental marketing, it could guide and shape consumers' activities toward a new environmentalism that would be good for brands. Planet Green offered consumers a whole range of resources, tips and techniques—instructions for a DIY air conditioner, promotion of a water-saving car wash spray and Chevy/GM's new line of hybrid cars, tips for eco-friendly camping, choosing eco-friendly toothpaste, planning a green funeral, doing a green remodel, making biodiesel, and making sense of the Climate Bill, for example—to take up in their everyday lives in order to craft green selves and lifestyles. It also worked to situate

brands as resources and authorities to guide the way this process of self-shaping took place (for example, branded experts from Whole Foods offered cooking and shopping tips on the cooking show *Emeril Green* as well as in "expert clips" online). Planet Green programming and web content invited individuals into this brand community, and offered its media universe as context in which individuals could carry out their all of environmentalism—in practices like watching television, going online, donating to Greensburg's rebuilding effort, signing petitions, and participating in a privatized public-sphere-type user-generated discussion "Forums."

Through these strategies, Planet Green worked to overcome unruly consumers by guiding them to enact their environmental commitments, activism, politics, and sensibilities within and through the fully branded media universe of Planet Green—and do so in ways that would add value to Planet Green and its sponsors' brands. I also argue, however, that Planet Green's governmental aims were about more than adding brand value, for they were concerned with producing and enacting a new environmentalism that, through branding, sought to overcome the tensions between profits and planet saving in a radically deregulated market.

In this way, Planet Green must be understood as a component of neoliberal environmental governance. In the context of the state's retreat from environmental regulation and the defunding of environmental enforcement agencies, matters of governance have been increasingly shifted onto the social. As Liz Moor (2007) argues, brands themselves have been "caught up" in debates about what the role of the state should be as they insert themselves as "solutions" to various and highly charged new

social "problems" that stem from the downsizing of public provisioning. Planet Green participated in the dispersion of matters of governance across the population, private institutions (including nonprofits), and authoritative discourses that characterizes "green" forms of neoliberal governmentality. It worked to enact a fully privatized planet saving by enabling volunteerism, personal responsibility, and entrepreneurialism—on the part of both corporations and individuals—aimed at managing capitalism's environmental externalities in a pure free market realm.

But I also argue that green branding ought to be understood a struggle, not an achievement. And for Planet Green, easing the tensions between privatization and public service, profits and planet saving was far more than even the strongest branding, with massive financial resources of Discovery Communications behind it, could achieve. As I will demonstrate, Planet Green's structuring tensions—between profits and planet saving, between consumerism and conservation, for example—became increasingly visible in its programming and web content over time. This becoming-obvious of Planet Green's tensions was intimately linked to its ongoing efforts to make environmental television advertiser friendly and garner sufficient ad dollars to justify Planet Green's existence as part of Discovery's super-aggressive growth strategy. In the end, Discovery concluded that it was not worth running a channel that failed to pull its weight in the context of its broader growth ambitions. In this way, Planet Green demonstrates the limitations of branded planet saving in neoliberal times.

Literature review

This dissertation draws upon four overlapping literatures: television industry studies, work on the particular history of Discovery, critical brand studies, and media studies work on neoliberal governmentality.

Television industry and history

In order to understand Planet Green as a commercial strategy that was managing a particular set of industrial conditions, it is crucial to situate it in the longer history of cable television. I draw from Sarah Banet-Weiser, Cynthia Chris, and Anthony Freitas's (2007) introduction to their edited collection, *Cable Visions: Television Beyond Broadcasting*, which traces the growth of cable television through the beginning of the twenty-first century, with particular attention to the consequences of deregulation in the 1970s and the consolidation of media ownership and proliferation of cable channels over the next three decades. Following Ien Ang's (1991) *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, I point out that these processes were concurrent with mounting industrial anxiety about consumers' ability to "escape" advertisements, thanks to remote-controlled channel switching, pay-per-view content, VCRs and other ad-skipping consumer technologies. Ang describes this as an industrial anxiety about consumer "revolt" and a loss of audience manageability. She points out that various audience measurement technologies and the discourse of ratings ought to be understood as an ongoing effort to "catch"—or know and predict—a consumer who is in fact essentially unknowable. This anxiety has only increased over time, as Joseph Turow (1997, 2006) explains in *Breaking Up*

America: Advertisers and the New Media World and *Niche Envy: Marketing Discrimination in the Digital Age*. As cable faced heightened competition for viewers and ad dollars in the 1990s and 2000s, Turow observes a mounting a sense of "crisis" in television industry press, arguing that the rise of "branded media formats" are an effort to manage this sense of crisis by divvying up consumers into niches, separating desirable consumers from undesirable ones, offering them a sense of belonging in the brand, and encouraging sustained engagement through which consumers offer up personal data to be used in customized marketing messages.

History of Discovery

Although Planet Green appears to be a straightforward response to this kind of media environment, it is crucial to understand Planet Green as situated response to this crisis that emerged from Discovery particular trajectory within this broader history of cable and niche marketing. I thus turn to work on Discovery in particular, centrally, Cynthia Chris' (2002) "All Documentary, All the Time?: Discovery Communications Inc. and Trends in Cable Television" and Ole J. Mjos's (2010) detailed book-length study, *Media Globalization and the Discovery Channel Networks*. Discovery had been somewhat insulated from the "crisis" in cable until 2007. For one thing, Discovery was a privately held company until 2007 and was thus not bound to generate short-term profits for shareholders. For another, although poorly performing channels risk being dropped by cable carriers, by positioning itself as "educational" and "nature focused" Discovery was protected (at least to the extent that it remained useful) from this fate because its public-

service mantle helped carriers stave off regulatory efforts (Mjos 2010, 21). But in 2007, Discovery's new CEO, David Zaslav, began moves to take the company public, completing the process at the same time that Planet Green was launched. Planet Green was part of a strategy in which Discovery brought its historical brand strategies of educational and nature focused programming to bear on its efforts to manage the crisis in cable in its increasingly aggressive pursuit of growth.

Critical brand studies

I argue throughout this dissertation that Planet Green drew upon strategies of contemporary branding, not only to manage this larger industrial context, but also to insert itself into contemporary matters of environmental governance. Branding is about more than knowing audiences, dividing them into niches, and offering them a sense of belonging. It is, as Adam Arvidsson (2006), Celia Lury (2004), Liz Moor (2007) have all pointed out, a productive strategy that, as I have already discussed, is both performative and governmental. Brands play a significant role in shaping markets, managing economic production, and organizing everyday life (Lury 2004, Moor 2007). They work by providing an "ambiance" and a range of resources aimed at "empowering" individuals to enact the details of their lives in a manner that is productive for brands; branding relies on individual's "spontaneous" use of brands to "co-produce" their value (Arvidsson 2006), (Arvidsson 2006). Brand value is produced and confirmed through an ongoing performative process (Lury 2004, Moor 2007) and it works to "[transform] and [shift] cultural labor into capitalist business practices" and "[transform]… everyday lived

culture into brand culture" (Banet-Weiser 2012 following Terranova 2000, 8 and 5). Branding is thus not only about maximizing profits—though it is always this as well—but, by enlisting individuals in market-based forms of empowerment, it is also a form of governmentality.

Media Studies and Neoliberal Governmentality

I understand Planet Green as a part of the dispersion of governmental functions across the population that characterizes neoliberalism. Although Planet Green contained (sometimes quite paradoxical) traces of older rationalities of government, such as those associated with the liberal-democratic state with its emphasis on education for informed rational citizenship and its tools for engaged civil discourse (see McCarthy 2010 and Ouellette 2002 for examples of this), as a fully commercial enterprise aimed at upscale consumers it is best understood as in line with work on television's role in neoliberal governmentality. Thus I follow Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008), who argue that reality and lifestyle television must be viewed as a "cultural component" to neoliberal governance. Such shows urge individuals to actively participate in their own government by taking lifestyle as an object of assessment and intervention, extolling privatization, volunteerism, entrepreneurialism, and personal responsibility, and by offering individuals a whole range of resources for working on their everyday conduct in line with these values. Often, television is positioned as a mode of social service delivery, providing tools for needy individuals to take care of themselves so as not to be a burden to the state (Ouellette and Hay 2008, Ouellette 2012, Ouellette 2004). But Planet Green was

different, for it addressed an audience presumably thriving under contemporary conditions. Rather, in what I call "a green governmentality for upscale consumers," Planet Green worked to enlist individuals' everyday practices and labor in alleviating industrial anxieties and resolving the contradictions that emerge in the process of reconciling contemporary branding with saving the planet.

My dissertation brings these literatures together to argue that, in Planet Green, strategies to mitigate industrial anxieties and maximize profits were inextricable from "green" governing ambitions to shape markets and consumer conduct. Discovery took its chances on the kind of "strong branding" that its powerful economic position enabled.[1] Strong branding, in the case of Planet Green, was an ongoing struggle that, while always fundamentally commercial, was also always governmental; through technical and performative means, it sought to overcome the tensions between profits and planet saving fully within the realm of the market.

Primary research

I began following Planet Green shortly I started a graduate program at the University of Minnesota the same year the channel went live. I bought a cable subscription and I wrote several term papers on the channel during my graduate coursework. For the papers, I had recorded shows onto an ancient VCR, transferring them from cassettes to DVDs on university equipment in the basement of the building in which my department was housed. Eventually I upgraded to a cable subscription that included a

[1] Discovery controls enormous sums of money, channels in multiple national broadcast and satellite markets, and a vast proprietary archive of high-quality content, further, the Discovery brand could be leveraged as not simply an asset, but also as a mark of legitimation

DVR, which streamlined the process of archiving the channel's shows and meant I could catalog far more hours of television.

But as I was gearing up to really dig into the material for my dissertation, Planet Green was canceled; it went off the air just months before I took my preliminary exams. Thankfully, I had watched—and taken detailed notes on—a great deal of the channel's programming; and I had already archived a small handful of shows and web pages. But the Planet Green brand was sprawling. There was still a lot of content that I didn't have.

As I searched for recordings of Planet Green shows, I discovered that Discovery controls its content unusually tightly—I later learned that this was part of its business strategy, to own all of its content so that it can monetize it in multiple ways. Although the receptionist at Discovery's headquarters tried hard to help me access content unavailable elsewhere (for example, full episodes of *Focus Earth* and *G Word*), she was unable to do so. I used the research money my department had granted me for the dissertation to purchase as many shows as existed on DVD and on Amazon's streaming video service—which was quite a few. Planet Green had YouTube and iTunes channels (which remained online as of the time of writing), where I could access short clips from Planet Green's staple shows. Additionally, there was content available posted by independent users on YouTube—sometimes even full-length episodes. I watched all of the shows I could get hold of, sketching out the broad arc of Planet Green's brand strategy and its consumer-citizen pedagogy.

I also began archiving the Planet Green website, making pdfs of web pages and comment threads, taking screen shots of images and interactive content. I took detailed

notes on the layout, design and content. I took eco-quizzes and played green online games, documenting the process. Although in an online message to Planet Green fans Discovery had committed to continuing to support the website after the channel was gone, I feared that the content might disappear at any moment. And indeed within the year, Discovery had begun to whittle it away. On October 2012, for example, I wrote in my notes, "navigating the labyrinth of the website; inevitably get shut down at a 'page not found'; for example, slide show of the futuristic 'green cars' advertised on the home page, as well as any link to a Planet Green Forum. The link to the Planet Green newsletter archive [also] brings me to an error message." I also noted, however, that the "featured quiz: is your sex sustainable?" was still operative and I could watch any of 37 video clips under "Health & Beauty." But on February 16, 2013, I wrote, "Today I tried to go to the Planet Green website and was redirected to the homepage of MNN.com, or Mother Nature Network" where there wasn't a trace of Planet Green content. "Some of Planet Green's website seems to exist at pg.treehugger.com," I noted. Eventually, I observed that Planet Green's "advertiser-friendly" content (for example drag racing segments from *Mean Green Machines*) was divvied up among Discovery's other web-holdings—TLC.com, HowStuffWorks.com, Discovery.com, etc. Much of its critical content, however, like news articles, calls to action, and links to petitions disappeared entirely.

In addition to the web and television content, I also analyzed the industrial discourse surrounding Planet Green. I searched popular and industry press databases for all mentions of the channel. I read Discovery's press releases, its annual reports, and its

corporate newsletters. I sought out interviews with the stars of shows, with representatives from Planet Green's nonprofit partners, and with Planet Green higher-ups. Getting interviews was a challenge. Few of Planet Green's nonprofit partners wished to speak with me and I exchanged emails with Eileen O'Neill's assistant over three years, but was never granted an interview. However, several former top Planet Green people who are no longer at Discovery were enormously generous with their time, even explaining the ins and outs of cable business to me—Annie Howell and Laura Michalchyshyn. Steve Thomas and Jodi Murphy, hosts of *Renovation Nation* and *Total Wrecklamation*, respectively, were also helpful in taking me behind the scenes of Planet Green programming and the business decisions surrounding it. Although I did not explicitly draw from all of my primary materials in the final text of the dissertation, it has all informed my research.

Chapter summary

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of this dissertation focuses on the lead-up to Planet Green's 2008 launch. In it I analyze Discovery's statements to the popular and trade presses, its press releases, its quarterly newsletters, its annual reports, its corporate websites, as well as personal interviews I conducted with a number of Planet Green insiders. I also analyze the broader green marketing conversation as it appeared in the trade press, alongside a number of green growth and natural capitalism manifestos, particularly those of Paul

Hawken (1999, 2007) and Al Gore (1992/2006), to map the larger discursive formation and structure of feleing that Planet Green both emerged from and responded to.

I situate Planet Green as an industrial strategy that aimed to help Discovery maximize profits and manage the "crisis" in cable—a crisis, as I noted above, characterized by industrial fears of viewer migration, ad-skipping, US market saturation, and media "clutter." I thus contextualize Discovery's decision to launch Planet Green in the history of cable's crisis, Discovery's somewhat unique trajectory within this crisis, and the way in which ratings discourse and branding promise to help cable companies get a measure of control in the anxious and uncertain world of media business.

In Discovery's discourse—as well as the green marketing trade press discourse surrounding it—environmentalism as a theme lent itself to strong branding: it promised to attract relatively affluent and educated lifestyle clusters as well as "media-savvy millennials" (O'Neill quoted in Kaufman 2007). In this way, Discovery pinned its hopes on the emergence of "green" as a legitimating discourse in the contemporary television landscape (Levine and Newman 2012); the company hoped that "green" would reinvigorate the medium in an era in which, as Elana Levine and Michael Newman point out, industry conceives of people who still watch their television sets in real time and sit through commercials in derogatory and often feminized ways.

Planet Green not only resonated with a trade press discourse that enthused about the profitable possibilities of green marketing, it also resonated with a second highly optimistic conversation that was concerned less with whether environmentalism made good marketing sense (something often dismissed as "greenwash"), and more with the

notion that making money and saving the planet could be brought into harmonious alignment through green growth and "natural" capitalism (Gore 1992/2006, Hawken, Lovins and Lovins 1999, Hawken 2007). In a number of ways, this discourse provided the structure of feeling (Williams 1977) in which Planet Green came to make sense, not simply as "good business," but also as "doing good" at a particular moment in time. But if Planet Green aimed to enlist environmentalism as a branding strategy to maximize profits in an era of crisis, it would also have to contend with the fact that a great many advertisers were far from convinced that attaching their brands to environmental themes was a good idea.

My argument in this chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, it is crucial to view Planet Green as commercial to the core, but on the other hand, it was never guaranteed to be commercially successful. Thus it must also be viewed as an effort to overcome both the essential unpredictability of consumers and the industrial anxieties and environmental contradictions when it came to green branding in particular. Drawing from scholarship on the television's "will to govern" (McCarthy 2010, Ouellette 2002) I analyze Discovery's struggle to overcome industrial anxieties through branding. Following Anna McCarthy, I argue that this struggle was characterized by "fantasies" and "governmentalizing dreams" of media decision makers. Specifically, in her analysis of postwar sponsored programming, McCarthy analyzes how television came to occupy a "privileged place" in governing ambitions of political and social elites as an ideal medium for governing, not "from above" or through state dominance or repression, but rather through "a process of cultivation that presumes individual liberty and seeks to preserve it through the ever

evolving medium of citizenship" (1). This occurred not so much because television actually worked to shape the minds of the citizenry or cultivate values aligned with elite interests ranging from class hierarchies to the tenets of the liberal capitalist democracy. Rather, television created a space "for the sponsor-citizen, a hybrid institutional entity embodying the period's technocratic fantasy of benign, voluntarist self-rule" (7) in a process that, despite the vast discrepancy between its governing aims and achievements, was amazingly effective in its "capacity to galvanize elites" (8).

It is in this sense that I use the term "fantasies": to describe the outsized optimism and impossibly ambitious governing goals evidenced in the discourse surrounding Planet Green. These are not fantasies in the sense of private hopes and dreams, though they do have an affective dimension for they are rooted in a structure of feeling where worries about climate change, media decision makers' class position, and the contemporary promises of branding come together. Planet Green's governing ambitions were rooted less in the feasibility of the project than in an optimism that is inextricable from a performative project working to overcome the deep contradictions between profits and planet saving that would soon come to threaten Planet Green's existence. In other words, I use the language of "fantasy" not to imply that I have gained privileged access to the interiority of Discovery executives, but rather to stress that when Discovery spokespeople professed intense optimism and certainty about the compatibility of environmentalism and profitable television, their statements were based less on certainty about the "reality" of a what they called "awakening" green consumers and "armchair environmentalists," than they were part of a performative discourse working to make it so.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 examines how the governmental fantasies mapped out in Chapter 1 materialized in the multiplatform Planet Green brand in its initial slate of commissioned programming and branded web content. I point out that the "quality" popular press dismissed Planet Green, both for its commercialism (on grounds both "high" and "low" since it "upscaled" green living and relied on "crass" product placement) and for its environmental contradictions. However, focusing solely on Planet Green's consumer orientation and its environmental "hypocrisy" tells us very little about its significance. I argue that Planet Green must be taken seriously at the place where branding meets neoliberal governmentality in a new environmentalism.

In this chapter, I focus primarily on the governing aims and objectives that can be seen across Planet Green's media content from 2008 to 2010. (In Chapters 3 and 4 I return to questions of uncertainty and struggle as I delve more deeply into Planet Green's structuring anxieties, ambivalences, and contradictions.) Planet Green materialized as an elaborate project to enroll advertisers, celebrities, and, most crucially, consumer labor in enacting a branded environmentalism. Through media content that featured brands "doing well by doing good," or dispensing environmental advice, or engaging in environmental philanthropy *within the Planet Green branded media universe*, Planet Green worked to transform co-branding into a process that would not only symbiotically maximize brand value, but would also co-confer and co-confirm eco-legitimacy. In this way, Planet Green's media content worked to situate branded actors as authorities and enablers of the new environmentalism.

But since brand value, as I have already explained, relies upon "subsum[ing] and appropriat[ing] what consumers do *with the brand in mind* as a source of surplus value and profits" (Arvidsson 2006, 7), Planet Green must also be understood in terms of the way in which it worked to enlist consumers in co-producing its branded environmentalism through governmental means. I argue that Planet Green worked to enact a "green governmentality" for upscale consumers. This was a corporate biopolitics realized through consumers' uptake of a whole range of "technologies of the self," to help them self-shape as green consumer citizens. These green consumer citizens promised to be valuable to brands beyond maximizing profits, for their everyday work on the self and home also promised to help to resolve the tensions between profits and planet-saving—a project crucial to Planet Green's very existence in a deregulated media environment. It is in this way that Planet Green must be viewed as a cultural component to neoliberal fantasies of planet saving wholly within the realm of the market.

I argue that Planet Green worked to guide and shape individuals' environmentalist impulses, remake them as a source of brand value and profits in three overlapping, though often contradictory, templates for green consumer citizenship. The first aimed to cultivate upscale consumers who would desire green consumer products and services—from biodynamic wines to luxury hybrid vehicles—to realize a green good life. The second aimed to democratize green living through offering tips for relatively inexpensive lifestyle changes (advice for choosing eco-friendly toothpaste, for example) and enlisting ordinary consumers in a self-shaping regime that made green living "easy" and "fun." The third aimed to cultivate informed and engaged citizenship through environmental

news programs and online articles as well as online "discussion forums" where they could put this citizenship into practice. Through these templates, Planet Green worked to subtly guide and shape individuals' environmentalist sensibilities and everyday activities toward, on the one hand, the aims of brand value, and on the other hand, though in inextricable ways, it also aimed to operate as a cultural component to neoliberal governance (Ouellette and Hay 2008) by calling on consumers to help manage the environmental externalities of a radically deregulated market.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 insists that branding be understood not as an achievement, but as a process fraught with uncertainties. In Planet Green, branding environmentalism for television involved an ongoing struggle to overcome a range of anxieties about both consumers and environmentalism. Some of these were industrial fears, overtly articulated in the trade press, about unruly consumers who, when addressed with green messages, might get bored, overwhelmed, skeptical, or offended, thus changing the channel and refusing to co-produce Planet Green's and its sponsors brands. Others were fears that were part of a broader, though certainly related, problematization of environmentalism that was addressed through a continual effort to simultaneously incorporate and repudiate the "tree-hugging" or "granola" figure. This problematization was undergirded by fears of partisan politics, of the feminized and labor-intensive connotations of green lifestyle, of the unhipness and earnestness associated with tree huggers, and of the "doom and gloom" associated with hardcore environmentalists. While Discovery presented Planet

Green's programming strategy as the result of the company's steadfast commitment to entertainment and credibility, my analysis reveals tensions between environmentalism and advertiser-friendly television.

On the most obvious level, Planet Green worked to ease these tensions by following mandates of "strong branding" to the letter and quite explicitly responding to worries expressed in the press in its programming and web content. But I argue that this explanation, while accurate and important, misses a more crucial point: that Planet Green's strategy for managing these tensions involved an elaborate effort to "post" environmentalism. I draw from Angela McRobbie's (2004) definition of postfeminism which, she argues, is not simply "backlash" against feminism, but rather an "ambivalent and fearful response" to feminism. Postfeminism is "an active process" that is an "undoing" of feminism. It works to undermine feminist gains of the 70s and 80s through an ongoing process that incorporates feminist values through the tropes of "freedom" and "choice" while feminism as a political movement aimed at gender justice and equality is "cast into the shadows," positioned as dated and no longer necessary (McRobbie 2004). Postfeminism invites women to achieve according to normative measures success and social and cultural inclusion "on the condition that feminism 'fades away'" (McRobbie 2004 referenced in Banet-Weiser 2012).

Planet Green worked to position itself as a *branded social movement* by posting environmentalism in ways that have much in common with postfeminism in McRobbie's sense. Planet Green's branded environmentalism would be a "new and improved" response to a purportedly impotent, unhip, and "old" (and, implicitly, unprofitable)

environmentalism. Planet Green posted environmentalism by strategically drawing on the specific tropes of postfeminism—sexist imagery and storylines positioned as "ironic," for example—as well as postfeminism's more general strategies, such as the simultaneous incorporation and repudiation of "old" forms of, in this case, environmental politics and situating personal empowerment within brand culture as the key to self-realization and planet saving within this post-environmental movement.

Posting was a crucial strategy in Planet Green's branding of environmental politics, in its effort to transform environmentalism from its multiple and contradictory manifestations as social and politics movements into a brand culture (Banet-Weiser 2012). For Planet Green, posting was a rehabilitative project that aimed to "solve" environmentalism for television. Posting worked to "move beyond" the "problems" environmentalism posed to branding including partisan politics, earnestness, anti-consumerism, and greenwash. Planet Green did so by situating entrepreneurialism, personal empowerment, and implicitly, I will suggest, *ambivalence* as key technologies of the post-environmentalist self.

Chapter 4

Planet Green underwent significant changes over its four years of existence, culminating in its 2012 rebranding as Destination America. In the first three chapters of this dissertation, however, I focus exclusively on the initial slate of Planet Green's programming—the commissioned shows aired during 2008 and 2009 (with the addition of *Living with Ed*, which was acquired almost immediately and was consistent with

Planet Green's original sensibility). In Chapter 4, I analyze Planet Green's brand shifts and eventual demise.

I begin by tracing the programming changes themselves. I show that there was a distinct shift away from explicitly environmental and pedagogical shows toward shows that very often did not have environmental themes and avoided overt advice. These shows were loosely united by a theme that Planet Green called "visionaries"—it featured people involved, for example, in techno-scientific innovation with military applications (*Dean of Invention*) or high cultural cache (as the molecular gastronomists on *Future Food*) or individuals entrepreneurializing small-town hobby farming (*The Fabulous Beekman Boys*) or, close to the end, a professional competitive eater (*Suzilla: The Mouth that Roars*).

Yet, as Planet Green's regular television fare consistently de-emphasized environmentalism, the brand was also acquiring and airing independent environmental documentaries that were often quite critical of capitalist business as usual and consumerism. The acquisition of these documentaries is aligned with Discovery's long-standing commercial strategy to differentiate its brand through the documentary genre and build a huge archive of proprietary content to monetize in various ways. For Planet Green, since no new "green" programming would be commissioned, the documentaries also likely represented an easy way to maintain a semblance of brand coherence while investing in content that had high cultural cache at a time when documentary was "absolutely a buyer's market" (van Messel quoted in Variety 2011) and could potentially be aired on any of Discovery's channels in the event of Planet Green's cancellation. But I

also suggest that acquiring and airing these documentaries at this stage in Planet Green's existence had traces of an environmentalist impulse that cannot be written off entirely—indeed, the documentaries were in many ways more critical than any of the original "dark green" programming with which Planet Green launched. Although Planet Green's brand coherence seemed to be disintegrating, I show that there remained a distinct—if unconscious—pedagogy that resulted from the divergence of Planet Green's effort to air programming that was fully advertiser friendly on the one hand, and overtly environmentalist on the other.

In the second part of the chapter, I zero in on Planet Green's cancellation, which Discovery spokespeople explained by arguing that green was a trend in which consumers were no longer interested, that ratings showed that people were not watching the channel, and that programming about the environment was "just not entertaining." Rather than taking these explanations for granted, I situate trends, ratings, and entertainment as crucial discourses in the performativity of television brands. And in the case of Planet Green, these discourses do not tell the whole story, for the backdrop to Planet Green's unraveling was Discovery's astronomical success on Wall Street and advertisers' ongoing reluctance to attach their brands to an explicitly environmentalist channel—Planet Green was unable to garner sponsorship dollars sufficient to justify its existence to Discovery higher-ups. Discovery's cancellation of Planet Green in this context speaks volumes of the limitations of profit-oriented planet saving in neoliberal times.

Chapter 1: Green governmentalizing dreams

Introduction

On April 5, 2007, Discovery Communications Inc.—parent company of such cable networks as the Learning Channel (TLC), Science Channel, Animal Planet, Military Channel, History Channel, and Discovery Channel—sent out a press release announcing plans to launch Planet Green, a multi-platform media brand entirely devoted to environmentalism. Planet Green, the release enthused, would be "a global, cross-platform initiative" with a cable TV network and websites in the US, a programming block and websites (in both Spanish and Portuguese) in Discovery's Latin American markets, a 50-hour block on Discovery Networks Asia, another on Discovery's channels in China, and a special slot for Planet Green content on the UK's Discovery Real Time's Big Green Build Night, which would also launch in 2008 (Discovery Globe 2008).

In the US, Planet Green would take the place of the poorly performing Discovery Home channel and begin with a $50 million dollar programming budget, which promised to deliver all-new content 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Online, PlanetGreen.com and its sister site TreeHugger.com would offer video-on-demand (VOD) and mobile device content as well as "interactive tools and comprehensive 'how-to' resources" for green living with news, games and quizzes, discussion forums, consumer advice, and original, short-form eco-themed videos (Discovery to Dedicate 24-Hour TV Network 2007).

The Planet Green initiative would extend beyond Discovery's proprietary media platforms to include "scientific explorations" to environmentally endangered sites around

the world, a "PlanetGreen Innovation Conference" to showcase new technologies "and bring together top business leaders, leading scientific experts, and top conservationists" (Discovery Communications Inc. 2007). Discovery promised to assemble a "World Renowned Advisory Board" of "the world's most preeminent scientists, researchers, innovators and environmental leaders" to advise the company's environmental initiatives. The Planet Green brand would partner with a broad range of not-for-profit environmental organizations engaged in on-the-ground delivery of environmental services and protections around the world.[2] The initiative would also involve an educational partnership between Discovery Education, Siemens Foundation, and the National Teachers Association; Discovery's own "Discovery Education Green" would offer standards-based K-12 educational content to "empower students to make more environmentally conscious decisions" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). Finally, under the Planet Green initiative Discovery would "green" its Global Headquarters in Silver Spring, MD, with ambitions to achieve the U.S. Green Building Council's third highest "silver" rating for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). By "Living and Working Green" the company hoped to demonstrate "its commitment to responsible operations" (Discovery to Dedicate 24-Hour TV Network 2007).[3]

In short, Planet Green would be a broadly articulated and highly elaborated attempt to build a multi-media, multi-platform, environmental brand—the first and only

[2] These organizations included Ashoka, the Environmental Media Association, Global Green USA, Global Inheritance, The Green Belt Movement, National Resources Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, Oceana, The Ocean Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy (Discovery Communications, LLC. 2009).

[3] In January 2008, the building's green improvements—including low-flow toilets, collecting rainwater for lawn irrigation, removal of non-essential light bulbs (such as those in vending machines)—had achieved a LEED Platinum rating, according to the 2007 rating system, the highest classification possible (Lazo 2008).

of its kind. It would operate as a context for advertisers, employees, TV personalities, web users, TV viewers, "experts," not-for-profit organizations, as well as K-12 students and teachers, to carry out environmental action, all within the Planet Green branded universe.

This chapter investigates why it made sense to Discovery to launch an environmental media brand at a particular historical juncture. In doing so, I make three arguments. First, I argue that Planet Green emerged as an industrial solution to a "crisis" in contemporary US cable business, marked by anxieties about competition for ad dollars given the enormous number of content delivery platforms, fears that viewers were "ad skipping" and "migrating" to online content, and worries about how to continue to grow despite a saturated US cable market. In this milieu, Discovery became a publicly traded company for the first time in its history.[4] Newly vulnerable to the vagaries and growth-imperatives of the so-called free market—but also newly positioned to profit from them—Planet Green promised to help Discovery manage cable TV's contemporary crisis in ways that not only reflected the larger industrial wisdom on "strong branding" but also grew out of Discovery's particular history of differentiating its brand from "mass appeal" broadcast television through high-production value "educational" and "nature-focused" programming and involvement in civic activities with educational and environmental themes (such as its Discovery Education K-12 media brand). Discovery has long mobilized nature-focused education as what Elana Levine and Michael Newman (2012) call a "legitimating" discourse, using normative and classed tropes of cultural legitimacy in profitable branding activities.

[4] For a discussion of the larger cultural context of financialization, see Karen Ho (2009) and Randy Martin (2002),

Second, I argue that, Discovery's discourse surrounding the launch of Planet Green was marked by what Ien Ang calls a "rhetorical tone of certainty"—certainty about the commercial viability of green TV. Discovery worked to make a case that the cable market was "ready" for green TV by announcing the existence of a huge consumer group of "armchair environmentalists" ready to be "activated" and "awakened" into the green space of eco-friendly consumer capitalism. However, I also argue that these statements were "performative" in the sense that they did less to describe an extant "reality" than they worked persuade advertisers of the existence of this group and the viability of the channel. In this way Planet Green's launch cannot be understood without attention to the deeply anxious and ambivalent space of green marketing as it comes together with the equally anxious discourse of audience research. Planet Green involved an elaborate effort to manage a range of anxieties and uncertainties specific to the meeting of green marketing and media branding, particularly those that cluster around industrial fears of unruly consumers. Thus I interrogate Discovery's claim that it launched Planet Green because the market was "ready" for green TV (i.e., that there was existing demand). Although it is crucial to situate Planet Green in the context of the broader surge of green marketing claims, corporate social responsibility campaigns, and consumer lifestyle choices, this context is not sufficient to explain Planet Green's emergence as a response to consumer "demand" in any straightforward sense. Rather, I argue that Planet Green was not describing the "reality" of existing demand, but rather working to actively construct markets and audiences in the course of managing anxieties about their unpredictability (Lury 2004, Moor 2007).

Finally, I argue that, while the launch of Planet Green was a commercial strategy to the core, the fact that Discovery launched the brand in the face of such uncertainty, anxiety, and ambivalence within the broader discourse on green marketing suggest that something more was at play. Specifically, I argue that in Planet Green, a particular "structure of feeling," in Raymond William's (1977) sense, came together with a long history of what I call "fantasies" of governing through television on the part of media and cultural elites, which I trace from Anna McCarthy's (2010) work on postwar sponsored TV programming, which worked to shape good informed and rational citizens for the liberal-capitalist democratic state, to its contemporary manifestation analyzed in Laurie Ouellette and James Hay's (2008) work on television's role in neoliberal governmentality. Planet Green's highly classed structure of feeling was shaped by "green growth" and "green capitalism" discourses as well as contemporary anxieties about environmental destruction and global warming, and it provided the backdrop for a branded governmental project: Discovery promised that Planet Green that would organize individuals toward the place where brand value met planet saving.

When I speak of the governing "fantasies" of Discovery insiders, I am using the term in McCarthy's sense. McCarthy points out that the postwar programming she analyzes was significant in the elaboration of liberal-capitalist rationalities of rule *not* because it was actually successful in influencing television viewers, but rather because a whole range of members of the governing classes were "seduced" by television's governing potential (McCarthy 2010, 8). Likewise, when I discuss Planet Green's conception in terms of governing fantasies, I do not mean that I have gained privileged

access to either Discovery decision-makers' emotional interiority or to their "true" motives for creating the Planet Green brand. Because "fantasy" also describes a process by which seemingly impossible things are imagined—or in the case of branding, *performed*—into possibility, I believe the term gets closest to describing a central theme in the discourse surrounding Planet Green: the intense and outsized optimism surrounding its highly ambitious goals and they ways in which these are not simply "rational" commercial decisions, but are rooted in a larger structure of feeling. That is, I wish to emphasize that when Discovery spokespeople professed certainty about the compatibility of environmentalism and profitable television—a discourse I will address throughout this chapter—their statements were based less on certainty about the "reality" of this compatibility than they were part of a what, following Celia Lury (2004) and Liz Moor (2007), I will refer to as a "performative" endeavor working to make this compatibility so.

Planet Green was rooted in a contradictory fantasy where utopian dreams came together with totalitarian ones: utopian because it imagined that a TV brand could resolve the environmental consequences of unfettered capital fully within the realm of the market; totalitarian because it could only do so by fully managing consumers' behavior and enlisting them in a particular vision of branded environmentalism, for it was only through consumers' labor that the tensions between planet saving and profits could be resolved.

In this way, branding environmentalism must be understood as a dimension of the broader dispersion of governmental functions across societal institutions and the

population in the context of neoliberal policy reforms—in this case, the defunding, devolution, and deregulation that has characterized environmental policy since the 1970s. Zealously committed to "voluntary" corporate "self-regulation"—which, in brand culture, has less to do with environmental urgency than with enabling profitable forms of being green (e.g., co-branding with a green media universe)—Planet Green sought to enact a context in which doing so would appeal to advertisers through the biopolitical promise of brands, their unique capacity to "administer life" by subtly guiding and shaping consumers' everyday activities toward various corporate aims.

Part 1: Managing the Crisis in Cable

In the first part of this chapter, I argue that Planet Green promised to help Discovery manage the "crisis" in cable business as the company went public in 2007. In order to understand why Planet Green contained this particular commercial promise, it is crucial to understand the way in which cable has come to see itself as "in crisis" over recent decades, the constitution of this crisis, and Discovery's particular relationship to it. In turn, it is necessary to take seriously the way in which the multiplatform Planet Green offered "solutions" to each dimension of this crisis by bringing "strong branding" together with the kinds of cultural legitimacy and brand differentiation linked to green marketing and corporate civic engagement.

History of cable and the evolution of a "crisis"

Although, as I noted at the outset of this chapter, Discovery launched Planet

Green into a moment in US cable television that was characterized by extreme competition and anxieties about growth, consumers, and advertiser dollars, this has not always been the case. On the contrary, the early discourse surrounding cable was shot through with promises of democracy. The discourse enthused about an idealized version of cable that would offer viewers a whole range of programming choices and points of view not available on broadcast television. While, as Sarah Banet-Weiser, Cynthia Chris, and Anthony Freitas (2007) explain, programming diversity was indeed facilitated by the low barriers to entry that characterized cable during its early years, cable's utopian promise was far from inevitable. In the 1970s, cable became a commercial system. The FCC rolled back regulations initially designed to stem cable's growth, advertising on cable grew rapidly, and the rate of cable installation in US homes surged. Over the next three decades, the cable industry experienced a huge "growth spurt" (19). Established media companies started entering the cable market and squeezing out smaller companies with fewer resources. Media consolidation left control of cable in the hands of a few large companies, and multi-system operators (MSOs) (carriers like Time Warner or Comcast) came to dominate most of the market (Banet-Weiser, Chris and Freitas, Cable Visions 2007).

Over the same period, anxiety about consumers' capacities to escape advertisements became a central theme in industry discourse (Turow 1997). Such anxieties intensified over the next decades with the rise of remote controls, pay-per-view content, recording devices (like VCRs), the proliferation of media choices, personal video gaming, home computers, and online media content. Ien Ang characterizes this crisis as a

"revolt of the viewer": when viewers began to "time shift" by watching taped shows on their own schedules, "zip" past ads on pre-taped programs, and "zap" between channels with remote controls, TV industry experienced this as a loss of audience manageability. TV companies found themselves increasingly required to convince advertisers of the value of their audiences in order to sell them viewers' "eyeballs." Industry's anxiety about audience unpredictability manifested in attempts to acquire more specific and "finely tuned" information about audiences through increasingly sophisticated audience measurement techniques (Ang 1991). From the 1970s on, media audiences were segmented into more and more specific "lifestyle" groups who could be targeted with tailored advertising messages in on niche television networks designed to appeal to their unique identities (Turow 1997).

As channels proliferated and cable operators faced heightened competition amongst themselves, vying for viewers and advertiser dollars, one audience-management strategy was to create "branded media formats." Such formats promised to more "efficiently" target audiences by producing a "distinctive identity" or "personality" of a given media vehicle—that is, a *brand*—that members of "a target audience would see as reflecting their identity." Branded media formats aim to target particular lifestyle clusters, or "niches," of affluent consumers "in a buying mood" in order to sell them to advertisers. This "slicing up" of society intensified throughout the 1980s and 1990s as firms sought to construct and target more and more specific niches of consumers (Turow 1997, 91-92).

By the 2000s, Turow notes an ongoing sense of "crisis" registered by advertisers in

trade journals. Although continuous with trends in decades prior, the context of a changing media environment and increasingly sophisticated data-mining techniques, firms worried even more about gaining and maintaining the trust of "valuable" consumers and overcoming ad-skipping technologies. This led to a range of solutions including intensified product-placement in TV shows, the use of interactive components to TV that call upon viewers to participate in the show/brand on multiple platforms to encourage deeper and more sustained involvement in the show and its sponsors, and encouraging consumers to disclose detailed personal information and actively seek out customized marketing messages.

By the time of Planet Green's 2008 launch, these worries had intensified in the context of even greater competition among still-proliferating media content platforms, an increasingly saturated US cable market, and a deregulating and privatizing international broadcasting market. By now, the number of cable channels had become enormous. According to the California Cable and Telecommunications Association, between 1980 and 1989, the number of cable channels increased from 28 to 79. In 1995, the number reached had reached 139, climbing to 171 by 1998, and 280 by 2002 (History of Cable n.d.). The percentage of marketing budgets devoted to TV had declined. Ad-skipping technologies also continued to multiply. And television business and advertisers ceaselessly worried that audiences were "migrating" away from the TV set to online and video-on-demand content with their computers and mobile devices.[5] These modes of ad

[5] When reflecting on Planet Green's failure, a former PG executive noted that trying to speak to a younger audience missed the boat because, "let's be frank, most, a lot of college/university students don't even get cable. Right? They watch TV on their devices—iPhones, iPads, smart phones" (Michalchyshyn 2013) and a Planet Green television personality similarly said, "viewership patterns have changed." I asked if he was referring to mobile devices, "Yeah, I mean, do you even own a television?" He was incredulous when I said I did (Thomas 2013).

skipping and "viewer migration" upped the ratings ante: poorly rated not only risked losing ad dollars but additionally risked getting moved to a higher, more expensive channel tier—or worse, dropped entirely—by MSOs (Howell 2013). For publicly traded media companies, the mandate to generate shareholder value is compounded with pressure to generate ad dollars. And on top of this, industry was describing the US cable market as "saturated" (i.e., dwindling opportunity for increasing the US subscriber base as it reached a "fixed" maximum), producing a crisis for an entire industry in a system that requires endless growth. In this context, practices like re-branding, branded entertainment, aggressive international expansion, and interactive, multimedia content have become key industrial strategies in an ongoing effort to manage the crisis in cable.

History of Discovery

Before I discuss the specific ways in which Planet Green's branding resonated as a crisis-management strategy for Discovery at a particular moment in the history of cable business, I want to emphasize that Planet Green was not simply a natural consequence of broader historical tendencies. Rather, Planet Green was a situated solution to the way in which cable's crisis came together with Discovery's particular historical trajectory as the company grew from a small, niche television network (the Discovery Channel) into a multi-platform, multi-channel mega brand, which it did precisely through transforming a kind of educational, nature-focused mission into a profitable global enterprise. Planet Green was an opportunity to leverage Discovery's particular resources and advance its

particular goals (especially as they pertained to going public) in the larger context of the cable crisis.

As I will show, Planet Green mobilized environmentalism as a legitimating discourse in much the same way that Discovery had long mobilized educational and nature-focused programming: as a form of brand differentiation and niche marketing as well as a rationalizing framework for aggressive international expansion and the privatization of education. When the Discovery Channel appeared on US cable in 1985, it promised to offer "all documentary all the time," a project that, Cynthia Chris explains, seemed risky given the highly competitive cable market, the huge barriers to entry, and the prevailing industry wisdom that documentary was out of fashion.[6] But although documentary is often elevated above the "crass commercialism" of entertainment media, it was hardly separate from commercialism for "Discovery strategically reinvigorated [the] out-of-vogue TV genre [of documentary] to engineer a niche market" (Chris 2002, 7).

The documentaries were mostly science and nature-themed, emphasizing "entertainment" through efforts, for example, to create narratives through which viewers could identify with animals, transforming nature into a "familiar domain" (Pierson 2005). Such programs have great commercial value since, as Simon Cottle writes, "they generally have a long 'shelf life'" and are highly exportable, since "their subject matter and universal appeal can seemingly cross different cultures, and they can easily be repackaged and dubbed" (Cottle 2004, 86). Further, such documentaries cost about half as much to produce as scripted drama, hour for hour, adding to their commercial appeal

[6] Discovery founder John Hendricks' search for funders in 1982 yielded no backers until his 212th attempt (Mjos 2010, 20).

(Chris 2002). Through this strategy, the Discovery Channel experienced staggering growth over its first fifteen years, with four basic cable channels, eight digital tier channels, multi-media holdings, a chain of brick-and-mortar Discovery stores and presence in 145 international markets (Guider 1997 referenced in Chris 2002, 7).

Discovery's growth was enabled by the rise of niche marketing in the US and trade liberalization and privatization of the airwaves globally. Discovery built its market share by expanding into international markets—often capitalizing on the withdrawal of state support from, as well as the increasing privatization of, formerly state-owned media systems. Discovery's success in its cable channels produced capital and brand value—as well as cultural legitimacy—that facilitated its expansion in non-television projects that likewise blurred the boundaries between making money and providing public services, particularly in its K-12 brand, Discovery Education (Chris 2002, Mjos 2010).

Discovery's emphases on natural history, science, exploration, and documentary was useful for brand differentiation and as a corrective in the face of a long history of public criticism that television was failing to serve the public interest. The hope was that Discovery's emphasis on documentary and educational programming would help to stave off such criticism and help to justify trends toward deregulation and privatization (Chris 2002). This was enabled, in part, by Reagan-era policies gutted public funding for documentary production, at the time of Discovery's emergence, there was a "gap" in TV programming (Mjos 2010). By inserting itself into this gap, Discovery was able to position itself in a kind of public service role. In this way, Discovery's very existence played a role in justifying cable itself to governments and regulators. For example, when

Discovery founder John Hendricks was seeking investors and carriers in 1986, John C. Malone, owner of cable operator Tele-Communications Inc. (TCI), took over a controlling stake in Discovery and committed to run the channel on its distribution networks. Although the channel was struggling financially, a Discovery executive explained that "it was great for [cable operators like TCI] because they could turn around and say to the governments and authorities and say: 'look, there's quality on cable... We have the Discovery channel'" (Comer-Calder quoted in Mjos 2010, 21).

Civic engagement and business have always operated hand-in-hand for Discovery, folding "civic responsibility" into aggressive brand building, transforming civic responsibility itself into a commercial enterprise. Education, for example, has been key to Discovery's brand-building strategy throughout its history.[7] In 1989, Discovery was one of a number of cable networks and telecommunication companies to offer free educational content and teacher-training workshops to public and private schools through a service called Cable Alliance for Education (which later became Cable in the Classroom). Although the educational media did not contain advertisements, for Discovery (and the other brands sponsoring the service) Cable in the Classroom programming helped to cultivate and reinforce investment in Discovery's brand among students, teachers, and parents. It thus operated as a form of brand extension at the same time that it laid the groundwork for Discovery's later educational initiatives (Chris 2002, 15), such as Discovery Education (DE), DE's partnerships with Siemens, and the Discovery Channel Global Education Partnership, which builds learning centers and

[7] Further, Discovery's educational programs had only "recently become profitable" as of the September 2, 2009 writing of USA Today reporter David Lieberman.

communications infrastructure, offers teacher training and Discovery branded educational content in Central and South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe (2009 Annual Report 2009).[8]

Never separate from commercialism, Discovery folded this service mission into aggressive brand-building activities. Discovery entered the US media landscape at a time when attention to branding was already accelerating in the context of deregulation, which opened up cable television to investors and fragmented mass broadcast audiences into niches and media companies increasingly worried about how to set their brands apart in a "menu" scenario of proliferating cable channels (Mjos 2010, 50-51). Discovery did so by building its brand with a mission.

Discovery was somewhat insulated from these industrial conditions, the "crisis" in cable, for much of its history. One contributing factor, as I have already discussed, was the fact that Discovery had laid claim to "quality" educational television, which had provided multi-system operators incentive to carry the network irrespective of its ability to generate advertising dollars. Even more significant, however, was the fact that, until 2008, Discovery operated as a privately held company. Discovery's private status meant that the company faced less pressure to generate short-term profits[9] and allowed it to focus on long-term growth (as well as any number of other commitments held by its decision makers).

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[8] DCGEP describes itself as "a public nonprofit organization dedicated to harnessing the power of television in under-resourced schools around the world to improve student learning, teacher effectiveness, access to information and community involvement in the schools" that partners with Chevron, Discovery Communications Inc., and Coca Cola (Discovery Communications Inc. 2009).

[9] Cynthia Chris points out that Discovery's private structure and historical reliance on commissioned programming sometimes opened up space for political and social critique. Discovery's private structure also meant that it was not beholden to structures of public funding, allowing the provision of support and distribution of work "too political" for public funding (Chris 2002, 22). Its private structure further meant that it could continue to invest in new brands, even if they failed to generate profits during their first few years, since Discovery's shareholders were interested in long-term asset growth (Mjos 2010, 26).

All of this began to change in 2006, however, when Discovery replaced long-time CEO Judith McHale with David M. Zaslav, a former corporate lawyer and then-senior executive at NBC Universal (Siklos 2006). Aggressive growth was foremost on Zaslav's agenda. For him, operating as a private company hindered Discovery's ability to pursue this goal. Thus, upon joining the company, he embarked on steps to take Discovery public, announcing plans to complete the process on June 4, 2008, the very day of the launch of Planet Green.[10]

Although risky, Zaslav expressed that this context of "crisis" also presented the opportunity for aggressive growth. Going public, he argued, would give the company "more agility and strength in our drive to be bigger and more efficient and stronger" (Ahrens 2007a). It would mean that the company could borrow to pay for acquisitions, a key dimension of its growth strategy (after the company went public, PetFinder.com and TreeHugger.com became part of the Discovery suite) (Ashton 2008), which would free up existing cash for new programming (Ahrens 2007a) and other projects like rebranding and building satellite infrastructure for international HD content delivery.

What is unstated in Zaslav's comments is that Discovery would also now feel cable's crisis far more acutely than it had as a privately held company. The possibilities opened up by going public would also become both instrumental and obligatory for managing the broader crisis in cable business. In line with this contemporary industry wisdom, Discovery hoped that the move would allow it to invest in (1) strong branding to

[10] The process to go public began in 2005 when Liberty Media Corp. spun off its 50% stake becoming the publicly traded Discovery Holding Company (McClintock, 2005). The move was met with skepticism on Wall Street and in the trade press since the remaining 50% of Discovery was still controlled by cable operator Cox Communications and Advance/Newhouse Communications, Discovery Channel and TLC's ratings (McClintock 2005) and ad sales were down (Martin, 2005). Also, Discovery's historical lack of disclosure was frustrating analysts (Goldsmith, 2005).

"break through the clutter" of multi-channel, multi-platform delivery possibilities, (2) video-on-demand and online, interactive content to multiply and intensify engagement with brands and advertisements to cope with "migrating audiences" and to target a younger demographic (3) aggressive international expansion to continue to grow into "untapped markets" despite the already "saturated" US cable market. In other words, going public both opened Discovery up to all the risks of the broader "crisis" in cable at the same time that it promised to enable aggressive growth within this uncertain context[11] and Planet Green was, it seemed, uniquely suited to be mobilized toward these aims.

Planet Green as a crisis management strategy

It is likely no coincidence that Planet Green launched at the very moment Discovery became a publicly traded company and thus faced heightened pressure to justify itself—to MSOs, to shareholders, to advertisers, and to the public. Wall Street was skeptical of the company given its history of poor disclosure. According one former Discovery executive, demonstrating "responsibility" to Wall Street as the company went public was one of Planet Green's promises (Howell 2013) since, as Zaslav told the *New York Times* in 2007, "Today, green means responsible" (Siklos 2007).

[11] Zaslav bought out Cox Communications' 25% stake in the company in the spring of 2007 and in 2008 Malone's Liberty Media (50% stake) and Advance/Newhouse (25% stake) agreed to combine their shares of the company (Dempsey and Hayes, 2008). The fully combined company went public on September 18, 2008. It worked to make itself known to potential investors and improve its reputation on Wall Street through highly publicized channel re-brandings including Planet Green, Investigation Discovery, and the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) (Dempsey and Hayes). Part of the strategy to go public had been a branding effort to better articulate a sense of "responsibility" to company operations. The socially/environmentally responsible efforts connected to Planet Green promised to add "responsible" value to the Discovery brand, as then-SVP of communications and public affairs at Discovery and a member of Planet Green's launch team reflected in a 2013 interview, "when you're going public, you're thinking about… stock price and relevancy and value… having a channel like [Planet Green], that spoke to responsibility of everybody… added to its value" (Howell, 2013).

Green TV also promised to allay concern that going public would negatively impact the "quality" of Discovery programming: would Zaslav have to go "low-brow" to get ratings? wondered a *Washington Post* reporter. Zaslav countered such worries by emphasizing Discovery's continued commitment to "high-quality, knowledge-based content…" (Zaslav 2008), assuring readers "We don't have any wet T-shirts; we don't have any girls behaving badly" (Ahrens 2007b), and cutting programming that was not sufficiently "on brand" with Discovery's mission to "educate and inform" (Ashton 2008). For Zaslav, "quality" programming was itself a business strategy that fit neatly into his international expansion goals: "At our core we have the best content, the stuff that really satisfies curiosity… That is what works best around the world" (Ashton 2008).

Planet Green emerged within this effort to demonstrate "responsibility" and continued commitment to a set of brand ideals. It was part of a business strategy to re-brand a poorly performing network in order to maximize profits, it offered opportunities for "strong" branding, it could be repackaged for international distribution, and promised to be aligned with "quality" television with its aims to "educate and inform." Of Discovery Home's rebranding as Planet Green, CEO David Zaslav explained, the channel "is doing well economically" (false, according to cable analyst Derek Blaine quoted in Levin 2008) "… but it's not serving this higher purpose" (Siklos 2007). Green TV would be no less profitable than other themed channels, but it would operate on a plane above financial gain.

"Green" also promised to legitimate new advertising strategies in an ad-skipping era by positioning product placement and branded entertainment. In answer to

advertisers' worries about ad-skipping, and to allay the fear that overt product placement will irritate consumers (Boorstin 2008), Planet Green offered a whole array of sites for branded entertainment that promised to be "tasteful" rather than "crass" or "annoying," thanks to Planet Green's ethical bent (Thomas 2013). Further, as I will discuss in later chapters, the fact that brands appeared in narratives as *enabling actors* in the story of a greener future, meant that there was not simply a commercial logic to their presence in the shows, but also an ethical and educational one (Thomas 2013). Green lifestyle TV showcased eco-friendly home improvement, transportation, food, makeup, clothing and other "lifestyle" products within consumer advice segments (Crupi and Moses 2008). General Motors signed up to sponsor the channel early on and a range of shows constructed narratives around GM products (for example, *Greensburg* (2008-2010), *Mean Green Machines* (2008)).

Other programs were structured around new technologies, fast "green" vehicles (*Mean Green Machines*), green building products (*Renovation Nation* (2008-2010), *Greenovate* (2008)) and brands. The cooking show *Emeril Green* (2008-2010) took place inside a Whole Foods Market and taught viewers how to incorporate branded foodstuffs into their daily routines. The docudrama series, *Greensburg* (2008-2010) was sponsored by SunChips, and prominently featured General Motors, Brita, and DuPont products. Lifestyle shows like *Battleground Earth* (2008), *G Word* (2008), *Wa$ted!* (2008-2010), and *Living with Ed* (2009-2010) offered viewers mini-lessons on green consumer products by a range of brands. By fully integrating a sponsor's brand into its TV content, Planet Green (like reality and lifestyle TV in general) promised to manage consumers'

use of ad-skipping technologies while also adding green value to sponsors' brands. In this way, green itself can be understood as a legitimating discourse, offering a pro-social rationale for aggressive international expansion, capitalist growth, and ongoing relevance within an industry in "crisis."

In addition to legitimating brand and product placement, Planet Green would also address worries about "migrating audiences"; it would capture them by moving into online and video-on-demand content. In 2008, Discovery viewed Planet Green as a "key brand" for expanding into mobile technology (Discovery Globe 2008). Planet Green worked to move into the online space through its websites. Planet Green would also have a short-form video channel on Verizon's "V CAST Video" service (alongside other Discovery brands like Animal Planet, Discovery Kids and TLC) (Discovery Globe 2008). To assuage industry worries that mobile content might pose a threat to the "integrity" of television brands, Discovery developed Planet Green's web content in ways that were aimed at mitigating this potential risk. As O'Neill explained prior to the channel's launch, "The Planet Green Web site … can be a promotional platform" for the Planet Green channel while "TreeHugger will act as a great third leg between the TV component and the Planet Green Web site… All three need to feed each other effectively, in cross-pollinating content and viewers and community. In terms of having content available that's synergistic, we want to make sure our audience/viewers move across all three" (Kaufman 2007). The web sites offered content that complemented Planet Green's TV offerings, but did not make any full-length episodes available. One had to tune into the TV channel to complete the brand experience. Planet Green also had a YouTube channel

and an iTunes channel, but again, neither of these made TV content available in full. Rather, a range of TV shows were made up of a series of informative mini-segments (i.e., step-by-step recipe demonstrations, DIY project instructions, lifestyle tips, or lessons on new technologies) that could stand alone in online videos, abstracted from the broader context of the show, without sacrificing coherence. Planet Green thus sought to control its content as tightly as possible while still making the brand available for interaction for free online.

Planet Green also promised to play a key role in Discovery's efforts to expand into markets outside the US. Like other media companies that are heavily invested in the cable model, Discovery worried about a "saturated" US cable market—a problem that cannot be managed by luring "migrating" US consumers back to the set. New US cable subscriptions had slowed significantly in previous years and a repeated industry refrain stated that most individuals only watch 16 of their 100-plus available channels (Lieberman 2007). By 2008, there was widespread consensus within US media business discourse that long-term growth required aggressive expansion into international markets (Ashton 2008).

Although Discovery has had international presence since the launch of Discovery Channel in the UK 1989 and as of 2008, was already present in 170 countries, boasting growth in Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and Europe, Middle East and Africa in its 2008 annual report, it continued to describe international markets as "under-penetrated" by pay TV (Annual Report 2008). At this time, Planet Green was promoted as part of Discovery's internationalization strategy as the company planned on "leveraging its green

programming strategy and global interest in the environment around the world" (Annual Report 2008). The *London Time*s called Discovery's foray into green "a brave new world" asserting, "David Zaslav wants to conquer the world and if along the way he can help save it, so much the better" (Ashton 2008). As noted at the outset of this chapter, Discovery planned Planet Green programming blocks and/or web content in its UK, Discovery Latin America, Discovery Networks Asia, and Discovery China (Discovery Globe 2008).[12] Planet Green offered Discovery the opportunity to build a brand in multiple markets. Rather than being US specific, Planet Green content promised "global" resonance, addressing worldwide problems by focusing on everyday details that promised to attract affluent consumers internationally.[13]

Finally, the re-brand of Discovery Home as Planet Green would address the cable crisis through its promise to "break through the clutter" by bringing environmental responsibly together with branding to differentiate the channel within the high-stakes media context "of cultural fragmentation and niche marketing" (Ouellette 2012, 66). And environmental television, according to Discovery, was uniquely positioned to do this. Between Planet Green's 2007 initial announcement and its 2008 debut, Discovery released statements averring that an environmentally themed media brand was a site of

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[12] As stated in Discovery's quarterly newsletter, GLOBE in 2008, "In the first quarter of 2008, Planet Green was introduced in Latin America under the tagline DESCUBRE EL VERDE. DESCUBRE EL VERDE includes special programming and interstitials on Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, Discovery Kids and Discovery Home & Health, as well as content offerings and interactive tools on the websites: descubreelverde.com (in Spanish) and descubreoverde.com (in Portuguese). Discovery Networks Asia also launched a Planet Green programming block on Discovery Channel in March 2008 throughout the region. (Another programming block in China was launched on Discovery Channel in April 2008, sponsored by ŠKODA Auto.) The Planet Green block in Asia launched with 50 hours of programming in 2008, from relevant stories produced out of the region, to global specials that celebrate, preserve and protect the environment. The block kicked off with a six-part premiere series, FEARLESS PLANET. In July 2008, the Big Green Build Night launched on Discovery Real Time in the UK, featuring a programming block from Planet Green in the U.S." (Discovery Communications 2008).

[13] Descubre el Verde/Descubre o Verde did indeed launch in both Spanish and Portuguese. And as of the time of this writing, a YouTube channel continues to hosts its branded videos. Big Green Build Night also began airing on Thursday nights on Sky Channel 250 (Discovery Real Time) with Planet Green's *Renovation Nation* and other green home/building shows. I could find evidence neither confirming nor disproving the launch of the Discovery Networks Asia block, nor the Discovery Channel in China block.

capitalist possibility. For example, in 2008, Discovery declared 40 to 50 percent of the US population "armchair environmentalists." Armchair environmentalists included a "group of consumers, 60 million of us, who are awakening to green and contemplating attitude or activity changes" Discovery's Eileen O'Neill told *TV Week*. "They need more information and inspiration to activate in a way that is helpful to our planet," she explained (Kaufman 2007). Discovery's conclusion was based on unreleased internal research conducted in 2007 and was one of a collection of claims the company made in the lead-up to the launch of Planet Green. This group of consumers, Discovery argued, did not simply exist, but was also *available*, possessing an openness to "activation" by a media brand; Discovery promised that Planet Green's content would "activate the armchair environmentalist in all of us" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).

In addition to announcing this purportedly extant group of consumers, Discovery also cited a range of evidence to demonstrate that the time was ripe for green TV. For one thing, there had been recent—and apparently successful—debuts of other eco-themed shows, such as HGTV's 2007 eco-themed, reality-based sitcom, *Living with Ed* (which Planet Green would soon acquire), The Sundance Channel's 2007 series *The Green* (Stelter 2008). Further, Discovery executives explained that Planet Green was, in part, a response to the popularity of the 2006 11-part HD series, *Planet Earth* (produced in partnership with the BBC and aired on the Discovery Channel US the previous year). The series garnered 65 million viewers, according to the *Washington Times*' Karen Goff, making it "the most-watched cable event of all time" (Goff 2008) and flooding the network with audience requests for similar content (Stelter 2008). Further, Planet Green's

President/General Manager, Eileen O'Neill pitched the channel by referring to the broader fashion for green branding and eco-lifestyle choices, explaining that Planet Green's "programming reflects what is going on in the overall social landscape… People are being more active [in the green movement] than ever" (Goff 2008). When *TV Week* asked Planet Green's Eileen O'Neill what impelled Discovery to launch the channel, she stressed that corporations and consumers are "awakening to green" citing a few "seminal moments" over the past year and a half, including "Tom Brokaw's No. 1 special on global warming [*Global Warming: What You Need to Know* (2006)], Al Gore's documentary [*An Inconvenient Truth* (2006)] or the horrendous weather we've had [she is likely referring to Hurricane Katrina]. All those things lined up, as well as all aspects of the marketplace, where corporations to consumers started awakening to green" (Kaufman 2007). Planet Green, she promised, would "address the needs of consumers who are awakening to greenness" (Kaufman 2007). Zaslav gave Planet Green his own vote of confidence, telling the *New York Times*, "We're pressing on the accelerator here… We think [Planet Green] has a real chance to be a flagship brand for us" (Stelter 2008).

Part 2: Green marketing, ratings discourse, and the performativity of brands

What I want to argue, however, is that Discovery spokespeople's unequivocal optimism about the commercial possibilities of green branding must be understood as both performative and deeply anxious in ways that reflected the broader discourse on green marketing at the time. The statements of Discovery spokespeople (and, as I will show, of other proponents of green marketing) were performative in the sense that the

optimism about the possibilities of green branding was not based on knowledge of an existing "reality" about, for example, market readiness or "green consumers." On the contrary, this "reality" is actively produced through this discourse. And despite the professed certainty about commercial possibilities of environmental marketing, this discourse was also always haunted by the essential uncontrollability of consumers, an uncontrollability that proponents of green marketing ritually disavowed.

Anxiety about consumer uncontrollability is not always immediately apparent. Certainly, some analysts celebrated green marketing: "Green is a category companies want to be in," a cable analysis executive, told the *New York Times*. "Whether you're an automaker or a bank or a petroleum company, somewhere in your marketing plan is something referring to the environment" (Lico quoted in Stelter 2008). The website *Sustainable Brands* hailed green marketing as "recession proof" (Sustainable Life Media Editor 2008) and green-branded products were everywhere.

But Planet Green was hardly launching into a market in which these sentiments were the norm. A great many commentators cautioned marketers against venturing into the highly risky terrain of green marketing. Indeed, despite the surging numbers of green product claims and brands in 2007 and 2008 and the massive investment companies were making in green product claims and branding, it would be disingenuous to present faith in green marketing as some kind of broad consensus.

On the contrary, Planet Green's and other market researchers' sanguine statements about a market ready for green goods and services were never simply about reporting the currents of consumer "demand" in a straightforward or "objective" sense;

rather, they constituted a performative discourse that aimed to disavow and assuage broader industrial anxieties about combine making money with green messages. Some of these anxieties concerned the economic downturn (Neff 2008) and government regulations (the FTC was revising their Green Guides ahead of scheduled, opening the door for regulatory crackdowns on claims not supported by "reliable evidence" (Cummings 2008)). But the bulk of industrial fears within the green marketing discourse constellated around consumer unruliness. For instance, *AdWeek*'s Mark Dolliver cautioned marketers in May 2008, "consumers aren't as devoted to the planet as you wish they were," citing their reluctance to change their behavior as well as their "skepticism and indifference" regarding green claims, despite expecting companies to demonstrate environmental commitments (Dolliver 2008). He calls the green marketing environment "inhospitable" to marketers, complaining that consumers are willing to "talk the talk"—that is, surveys indicate that they care about the environment, favor environmental standards and regulations, and criticize companies with poor environmental records—but not "walk the walk" by instituting behavioral changes in line with green consumer lifestyles. And on top of this, companies were operating in the context of what he called "a turbid current of anti-corporate sentiment" (based on results from an Associated Press/Stanford University/Ipsos Public Affairs poll). Consumers, he writes, have "a basic distrust of corporations"; and looming on the horizon was the term "greenwashing," just becoming common parlance among consumers skeptical of corporate efforts, threatening to foment consumer backlash (Dolliver 2008).

It was these anxieties, it seems, that Planet Green's promotional discourse was

most concerned with alleviating—and, indeed, Planet Green's very existence was incumbent upon doing so, for if its advertising team could not convince advertisers to buy time on the channel, it would not be long for this world. Fortunately for Discovery, there was a whole discursive formation that was already managing industrial anxieties about green marketing by offering up knowledge about green consumers to render them manageable and predictable and offering explicit strategies for speaking to them in a way that "works." This was an anxious discourse, always contending with the unknowability of its object. Marketers' and market researchers' efforts to find and capture the "green consumer" manifested in the production of a range of psychographic groups—identifying them, constructing their profiles, detailing instructions for targeting them, and doing so through marketers' normative assumptions, yielding a range of "shades" of green ("light" to "dark" depending on the extent to which consumers prioritize environmentalism in their purchasing decisions).

The seemingly least risky target group for green marketing messages included consumers who are "aspirational," or those who have not yet committed to "green lifestyle" but aspired to (they are much like Planet Green's "armchair environmentalists" and "awakening" green consumers), who should be encouraged to make behavioral changes in "baby steps" (Dolliver 2008). People who are already environmentalists were also an appealing audience for green branding messages, but were also most likely to scrutinize companies' environmental records and practices, so had to be addressed "transparently"—all the more important when addressing those who were highly networked and interactive online.

Discovery's acquisition of the already established and "trusted" TreeHugger brand—along with its cross-linking with PlanetGreen.com—promised to address these "greenfluencers," who could be enlisted to use their everyday, unpaid, communicative labor as free mobile advertising for brands that they liked, but this highly communicative group was at least as apt to register displeasure at green claims as they were to promote them. Further, "greenfluencers" tended to be under 35 and some marketers questioned the wisdom of targeting young people with green product claims, given research suggesting that it is "older folks" or "matures" who tend to purchase energy-efficient appliances and locally grown foods (Dolliver 2008), so it was a good idea to target them.

Marketers believed moms were "a promising audience for green-marketing efforts" for a handful of reasons: they believed that having children produced concern about the long-term health of the planet, that environmentally conscious children might scrutinize mom's behavior, and that moms tend to become more intensely focused on the immediate and everyday details of the household. However, marketers worried that moms would be unlikely to do something unless it offered a "tangible benefit" to her family and household (Wilbur quoted in Dolliver 2008). Planet Green would address women as well as "new parents" through highly calculated tactics that it elaborated in the Discovery-sponsored "Good and Green Marketing Conference" which offered workshops that promised that, through green messages, marketers could "deepen their connection with women" who were increasingly "in a green state of mind" (Ganshirt quoted in Neorr 2007).

One *AdWeek* essay outlines a strategy that bore such uncanny resemblance to

what would soon become Planet Green's brand strategy that it seems impossible that Planet Green's marketing team was not influenced by it. The author recommends that potential green consumers be addressed as "awakening" to green, but still confused. They might exhibit inconsistent behaviors, such as driving an SUV but boycotting Exxon, or eating organic foods but purchasing the 8000-mile transported Fiji bottled water. The unprecedented availability of information on the Internet had both "empowered" and "bewildered" awakening consumers. They care, but are easily derailed. In the face of these purported realities, marketers must approach them with messages that are clear, honest, and offer them hope (Hough 2007). The author implies that the knowledge, skills, and capacities that consumers bring to a brand must be contained and delegitimized. Consumers must be re-educated to enact their environmental desires and investments in line with brands.[14]

By promoting Planet Green as "solutions oriented" and a "fun" and "easy" corrective to the "intimidating" deluge of green messages (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008), Discovery spoke directly to this problematization of consumer unruliness is as "confusion" and promised advertisers that it could solve it. That is, if, as this discourse suggests, consumers are "confused" rather than unruly, Planet Green could "solve" consumer unpredictability with branded education—or at least it can in this performative discourse. "Confusion" becomes a stand-in to explain the range of possibilities that result when individuals with complex subjectivities and ethical investments encounter green claims in a marketplace of consumer choices. In this way,

[14] It is not that such sentiments—anxiety and ambivalence about what consumers will actually do with brands—do not structure other marketing discourses. Rather, that it seems to be more pronounced, here. Co-creation seems to be shut down at every turn.

this discourse also always involves a process of disavowal—disavowal of the essential unpredictability of what individuals will do with green marketing claims, of whether such claims will "work" as intended. While this disavowed reality certainly generates anxiety, the language used here, the very language used in Planet Green's promotional materials, works to assuage the marketers' anxieties by erasing consumers' complexities and offering clear instructions that promise tangible and positive results.

Despite the fears that characterize green marketing, however, Discovery executives' statements to the press averring the existence of "armchair environmentalists" or consumers "awakening to green" are marked by a "rhetorical tone of certainty" in the sense written about by Ien Ang nearly two decades prior. Ang observes such a tone among the voices of television institutions in the 1980s as they attempted to manage the invisibility of the TV viewers with "crude simplifications" that purported to tell an "essential truth about a group of others" (Ang 1991). Such simplifications were industrial stereotypes of audiences generated through audience measurement techniques, such as set-top boxes and diaries which, when combined with demographic data, promised to "reduce the uncertainty, ease the anxiety" surrounding TV institutions' inability to fully "know" the TV audience in the face of the imperative to pursue and "catch" them to sell to advertisers. This strategy, Ang explains, is "not just a technical matter, but a matter of control" (Ang 1991), an effort to achieve control over inevitably uncertain conditions. However, the tactics that industry uses to reduce risk "can only help to *manage*, not remove the basic uncertainty with which the TV institution has to live. There are no guarantees that actual viewers will comply to the codes, routines and synchronicities of

viewing behavior as designed by the institutions. Ultimately, then, the problem of (lack of) control amounts to one thing: the impossibility of knowing the audience" (Ang 1991).

The reductionism of 1980s ratings systems may seem cartoonish today, offering only the crudest understanding of audience behavior by tracking whether the set was on or off and ignoring all of the lived dimensions of individuals' TV viewing practices. Now, of course, consumer profiling and audience tracking strategies are far more detailed and specific, attempting to grasp the "intangible" aspects of individuals' everyday activities and emotional attachments through a broad array of surveillance and data mining strategies. Now, industry stereotypes audiences less as "couch potatoes" than it figures them as "active consumers," abuzz with potential that needs to be guided ("activated" and "empowered") in particular directions. Planet Green's "awakening" green consumers would be "activated in the green space" by offering them a brand experience and speaking to them in ways that reflect marketers assumptions about their identities.[15]

But even though the Planet Green market research that "discovered" a pool of armchair environmentalists, and despite the fact that all the market research that produced knowledge about various green consumers was certainly far more sophisticated than the ratings strategies of the 1980s and 1990s, these contemporary approaches to "knowing" audiences remain industrial constructions. Neither Discovery nor marketers have privileged access to the "truth" of the individuals that they hope to transform into green consumers. Yet performing this knowledge as truth has become a key commercial

[15] Arvidsson explains that "brands work by *enabling* consumers, by empowering them in particular directions" and thus "embrace the general principle of what Nikolas Rose (1999) has called 'advanced liberal governance' – they work *with* the freedom of consumers" (Arvidsson 2006, 8), "they say not 'You Must!' but 'You May!'" (Arvidsson quoting Barry 2001; Zizek 1999).

strategy within cable business—one that is surely performed with added urgency at times of crisis for, as Ang explains, the threat with which television contends is the loss of audience manageability. Planet Green attempted to manage this crisis—this threat of audience unmanageability—through an effort to render invisible realities and complex subjectivities predictable and profitable. And it did so not only through ongoing collection, refinement, and organization of knowledge about green consumers, but also through a discursive strategy wherein claims about this knowledge were marked by a rhetorical tone of certainty.

But Planet Green's effort to manage the unpredictability of audiences' behavior extended far beyond gathering and performing knowledge about them. By folding this knowledge into a brand, it would work to guide and shape this behavior as well. Scholars of branding have pointed out that brands work to "govern at a distance" in the sense written about by Foucault, subtly guiding and shaping consumers' everyday activities—what they "do with brands" in their day-to-day lives—in line with firms' aims and objectives (Arvidsson 2006, Banet-Weiser 2012, Lury 2004, Moor 2007). Foucault theorized governmentality as the dispersion of governmental functions across a range of institutions, specifically with respect to the liberal-democratic state. For him, governmentality describes efforts to maximize the health and wealth of a population by governing "at a distance" and "through freedom," by enabling individuals to "govern themselves" through an array of technologies (Foucault 2008). As Tony Bennett (1998) summarizes, rather than centering the top-down sovereign power of the state, governmentality is characterized by efforts at "knowing, regulating and changing the

conditions of the population" (70) in order to enlist them in "programs of self-management through which specific governmental objectives will be realized or carried through in and by the voluntary activities of individuals" (75). Scholars of branding have pointed out that the functioning of contemporary brands closely resembles governmentality in this sense. Through branding, firms attempt to "provide a propertied, micro-context of consumption" and offer individuals suggestions for how "a product or service can be experienced, related to, or 'felt'" (Arvidsson 2006, 82). When successful, brands come to "occupy a valuable position in the life-world (or to use marketing terminology, the '*minds*') of consumers," writes Arvidsson. When brands achieve such a position, they can "subsume and appropriate what consumers do *with the brand in mind* as a source of surplus value and profits" (Arvidsson 7). Thus, brands operate to manage or organize individuals' everyday use of brands such that individuals' mundane activities will unfold in ways that are desirable to firms and "brand value." In this way, brands can be understood "as a kind of ubiquitous managerial devices by means of which everyday life is managed, or perhaps better, programmed, so that it evolves in ways that can potentially generate the right kind of attention (and hence, brand value)" (7). Media brands thus works to governmentalize consumers' everyday interactions with the brand toward the production of brand value.

Planet Green attempted to do just that by drawing upon proliferating data about consumers' "green" sensibilities and promising advertisers that it could construct a mediated environment in which individuals' everyday activities would unfold in ways that helped them self-realize as "green consumers" and at the same time add value to

Planet Green's and its sponsors' brands. By watching the television shows, playing the online games, taking up consumer advice, attending marketing events, consumers' quotidian activities generate value. In other words, the Planet Green brand would attempt to organize, as Adam Arvidsson explains, the "autonomous productivity" of individuals toward profits and brand value by producing coherent narratives about a Planet Green's identity in which individuals could participate (Arvidsson 2006, 4).

Yet the governmental functioning of brands is never guaranteed: what individuals do with brands can never be fully contained or controlled by the brand's parent organization. Thus, despite huge investment in the "science" of branding, brand value is neither stable nor can it be taken for granted. The forms of measure with which modes of action are rendered "predictable" are "inherently subjective" and "arbitrarily chosen" (Arvidsson 2006, 134). As Arvidsson writes, "Brand values build on qualities like attention, association, loyalty and emotional or other subjective investments, that lend themselves to measurement only with great difficulty" (133-134).

In the context of such *un*certainty, the "rhetorical certainty" that characterized Discovery's aforementioned claims about green consumers and markets, must be understood as crucial to the production of brands themselves. Such claims of certainty are *performative* in the sense written about by Celia Lury (2004) and elaborated upon by Liz Moor (2007) in their respective work on brands. Lury explains that the "brand as interface is a site—or diagram—of interactivity" and in this way the brand can be viewed as shaping or mediating, not determining, "'exchange' between producers and consumers" as consumers' communicative labor is enlisted in the production of the brand

itself; the "ongoing object-ivity" of the brand emerges in this two-way performative process (Lury 2004, 7). Moor adds that while branding is a "conceptual enterprise" because "it involves the formation of generalizations and abstractions" for example, generalizations based on ratings data and other market research or its "informational qualities," the brand itself is constituted through performative and technical means, brand value is produced, it comes into being and into materiality, as the ongoing performative work of industrial actors comes together with the effort to "pattern information" in ways that aim to organize individuals experiences and behaviors (Moor 2007, 9).

When Discovery's Eileen O'Neill asserted the existence of a group of "awakening" consumers, or when Discovery executives announce the availability of a pool of "armchair environmentalists," they were making "performative claims," or, statements that "attempt to conceive of inalienable qualities and social phenomena (such as loyalty, commitment, passion) as things that can be measured, valued, and potentially, sold" (Moor 2007, 71). Such statements "are not so much descriptions of what *actually* happens as performative claims made by marketing people embedded within particular institutional contexts" (71) (for example, performative claims about the extent to which a green brand will succeed in operating as a platform on which consumers activities will unfold in ways that are desirable to advertisers). The value of green branding and various "truths" about the operations of a "green market" are actively *produced* (Lury 2004) through performative marketing claims, such as those made by O'Neill, and Zaslav. The "facts" governing green marketing are a range of interpretations by actors embedded in particular institutional contexts, of studies that were produced by researchers likewise

embedded specific institutional contexts. There is no single certainty or "factual" reality behind the claims about consumers or how to target them with green messages. Such statements purport to reflect an *a priori* reality, but are in fact actively engaged in *making* that reality in ways that are rooted in the assumptions, values, and interests of the individuals making the claims—in this case, those with an interest in profit maximization.

When brands themselves are understood as performative (Lury 2004), green marketing discourse and Discovery's statements can be viewed as part of how the green brand is performed for a range of audiences, and through which the brand accrues or loses value. Planet Green's brand value was rooted less in what consumers are actually doing with the brand than in the success or failure of Discovery discourse in producing a story—a story about what consumers are doing, feeling, and thinking—in which advertisers, shareholders, and MSOs are willing to invest.

While in some ways, Planet Green held potential to help the newly-public Discovery Communications Inc. manage the crisis in cable. It promised to overcome ad-skipping, it promised to capture consumers who were "migrating" online, it promised to aid in international growth, and it promised to overcome unruly consumers through audience measurement and brands. Thus, in some ways, as this section has demonstrated, the "green" anxieties felt by marketers and media business higher-ups are managed in much the same way that general worries about invisible audiences and unruly consumers are managed across the board: through attempts to know consumers, detail specific instructions for targeting them, and build "strong brands" around this knowledge. But, as the green marketing discourse suggests, by venturing onto the terrain of

environmentalism, Discovery not only faced managing a set of anxieties produced by the "crisis in cable," but was also contending with an additional set of anxieties specific to environmentalism.

Given the heightened worries circulating within the green marketing conversation, it is difficult to argue that there was anything definite about the capitalist possibility of green marketing that compelled firms to embark on green campaigns. Certainly, green marketing tapped into broader industrial desires to "know" consumers, to establish certainty about how markets work, and to profit from this knowledge. However, I argue that Discovery's decision to launch green television was not just a strategic response to desires for control over markets and consumers, but also representative of the deeply ambivalent way in which environmentalist sensibilities came together with the seductive pull of governing through branding for the industry elites and cultural intermediaries who were involved in Planet Green.

P*art 3: A green structure of feeling meets governing ambitions*

In some ways Planet Green presented a potential solution to a set of industrial problems facing a cable company on the brink of going public at a particular moment in time. But this doesn't answer specifically: why undertake this huge experiment to center the solution to television's crisis on environmentalism? Sure, Planet Green offered opportunities for international expansion, for video-on-demand, for generating web traffic, and for branded educational content. It also seemed to be a bold idea for "breaking through the clutter" and there was some sense that green lifestyle television

would attract affluent consumers. However, the uncertainty and anxiety about consumers, markets, and regulations that characterize the green marketing discourse make "market readiness" an insufficient explanation for Discovery's decision to heavily invest in a multi-platform environmentalist brand. So, again, why would Discovery venture into territory—environmentalism—that seemed at odds with capitalist growth?

In order to answer this question, I argue that the environmentalist impulses and designs of Discovery decision makers must be taken seriously. I do this not to celebrate them or suggest that they are somehow "authentic" desires separate from their commercial goals, but rather to argue that a particular "structure of feeling" came together with the seductive pull of governing through brands in a way that had particular resonance among media decision makers at a particular moment in time. I argue that this conjuncture is marked simultaneously by deep anxiety and by ambitions of control, and that it is crucial to analyze it in the context of the mounting centrality of brands—and the industrial actors behind them—to how environmentalism is thought and put into practice in contemporary culture.

Raymond William defines structure of feeling as "social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available" (Williams 1977, 133-134). This "solution" is "a specific structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and, in what are often its most recognizable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions" (134). A structure of feeling is about "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (133). This "particular quality of social experience and

relationship" is historically specific and "gives the sense of a generation or period" (131). It involves the relation between seemingly "private" thoughts and a social experience at a particular moment in time. In analysis of a structure of feeling, one must attend not only to the ways in which media themselves are part of a "social material process" (133), but also to the "historically variable" and "complex relation of differentiated structures of feeling to differentiated classes" (134).

For Discovery decision makers, it is safe to assume that this was a particularly classed structure of feeling, shaped by their position as high-level media professionals and the accompanying classed sensibilities. It is synchronous with broader cultural anxieties about the increasingly visible environmental externalities of unfettered capitalism: climate change, habitat loss and species extinction, pollution, desertification, destructive hurricanes, and other forms of environmental catastrophe. It is a structure of feeling that must be understood in relation to the rise of ethical consumerism and discourse of "green growth"—and the resonance of these phenomena within the liberal/democrat-leaning business community[16] and upper-middle classes in the US—as it comes together with governing ambitions that have a long history among media and cultural elites (McCarthy 2010, Ouellette 2002). Planet Green's governing aims centered on saving the planet through the wholly commercial space of cable branding and through activities that were not always rational but also affective—the realization of Planet Green's governmental objective (since it was conceived fully within the logic of brands) was contingent upon enrolling individuals in the brand community such that their labor

[16] Discovery CEO David Zaslav makes campaign contributions in the tens of thousands of dollars to democrats running for office.

would not only co-produce the Planet Green brand, but also enable a privatized form of planet saving.

It was in the optimistic discourse surrounding these governing ambitions that Planet Green departs from the green marketing discourse, which, as I noted, is structured primarily by anxiety about markets and consumers. In contrast, the discourse issuing from Discovery in the lead-up to Planet Green's launch was structured at once by a sense of urgency about environmental destruction and climate change as well as intense optimism about the possibilities saving the world through television and the magic of brands—a sense that I locate in a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977) that resonates with these media higher-ups at a particular moment in time. Specifically, when Discovery announced plans to launch Planet Green, it not only made a case for the channel in terms of "demand" or "market readiness" it also argued that there was a "need" for green TV given climate change and other forms of environmental destruction and that television was uniquely positioned to "bring green to the mainstream."

Planet Green's particular brand of environmentalism was structured by a utopian promise of "saving the world" through television. Discovery higher-ups claimed that Planet Green was a response to a "need" for such programming given the "vitally important issue of climate change" as Eileen O'Neill told the *Washington Times* in 2007. She continued, "The reason this network needs to exist is that there is a real problem with climate change… And we can help people make changes in their lives that will help change the world" (Baschuk 2007). The Planet Green marketing team likewise emphasized an environmental mission: "With climate change and environmental issues

accelerating at alarming rates and consumer awareness reaching new levels, an information and content vacuum existed in the media landscape," wrote the Planet Green marketing team in their submission to the Mark awards. "While environmental programming and content existed in pockets," it went on, "there wasn't a dedicated television platform connecting the state of the environment with viewers" (Planet Green Launch Marketing Team 2009). A former Planet Green executive explained that Discovery hoped that its unique positioning—as a powerful media firm with a hefty programming budget, along with a mission to both "entertain" and "educate"—could "bring [environmentalism] more to the forefront in the larger population… Discovery had the big brands and big names and ability to reach millions and millions of people…the goal was to make [environmentalism] a little bit more mainstream" (Howell 2013). In other words, she emphasizes Discovery's unique potential for being an advocate for the environment.

The promise that TV could be a force for environmentalism seemed to be quite appealing to Discovery insiders, though I say this with the acknowledgment that their statements were also always performative and thoroughly imbricated in the commercial logics of branding. People at Discovery were "very excited" about Planet Green, one executive told me. "Everybody was behind it. It had a lot of support from all departments… it was an extremely big, successful launch" (Michalchyshyn 2013). Another executive remembered that "everybody was extremely excited about the launch … A lot of people had vested interest in it… it was exciting! Because it was something that was loud and fun and interesting" (Howell 2013). She also emphasized a felt

investment in environmentalism at Discovery, that it was "important" to the company; she listed its sustainability efforts—recycling, efficient heating and cooling, the LEED certified headquarters building—noting, "As a corporation, [environmentalism] was an important thing to them. I believe it still is" (Howell 2013). Celebrities signed on in droves, including actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Adrian Grenier, celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse, "Science Guy" Bill Nye, rapper Chris Bridges aka Ludacris, Tom Green of "bum bum song" fame, comedian (and host of the TBS *Dinner and a Movie*) Annabelle Gurwitch, news anchors Tom Brokaw and Bob Woodruff among others. Those who appeared on the channel explained that they favored endorsing something they "really believed in" and "for our kids" rather than something "stupid" as rock star Tommy Lee reflects before the channel's launch (Levin 2008).

Planet Green promised celebrities more legitimate and "authentic" forms of programming than the "crass commercialism" elsewhere in popular media. "I was definitely not down to do another reality show, because we have too many of those, and they're stupid," rock star Tommy Lee told *USA Today*. "But we're doing something for our kids" (Levin 2008). When an interviewer asked celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse, whose Planet Green show *Emeril Green* would be located inside a Whole Foods Market, how he stays "authentic," Lagasse responds, that he isn't "really about" doing product endorsements. "For me" he explained, "it's not only about selling the product; it's really about believing in what it's all about… [the partnership with Whole Foods and Planet Green] is really important to me ... turning the average person on to sustainable growing or organically grown, pesticide-free foods" (Hampp 2008a). For Lagasse, the

environmental bent of Planet Green fit with his self-concept and personal brand: "for over 30 years, I've been growing organic foods. I was using them when people didn't know what organic was or how to spell organic, especially for my restaurants. ['Going organic' on Planet Green is] no stretch for me at all because I've been in that environment for so long" (Hampp 2008a). Similarly, Steve Thomas (of PBS's *This Old House*), who would host Planet Green's eco-home improvement show *Renovation Nation*, explained, "my personal mission is to promulgate green building practices or sustainable building practices" (Thomas 2013) and Planet Green promised to be a platform to enable that mission.[17]

Such hopes for the possibilities of environmental television were expressed not only by those actively involved with Planet Green, but also were also evident in the way in which the notion of TV with an environmental mission resonated with media decision-makers beyond Discovery Communications.[18] For example, the *Washington Post* described advertiser interest in Planet Green as "intense" (Ahrens 2007a) and the Planet Green marketing team won several advertising awards for the channel's launch. *PR Week* awarded it "Consumer Launch of the Year" (Launch of the Year 2009) while the Cable and Telecommunications Association for Marketing granted the Planet Green marketing team a Gold Mark Award in the "Brand Image and Positioning – Campaign" division (Mark Award 2009). Perhaps actors on these award-granting bodies shared Discovery's

[17] For Thomas (2013), negotiating the imperatives of contemporary media business through his personal mission opened up space to refigure product placement, such as the three-way partnership between his show, the car company Saturn, and Habitat for Humanity, as an innovative and "tasteful"—rather than "hokey" or "offensive." Across the celebrity discourse, there is a sense that this kind of programming is different from other kinds, was more legitimate than the "crass commercialism" elsewhere in popular media. By participating in Planet Green, these celebrities could realize desires for a kind of ethical authenticity *within* media and brand culture.
[18] The approval expressed through the practice of this award granting may seem surprising when placed alongside the initial dismissals of the Planet Green project in the trade press. I argue that it speaks to the ways in which a whole range of competing performativities are involved in commercial media culture—from profound anxieties about profits to the kinds of desires for "authenticity" (for example, in "art" or "doing good") that, as Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) has argued, are central to brand culture.

assumptions about the alignments of environmentalist sensibilities with cultural legitimacy and a "will to govern" through television.

Green Growth

I argue that the performative statements of intense optimism about the compatibility of commerce and world-saving, alongside the serious concern about the threats posed by human-created environmental crises like climate change, habitat destruction, species extinction, and pollution, are rooted in a structure of feeling shared by the writing of Paul Hawken (1999, 2007), Al Gore (1992/2006), and others who embrace and promote a set of philosophies including "Natural Capitalism" and "Green Growth." These philosophies are marked by deeply felt objections to environmental despoliation and deeply felt faith in the possibilities of a better capitalism. Gore and Hawken are both troubled by what they perceive as the immorality of human and corporate hubris and a loss of intimacy with nature, a position that is historically rooted in the writing of people like Thoreau and Emerson and is, of course, in many ways is predicated on privilege. The environmental crisis, for them, is framed as a spiritual crisis as much as an economic one.

The authors call upon what they call the "business community" to restructure its thinking around environmental problems. They draw upon a long history in English-language motivational speaking and writing by pointing out that "crisis" in written Chinese is made up of two characters, one that signifies danger and anther that signifies opportunity (Gore 1992/2006, xxii-xxiii, for example). (Fluent speakers, however, have

pointed out that this is based on a convenient, if slight, mistranslation.) The climate crisis represents a chance for privileged and powerful people to take responsibility, which promises personal pleasures, good feelings, and the restoration of a kind of spiritual "balance" within oneself. At the same time, the climate crisis represents a business opportunity, as former president Bill Clinton's writes in his back-cover endorsement of Hawken's *Natural Capitalism*, the book "basically proves beyond any argument that there are presently available technologies, and those just on the horizon, which will permit us to get richer by cleaning, not spoiling, the environment." The "green growth" and "natural capitalism" discourses provided a structure of feeling in which Planet Green made sense.

It may be tempting to dismiss Planet Green decision makers' environmentalist impulses as hypocritical or disingenuous. However, as Sarah Banet-Weiser has persuasively argued "Rather than generalize all branding strategies as egregious effects of today's market, and think wistfully of a bygone world that was truly authentic, it is more productive to situate brand cultures in terms of their ambivalence, where both economic imperatives and 'authenticity' are expressed and experienced simultaneously" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 5).

In bringing environmentalism together with making money, Planet Green drew upon Discovery's long history of the interrelation—not separation—of commerce and civic action. For example, it offered a range of specifically environmental educational programs. Discovery Education partnered with Siemens Foundation and the National Science Teachers Association in the "We Can Change The World Challenge." The

challenge was aligned with K-12 state standards, and promised to "inspire" students toward developing "green solutions" for their schools and communities and "transform" them "into active citizens for a greener tomorrow" (Discovery Globe 2008). Discovery Education Green, a K-12, state standards-aligned media content service promised to "help teachers integrate Green lessons into their curriculum and empowers students to make more environmentally conscious decisions" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). Finally, Discovery partnered with GM to co-creating "Live Green Teacher Grants" as part of Discovery Education (Hampp 2008b).

These initiatives do not represent a cooptation of education, but rather transform environmental education as a process of branding. For example, how educational content gets selected, produced and sold, or how educational events, such as competitions for grants or awards (such as the middle school competition for a new science building, making the distribution of educational resources contingent on the entrepreneurial abilities of middle-schoolers), the citizenship projects toward which it gets articulated all get reshaped through the imperatives of branding. The blurred boundaries between branding and civic duty, I argue, are part of this larger industrial structure of feeling.

In addition to the promises of this marriage of civic responsibility and brand value, I argue that Planet Green appealed to media decision makers as their environmentalism came together with the governmentalizing promises of brands. Discovery positioned Planet Green as an educational channel—specifically to give people tools to become better, more eco-minded citizens. When Zaslav announced the channel, he legitimated Planet Green's environmentalist promise—its claim to eco-credibility to

rolling out what was in many ways framed as project of citizen reform—through the rhetoric of the "trusted brand." "The Earth has been central to Discovery since John Hendricks first chose the planet to represent our brand" Discovery CEO David Zaslav reminded readers in the April 2007 press release announcing Planet Green's impending launch. He explained that Discovery's "worldwide credibility" made it uniquely suited to launching what would be "the most comprehensive and trusted global resource for celebrating, preserving and protecting the planet" (Discovery to Dedicate 24-Hour TV Network 2007). He pointed out that Discovery had always been an advocate of environmental protection—especially in the realm of wildlife preservation (Siklos 2007). Discovery's acquisition of the website TreeHugger.com would only add to Discovery's pro-planet, pro-social mission: "Bringing TreeHugger.com into the Discovery family gives it the resources to continue doing what it does best: bringing green living to the masses" Discovery's president of digital media, Bruce Campbell, told the *Washington Post* (Ahrens 2007a). Zaslav told the *London Times*, "People should go away from watching Planet Green and be inspired a little bit" (Ashton 2008). He promised programming that was "documentary" in orientation, not "reality" and hoped that viewers would "[come] back [to Planet Green] for a bit of nourishment, along with your entertainment" (Ashton 2008).

Zaslav's promise of "nutritious" programming and Campbell's pledge to "bring green to the masses" resurrect discourses historically associated with educational television and the emergence of US public service broadcasting in the 1960s. In her study of PBS, Ouellette (2002) notes that when Newton Minnow famously condemned

commercial television as a "vast wasteland" in 1961 or when the *New York Times*' Jack Gould described the mass audience as "childlike," mindlessly consuming "candy" instead of nutritious "spinach" (quoted in Ouellette 2002, 33), these commentators were painting the mass audience in implicitly classed and gendered terms. They were expressing (usually white and male) elites' anxieties about stereotypes of such "lazy feminized masses" as soap opera-addicted housewives and working-class "Joe Sixpacks" passively consuming broadcast offerings (Ouellette 2002, 33). Ouellette points out that educational television was conceived not only to redeem television from the "vast wasteland," but also with a governmental project of cultivating "responsible citizens" with aims of Eurocentric "cultural uplift" and individual "maturation"—goals that were shaped by and validated the tastes, values, and knowledge of "the sophisticated, college-educated, intellectually oriented, implicitly white minority" who conceived educational television as an effort to combat what they perceived as broadcast TV's "cultural mediocrity" (Ouellette 2002, 45).[19]

Although Planet Green was not conceived as an overt project of "uplift" for the masses, Zaslav reanimates this discourse to differentiate Planet Green from the "trash" television available elsewhere and his comments tap into the same deeply classed and gendered discourses that cultural elites mobilized in the 60s. Yet while public television framed its public service mission in terms of attracting disadvantaged populations to "'better' television" (19), Planet Green courted affluent consumers. Planet Green never tried to distance itself from commercialism but rather refigured commercialism itself as a

[19] Ouellette also points out that public television emerged in the context of the great society rhetoric and programs of the 1960s. It was framed by some reformers, such as Walter Lippmann, as a solution to "cultural poverty" and mass culture. "Good" television offered "cultural enlightenment" that was Eurocentric and reflected and reproduced the tastes and values of the white, educated elite. The promise was the "democratization" of access to this culture through making "quality" programming available on the public airwaves.

site of environmentalist possibility. Planet Green was in many ways unabashedly commercial, constructing and courting what Ien Ang calls an "audience-as-market," consumers to sell to its advertisers, it also, seemingly contradictorily, imagined an "audience-as-public" in Ang's sense, made up of citizens to be "reformed, educated, informed, as well as entertained – in short, 'served' – presumably to enable them to better perform their democratic rights and duties" (Ang 1991, 29). Planet green positioned itself as a multimedia "public service" to "bring green to the mainstream." Discovery's initial Planet Green press release described the brand as "a forum" where "like-minded individuals" wishing to learn about the world and "make a difference" could gather to, for example, measure their carbon footprints, get green consumer advice, and find "reliable status reports" on a range of environmental issues including climate change, endangered species, deforestation, and the melting of polar ice caps (Discovery to Dedicate 24-Hour TV Network 2007). Through Planet Green's content, individuals could be transformed into greener citizens.

While the conception of the "audience-as-public" and the "audience-as-market" may appear to be in conflict, Ang (1991) points out that the seemingly distinct constructs—"audience-as-market" and "audience-as-public"—are only "relatively conflicting" for both are rooted in a struggle by media institutions to conquer and control the audience.[20] Ang describes the way in which media institutions that address their audience as a "public" and citizens to be reformed as "paternalistic" in Raymond Williams' sense, "an authoritarian system with a conscience" (quoting Williams 1976,

[20] In fact, the tensions between audience-as-public and audience-as-market are far from unique to Planet Green, for the distinction between them is historical, not natural, and processes of broadcast deregulation since the 70s have made audience-as-public increasingly resemble audience-as-market.

28). In such a system, the relationship between audience and institution is understood in "cultural and ideological terms" transmitting the tastes, values and habits of the ruling majority, in addition to a "sense of cultural responsibility and social accountability" that stands in contrast to gratifying audience "wants" (Ang 1991, 28). While Planet Green insisted that it would be "entertaining" in addition to "nutritious," the way in which Zaslav mobilized the rhetoric of the "trusted brand" plays on the same kind of paternalism, positioning Discovery as the authoritative arbiter of what counts as "green" and promising to "bring" it to "the masses." Further, despite the fact that Planet Green was operating in a context where branding wisdom figures the relationship between consumers and brands in terms of a kind of managed freedom, in which individuals' "spontaneous" use of brands would co-produce their value (Arvidsson 2006), Zaslav takes up a regressive "transmission" or "hypodermic" view of communication: rather than inviting varied participation, as do brands, by imagining an audience as "a public" Planet Green conceives of its audience as "receivers" of its environmental messages (Ang 1991, 29).

In this way, Discovery's Planet Green project was rooted in a structure of feeling in which the meeting of this fantasy of environmentalism with this fantasy of control had particular resonance. The discourse issuing from Discovery tapped into the world-changing promises of green growth discourse and the compatibility of making money and doing good. Indeed, the promise of Planet Green was as much an expression of environmentalist dreams, as it was pursuit for profit. The discourse surrounding Planet Green itself, especially in the early months, was structured by a promise that a media

brand could be an, albeit top down, activist force as well as a site of activism—a promise that Planet Green could be an environmentalist intervention and at the same time provide a context for the environmental interventions of fans, celebrities, and corporate sponsors.

Governmentalizing dreams, biopower, neoliberalism

While branding is always entangled with a control impulse, as I have already discussed, in Planet Green this impulse came together with a "will to govern" in a broader manner as well. The biopolitical promise of branding makes it "seductive" in Maija Nadesan's (2008) sense. She writes, "Biopower is seductive because its logics, technologies, and experts offer, or at least purport to offer, tools for societal *self*-government. Biopower's mantra of the rational administration of life promises means for realizing the elusive cybernetic fantasy of a society of self-regulating individuals" (Nadesan 2008, 3). In the case of Planet Green, the "environmentalist desires" I have been discussing are not so much "authentic" as they represent the coming together of a particular structure of feeling with the seductive dream of this kind of "governing at a distance." The appeal of such governing must be understood within a long history in which television came to be viewed by media and cultural elites as an ideal mechanism for disseminating lessons for good citizenship. Further, this is a history that complements in crucial ways the taking hold and intensification of neoliberal rationalities of government from the postwar era to the present.

For example, as Anna McCarthy (2010) has shown, in the 1950s social and cultural elites came to view mass-appeal television as an ideal vehicle for cultivating

citizenship qualities that complemented Cold War liberalism (ironically, however, they also worried about the stupefying effects of such TV's "cultural mediocrity" (Ouellette 2002)). They conceived of ideal citizens who were "mature," rational, self-managing and moderate selves who would conduct themselves "intelligently" in the realms of politics, the arts, and the market, and look favorably upon the equation of democracy with the free market (McCarthy 2010). These elites developed sponsored programming aimed simultaneously at nurturing these qualities and consolidating their own classed interests. Sponsored postwar television programming, she argues, helped "implant the neoliberal program in U.S. political culture" less through "its influence on the so-called masses" than through "its capacity to galvanize elites" (8).

As liberalism intensified into advanced or neo-liberalism with the "reinvention of government" in the 1980s and 1990s—an ongoing process of public sector downsizing, dismantling of welfare programs, and valorization of market deregulation, public-private partnerships, and privatization of historically state responsibilities—government has become increasingly reliant upon a citizenry that is self-managing, self-responsible, enterprising, risk averse, and requires no intervention on the part of the state. Laurie Ouellette and James Hay have demonstrated that television—specifically the inexpensive-to-produce and highly profitable genres of lifestyle and reality-based television that proliferated with the explosion of niche media in recent decades—has become particularly useful to neoliberal rationalities of rule. By taking lifestyle as an object of assessment and intervention, by extolling privatization, volunteerism, entrepreneurialism, and personal responsibility, and by offering individuals a whole range

of resources for working on their everyday conduct in line with these values, contemporary reality and lifestyle television urge individuals to actively participate in their own government (Ouellette and Hay 2008).

Although Ouellette and Hay focus centrally on the ways in which reality and lifestyle TV has inserted itself as a mode of social service delivery, instructing struggling individuals in self-care and personal responsibility so as not to be a burden to the state (see also Ouellette 2012 and Ouellette 2004 for other examples of this). Planet Green, was a second tier cable channel that hoped to address relatively affluent consumers. Representing what I will call "a green governmentality for upscale consumers," Planet Green would work to enlist individuals' everyday practices and labor in alleviating industrial anxieties and resolving the contradictions that emerged in the process of reconciling contemporary branding with saving the planet.

Planet Green's televised and online pedagogies of citizenship would not separate from commercialism, but rather work to over come the contradictions of public sector downsizing and environmental regulation in the privatized space of cable branding, calling upon private individuals, corporations, and environmental not-for-profits to come together in voluntary and mutually beneficial ways. Discovery imagined that it could build a kind of branded utopia in which consumers' active engagement with Planet Green—their TV watching, their online interactivity, their uptake of green tips and products in their everyday lives—would be fully structured toward "coproducing," in Arvidsson's sense, a range of green brands (including celebrity brands, product brands, media brands, and their own self-brands). This branded utopia that would organize

individuals' environmentalism into something that would work for brands and, in turn, organize advertisers' activities in a way that would work for environmentalism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the discourse surrounding Planet Green's early branding articulated a very specific fantasy of planet saving—one which, I argue, resonated with a larger structure of feeling in which the investment in the governmental powers of brands came together with a class-inflected concern about environmental destruction and investment in business-as-usual market structures. In part, Planet Green was promoted as a paternalistic project that bore the legacy of educational television, with its project of citizen reform. But Planet Green also promised to transform environmental governing in line with the aims profit maximization. In Planet Green, Discovery hoped to realize a new kind of environmentalism within the constraints of media business. This was an environmentalism that would be neither fake nor hypocritical, just highly orchestrated. Planet Green can be viewed as a kind of experiment that attempted to answer, "What would it mean to fully organize consumers' environmentalism?" This was a question that would generate enormous anxiety, as I will discuss in the next chapters, given the impossibility of realizing this dream. But at the outset, insofar as the marketing and industrial discourse conceived of consumers' autonomous environmentalism as an obstacle to corporate environmentalism—such as consumers willing to "talk the talk," but not "walk the walk"—Discovery developed Planet Green to address the notion that corporations can't *do* environmentalism if

consumers don't cooperate (this, of course is only one problematization of corporate environmentalism; corporate environmentalism could be conceived differently if we think outside of the mandates of a radically free market). In the face of all of green's potential risks, in the face of the myriad reasons why green might either fail or threaten brands and profits, Discovery would build a universe that promised to counter all of these risks by organizing the affects and activities surrounding environmentalism according to strict criteria—criteria that aimed to alleviate industrial anxieties and to organize consumers against a range of potential outcomes that are not only unprofitable, but are also perceived threatening to brands' ability to "be green." In this way, the industrial fantasy of control over consumers became likewise a fantasy of (the feasibility of this kind of top-down corporate) environmentalism, and vice versa. For Planet Green, branding—with its governmentalizing dreams—contained the promise of overcoming unruly consumers *for the environment*.

Planet Green would not only enact these "solutions" to cable TV's crisis, Discovery spokespeople would also perform their viability—largely for an audience of advertisers—in a larger industrial discourse. Part of this performative discourse involved proposing that Planet Green would not only provide consumers with a range of resources to self-realize and self-govern as green consumer-citizens but also provide them with a whole media environment in which they could enact their environmentalist activities and sensibilities in a way that would be productive for Planet Green and its advertisers' brands.

It is not surprising that the Planet Green project appealed to media higher-ups because it promised to operate as a mediated form of governance, guiding consumers toward brand building activities in ways that also resonated with specific very fantasies of environmental clean-up. These fantasies—while surely not entirely cynical for these cultural intermediaries—were contingent upon choice-based modes of agency in a radically free market. They imagined a fully privatized environmentalism aligned with both corporate profits and neoliberal rationalities of rule, working to repair the environmental consequences of unfettered capitalism in the realm of the market (that is, *through* unfettered capitalism itself). Planet Green was conceived as a kind of utopian context in which this apparently contradictory project would work. Through performative and governmental means, Discovery hoped to guide advertisers and consumers toward activities that could to resolve the tensions between profits and activism, between commerce and politics, between attracting eyeballs and reforming citizens, and between consumerism and conservation. I argue that this produced a highly ambivalent and anxious space, in ways that I will explore further in the remainder of this dissertation. Branding environmentalism for television involved extensive performative work to disavow the irresolvability of these contradictions; and part of this disavowal was the practice of branding itself, for "strong branding" promised to help firms control and predict markets. Planet Green worked to resolve these contradictions through the pursuit of a god-like level of control, which, as I will show in later chapters, for all its governmental dreams, even branding could not realize.

Chapter 2: Branding, governmentality, and the new environmentalism

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I examined the way in which Planet Green emerged within a complex industrial structure of feeling as it came together with ambitions of governing through brands. In this chapter I delve into the way these materialized in the multiplatform Planet Green brand. I extend the argument I made in Chapter 1—that for Planet Green, the process of branding was linked to a control impulse from the get go. I show that contemporary branding is structured in ways that bear remarkable resemblance to what Foucauldian scholars call governmentality. This resemblance, however, is more than coincidental, for brands and branding have become increasingly involved in neoliberal forms of governmentality (see Moor 2007, Banet-Weiser 2012, Ouellette 2012 for examples of this). For this reason, this chapter insists that analysis of what is sometimes called "green governmentality," which I will define shortly, increasingly demands attention to brands. Planet Green offers a quintessential example of the meeting of branding, governmentality, and what I am calling "the new environmentalism." This is a form of environmental governance that gains its legitimacy not from the state, democratic process, or collective struggle, but rather through the logic branding itself. This chapter seeks to examine what this form of governance looked like in the highly detailed and elaborated example of Planet Green, taking seriously what environmental possibilities were opened up and what were shut down.

Although Planet Green's content changed significantly over its four years of existence, in this chapter (as well as the next), I zero in on its initial slate of programming commissioned and aired in line with Planet Green's original mission and brand identity, for this programming is the clearest articulation of Discovery's particular dream of environment saving through brands. It was on June 4, 2008, not quite a year after Discovery had initially announced its plans to launch the brand, Discovery Communications Inc. rebranded its Discovery Home channel as the "first-ever 24/7 eco-lifestyle network" (Planet Green Launch Marketing Team 2009). The new channel exploded onto the scene with an enormous publicity launch with marketing events that doubled as environmental action. Planet Green "greened" Major League Baseball games along the East Coast, handing out prizes to randomly-selected individuals engaged in "green" behavior. In Times Square, it "greened" billboards and staged a bicycles giveaway. It held an Earth Day tree planting and an outdoor clean-up session at the Indianapolis 500. Working to bring individuals' existing fan investments in, for example, professional baseball or car racing, as well as their environmental sensibilities into alignment with the business imperatives of the brand, Planet Green's launch offered a preview of what would soon become a fully branded environmentalism.

As Planet Green rolled out its initial slate of programming and web content, it elaborated this branded environmental activism through programming ranging from environmental news (*Focus Earth* (2008-2010)) to game shows (*Go for the Green* (2008)), from documentaries (*Greensburg* (2008-2010)) to cooking shows (*Emeril Green* (2008-2010)). Celebrity-studded programs, such as the eco-themed faceoff between

rocker Tommy Lee and rapper Ludacris aka Chris Bridges (*Battleground Earth* (2008)) educated viewers about environmentally-friendly products and ways to conserve energy at home. Magazine-type shows (*G Word* (2008)) offered lifestyle tips, instructions for green DIY projects, mediated fieldtrips to visit eco-entrepreneurs, and lessons on new green technology. A number of home renovation shows demonstrated eco-friendly improvements while a spoofy reality program showcased "eco-don'ts" and offered cash prizes to featured "eco criminals" who reduced their ecological footprints on TV (*Wa$ted!* (2008-2010)).

Billing itself as "the multiplatform media destination with a mission," Discovery promised that Planet Green would be "the center for the new green conversation, speaking to people who want to understand green living and to those who truly want to make a difference in meeting the critical challenge of protecting our environment." Its "unique content, tools and information" would "enlighten, empower and most important entertain." The television component would do so in tandem with its "leading eco-lifestyle website TreeHugger.com"—a recent acquisition that focused on eco news, science and technology and already had a devoted following of users—as well as the brand new "solutions-oriented PlanetGreen.com" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). Online, individuals could find lifestyle tips, additional information on the television shows (including how to become a contestant), consumer tips, news bits, quizzes and games, discussion forums, and opportunities to "get involved." They could find tips for "greening" one's commute to work or school, be "sustainable on the cheap," a guide to "better biking" DIY projects, "organic A-Z" green holiday traditions, "join the

conversation" on forums and discussion boards—and later on Facebook and Twitter. They could learn about "less-is-more lifestyle," greener travel and vacationing, public transportation, hybrid cars, pollution, tips for greening up investing, home renting and buying, weddings and sex practices, workout routines, skin care and babies. If individuals wanted to choose favorite celebrities based on green criteria, they could do that too. They could even learn how to plan a greener funeral (Planet Green Homepage 2009).

When the channeled launched, however, the "quality" popular press greeted it with measured derision.[21] For *Boston Globe* TV critic Matthew Gilbert, green TV was no more than a marketing ploy, a savvy move by advertisers eager to tap into an emergent—and affluent—green consumer group. Most of Planet Green's programming, he argued, showcased a consumerist good life that was "unbearably posh and fashionable," "shallow and self-satisfied," and hopelessly commercial (Gilbert 2008). The *New York Time*'s Alessandra Stanley wasn't convinced by the channel's "wide and at times inconsistent" definition of environmentalism, given advertisements for Dow Chemical, a company with a horrendous environmental record, and celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse's breezy shopping trips or super-caloric recipe demonstrations during his Whole Foods Market-based cooking lessons (Stanley 2008).

While it may be tempting to dismiss Planet Green for its commercialism, its corporate sponsorship, its inattention to structural issues, its focus on consumer lifestyle, or, most troubling to commentators, its environmental contradictions (i.e., "hypocrisy"), doing so tells us very little about its significance. The features of Planet Green that open

[21] This derision represents a different discusive formation, that of the "quality press," than that of media spokespeople and advertisers talking to each other in the trade press. This "quality" discourse is structured far more by classed forms of "taste" than by advertiser anxieties.

it up to the kind of criticism registered in the press are not unusual in ethical and environmental lifestyle media—nor in green marketing more broadly. Planet Green emerged in the context of an enormous surge in environmental branding and lifestyle media, which I laid out in the introduction to this dissertation. These brands that make of the "green space" are undeniably commercial—and obviously preoccupied with individual lifestyle choices. However, one would be remiss to ignore the way that they are also increasingly involved in how we govern ourselves as climate change, pollution, extinction, habitat destruction, deforestation, desertification and other forms of environmental degradation continue apace, and with increasing media visibility. Lifestyle has become a key site of environmental governance. At the same time that environmental policy has been deregulated and its enforcement agencies defunded in favor of corporate "voluntary self-regulation," we have seen a rise in rebate and incentive programs that reward individuals for the purchase of energy-efficient home appliances like furnaces and water heaters, windows, and hybrid vehicles. While some of these programs are government sponsored, they are also dispersed across societal institutions, a great deal of which are brands. Dismissing Planet Green—the most elaborate and highest-profile green lifestyle brand to date—risks missing what it can tell us, not only about the role of brands in the larger proliferation of this kind of governance, but also how very contradictory branding environmentalism can be. Most crucially, I argue it fails to see the way in which, as I will show, Planet Green was actively involved in both producing and doing what I call a "new environmentalism."

I understand this new environmentalism as a particular manifestation of contemporary environmental governance. It situates brands as authorities and enabling actors in a privatized form of planet saving that doubles as profitable branding in a cluttered and competitive media environment; and it offers individuals a range of resources to help them self-govern as green consumer citizens and members of the Planet Green community. In calling this environmentalism "new" I am highlighting its alignment with new forms of privatized public service that proliferate in the context of neoliberal roll-backs of the social safety net. As environmental historians have pointed out, there is nothing new about the involvement of the private sector in how environmental issues get addressed. Oil and gas companies, polluting industries, the waste disposal industry, various other elite (e.g., hunting/sporting) and industrial interests (like the timber industry, which has a stake in conservation, for example) have actively participated in shaping regulatory policy and the agendas of "establishment" environmental organizations, at least since the early 20th century (Gottlieb 2005). Nor is there anything new about market-based approaches to environmental regulation. Since the Reagan administration, the US has witnessed ongoing efforts to systematically dismantle the environmental policy apparatus by deregulating industry, devolving enforcement responsibility from the federal government to states and municipalities, and defunding enforcement budgets to starve much environmental regulation into inefficacy.[22] Environmental policies increasingly emphasize—not regulations, strict limits on emissions, or binding timeframes for achieving target improvements—but

[22] This is a process which, in turn, has helped to position regulation itself as frustrating "red tape" for th states and municipalities that could no longer afford enforcement.

voluntary, marketized programs that seek to incentivize voluntary compliance (Andrews 1999/2006, Gottlieb 2005). Finally, neither is there anything new about the role of media as a technology in these processes. "The environment" was a media darling throughout the 1970s in a manner that hardly contested what Robert Gottlieb (2005) calls the "urban industrial order"; by 1990 the Earth Day celebration was conceived from the get go as a media event that was framed by "need for individual action" and operated as a platform for environmentalist-themed PR efforts on the part of polluting industries (Gottlieb 2005).

What is new, or, at the very least, specific to the contemporary form of US neoliberalism, is the extent to which the state's central purpose is to ensure the "freedom" of the market and, with this, the extent to which government has become reliant, not only on a citizenry that is self-governing and a corporate sector that is self-regulating, but also on the voluntarism of these same entities to help overcome the environmental contradictions of a radically free market.[23]

In this analysis, I make two main claims. First, I argue that Discovery worked to set the stage for green branding through a number of industrial interventions (for example, marketing conferences, advertising awards, market research, and the creation of Planet Green as a branding platform). In doing so, Discovery positioned the Planet Green brand as site at which the possibilities of green branding could be realized for corporate sponsors, for non-profit partners, for celebrities, and for Discovery itself. This involved a cyclical process that was both technical and ritualized. In branding environmentalism,

[23] Andrew Hoffman (2001), for example, argues that this history of industrial or corporate environmentalism can be loosely organized into four eras: "industrial environmentalism" in the 60s, "regulatory environmentalism" in the 70s, "environmentalism as social responsibility" between 1982 and 1988, and "strategic environmentalism" between 1988 and 1993.

Discovery not only worked to create a market for these green brands, but it also worked to enact a process in which this range of brands would co-confer and co-confirm eco-legitimacy. This kind of legitimacy, as I am using the term, is not a predetermined "authentic" or "truth-telling" environmentalism. Rather, it something that is *produced* within the performative process of branding (indeed, like branding, such legitimacy depends upon, as I will discuss shortly, "consumer co-production"). Never an either-or proposition (i.e., either profits or environmental legitimacy), in Planet Green profitability and environmental legitimacy would be inextricable and mutually enabling. Environmental legitimacy, then, is not simply ideological, but is materially and discursively productive: in Planet Green's range of brand partnerships, Discovery was actively engaged in performing and enacting a new environmentalism.

This green co-branding, however, could not be complete without consumers, whose labor was required to "co-produce" (Arvidsson 2006) the brands and, in this case, co-produce the green authority and the new environmentalism that the branding process aimed to enact. Thus my second argument is that, at every stage, this branding of environmentalism enabled forms of what Foucauldian scholars call "green governmentality" that enlisted upscale consumers by offering them an array of branded "technologies of the self." Specifically, the branding of environmentalism on the industrial side (i.e., Discovery's effort to make green branding appealing and economically rational for actors like advertisers, celebrities, and nonprofits) materialized in a multiplatform lifestyle brand that put forth a whole "art of living" (Foucault 1990). Guided by a range of authoritative eco-discourses that were indistinguishable from

brands, Planet Green offered individuals tips and techniques, forms of measure, tools for self-assessment, and interactive platforms. By engaging with these resources in their everyday lives, individuals were invited to self-shape as green consumer-citizens and members of the Planet Green brand community. In this way, Planet Green offered a template for green consumer-citizenship that promised to be directly productive for brands—productive, for example, of brand value and branded eco-legitimacy—at the same time that it called upon individuals to self-govern for the environment.

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly review the critical literature on branding, with special attention to the ways in which branding comes together with forms of neoliberal governmentality. I address the way in which environmental governance is increasingly approached through forms of what scholars call "green" or "eco-governmentality" or "environmentality" (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006, Hart 2011, Kusno 2011, Luke 1995, Methmann 2011, Rutherford 2007). Branding is rarely made central to analysis of green governmentality. Yet branding is a fundamental dimension of contemporary environmental intervention and manifests in the proliferation of green lifestyle media, eco-friendly products and services, corporate environmental responsibility campaigns, and public-private and not-for-profit partnerships. I argue that analysis of environmental governmentality requires close attention to brands and further, that Planet Green offers an ideal case study for doing so. In the second section of this chapter, I lay out Planet Green's branding strategy, demonstrating that at every turn it worked to simultaneously enable forms of branding and forms of governmentality. And

in the third section of this chapter, I offer a more detailed analysis of three templates for eco-consumer-citizenship that the Planet Green brand aimed to enable.

Part one: Branding, neoliberal governmentality, and the new environmentalism

In the previous chapter, I argued that Planet Green was conceived on the basis of a governmentalizing impulse that came together with hopes of saving the planet through branding. Discovery executives hoped that the Planet Green brand would "activate" consumers in the "green space" of eco-friendly consumer capitalism and work to guide these individuals' activities in line with the interests of advertisers. This of course is not surprising given the contemporary cultural purchase of the belief that brands—with their unique affective, practical, narrative, and spatial qualities—can successfully shape individuals' behavior and emotional investments. This confidence in the potential of branding—or at the very least, this felt imperative to brand—is not limited to media firms and product manufacturers, but, as a number of scholars have observed, extends to nonprofits, religious organizations, political and social movements, and even selves (Banet-Weiser 2012, Moor 2007, Hearn 2012). Brands provide a context and a range of resources that are aimed at "empowering" individuals to enact the details of their lives, their social relations, and their everyday activities in ways that are productive for brands (Arvidsson 2006). As Liz Moor has explained, through practices of branding, brand managers work "to organize human and technical productivity in line with various strategic ends"; they do so by mobilizing "various aesthetic and cultural themes and signifiers… to support projects that are essentially about governance" (Moor 2007, 11).

The governmental promise of branding makes the practice especially appealing to TV business (as well as ad-supported media business more broadly). TV has long been engaged in a struggle for control over the television audience—an inherently invisible and unpredictable entity (Ang 1991). Historically, television firms have sought control by using ratings to render television audiences visible and predictable in order to sell them to advertisers. Branding, which gained popularity among TV firms in the 1980s, offers the promise of not simply knowing the audience, but guiding it toward particular ends.

In this way, branding bears remarkable resemblance to what Foucauldian scholars call governmentality. Governmentality involves the dispersion of governmental functions across a range of institutions and authoritative discourses. Rather than top-down efforts to "force, control or dominate," governmentality involves "forms of action and relations of power that aim to guide and shape… the actions of others" and "the way we act upon ourselves" (Cruikshank 1999, 4). Governmentality describes a process of "governing at a distance" through a proliferation of discourses, techniques and resources—what Foucauldian scholars call "cultural technologies"—to aid individuals in governing themselves in line with certain goals.

The concept of cultural technologies draws from what Foucault called "technologies of the self" in his work on the role of ethics for the male members of the ancient Greek ruling classes and has much in common with the advice and resources disseminated through the Planet Green brand. According to Foucault, these Greeks conceived of one's self and one's freedom as an ethical problem (Foucault 2003, 136). Rather than a rigid moral system of do's and don'ts, ethics involved a "whole art of

living" enabled by an array of "technologies of the self," or tools and strategies to assist one in caring for, working on, scrutinizing, reflecting upon, and evaluating one's self. Such "technologies of the self…permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (146). The uptake of such techniques aimed to enable self-government through an ongoing process of knowing and mastering one's self and one's conduct. In Foucault's summary, technologies of the self for the ancient Greeks included techniques like writing, reviewing and reconsidering past action, self-disclosure and verbalization, self-scrutiny and ongoing contemplation (158). Environmental lifestyle brands (as well as brands associated with what is more broadly termed "ethical consumerism") tap into this very impulse to work on oneself through "tips and techniques" of self-reflection and self-mastery and the uptake of various practices and products in order to live a kind of "beautiful green life." Although we cannot simply extend Foucault's work on Antiquity to the present—not least because, in contemporary culture the aims and objectives of such techniques align less with becoming a just ruler of others, as it did for these Greeks, than with the rationalities of neoliberalism—the attention to the minute details of everyday life and the ongoing work on the self discussed by Foucault offers insight into contemporary regimes of self work. And, as I will show, Planet Green was entirely structured around disseminating such tips and techniques, and offering them in the context of a range of branded authoritative discourses to guide their uptake.

While the role of technologies of the self in strategies of branding may seem unconnected to larger questions of governance, Planet Green, with its slate of reality and lifestyle television, follows a great many other shows in these genres that operate, as Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008) argue, as a "cultural component" to neoliberal governance. Since the 1980s, with the "reinvention of government" into what is now called neoliberalism—an ongoing process of public sector downsizing, dismantling of welfare programs and the environmental regulatory apparatus, the valorization of a "free" market, increasing public-private partnerships, and the privatization of historically state responsibilities—government has become increasingly reliant upon a citizenry that is self-managing, self-responsible, enterprising, risk averse, and requires no intervention on the part of the state. As I discussed in Chapter 1, reality and lifestyle television can be viewed as a "cultural technology" that works to "govern at a distance" by enlisting individuals in "personal programs of cultivation" (Ouellette and Hay 2008) structured by neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility, entrepreneurialism, risk-aversion, and volunteerism.

Such scholarship on TV's role in neoliberal rationalities of rule has often focused on the ways television has become a mode of social service delivery by providing tools for needy individuals to take care of themselves so as not to be a burden to the state (see, for example, Ouellette and Hay 2008, Ouellette 2012, Ouellette 2004). In the case of Planet Green, however, the second tier cable channel addressed an audience ostensibly already thriving under neoliberal political and economic conditions. The channel assumed homeownership, disposable income, and that needs for shelter, safety,

healthcare, and other forms of security were already being met. Rather than safety or security, Planet Green promised self-actualization through green living (See Ouellette and Hay 30). Planet Green elaborated a green governmentality for upscale consumers. It worked to enlist individuals' everyday practices and labor in alleviating industrial anxieties and resolving the contradictions that emerge in the process of reconciling contemporary branding with saving the planet.

In the context of brand culture and convergence media, the governmental functioning of TV that Ouellette and Hay discuss plays out not just on television, but also through the kinds of sustained brand engagement that multimedia interactive content enables. In Planet Green, individuals were offered not just television programming, but a whole branded universe that encompassed not only Planet Green's brand, but also those of its sponsors and the channel's affiliated celebrities. By moving between branded platforms, individuals could access a range of tools for self-work and guiding advice and incorporate all of this into their everyday lives (see Ouellette and Wilson 2011 as another example of this).

As a technology of neoliberal governance, then, the resemblance of branding to governmentality is more than coincidental. Planet Green attempted to do what Sarah Banet-Weiser calls the "branding of politics." Banet-Weiser insists that the branding of politics not be reduced to "another binary corporate appropriation and some vague ideal of progressive politics" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 126). Rather, it is part of a broader shift that "The US is witnessing, and participating in, a shift from 'authentic' politics to branding politics *as* authentic," illustrated by practices like "corporate social responsibility, in

which corporations use a social issue (such as environmental concern or poverty) as a platform not only to sell products but also to further their brand" (126). Banet-Weiser's broader argument is that "the emergence of brand culture in the contemporary moment means that realms of culture and society once considered outside the official economy—like politics—are harnessed, reshaped, made legible in economic terms" (126-127). Practices like the branding of politics under brand culture blur the distinctions between corporations and consumers (127). Such branding is not simply commodification. Rather, "branded politics by definition also involves coproduction with consumer activists, where people act politically by consuming" (128). Following this line of reasoning, Planet Green ought not be understood as a false form of politics. Rather, Planet Green worked to reshape environmental politics by transforming itself into a social cause and a green future.

As a green governmentality for upscale consumers, Planet Green departs from much of the literature on what is variously called "eco-" or "green governmentality" or "environmentality," which is focused on the notion of "nature" as it comes to be subject to forms of measure, authoritative knowledge, and management and thus brought under neoliberal rationalities of rule as "instrumental rationalities" come to govern the "policing of ecological spaces" (Luke 1995, 65) and a proliferation of environmental experts, professionals, forms of measure, and authoritative discourses, particularly about risk and risk management as "the administration of life" comes to encompass not just individuals and populations, but the natural environment as well (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006,

54).[24] While this literature provides a useful backdrop, I argue that without attention to brands, our understanding of green governmentality is not complete. Further, the particularities of Planet Green as an explicitly *commercial enterprise* aimed at upscale consumers not only requires specific analysis but also offers insight into green governmentality—as well as green branding—more broadly. Certainly Planet Green was fully preoccupied by authorizing particular kinds of actors to solve a specific construction of environmental crisis. But Planet Green is less interested in "nature" as an object of assessment, measurement, and management than it is in the upscale consumer as such. Nonetheless, it intersects with these forms of green governmentality/environmentality in that it is wholly entwined with this larger dispersion of ecological governance made legible and practicable through the economic rationalities associated with a radically free market.

Thus, to analyze Planet Green in the context of brand culture and as a governmental technology requires not simply examining its television shows, but also looking at the whole Planet Green brand: how Discovery worked to create a market for it, how it took shape in its launch, and how its initial programming came together with contemporary regimes of governance. For Planet Green, as we will see, branding was a process of both *enacting* a particular future in which, for example, commerce and conservation come together, but also *demonstrating* this strategy and all the practices

[24] Green governmentality manifests in sustainable development trainings (Hart 2011), carbon trading/carbon offsets and the "discourse of ecological modernization" (Baeckstrand and Loevbrand 2006), discourses of "sustainable" or "green cities" (Kusno 2011), voluntary carbon abatement, and a range of equivalencies (carbon sinks in the form of forests, for example, and carbon in the form of industrial pollution, the "techne of commensuration" making carbon tradable (Methmann 2011, 13)). Stephanie Rutherford points out that green governmentality is productive of "regimes of truth, subject positions, representations of reality, practices of rule, and kinds of morality" (294). That is, if we are to understand "the truth about the environment is made, and how that truth is governed," it is crucial to examine contemporary constructions of the environment in crisis, the production of knowledge around this crisis, and who "is authorized to save it" (Rutherford 2007, 295).

associated with it in a pedagogical project. Planet Green invited viewers to invest in the possibilities of green branding. It modeled and enacted a green future in which individuals could self-realize as green consumer-citizens and bona fide eco-celebrities (as entertainers, experts and/or entrepreneurs) at the same time that human and environmental problems could be solved by brands.

Part two: producing a "green space" for brands to become active players in the new environmentalism

As I discuss throughout this dissertation, there is a great deal of anxiety among firms about attaching their brands to environmental causes; it is believed that doing so opens up their corporate and industrial practices to heightened scrutiny. If Planet Green was going to persuade brands to sign on to the new channel, it had to do a great deal of work to make green marketing appealing. It had to produce and perform itself as a site of possibility first, at which environmentalism and brand building would be indistinguishable, and second, where the meeting of environmentalism and brand building would operate as a governmental technology, rendering consumer activities predictable and productive for this new environmentalism. In this way, Planet Green's branding would be about more than persuasion for it would play an active role in shaping a green market and enabling the new environmentalism.

In order to carve out a market space for Planet Green, Discovery began by intervening in the broader context in which green marketing and corporate sustainability took place. Planet Green was the "exclusive presenter" of the first annual Good and

Green Marketing Conference in November 2007.[25] By presenting the conference, Discovery did not simply work to convince marketers that investing in green branding was a good idea (though, of course, it did this as well waxing enthusiastic about its profit possibilities in press releases), the conference itself can be understood as technical and productive, for it offered marketers tools, lessons, and workshops to learn how to put green marketing into practice. The month following the conference, Planet Green sponsored a new special division for green marketing at the 2007 Effie Awards (advertising "Effectiveness" awards). The new prize would "reward marketing communications efforts for eco issues, including sustainability, healthy lifestyle, energy conservation, green products or services, green business alignment, etc." (Effies Go Green 2007).[26] Discovery thus also participated in putting into place new modes of valuing, legitimating, and recognizing green marketing efforts.

Not only did Discovery engage in these market interventions, it also worked to situate Planet Green itself as a partner in an environmental future. For example, in the lead up to the channel's launch, Planet Green worked to position itself as a key actor in an environmental future. Its "first major content initiative" which aired on the Discovery Channel just before Planet Green's launch was called, *Ten Ways to Save the Planet* (part of which was later repackaged for DVD in partnership with GAIAM as *Discovery Project Earth* (2008)). The series featured a range of large-scale, highly technological

[25] An annual green marketing conference, that began with this 2007 event held at the Chicago Cultural Center Nov. 29-30. The 2007 and 2008 conferences were presented by Discovery's Planet Green. The final conference, which occurred in 2011, was put on by the *Daily Green* and *Good Housekeeping*.

[26] Reassuring *AdWeek* readers that the green award category would be subject to the same exacting standards for "effectiveness" as the others, Effie executive director, Mary Lee Keane, explained, "Effie stands for effectiveness and our guidelines for the Green Effie will be just as rigorous as our other categories. Eco marketers will have to back up claims that they are making a difference" (Keane quoted in AdWeek 2007).

experiments. A Discovery press release described the program as an "ambitious series" that would "be a global effort to find solutions to the planet's most serious environmental threats, and will work with the world's leading eco-scientists to test innovative and ground-breaking ideas, including wrapping glaciers in thermal blankets to stop their melting, dropping thousands of saplings from planes to provide mass reforestation, and painting entire towns white to reflect the sun" (Discovery Communications Inc. 2007). The series itself promised to intervene in global environmental crises with made-for-TV, drama-packed, technological solutions. Discovery/Planet Green itself became a team member in the doing of environmental engineering, branding it as a solution to environmental crisis, and in turn branding Planet Green as an environmental platform.

Planet Green also worked to legitimize itself as a bona fide eco platform through partnership with environmental not-for-profits. The environmental organizations would build Planet Green's environmental credibility at the same time that the partnerships themselves would perform a productive role, situating for-profit media brands as a site of possibility for (a certain kind of) environmental action. Planet Green's co-branding did more than simply "greenwash" a media firm's brand through association with these historically legitimated sites of environmentalism. The co-branding itself was part of a reciprocal production of legitimacy. These partnerships were rolled into Planet Green's governmental project as individuals were invited to "meet our partners!" online and participate in branded volunteerism, such as the Plant a Billion Trees project in partnership with the Nature Conservancy. Positioning itself as an actor in the new

environmentalism, Planet Green attached itself to forms of eco-legitimacy that could in turn be productive of green value for its own and its advertisers' brands.

When Planet Green materialized in its multiplatform brand, its television and web content can likewise be viewed as technical: at the same time that Planet Green worked to perform its brand as a site at which the possibilities of green marketing could be realized—profits, brand value and loyalty, for example—it also offer itself as a *structured context* to support and enable this very endeavor. Planet Green would be a platform on which brands could become green and "do well by doing good." The advertising would be "corporate-focused" rather than conventional "product-focused" advertising (environmental marketing consultant Jacquelyn Ottman quoted in Goff 2008). Planet Green TV and web content would do more than simply "greenwash" for it would showcase a particular kind of environmentalism that could only be enabled by brands. While this is inextricable from the industrial fantasy laid out in Chapter 1 of this dissertation—that greener futures could be realized through brands—in its realization, it was far more than fantasy for brands were actively involved in the very *doing* of this environmentalism.

Specifically, Planet Green would provide a platform for large brands like Waste Management, General Motors, SC Johnson, DuPont, Clorox and others to position themselves as partners and key players in a green future, enabling a range of environmental action, from large projects of social service delivery, to personal projects of home and lifestyle makeover. Insofar as Planet Green was a site of this new

environmentalism (or, really, *was* this new environmentalism), these brands were literally crucial since Planet Green's very existence was contingent upon advertiser dollars.

The docu-drama *Greensburg* is perhaps the most elaborate example of this particular kind of branded entertainment. The multi-season series chronicled the green rebuilding of Greensburg, KS, a conservative agricultural town nearly destroyed by a tornado in 2007. The show's "exclusive national and integrated sponsor" was General Motors—one of the narrative threads in the show followed a local Chevy dealer who was doing an eco-friendly rebuild of the dealership he lost in the tornado (Hampp 2008b). The narrative of the show worked alongside advertisements (commissioned from Discovery) that worked to align the GM brand with Planet Green's "green-marketing messages" and the promotional spots celebrating GM's "commitment to new technologies such as hybrid cars and hydrogen fuel cells" and its "'Gas-Friendly to Gas-Free' initiative" to improve the fuel efficiency of GM vehicles that use over 30 miles per gallon. This Discovery-GM partnership extended into the provisioning of educational services more broadly as "Discovery and GM have paired up on philanthropic and educational efforts, donating three Chevrolet Tahoe hybrid SUVs and a Silverado FlexFuel to the Greensburg city administration and co-creating the Discovery Education Live Green Teacher Grants" (Hampp 2008b).

In this way, GM's partnership with Discovery did more than "greenwash" the GM brand; it inserted itself in the doing of environmentalism itself. This kind of partnership is framed as a potential opening for "education" which is not an underhanded way to slip advertising past potential pupils unawares, but demonstrates the way, in the context of

branded edu-tainment, informing and advertising are no longer separate, as GM's executive director of advertising and media operations, Betsy Lazar, said in a statement: "It's a great way for GM to educate and inform consumers about all we are doing in the area of sustainable transportation… Planet Green programs will attract consumers who also want to know what GM has to offer in terms of fuel-efficient cars and trucks, hybrids, and alternative-fuel vehicles" (Lazar quoted in Hampp 2008b).

The narrative of *Greensburg* helped to position brands as uniquely enabling by organizing dramatic tension around "funding gaps" that would prevent residents from completing their green rebuilding projects. Invariably these were resolved when a celebrity or a corporation stepped in with a donation. SunChips cut a check for one million, while a personal phone call from Leonardo DiCaprio heralded another $400,000. Chevy/GM donated a fleet of vehicles and Brita became one of the public school's "major sponsors" providing a branded filtration system and "filling stations" where students could bring their Nalgene/Brita branded water bottles. DuPont partnered with Habitat for Humanity to build a home for a Greensburg resident. If, as Sarah Banet-Weiser has written, in brand culture, public private partnerships are not merely presented as the "best" but the "only" solution to social problems (Banet-Weiser 2012, 143), *Greensburg* offers itself as a quintessential example environment saving in brand culture.

But the branded planet saving could only be realized through consumers whose volunteerism and enterprise would encourage corporations to self-regulate and make these philanthropic gestures. On the show, for example, residents demonstrated that they "deserved" corporate philanthropy by demonstrating their hard work and a can-do spirit

(overcoming losing their business or loved ones in the tornado, sticking it out to help rebuild the town, for example). The largess of corporate sponsors was always contingent upon a populace that embodied these ideals of neoliberal citizenship. This is not a random coincidence, of course, for if an environmental future is to be enacted in the context of a radically free market, neoliberalism demands that citizens take responsibility for themselves and/as the planet so the state does not have to and can instead continue to enact policy whose central aim is to support unfettered growth—a project that runs contrary to "green" goals from conservation to environmental justice.

But on *Greensburg*, personal and collective appeals to the private sector can not only solve public problems but also are the only route for moving forward with an environmental agenda, since other residents might not be on board and there's never any money elsewhere. Thus, while some residents are positioned as "naysayers," corporate sponsors are always described as having done a "really nice thing" by funding or donating (and getting to place their brand on public buildings or services). *Greensburg* frames all action as matters of morally loaded voluntarism and strategic market engagement. Residents' weigh the choice to stay or leave town (staying, paradoxically, is a marker of enterprise, a vote of confidence in a greener future). A "state of the art" school building, a "business incubator," a town center, and a museum are all framed as entrepreneurial projects to better market the town (to, for example, business-sector investors and tourism). Rebuilding (and the docu-series itself) participate in branding the city to attract tourists, businesses, investors and philanthropist brands. Greener futures are recast as entrepreneurial projects only possible thanks to the largess of corporate sponsors

and voluntary stick-to-itiveness of residents. Greensburg doesn't simply advance arguments for these solutions, it enacts them, modeling a green future through sponsorship, enterprise, and volunteerism.

For other shows, these overt brand interventions were only occasional, as Planet Green was working to keep product placement "tasteful" rather than "hokey" or "annoying" (Thomas 2013). On the home renovation show, *Renovation Nation,* for example, most episodes feature host Steve Thomas (host of the long-running PBS series *This Old House* from 1989 to 2003) visiting people who are already engaged in an eco-friendly building or renovation project. He teaches us about salvaging materials as well as building products made from recycled or low-impact materials. We learn about how to fashion cheap rain collectors and install non-branded solar panels. Thomas gives us specs on various home building products—the difference in insulation value of closed-cell versus open-cell spray foam, the kinds of environmental "tradeoffs" renovators make as they weigh the pros and cons of petroleum-based insulation—environmentally harmful because it, as Thomas says "locks up petroleum" but beneficial in the long term because it provides superior insulation, reducing energy use in heating and cooling.

There are certainly moments when sponsors' brands enter the narrative overtly. For example, in a series of episodes that showcased and enacted *Renovation Nation*'s three-way partnership with Habitat for Humanity and Saturn cars, Thomas sings the praises of Habitat which, is a "hand up, definitely not a hand out" (repeated *ad nauseam*, troublingly reassuring middle class viewers that Habitat had carefully separated "deserving" from "undeserving" poor, since recipients have to "earn" their new home

through some 250 hours of volunteer home-building labor). In the episode, Thomas cries out, “We’ll take my Saturn hybrid!” to the future Habitat homeowner as they take off to pick up bamboo flooring from a local retailer (Renovation Nation episode "Detroit, MI: Gift of Green" 2009).[27] In another episode, the show surprises financially-struggling renovators (who are themselves only occasional features on the show as most of the guests are affluent) with surprise giveaways: “The folks at Sears are donating to you a brand new Kenmore elite refrigerator—super energy efficient—a brand new dishwasher, and also a brand new range… the latest and greatest and greenest in their product line!” Thomas tells one couple. He goes on to tell us about its superior qualities: high-velocity water jets that obviate the need to pre-rinsing, “smart” features that can measure how much cleaning is needed for a particular load to save up to 40% on water and 34% energy, etc. Pop-up boxes tell us that refrigerators account for 14% of home energy use and we learn about how the new electric range uses magnetic induction instead of heat a coil or gas flame, to save 70% of electricity (Renovation Nation episode "Tucson, AZ: Harvesting Desert Rain" 2009).

But even without overt presence of sponsors’ brands, *Renovation Nation* and Planet Green *as brands themselves* were enacting the same project. The branding of environmentalism, here, goes far beyond advertising or product placement. The kinds of education about green appliances and incentive programs we see on *Renovation Nation* are increasingly central to contemporary environmental governance. Rather than state-

[27] This is also a branding opportunity for Habitat as well as the cities of Philadelphia and Detroit. Viewers also learn about the role of Habitat in struggling neighborhoods and Philadelphia Mayor Nutter shows up to talk about how Habitat is about building communities, “we love Habitat here in Philly” he says. This demonstrates the way in which these privatized forms of social service are enabled by these kinds of partnerships and the same time that viewers are educated about the “good work” that Saturn and Habitat are doing for these places.

based efforts to regulate activities that degrade the environment or fund environmental enforcement agencies, we see federal programs like the Energy Star appliance ratings system and nongovernmental programs like Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, a program developed and maintained by the US Green Building Council[28] that work to incentivize eco-friendly practices.[29] Since such voluntary environmental governance operates according to a market logic—a logic in which only "demand" for Energy Star appliances and LEED certification can drive pro-environment action—in order for such interventions to "make a difference," a great deal of voluntary uptake is required (typical fantasies about the environment-saving possibilities of such schemes imagine what would happen if "every person in America" made one of these small changes). In order to cultivate this "demand," a whole educational apparatus has emerged. Labeling and certification programs as Energy Star and LEED necessitate education of, for example, contractors and consumers. In this context, *Renovation Nation* and Planet Green offered their own kind of branded citizen education, informing about and informally incentivizing[30] home-greening projects. With its official partnership with the US Green Building Council (Howell 2013) and frequent mention of Energy Star-rated appliances, as well as its efforts to elevate the possibilities of environmental governance through appliance upgrades with pop-up textbox factoids—"If all homes in the US had a dishwasher with an Energy Star rating, it would save over 400 billion gallons of water a

[28] The US Green Building Council is a non-profit organiztion that has, among other things, also supported legislation strengthening and publicizing federal incentive programs for energy-efficient building projects.
[29] This tendency continues to bear out in recent legislative proposals like the Better Buildings Act of 2014 and the Streamlining Energy Efficiency for Schools Act of 2014, which seek to improve energy efficiency in commercial and public buildings not through regulation, but through education and incentives.
[30] This incentivizing was both affective (the show promised that renovating green would be fun and make us feel good because we were helping the earth) and economic (*Renovation Nation* always emphasized the long-term costs savings that energy efficiency would provide).

year"—the Planet Green and *Renovation Nation* brands participated in the dissemination of this particular technology of governance.

In this way, the branding of environmentalism involved, first, creating a platform on which brands could add value *as green value*—that is, it worked to transform "being green" into brand value—and second, it positioned brands as enabling actors in a new environmentalism; it worked to make adding brand value and doing this particular version of consumer-based environmentalism indistinguishable. But this was not sufficient to Planet Green's broader project, for branding environmentalism also necessitated enrolling consumers in its realization. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Planet Green involved a whole range of tips and techniques that individuals could take up to govern themselves in line with broader goals. This was crucial to the project, for consumer co-production is the normative measure of brand success. But what would guide individuals in the uptake of, for example, green products, services, and practices? How would these broader goals be articulated? Before we can analyze the particular templates for green consumer-citizenship that Planet Green laid out for its viewers and web users, it is crucial to first understand how branding environmentalism required the production of a cluster of new forms of environmental authority. Part of branding environmentalism was an elaborate project that aimed to produce brands themselves as environmental authorities.

Branding eco-legitimacy and eco-legitimating brands

While it might be tempting to dismiss branded environmental authority as

"greenwash," doing so runs several risks. For one thing, it risks naturalizing other forms of environmental authority as "authentic." Yet the kinds of authority bestowed, for example, by academic credentials, professional or scholarly achievement, or endorsement by "establishment" conservation organizations (see Gottlieb 2005) are equally produced—not to mention deeply embedded in contemporary knowledge hierarchies in ways that are hardly free form the logics of the market (though their relationship to capital is often mediated by things like grants and donations or University/research institute support). Further, as we will see, Planet Green tapped into these kinds of authority at various points (though, as I will discuss, in ways mediated by brands).

The second reason one ought to be wary of reducing branded authority to "greenwash" is that doing so risks missing the way in which power works, as Foucault (1978/1990) pointed out, not simply through concealing—greenwash would be an example of concealing, in his sense—but rather in a *productive capacity*. Specifically, in his analysis of the repressive hypothesis, he points out that sex was governed less by a "law of prohibition" than through to a proliferation of discourses, rules and norms regarding sex. Through this "discursive explosion," sex was transformed into something that could be "administered" by experts and powerful institutions (Foucault 1978/1990, 17). In the case of green branding, we likewise see a multiplication of experts and authoritative discourses that seek to guide viewer's activities and environmental investments in particular ways. Thus, rather than pointing out that Planet Green's environmental authority was dubious by some "objective" standard, I argue that it is more

useful to look at the process through which branded authorities were produced, and, in turn, what kinds of environmentalism this process enabled.

I have already discussed Planet Green's nonprofit partnerships, its branded environmental interventions, and its production of eco-branded entertainment. While certainly these activities were part of a larger process of working to add value-as-green-value (and vice versa) to brands, they also did more than this. They helped to collapse the distinction between brands and environmental authority in ways that would become crucial to Planet Green's particular kind of environmental governance. In Planet Green, brands themselves would become caring authorities, guiding individuals toward greener lives through detailed attention to her over her entire lifespan and intimate knowledge of her interiority. By working to transform eco-brands into authorities of environmental lifestyle, Planet Green set the stage to bring this form of environmental governmentality to bear on its particular branding project.

In the programs I discuss in this section, Planet Green did this not though appeals to credentialed expertise nor peer-reviewed research nor experiential knowledge of environmental degradation,[31] but rather through a ritualized performance in which co-branding itself would both confer and confirm environmental legitimacy. Doing so would be crucial to enabling Planet Green as a technology of eco-governance, for a whole authoritative apparatus—discourses, experts, and markers of credibility—was needed to guide individuals in the uptake of Planet Green's tips and techniques for green living.

[31] Though, as I note at various points in this dissertation, conventional forms of credentialed expertise and authority were also enlisted in the Planet Green project, from its "world class advisory board" to featured climate scientists and oceanographers. This will become relevant in the final section of this chapter when I discuss the way in which Planet Green worked to position itself in line with traditional forms of civic education, with informative news segments and resources to enable civil discourse and democratic participation. Planet Green was a highly contradictory endeavor, so each of its component mini-projects that I lay out cannot be regarded as having explanatory weight for making sense of the whole brand as though it told a tidy and coherent story.

The project of collapsing brands with environmental authority was expansive. It ranged from A-list celebrities to environmental professionals to small-time online green lifestylists to Planet Green sponsors. And all of it must be understood as part of a range of co-branding projects that extended beyond the Planet Green universe to enact this environmental future in which brands *are* environmental authorities, disseminating useful and credible (as defined within the branded universe) advice to viewers at home.

Planet Green worked to construct a branded authoritative apparatus through three co-branding strategies. One, Planet Green it offered itself as a platform for celebrities to "green" their brands and enact their environmentalism. Two, Planet Green worked to enrolled small-time eco-brands—from lifestylists to small business owners—in the Planet Green brand community, promising to "make them into celebrities" (Annie Howell quoted in Maul 2008). Three, Planet Green worked to eco-legitimate large corporate brands and branded actors as enablers of environmentalisms, offering them a platform to provide everyday lifestyle resources and showcase large-scale philanthropic projects.

In this first mode of eco-co-branding, Planet Green offered green-minded celebrities a platform on which to perform their environmental sensibilities and expertise. For example, an amazingly eclectic bunch appeared on the eco-face off show, *Battleground Earth*. The show's headliners were Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee and rapper/entrepreneur Chris 'Ludacris' Bridges. The pair, along with their "ecorages" competed in a series of challenges ranging from recycling to water conservation. While Lee and Bridges themselves were not positioned as authoritative (not in the least—their eco-resistance and ingénue were a source of humor and narrative drama), their celebrity

friends appeared to give them eco-advice and offer viewers at home environmental factoids and energy-saving tips. We get advice from Taylor Swift, Cedric the Entertainer, Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx, Meat Loaf, the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart and Bob Weir, P. Diddy, Questlove, Too Short, The Roots, Isaiah Washington, Dr. John, Ivan Neville, Outkast's Big Boi, Kiss's Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons, Phish's Jon Fishman, model Summer Rayne Oakes, Paul Rodriguez, Craig Gass, Joe Bartnick, Joan Baez, Daisy Fuentes, Justin Fargas, American Football player Thomas Howard, Kirk Morrison, Oakland Athletics players, Michael Irvin and Flo Rida among others. Magic Johnson tells us that it isn't hard to be green, it's a "smart thing."

In segments called "pass it on," a celebrity would address the camera directly, recommending an eco-friendly practice. Actress Persia White urged us to eat peanut butter sandwiches instead of hamburgers and Rapper Bun B implored us to "give the treadmill a rest" by running outside instead to save electricity. The "pass it on" segments appeared after every commercial break and were involved in a dynamic interplay with Planet Green's popup textboxes—a feature on all of Planet Green's shows. The popup boxes appeared on the screen and inform viewers about the environmental impact of meat or fish production, pollution and greenhouse gases, and they also recommend alternatives ("Vehicles consume half the worlds [sic] oil and produce 25% of its greenhouse gases"; or "Biking 1 mile instead of driving keeps 1 pound of CO2 out of the atmosphere"; or "Some factory fish farms are over populated causing increased disease and the need for antibiotics. Wild fish within miles of these farms test positive for antibiotics, making fresh fish nearly a thing of the past").

For Planet Green, of course, this was part of its commercial logic, as Planet Green's Eileen O'Neill explained, "The voices from Hollywood" promised to "help audiences find the network faster" (Eileen O'Neill quoted in Levin 2008). And for celebrities, the spots offered an opportunity to add green value to their brands.

While it is easy to be cynical about these commercial aims, the co-branding process went beyond adding value. By positioning these celebrities as eco-intermediaries[32] and by situating their advice in relation to authoritative popup boxes in the context of the Planet Green brand universe, *Battleground Earth* worked to transform celebrity culture into a site at which environmentalism could be realized, enlisting these celebrities' eco-sensibilities, brands, and self-branding labor in the process. But it also did more than this, for it *enacted a ritualized process of co-branding that was also a process of co-legitimating environmental authority*.[33]

The second way in which Planet Green worked to enable a proliferation (and legitimation) of brands-as-authorities extended far beyond Hollywood celebrities and music stars, though the productive strategies remained much the same: it worked to bring small-time green lifestylists and eco-product representatives into the branded universe of Planet Green. For these actors environmental authority and branding were mutually constitutive even before their partnership with Planet Green. But Planet Green would

[32] There is more to explore in the relationship of branded cultural intermediaries to branded authorities. Although they are not equivalent, teasing apart their alignments and departures is beyond the scope of this chapter. An alignment that is important for my purposes is that they are both *authorized to speak* within this branded governmental project.

[33] This also occurred on *Hollywood Green with Maria Menounos* (part of a partnership with NBC's *Access Hollywood*), a weekly hour devoted to eco-celebrity news, gossip, and interviews. On the show, stars could come to peddle their lifestyle blogs and green fashion lines, share their eco-tips and give us tours of their new green baby nurseries. The show kicked off Planet Green's opening lineup on June 4th and featured Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts and Leonardo DiCaprio. The Obamas appeared as did John Travolta, Miley Cyrus, Gwyneth Paltrow and many others. *Hollywood Green*'s repetitive showcasing of these branded actors as environmental actors, positioning them to disseminate advice in relation to authorizing popup info—indeed, it hardly mattered what the advice was for the object, here was the ongoing co-eco-branding process.

give them a bigger platform, affirming their expertise with popup boxes, and co-legitimating their environmental authority through their presence within the Planet Green branded universe. The news magazine *G Word* was a key site for doing this. Aiming to "translate" the deluge of green information "into actions and resources for everyday life," *G Word* and its team of "eco-minded experts" promised to "guide viewers through the ins and outs of green"—specifically in the areas of "home, design, gadgets, food, shopping, the latest science and tech innovations, fashion and much more"—and teach us about "preserving the environment and enjoying life at the same time" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). It featured a range of short segments "spotlighting businesses that are doing well by doing good" (Crupi 2008).

Clearly aiming to advance Planet Green's commercial goals, promoting green businesses while bringing cheap-to-produce TV content to the network's schedule, the segments also did more than this. Hosted by the *G Word* "eco-minded experts," the segments were also part of Planet Green's mission to, as Discovery's SVP of Communications and Public Affairs Annie Howell explained in 2008, "take people known in the [green] space and make them into celebrities" (Maul 2008).[34] The eco-experts included a number of lifestyle bloggers, comedy acts, and authors. Jeff Yeager, the Ultimate Cheapskate, played a character who "kept it green" through his extreme and hammy horror of spending money. Troy Casey, the Health Nut of the website of the same name had a *G Word* gig hunting for things like a "carbon neutral lunch" or an eco-friendly burial. The Keep it Green Girls Shelley Pack and Sarah Norton are a campy,

[34] It would be worth exploring how Planet Green's co-branding was also an attempt to hitch the promises of celebrification that proliferate under post-Fordist regimes of work and the meritocratic fantasies of neoliberalism to a green future.

high-femme comedy duo who already had a small but devoted online following. Impractically clad in stilettos and miniskirts, Pack and Norton took Planet Green viewers on outdoorsy adventures to visit beekeepers, pig farmers, flower growers, to take camping lessons and more. Lori Harfenist of the news commentary and satire online video show *The Resident* became *G Word*'s "quizzer" asking people on the street what was better for the environment, fake or real Christmas trees, desktop or lap top computers, hand washing or using the dishwasher, etc. *G Word*'s Waste Sleuth Todd Sutton, also the owner of the "waste prevention, sustainability, reuse & recycling" firm (Sutton 2010), took Planet Green viewers to visit various recycling operations. Gregory Schaefer, organic chef, wine consultant, Hip Chef instructor and farmer as well as a member of the Second City Theatre Group, became *G Word*'s eco-cook. "Salvage Queen" Evette Rios, who rehabbed thrifted and found furniture *G Word*, has hosted home rehab-type shows on TLC and HGTV (and launched herself as a lifestyle expert and television host who subsequently appeared as a regular "crafter" and design expert on ABC shows, *The Chew* (2011-) and *Rachel Ray* (2006-), and now hosts CBS's *Recipe Rehab* (2012-)).

The *G Word* segments, of course, helped Planet Green produce cheap content, but also helped to ritualize the transformation of a whole range of branded entities into green authorities. Since the segments took the shape of "field trips" to learn about various products, business and entrepreneurs, *G Word* was also a platform on which these small-time eco-brands could add value while Planet Green worked to transform their specific expertise (which doubled as promoting their green burial service or pizza restaurant) into

a whole authoritative discourse of branded environmentalism.[35] While on the one hand, Planet Green worked to provide a platform to launch these self-styled eco-experts into existing forms of enterprising celebrity (this was certainly the overt promise made in the trade press), in addition, by having these experts mediate our encounters with a range of green businesses, "translate" the business proprietors' commentary, *G Word* situated this wide array of branded personalities as environmental authorities who, in turn, branded businesses "doing well by doing good" as key technologies for a greener future.[36]

Finally, the third way in which Planet Green worked to multiply and legitimize brands-as-authorities was through co-branding with established "trusted" brands. For example, the cooking show *Emeril Green*, hosted by celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse, worked to situate Whole Foods Market as a site of eco-self-realization and authoritative green knowledge. According to a 2008 study by the marketing firm BBMG, which asked consumers to rank 20 companies, consumers believed Whole Foods to be "most socially responsible" of the bunch (Dolliver 2008). The "Emeril" brand also has enormous recognition and popularity. On *Emeril Green*, Lagasse helped individuals conquer "food

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[35] From what I could gather, these were not paid promotional spots. I called up one of the business "doing well by doing good" in Minneapolis: Galactic Pizza. I asked the owner how the restaurant had ended up on *G Word*. He said that they just "called him up out of the blue." The segment involved an interview with the owner as well as one of the superhero delivery drivers, and the *G Word* correspondent took the tiny, fuel-efficient electric delivery car for a spin on her own delivery mission.

[36] *Greenovate*, a documentary-style show following an eco-friendly remodel from beginning to end, had much the same project. It aimed to demonstrate how homeowners can "reduce energy bills and carbon footprints while increasing the value of their homes" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008) as an array of eco-professionals offer "personalized strategies" for achieving these goals (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). A voiceover offers a set of goals (i.e., improving indoor air quality, lower energy usage) while popup text boxes let us know that VOC paints can negatively impact a child's development or "radiant heating can provide 30% to 40% energy savings" or facts about construction waste, low-flow faucets, dual flush toilets, cork or other "sustainably harvested" flooring, and energy star appliances. We also learn about green building products as well as the whole range of eco-experts we could hire to help with our own greenovations. The show also worked to bring branded forms of authority, measure, and expertise into a new environmentalism. At least "30 Eco brands" were "researched and integrated" into the show, according to one Synergy Productions producer's online profile Monica Ramone (2013). These brands involved a range of professionalized, commercial eco-experts including "eco-brokers, 'green' home consultants, 'non-toxic' interior designers" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008) green home specialists, environmental analysts and many others. These experts were featured alongside forms of measure and knowledge produced through their commercial activities, from energy audits, to measure electromagnetic fields, to questions of green design, to locate and measure air leaks, etc., thus enabling solutions like the use of BioBased® spray foam insulation or Clear Skies Solar Shines solar panels. In this way, branded intermediaries are positioned as environmental authorities, their authority is performed and ritualized through the structure of the show, and their authority aims to brand these eco-businesses as technologies of a greener future.

fears" by addressing everyday problems of cooking and eating (they might feel "confused" and "intimidated" by an ingredient or they or their loved ones might have food allergies, restrictions, or limited palates). *Emeril Green*'s hapless guests were called upon to position themselves as blank slates through the application process in which they had to ham up a "food fear," shaping themselves to convincingly fit into a deficit model in a way that would, not only land them on television, but set the stage for Whole Foods branded experts to guide them out of their intimidation.

One call for participants read, "Planet Green is looking for residents in the Washington, D.C. metro area who love to cook but have a tough time making heads or tails of what's in the fridge, or are wondering how to be eco-friendly while still deep-frying a turkey" (Emeril Green: Inside the Show 2008). Each episode begins with a testimonial video in which guests demonstrate, for example their inability to cook fish, the fistfuls of sugar and mesquite seasoning they compulsively add to everything, their chronic soufflé failure, or their struggles as single moms or with picky teenagers. "Help me, Emeril!" they plead at the end of their videos. Through this positioning, they submit themselves to these forms of authority and their problems were solved as they conquered a food fear.

For example, in one episode, *Emeril Green* attempted to take a "die-hard meat and potatoes guy and make him change his ways by showing him a little leg" chicken leg, that is! On each episode, Lagasse diagnosed the pupil's problem: Rodney, for example, has a case of "red meat syndrome: a problem of exposure, not exposed to a lot of fresh vegetables" (Emeril Green episode "Chicken Campaign" 2008). Enter Whole Foods

Market. Each episode of *Emeril Green* begins with an establishing shot of Whole Foods. Not only does the instructional cooking show take place inside the store, but part of the lesson is also a "shopping trip" through the aisles, during which Emeril and his guest pupil pause to receive advice from Whole Food's fish mongers, butchers, and nutrition experts. These are interspersed with well-composed shots showcasing Whole Food's bounty. While certainly this worked to position the Whole Foods store as site at which green subjectivities could be realized within a consumerist good life, but it also positioned Whole Foods itself as marker of authority, as uniformed Whole Foods employees appeared as "experts" offering mini-lessons on fish, tea, gelato, chicken ("natural" versus, "free range" versus "organic").

The show demonstrates a process of empowerment, a process to which viewers can submit themselves at home, not only by taking up Emeril's recipes, the popup tips and factoids, and expert advice on the show, but also by heading online to find recipes and watch Emeril's "expert clips" (for example, the "Whole Foods Green Expert," the "Whole Foods Fish Monger," the "Whole Foods Tea Expert," the "Whole Foods Wine Expert," the "Whole Foods Bakery Expert," etc.). Viewers are invited to identify with the "food fear" of the guest and use all of *Emeril Green*'s resources to work on themselves to become "fearless" when it comes to shopping (at Whole Foods) and cooking, and to fold these resources into everyday life. In this way, the *Emeril Green* and Whole Foods brands become integral to self-realization.

Emeril Green teaches individuals to skillfully navigate Whole Foods and home cooking without financial constraints. And it aims to cultivate a consumer who would

realize their eco-selves through brands and consumer culture, enlisting them in this form of branded governance, enlisting them in helping to produce the authority of the Whole Foods brand and the particular solutions to environmental crisis that it offers.[37]

In this way, *Emeril Green* was part of a larger project aimed at ritually transforming the Whole Foods, Emeril, and Planet Green brands into authoritative discourses of green living and, simultaneously, transforming environmental living in line with these discourses. The brands themselves are positioned as both authoritative and as resources useful in everyday life. Whole Foods promises not only to educate, but also to enable these new green practices.

Through shows like *Battleground Earth*, *G Word*, and *Emeril Green*, Planet Green set up a kind of self-referential legitimating economy that was also co-branding: Planet Green gained environmental legitimacy from Whole Foods and vice versa, environmentalist celebrities added green value to their own brands by appearing on Planet Green and Planet Green was confirmed as environmentalist thanks to celebrities' appearance on the channel. This process was absolutely crucial to branding environmentalism in Planet Green for eco-governing through television required not simply disseminating tips for eco-living, but also collapsing the distinction between brands and environmental authority in order to enable a form of governmentality that could corral unruly consumers toward its branded environmentalism. On Planet Green, eco-legitimacy was more than ideological and more than simply "greenwash." Through

[37] *Emeril Green* is potentially progressive in that it takes seriously the minutia of everyday life, the struggles of single parenting and shows a commitment to superficial gender, racial and sexual diversity. It had a democratizing impulse—democratizing access to skills, information, knowledge, aiming to translate complicated questions into something "easy" you can do at home. The paradox, however, was that it was never democratic. For one thing, what is true about all of these dishes—except perhaps the ones aimed at a "food fear" explicitly related to cooking on a budget—is that they are incredibly expensive. One "simple, healthy" recipe, for example, involved an entire single fillet of halibut. Just for perspective, I recently splurged on a small halibut steak for a friend's birthday dinner that was nearly 30 bucks. The side of the fish on the show was many times the size of mine.

ritualized and technical means, Planet Green produced a wide array of brands as enabling actors of the new environmentalism in ways that set the stage for the forms of governmentality and technologies of the self that I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter.

Part three: Planet Green as a technology of the self

Branding environmentalism, however, required more than collapsing brands with environmental authority. It was crucial that these authorities also enlist individuals in the brand through a range of "templates for citizenship" that would simultaneously cultivate eco-sensibilities, eco-self governance, and members of the Planet Green community. When famous actors musicians viewers to skip the treadmill on *Battleground Earth*, or when the Keep it Green girls gave us a camping lesson on *G Word*, they were participating in the dispersion of governing through elaborating these technologies of the self.

Like Foucault's description of ethics for the ancient Greeks discussed above, the green "care of the self" offered by Planet Green likewise involved a number of "practical 'procedures'" (Foucault 1988 quoted in Ouellette and Hay 2008, 78): self-assessment/lifestyle-assessment quizzes, resources for increasing and improving one's "green" knowledge, tools for reflecting on that knowledge in online forums and discussion boards, suggestions and tips for the uptake of that knowledge in daily routines and decision-making, including how-to demonstrations and expert guidance for doing so. These techniques aimed to cultivate self-empowerment, personal responsibility, and tools

for rational-ethical decision making, all with an environmental bent. Planet Green worked to situate branded intervention and personal responsibility as solutions to a wide range of environmental problems, offering viewers tips and techniques to empower themselves privately in line with these solutions. Planet Green brought a green commercial logic to techniques of the self, attempting to stitch a neoliberal rationality of government to matters of everyday environmental saving.

As Planet Green rolled out its initial slate of programming and web content, it offered individuals tools for encountering themselves, coming to know themselves, taking stock of their attitudes, knowledge and lifestyles through forms of measure and assessment. It invited them to submit themselves to experts and authoritative discourses, build their toolkits of eco-knowledge, and put this all into practices in their everyday lives. It offered resources for an ongoing project of greening the self, home and lifestyle. The Planet Green brand, along with the brands of its partners and sponsors, was a site at which this greener self could be realized. This would be an infinitely customizable life plan aimed at self-realization for the planet and for the Planet Green brand.

As I discussed above, at every turn, Planet Green's branding enabled technologies of the self and a green governmentality. In this section of the chapter, I will map three templates for citizenship that these technologies enabled. The first included shows and web content that worked to articulate green living to an unabashedly upscale lifestyle in ways that were undoubtedly related to Planet Green's effort to perform the brand as a vehicle that would reliably deliver upscale and "aspirational" consumers to advertisers—a crucial dimension of making environmentalism "work" for TV—but doing so, as I will

show, also elaborated a particular governmental project. The second had a more democratic impulse, offering "simple" and "easy" tips that anyone could use. The third and last template I will address worked to produce the Planet Green brand as a site of civic education, public engagement, and civil discourse. These three distinct but interrelated templates occurred simultaneously—all within Planet Green's initial slate of shows.

Template 1: cultivating upscale consumers for the new environmentalism

The first template for eco-citizenship that Planet Green articulated can be viewed as at once a kind of eco-pedagogy for the affluent and, for "ordinary" viewers, an aspirational technology that inserted itself where promises of upward mobility meet environmental self-governance. The programs were, to borrow a phrase from Maureen Ryan's work on 1980s lifestyle media, "fantasies of material abundance on display" (Ryan 2014, 3). They reformulated a kind of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, transforming it for greener living and for an audience more ambivalent about material and consumer excess. In this way, these programs showcased what Kate Soper calls "alternative hedonism": a green version of "the good life" positioned as a "seductive alternative" to resource-intensive "affluent, 'consumerist', Euro-American mode of consumption" (Soper 2008, 571). These television programs demonstrated just how pleasurable in the green life could be.[38] While this green good life cropped up on a range of shows—on *Supper Club with Tom* Bergeron, viewers could witness celebrities indulge

[38] *Emeril Green*, for example, is a technology of a green consumerist good life, emphasized by its opening sequence that reads, "Real People, Real Problems, Easy, Healthy, Fresh, Natural Solutions." Another cluster of words (mostly the names of vegetable), spring into view as Lagasse pushes a cart overflowing with vegetables, giving us the thumbs up. Finally, words like grass-fed, local, organic, farm fresh, free range, hormone free appear as Lagasse toasts us from behind his cooking range.

in haute green cuisine, artisan beers, and fine organic wines and the *Access Hollywood* spinoff *Hollywood Green* gave viewers a sneak peak into the glamorous lives of eco-minded celebrities—the clearest examples of this particular dimension of Planet Green's eco-pedagogy can be seen in *World's Greenest Homes* and *Alter Eco* (6/4/08-12/1/08).

On *World's Greenest Homes* viewers were treated to exclusive tours—led by celebrity designer, Emmanuel Belliveau—of houses that were the stuff of techno-scientific and sustainable design fantasy. We travel to Hamburg, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Boston, Seattle, and many other regions, visiting an array of "high-tech superhomes" and "experimental eco-dwellings," all with what Planet Green called "top-notch green credentials and an array of mind-blowing eco-innovations" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).[39]

In each episode, we learn about the way that design meets environmental friendliness. In a visit to a converted store in Boston's South End, for example, the host explains, "The mix of sustainable woods on white washed walls and dark stained floors really makes a statement"; homeowner Susan adds that the floor is white ash, sourced from an organization that "prunes forests to manage fire issues and help forests grow…" Their sleek Energy Star appliances get equal airtime (World's Greenest Homes episode "Claremont House" 2010). In North Branch, Minnesota the show tours a geodesic Dome

[39] We visit homes like that of romance novelist Stephanie Laurens, an "off-grid Aussie hideaway" (Oct 28 2008); or the Seattle area house built "in an exclusive conservation area and golf resort" "award-winning, 3,000 square foot home features superior insulation and eco-friendly finishes throughout" (Nov 7 2008); "In the heart of Silicon Valley, this 3,000 square foot Palo Alto home blends industrial chic with modern comfort. Perfectly oriented to capture sunlight, the home's green design includes passive solar energy and solar panels that generate 80 %..." ("Nov 20 2008); "Located in a reclaimed industrial site transformed into a green residential neighborhood, a grand home in Atlanta combines Southern charm with eco-friendly living. Then, an energy-efficient home proves it's possible to be green while going green" (Oct 15 2008); the D.C. same page, Oct 14 2008 "Only ten minutes from the White House in Washington, D.C, green pioneer and architect, Travis Price, cantilevered his four-storey steel and glass dream home over a cliff so it barely touches the forest below" (Oct 14 2008). Or, on Oct 9 2008 the upstate New York octagonal house "An hour North of NYC, and overlooking a lake and manicured grounds, Manny visits a two-storey, octagonal- shaped, energy-efficient super home. Then, perched high in the mountains of Oregon, a pioneering green home is cantilevered above the ground" (PlanetGreen.com episode guides).

Home, “nestled… on a 50 acre wooded lot, is a home called Bear Creek Dome.” Minnesota, homeowner Dennis explains that the home is 49 feet in diameter, and 33 feet high, including the cupola at the center. Belliveau adds that everything “is as natural and chemical free as possible,” and that the home features radiant heated floors and tripled-paned, tempered glass windows, among many other eco-design features. All the while the camera pans lovingly back and forth over each design element, room, and “outdoor living space” (World's Greenest Homes episode "Bear Creek" 2010).

World’s Greenest Homes has very little to say about the excesses of industrial and consumer capitalism or environmental degradation. It offers no factoids or popup bubbles about the tradeoffs of green building. Rather, eco-design, pleasure in living, and spiritual satisfaction come together, as the homeowners describe the features that they “love,” the possibilities for “entertaining,” and the spiritual satisfaction they gain from, for example, being at one with nature or doing the “right thing.” The tours dwell on the sensual as much as the technological. In the dome home, the “large kitchen spills into the dining room. There’s a living room and an entertainment area” the camera pans across the master bedroom and a luxurious master bath. “This is my wonderful kitchen,” says Dennis’s wife Tessa, “I love it here. It’s big, it’s very non toxic…” Dennis adds that “everybody congregates in this area” gesturing to the banquet-length kitchen island made from wood salvaged from an old Minneapolis brewery (Grain Belt), polished to a glossy sheen and situated carefully beneath rustic, exposed joists cut from a single, knotty tree from their own property. Dennis and Tessa explain that they love the “imperfect” look of reclaimed wood and lumber harvested from fallen trees. Further the reward of building a

green super home is as spiritual as it is environmental. In Boston, homeowner Fritz tells the camera: “One of the reasons we wanted to make the renovation as green as possible, is, kind of, we felt that it was the right thing to do” (World's Greenest Homes episode "Bear Creek" 2010).

Alter Eco, a green lifestyle show hosted by actor Adrian Grenier, followed the *Entourage* star (though he actually appeared in relatively few episodes) and several of his youthful, attractive, and eco-conscious friends—“green guru Boise Thomas, sustainable style expert Angela Lindvall and eco-renovation expert Darren Moore” explained the Planet Green press release (Chua 2008a)—as they luxuriated in fine simple living, dabbled in DIY projects, and sampled organic wine as they “greened over” a 1920s Spanish-style house in Hollywood. The episodes focus on mini-projects and adventures—the team helps a local restaurant owner build a green wall, a neighbor construct wooden composters, and guest celebrities like graphic artist/designer Shepard Fairey green his studio—all to “make a stylish, earth-friendly difference in Los Angeles” (Team Planet Green 2008a). Certainly viewers learn about eco-friendly products and practices: high-efficiency windows, their and “U value” which a popup tells us “is the measure of heat flow through a material” and their “solar heat gain coefficient” which, viewers learn, “measures how well a window blocks heat from sunlight.” The show also teaches viewers about all the kinds of questions one should ask about the glues in particle board and chip-wood when one is trying to do a green renovation: whether board has VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and formaldehyde, for example. But the show is centrally concerned with rolling eco-sensibilities into a hip, leisured lifestyle. In the

episode “Coachella,” for example Boise Thomas heads to the (very expensive) music festival, Coachella, in a Winnebago that, as a popup explains, is “outfitted with hydrogen-assisted fuel cell system.” The show doesn’t dwell on what that is or its environmental advantages—in fact, we get as many factoids about Coachella as we do about environmental building. As Boise and the driver roll through the beautiful Coachella valley, they pull over to admire a wind farm. Once at the festival, a woman leads Boise to his “luxury tent.” “Feel how soft this is!” she urges him to touch the complimentary bamboo bathrobe. “Whoa ho-ho!” Boise exclaims as a popup lets us know that “Bamboo fabric naturally lifts moisture, is antibacterial and hypoallergenic,” and Boise adds, “Feels amazing. I’m stoked!” The episode concludes with a shot looking out from inside the tent. Boise is silhouetted, lounging in an Adirondack chair in his new bathrobe, sipping a glass of wine as he gazes into the sunset. “This does not suck,” Boise says to himself. “Actually, this is kind of sweet,” he concludes, toasting the painted sky (Alter Eco episode "Coachella" 2008).

While it may seem like a stretch to situate *World’s Greenest Homes* and *Alter Eco* as technologies of governance and branding in the sense I have been discussing. The pedagogies, here, were subtle and product placement was minimal. Aimed at upscale consumers, the stakes of taking up or rejecting the tips were centrally about pleasure and self-realization. The hosts and guests on the show did not shame viewers into submission to an ascetic low-impact lifestyle or scare them with discussions of environmental degradation and climate change. There was no invitation to take stock of one’s life or attitude, no pressure to self-assess or measure one’s own “carbon footprint.” No norms of

conduct were articulated. Indeed, although climate change, deforestation, drought, and pollution provided a vague rationale, draped causally in the background, there was no real urgency to the uptake of practices demonstrated on these shows.

Yet *World's Greenest Homes* and *Alter Eco* can be understood as offering what Maureen Ryan calls a "desiring object, a technology through which to imagine oneself performing an idealized and class-inflected" lifestyle (Ryan 2014, 8). These are aspirational shows, "upscaling" green living and offering aesthetic instruction to viewers at home—how to select beautiful "sustainable" objects, energy star appliances, and efficient windows, while luxuriating in eco-design. They showcased the transformation of salvaged or repurposed objects (straw-bale walls, reclaimed wood, recycled fabric, etc.) into the trappings of fine living, thus articulating the dream of a green good life while tapping into presumed desires for class mobility. Borrowing a term from Tania Lewis, these are "etiquette manuals" for making classed green selves (Lewis 2011). By offering this technology for green class aspiration, the shows aimed to cultivate a specifically classed eco-sensibility. It may be tempting to link this classed mode of address to an educated liberal professional middle class *habitus*, in Bourdieu's (1984) sense—especially since this audience is so regularly addressed by ethical consumer media and marketing. However, on Planet Green, class was highly contentious. As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, Planet Green was completely preoccupied by avoiding associations with a "liberal elite" and structured by a horror of driving away what it imagined were fully "entertainment-driven" mass audiences highly suspicious of education and advice. Planet Green's programming thus worked hard to reduce class to pure affluence and

cultivate acontextual desire for eco-glitz and glam. The *World's Greenest Homes*, *Alter Eco*, and Planet Green brands themselves were situated as resources that viewers could take up work on themselves, "green" their conceptions of "good taste," and hitch their class aspirations and green sensibilities to the Planet Green brand.

Template 2: "Democratizing" green living by cultivating self-responsible, economically rational selves

Although *World's Greenest Homes*, *Alter Eco*, and *Hollywood Green* articulated a model for green consumer-citizenship that was quite clearly out of reach for most viewers, another cluster of content attempted a more purportedly democratic avenue for becoming an eco-consumer-citizen.[40] Characterized by a more middle-class sensibility, rather than an elite one, these shows ritually insisted that green living was for "everyone" that it was "easy" and "fun." With greater economic accessibility, however, came more emphatic—even didactic—pedagogical strategies. In the shows discussed above, environmental authority was distributed among the homeowners, the hosts, the celebrities, as well as the brands of *Alter Eco, World's Greenest Homes* and Planet Green themselves. Together, they authorized and offered a technology for classed eco-aspiration that hardly insisted on the lifestyle changes or the eco-upgrades on the shows. In shows like *Wa$ted!* and *Stuff Happens* (6/4/08-12/16/08), on the other hand, didacticism reigned supreme. Norms were articulated, and forms of measure and tools for self-assessment were offered. Viewers were explicitly invited to work on their souls and everyday

[40] While I will not discuss them again, here, *Renovation Nation* and *Emeril Green* also had a ritually and resolutely democratic mode of address, endlessly reiterating that the practices they recommend were "easy" and "simple" and that "anyone can do it!," though, of course, they also recommend practices that were very expensive and required enormous amounts of leisure time, not to mention the physical ability to do these elaborate cooking and building projects.

conduct in line with branded models of greener selves and lifestyles through techniques including lecturing and shaming, confession, self-reflection, and ongoing work on one's everyday conduct. The shows aimed to cultivate a *thinking* approach to the details of everyday life.

As a mode of governing through branding, these shows address viewers "as beings possessing a certain freedom to act" and thus "in possession of the freedom to think about their actions—to interpret the predicaments of their actions in ways that lend purpose and legitimacy to the rationalities that underpin their conduct" (Binkley 2006, 347, paraphrasing Rose 1999). By thus inviting viewers into self-governance the shows also invite them to both to act and to step back from action, "to conduct oneself, but also to conduct that conduct…to make oneself more efficient, more productive, cleaner, more communicative, loving, civil, or giving… the unthought and thus unfree act is, in every case, transformed into the reflexive act—the act thought about and justified by thought" (348). The shows offer viewers a whole range of tools—from economic equivalencies to information about environmental destruction and alternative products—to transform them into greener consumer-citizens who reflect carefully on the minute details of their everyday choices.

For example, on *Stuff Happens*, "Science Guy" Bill Nye takes us through various domestic spaces and daily routines to explaining the ecological footprint of sushi dinners, litter boxes, and playing sports. With episodes entitled, "Garage," "Bathroom," "Kitchen," "Bedroom," "Attic," "Beach," "Sports," "Breakfast," and "Dinner," Nye reveals the toxic chemicals lurking in garages and in pressurized cans of shaving gel and

the environmental impact of bacon and toilets and pharmaceuticals. The show combines live "person on the street" pop quizzes (for example, Nye stops passers-by to ask them, "What is the most dangerous beverage in the rainforest?" Answer: industrially grown coffee), science experiments in the television "lab," classroom-type lessons on why (some) toothpaste threatens the survival of orangutans (it contains the palm oil-derived sudsing agent, sodium lauryl sulfate, and palm plantations are displacing orangutan habitat), and humorous, scripted exchanges that dramatize green teachable moments when Nye catches his friends and relatives committing eco-don'ts (like driving ATVs), thus modeling the teacher-pupil arrangement and practices of self-reflection and self-work that we can take up at home (Nye's pupils are reformed in the process of learning about, and reflecting on, the toxic particulate pollution produced by ATVs and the way in which driving them can contribute to the spread of invasive species when seeds get lodged in their tires). Animated sequences translate our daily practices (using toilet paper, eating chicken, shaving, throwing out wire hangers) into ecological and economic quantities (numbers of trees, dollars, food miles, gallons of water, pounds of pesticides, the number of homes that could be powered by an ingredient in shave gel, the number of miles the wire hangers thrown out yearly would stretch, untwisted and placed end-to-end).

While all of these are tools to think with, Nye also gives explicit advice to, for example, buy organic chicken, fair trade coffee, sodium lauryl sulfate-free products, use "green" dry cleaning services, recycle your sneakers, and donate your old clothes, instead of throwing them away. After a lesson on the links between intensive cashmere

production and desertification, for example, Nye recommends that viewers seek "alternatives" because "inexpensive cashmere is not reflecting the true cost of making cashmere." In order for us, "we cashmere consumers" to "help solve this problem" it is viewers' job "to decrease demand for cheap, not sustainably produced cashmere no matter where it comes from." Rather than regulatory interventions, one can stop desertification by purchasing alpaca instead: "The wool from these llama-like animals is just as soft as cashmere, but a whole lot softer on the environment… so try the *al*-paca *al*-ternative. And the next time you see a stack of cashmere sweaters that seems too cheap to be true—too inexpensive to be true—well, they probably are. Just leave them there! If we stop buying stuff like this, sooner or later it won't be on the shelves" (Stuff Happens episode "Closet" 2008). In line with a larger "ethical consumerism" discursive formation, Nye calls upon viewers to pay what food author Michael Pollan (2006) has called the "hidden costs" of corporate and consumer capitalism, the externalized costs of industrial production. Nye articulates a range of equivalencies that "translated" environment saving into everyday actions one could take up at home (and likewise articulates environment destroying to our un-thought everyday actions). Through these tactics, the show connects global environmental problems to individual consumer choices, empowering "ordinary" consumers to "make a difference." "Buy fair trade!" Nye enthuses. "Vote with your dollars!"

If the pedagogy of *Stuff Happens* was not clear enough for Planet Green's particular pedagogical project, *Wa$ted!* demonstrated the process of "ordinary" people submitting themselves to Planet Green's eco-training regime. A reality "life intervention"

show, *Wa$ted!*, dramatized a eco-consumer citizen training and offering a range of technologies of the self to help both participants and viewers at home work on their attitudes, lifestyles, and souls. I will discuss *Wa$ted!* in considerably more depth than I have the other shows, for it most clearly articulates the way in which governmentality came together with branding in Planet Green, and in turn, what kind of environmentalism this convergence enabled. Hosted by Annabelle Gurwitch and Holter Graham, the weekly program intervened in households of "eco-criminals," and offered them tips and resources for reducing their polluting behaviors and energy use. Reformed contestants were rewarded with a cash prize. Through a combination of parodic discipline, surveillance, confession and shaming, alongside an emphasis on self-awareness and self-improvement that the show seemed to take quite seriously, *Wa$ted!* specified problematic behaviors and offered participants an array of corrective technologies to address their personal eco-don'ts. The show aims to prove "that American homeowners don't have to be extreme to be green" by taking "the average household full of eco-horrors" and transforming "it into a clean, green haven, saving participants serious cash in the process" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).

The narrative arc of the show resembled to other reality life intervention shows, albeit with a parodic and ambivalent slant: it was as delighted by the excesses of its "hardened eco-criminals" as it was disgusted by them and the hosts' heightened performances as "eco-police" invited more humor than intimidation. Episodes of *Wa$ted!* began by establishing the participants as objects of intervention through a blend of

confession, surveillance, pathologization and auditing.[41] Each "victim" addressed the camera to remorselessly own up to a litany of personal eco-crimes. For example, eco-criminal Kisha says "It's pretty easy to recycle, but I think we're just a little lazy for that," while her roommate, Donna, doesn't "plan on doing anything to fix it." Mock closed-circuit surveillance footage shows one of the women drop bottle after recyclable bottle into the garbage (and the recycling bin is right next to it!). A red police stamp of "GUILTY" is branded across the screen. "I don't know any other way to live," offers another of the women plaintively: "GUILTY!" (Wa$ted! episode "Sex and the City" 2008).

The hosts then descend on the household, armed with megaphone and a truckload of the household's garbage. The criminals are called upon to know themselves by coming to know their own waste, recognize their behavior as problematic and excessive. The garbage is unloaded on their driveway or sidewalk in a spectacular heap. "Do you feel like you can justify all this garbage?" asks Gurwitch asks one couple of their yearly 1300 lbs and calls upon them to take responsibility for individual items: "Whose is this?" she says, holding up inappropriate trash items (recyclables, clothing, packaging, metal water bottles) (Wa$ted! episode "He Said, She Said" 2008). Gurwitch presents statistics of the particular wasteful pathology from which the individual household suffers: "Of your 1300 lbs of garbage, 375 is just packaging!" This functions not only to locate the specifics of the household's dysfunction, but also becomes a teaching moment for offering eco-facts to the viewer, for whom an animated sequence explains "Every year 30

[41] Like that of *Emeril Green*, The *Wa$ted!* casting call urged individuals to position themselves as problematic and in need of intervention. Seeking "people with bizarre, energy-wasting habits" the call asked a contestants to submit a brief biography that explained why they believed their "family need[ed] an eco-makeover" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).

million lbs of packaging, *packaging*—we're not talking something that was *used* for something—is going into landfills across America." The show thus brings participants "face-to-face" with their bad habits, leading them toward confession. Eco-criminal Laura uses her gas-guzzling SUV in her daily commutes. She confesses that it only "averages about 13 to 15 miles to the gallon" and that "ultimately, it shouldn't be a commuting vehicle." Or when faced with the evidence that her family generates 2000 pounds of garbage per year, Mary Lou Zeller tells the camera: "I am ashamed. I am embarrassed. I had no idea that we were producing so much garbage." Here, the viewer is invited to both judge and forgive. In both cases, through the act of confessing, individuals, within the logic of the narrative, undergo a shift: they become subjects who can be addressed as feeling *responsible* for their effect on the environment and *desiring* to change. Thus, the confession serves not only to align the viewer with the hosts—the arbiters of eco-norms—and distance her from the guilt of those on the show, but it also functions to negotiate shame, to produce excess as problematic, and, critically, to indicate the individual's readiness to take on the corrective regime: it is a condition of eco-salvation.

The narrative was organized around an "audit" of each household's ecological footprint: it measured its waste production as well as its consumption of resources in household energy use, water use and transportation. The results come with a shaming lecture: "All of us depend upon nature for the resources that we need, like land to grow our food and forests wood and for paper," Gurwitch reminds us, "but if everyone consumed like you guys do, we would need more planets!" An animated sequence illustrates the size of the group's property, and then the size of the "ecological footprint,"

which is specified in acres, then in terms of the group's property, for example, "your ecological footprint is 81.9 acres, that's 41 times the size of your property!" That is then translated into the number of planets we would need if everyone consumed the way that the group consumes (usually in the range of 5 to 9 Earths). The result of the audit acted as a baseline against which to measure that household's improvement after submitting itself to a "green regime" for the next three weeks.

While *Wa$ted!* is partially parodic, inviting viewers to distance themselves from the participants, it is pedagogical at the same time. Viewers are empowered with information via the mini-lessons cited above, as well as "ECO-TIPS" that appear in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen. It produced a range of norms and forms of knowledge through which viewers could self-assess and, both through the show and online (one could take advantage of the online ecological footprint calculator to take up the auditing techniques demonstrated on the show in one's own homes), and it offered corrective tools to not only green one's everyday life but also to save money. The hosts recommended tips and tools including, newspaper insulation, automatic composters, cloth kitchen towels, eco-friendly cleaners, color-coded recycling bins, CFL bulbs to replace incandescent bulbs, solar panels, and hybrid cars. They also suggest practices like curbing online shopping, replacing old energy-intensive appliances with new energy star-rated ones, telecommuting, looking for an eco-friendly drycleaner, reducing the amount you drive your SUV, not leaving the fridge door open, switching to organic makeup [not money-saving in the short run, but linked on the show to personal health and risk avoidance, reducing exposure to such ingredients as lead and formaldehyde], and

changing other consumption and waste habits. It is a customized action plan specific to each group. The hosts introduce the "extra incentive" of the cash prize, equivalent to an estimate of the year's-worth of "eco-savings" the group would achieve based on their three-week trial of implementing the techniques proffered. Viewers were invited to "extend their quality time" with the hosts by visiting Planet Green's website, where they could "find additional tips, resources and insights" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). The overarching logic of the narrative invites viewers to invest in participants' journey to remake their souls and take responsibility for their eco-sins. The eco-don'ts demonstrated by those who appear on the show offer viewers tools for making sense of what *not* to do, enabling individuals to self-police. The parody is thus concerned not only with adding narrative interest to the don'ts of green living but also with the production of a subject who is available—that is, who will submit themselves in their freedom—to a green makeover. While viewers may take pleasure in the fact that we are not as bad as participants on *Wa$ted!*, the show invites us to invest in their journey toward good green subjecthood.

When each episode concludes "three weeks later," we return to evaluate the group's adherence to the customized eco-program. Gurwitch emphasizes their "failures," to add an element of dubious suspense ("failure," within the logic of the show is, in fact, impossible), which are going to "hurt" both their "footprint" and their cash prize. However, we soon learn that, despite missteps, the participants have "taken [the program] to heart." Their new "ecological footprint" is, inevitably a smaller one (albeit one that remains vastly larger than their property). The percentage by which it was reduced enjoys

verbal emphasis, but the number of Earths contestants still need to maintain their new, greener lifestyle is not considered. Instead they are presented with their prize and kudos from the hosts. The show closes with footage of the hosts enthusing about how "really proud" they are, which cuts to confessional shots of the reformed participants reflecting on their new moral outlook. Donna notes that "a lot of people think that you're just one person…one person can't make a difference, but one person really can make a big big difference…" (Wa$ted! episode "Sex and the City" 2008). Similarly, a college student in a fraternity house featured on the show concludes, "this whole experience really opened our eyes to everything that's going on in the environment and what we can do…" (Wa$ted! episode "Fraternal Affairs" 2008).

While *Wa$ted!*'s aim to empower individuals toward environmental subjecthood was potentially progressive, on the show, the greatest threat to the environment are not the policies of governments or the practices of industry and large corporations, but rather the particular pathology of the individual herself. Individuals are simultaneously blamed for the problem (in fact, with their "strange obsession[s] with burning carbon" and "online shopping addiction[s]," they *are* the problem (Wa$ted! episode "He Said, She Said" 2008)) and empowered to solve it. They can govern themselves through their freedom to make the right consumer choices. Making the right choices—and *wanting* to make the right choices—becomes simultaneously a means of self-realization, of saving money, and of doing good for oneself and one's family, for humankind, for future generations, and for the planet. *Wa$ted!* focused on a makeover of the soul that is aimed at a realization that "one person can make a difference." Within the narrative, living a

green life—even as it includes instructions for making small, manageable changes—is less important than *believing* in oneself as an agent vis-à-vis the environment, believing that one can do good through small, personal acts and consumer choices.

In this way, *Wa$ted!* is a quintessential example of the new environmentalism as articulated by Planet Green. Through new products and self-empowerment, coming to see oneself as an agent of the new environmentalism, one can engage in environmental saving fully within brand culture. While only some of the practices specifically require the purchase of products, the entire program can only be realized through the Planet Green branded universe, as individuals bring tips and techniques from the television and website into their everyday lives. It extended and elaborated the pedagogy of *Stuff Happens*, demonstrating and rewarding its uptake in a "real life" household.

The Planet Green websites fully supported this project. Viewers at home could go online to find an array of tools for acting on themselves in the manner that the show acted on its participants. In addition to the "ecological footprint calculator," the site offered viewers games, quizzes and other tools for self-assessment, enabling the detailed scrutiny of their daily routines, green sensibilities, and eco-knowledge. One could test one's eco-savvy in quizzes like, "Would you fall for an eco myth?" "How good is your green vocab?" Do you "know the biodiversity hotspots"? What's your "ocean IQ?" By taking the quiz, "How well do you know Climate Science? (Quiz)" you could test your knowledge of "the current state of climate change science" and its impact on "Sea level rise, the strongest greenhouse gases, deforestation, and more" (Planet Green quizzes 2009).

One could also find tools for detailed scrutiny of one's daily routines by finding out the environmental impact of everyday cleaning, cooking, shopping, and gardening: "Are you a green appliance guru?" a "green cleaner?" "test your organic gardening knowledge" to find out if you are a "composting pro." Do you "know how much energy you're using? Take this quiz to find out!" You can find out "your food's carbon emissions" as well as its "water footprint." What about a "Who owns your food?" quiz to test your knowledge of the brands you *think* you know and trust at the natural foods stores? You can test your knowledge of farmers markets, "green diet," and "green" wines and beers: "Are you an eco-friendly eater?" "How green is your happy hour?" Test your travel habits to learn whether you are a "green globetrotter." In the realm of "Fashion & Beauty," individuals could take quizzes like, "How Green is your Wardrobe?" "Are you a green beauty?" and "What's your clothing's footprint?"

One could work on one's green-appeal in the dating marketing: "What's your Green Celebrity IQ?" "Are You a Great Green Date?" or "An Ecosexual?" (Planet Green Homepage 2009). One could even take a deeper look at one's psychological health and "Measure Your Eco-Anxiety Level" by answering questions like, "How panicked do you get when you think about global warming? When you watched An Inconvenient Truth, did you a) fixate on Al Gore's coif, b) try to calculate the carbon footprint of your organic Oreos, or c) wonder where you could stop for a bottle of Pepto Bismol-and then worry about the impact all that plastic will" have on the environment? (Chua 2008b).

Stuff Happens, *Wa$ted!* and Planet Green's vast array of online lifestyle resources—thanks in part to their focus on the ordinary details of everyday middle class

life—have a far more inclusive and democratizing mode of address than, for example, *World's Greenest Home* or *Alter Eco*. The range of online tools in particular made the recommended self-work appear even more accessible. But the seeming progressivism of this template for citizenship is rooted in a process that works to transform environment saving into matters of individuals' "rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences" (Brown 2005, 42). Specifically, this template posited that "going green" could "save green" *and* the planet by offering equivalencies that translated quotidian practices into quantities of land, distance, trees, and, significantly, dollars. Planet Green refigured environmental clean-up through forms of measure, equivalencies, and discourses of personal responsibility that are useful, not only to neoliberal rationalities of rule, but also to brands whose environmentalism is contingent on consumer "co-creation." *Wa$ted!, Stuff Happens,* and PlanetGreen.com's self-assessment quizzes worked to imagine an environmentalism achieved through the production of "rational actors and impos[ing] a market rationale for decision making in all spheres" (Brown 40). This logic casts environmental action as economically rational and a site of self-realization within the Planet Green branded universe. This economic logic, while useful for its branding and citizen pedagogy, also produced paradoxes. For one thing, it was precisely through the shows' appeal to these ideals of neoliberal citizenship that the "democratizing" of this new environmentalism was done—the techniques of providing education for rational decision making and transforming "going green" an economically rational choice themselves promised to make this branded version of green living democratically accessible. But of course, green consumerism is often far from

economically rational under contemporary political and economic conditions—and hence hardly democratically accessible, as the practices were often very expensive and assumed things like car and homeownership.

Template 3: Civic education, civil discourse, and public engagement

Finally, Planet Green worked to produce the brand itself as a site of civic education, public engagement, and civil discourse. While such activities are often associated conventional forms of democratic citizenship and the "public sphere," Planet Green worked to incorporate them into the neoliberal logic of the overall brand, which, unsurprisingly, often created quite glaring tensions. In shows like *Focus Earth*, *Supper Club with Tom Bergeron*, and a number of online features, Planet Green worked to articulate this new environmentalism to a "serious" kind of public engagement, throwback to old PBS and educational television, working to produce good citizens who would engage in civil discourse and self-realize as informed and "active" citizens rather than irrational and impulsive consumers.[42] As Ien Ang (1991) and Laurie Ouellette (2002) have both pointed out, while guided by a democratic impulse, televised efforts to activate citizens though information and opportunities for "engagement" are often "paternalistic" and "controlling" in their own right, equally implicated in the forms of governmentality I've been discussing throughout this chapter. Thus, it is crucial to not simply presume that these aspects of Planet Green were progressive and democratic, but rather examine what they contributed to its broader consumer-citizen pedagogy.

[42] Online could expand one's ethical/activist knowledge based by "Watch[ing] a socially conscious film once a month" with a film-of-the-month subscription that promised to deliver "thought-provoking, socially conscious, yet often little-known feature films, plus a few short selections, on diverse subjects such as human rights, grassroots democracy, food politics—and, of course…" the rest is cut off, but the context suggests, "environmentalism."

Billed as an "eco-newscast," *Focus Earth*, hosted by ABC's Bob Woodruff, promised to cover "subjects ranging from climate impact, environmental policy, political debate and world events, as well as how climate change affects religious and cultural views and issues" by drawing "on the global resources of ABC News and its reporting team around the world" (Dolliver 2008). This "news you can use" aimed to "narrow the lens on" environmental issues and current events in order to "present news and information the average American can use in their daily life" (Team Planet Green 2008b). The online episode guides outlined a wide array of topics, from gorilla habitat loss in central Africa, to a digest of Department of the Interior's proposed changes to the Endangered Species Act, including links to the documents (Aug. 2008), coverage of issues of air pollution and the Beijing Olympics and air pollution, as well as the "disappearing" Louisiana coastline. They promise to explain "the role that climate change may play in U.S. national security" (Sept 13, 2008), and give us a primer on Denmark's "energy independence," the return of the grey wolf to the endangered species list, and eBay's ban on illegal animal products (Oct. 20, 2008), California's drought and the "Green Tech revolution" (March 20, 2009), as well as coverage of the G20 summit in London and the anticipated collapse of the Wilkins Antarctic ice sheet (April 11, 2009).

But viewers who watched the show hoping for incisive exposés of environmental abuses, investigative reporting, or structural critiques would be disappointed. Resolutely aligned with Planet Green's "solutions-oriented" sensibility, *Focus Earth* took on these issues by profiling actors who put their can-do spirit to work in a whole range of environmental interventions. With the exception of the episodes on global warming that I

discuss in Chapter 3, which were much harder to shape into this problem-solution structure (though the entire Planet Green brand, *Focus Earth* included, worked tirelessly to do so, relentlessly positioning "you" as the most vital agent of change), on *Focus Earth*, Planet Green problematized environmental issues in ways that gave way to solutions by change-making "visionaries."

For example, in an episode about Hollywood "going green," viewers learn about how "dirty" the movie and music business can be. This positions eco-innovations in special effects and musicians "greening" their studios and tours as a pressing kind of environment-saving (Underwood 2008). In a segment on the "dangers of eco-tourism"—the ecological damage caused by so-called green vacations—brings us to the Galapagos Islands to see how "the very tourists who come to celebrate this unique eco-system may in fact be changing it forever." While the segment does give us some clues about the kind of ecological damage such tourism is having, this functions largely to set up a man named Costas Christ, Global Travel Editor and columnist at *National Geographic Adventure* magazine, as an agent of change—and by extension, set up the viewers as potential change agents as they become *better informed* eco-tourists (Team Planet Green 2008c).

One episode that, at the outset, seemed to have promise for opening up structural critique was called "Environmental Injustice" (2009). Viewers received mini-lessons on environmental racism, specifically the waste facilities, polluting truck routes, and illegal dumping that goes unchecked in one predominantly Africa American neighborhood in the South Bronx, which had contributed to all kinds of health and quality of life problems for residents—the episode is particularly interested in asthma and obesity, attributed here

to residents' reluctance to allow children to play outside due to particulate pollution and garbage in the local parks and green spaces. But rather than learning more about who these polluting companies are, or being encouraged to think about how to stop them, Woodruff explains, "From planting trees to creating bike paths to promote healthier lifestyles, they're working to make this a better place to live." Volunteers help to clean up trash. Residents do their part to "fight obesity" by getting physically active. A cut to a demonstration, not contextualized by the show, shows a handful of people holding up "Green Jobs not Jails" signs.

The show weaves these seemingly disparate activities into a narrative of planet saving. While most of the individuals featured in this episode are othered in highly racialized ways—chubby African American children are shown in doctor's offices, heads cropped out of the frame, as an adult stretches a tape measure around their middle and a voiceovers and popup text boxes offer statistics on obesity—we do meet a "visionary" with whom we are invited to identify: the celebrated (but controversial) environmental justice advocate, non-profit founder/director, and industry consultant Majora Carter. The promotional web spot for the episode calls Carter "a prime example of changing the world one person at a time" (Team Planet Green 2009) and throughout the segment she mediates South Bronx for presumably middle class white viewers at home, informing us about the statistical links between predominantly Black and Hispanic neighborhoods and pollutant levels that exceed government safe limits. The causes, however, are not explored on the show. Absent of perpetrators and structural analysis, the narrative hardly paints a coherent picture of the power dynamics that operate where white supremacy,

capitalism, and environmental degradation meet. Rather, it is a can-do story of "greening the ghetto." Viewers are invited to become informed citizens, savvy about environmental racism and people like Carter, in ways that are less about fighting structural inequality than about folding this savvy into their ongoing engagement with the Planet Green brand.

While it is potentially progressive that *Focus Earth* named environmental racism as a problem, exposed the environmental impact of the music and movie industry, and uncovered the environmental damage that can be caused by eco-tourism, viewers are quite explicitly *not* called upon to identify personally with the environmental problems in ways that were shaped by a mode of address that presumed whiteness and relative affluence. They are not affecting *their* everyday lives. Rather, viewers are invited to understand themselves as "visionaries" who, as I will discuss in the next section, can self-realize through consumer choice, volunteerism, and philanthropy.[43]

As I have suggested, *Focus Earth* may seem like a throwback to early educational television, which, as Laurie Ouellette points out, engaged explicitly in education for good citizenship that "insisted that viewers learn, strive, pay attention, and, eventually, turn off the set and 'do what has been suggested'" (Ouellette 2002, 46). But *Focus Earth* was characterized by far gentler ethos that did not "insist" but "invited" viewers into a new environmental consumer-citizenship by providing tools for them to become active, engaged, and informed in line with the demands of branding. For *Focus Earth*, in the

[43] In a special episode on environmental "visionaries," for instance Bob Woodruff, addresses the camera: "There's no doubting it," he begins, "we're facing some extraordinary environmental challenges. But were also living in a time of innovation and solutions thanks to the 6 inspiring individuals you're about to meet. I like to call them heroes because they're literally saving out planet from some of its greatest threats… and also renewing another important source of energy: hope." But in fact, there is a seventh segment to the show, on "the unsung hero who's making the biggest difference of all": you. It called upon individuals to think of themselves as "unsung heroes" each time they dump their recyclables into the correct bin (Focus Earth, Earth Day episode, 2009). Even in coverage of mass mobilization, such as an article on the 2010 climate rally on the National Mall, the demonstration was recast inline with Planet Green's affinity for "visionaries" and individual action: the "visionary responsible for the future is you" declared the headline (DeFranza 2010).

larger context of Planet Green, the "active viewer" was likewise invited to "do" various things, but she would do so not by disengaging from the brand, going out as a "citizen" to engage in purportedly "non-commercial" activities. Rather, she could "turn off the set and 'do what has been suggested'" fully within the Planet Green branded universe, heading online to self-realize as a green consumer, philanthropist, volunteer, activist, and/or participant in civil discourse, in ways that added value to the Planet Green brand at the same time that it worked to realized the new environmentalism.

For example, on PlanetGreen.com individuals could take part in branded volunteer and charitable activities, thanks to links on the Planet Green web site that brought them to partner organizations' opportunities. They could "help save polar bears without leaving home," or "Use Facebook to Plant Trees and Win Cash" by "liking" the iChapters Plant a Tree Drive's Facebook page and taking one of its eco-quizzes. They could learn how to get involved in wetland restoration or find resources to "help your favorite restaurant conserve" with advice from the National Restaurant Association's Conserve Initiative and urged individuals to "Encourage your local school to change the world" by hooking it up with the Discovery Education-sponsored middle school eco-competition, the Siemens We Can Change the World Challenge, in which promised to reward students working "to solve local environmental issues" (a partnership with the National Science Teachers Association and Siemens Foundation).

Visitors to the Planet Green site could take part in a green consumer boycott as part of a Planet Green branded collectivity: "Don't Buy Eco-Nightmare Collectible Plates!" the feature exclaimed, calling out by name those with Christian and "Precious

Moments" scenes. The site recommended protest and activist strategies like tree sitting and direct action. The site urged viewers to "Throw a seed bomb" and encouraged individuals to be "anonymous green nuisance[s]" by filling retailers' comment boxes with their green opinions about corporate operations. One could even sign a "Petition to Fight Climate Change and Download Free Missy Higgins Song" (Root 2009) or one to "stop junk mail" through the consumer rights organization ForestEthics (Chua 2008c).

Planet Green also encouraged individuals to participate in the political process in conventional ways for example, to read a "5-Minute Guide to the Senate Climate Bill" (Merchant 2009a), "write your congressman [sic]" or, on November 4, 2008 the website urged, "forget Democrat or Republican, Vote Green!" (Merchant 2008)[44] On December 2009, it reminded uses that "There's Still Time to Speak Out Against Natural Gas Drilling in New York" informing users about the extended deadline for public comment (Cernansky 2009a).

Planet Green even encouraged individuals to participate in mass mobilization. "What Are You Doing October 16? If You're Not Standing Against Poverty and Climate Change, Maybe You Should Change Your Plans," (Cernansky 2009b). Through Planet Green, we could join the organization Stand Up: Take Against Poverty and Climate Change, in events around the globe aiming "to get every individual, community, and government involved in the struggle against these pressing (and interconnected) crises." A guest contribution from environmentalist and author Bill McKibbon ("How to Create Massive Change when it Comes to Climate Change") reiterated this call to viewers to

[44] The author of the feature clarified this as a "bipartisan proposition for citizens across the country" not a vote for the Green Party, but a call to assess the environmental records and commitments of the candidates.

join in global demonstrations on Oct. 24, 2009 (McKibbon 2009). And the following year, we were invited to join in "1Sky's National Call-in Day for a Clean Energy Future" (Team Planet Green 2010).[45] But even when urging individuals to participate in these conventionally "political" activities, Planet Green always stitched such activism and volunteering back into lifestyle. Indeed, individuals were invited to customize and personalize their eco-engagement through the Planet Green brand by finding out their "volunteering personality." Planet Green suggested partner orgs fit for "social entrepreneurs," Rock 'n Roll fans, those attracted to "Exotic travel," outdoorsy types, or "lovers of the sea" (Get Involved n.d.).

This was a remarkably expansive array of possibilities for branded environmental action. Through these offerings, Planet Green worked to encompass all of the potentially threatening activities associated with environmentalism within the brand itself, transforming them in the process. If environmentalism was a threat to brands, Planet Green would subdue it by subsuming it entirely. It didn't matter if the activities recommended were directly productive for brands in the sense of shopping or viewing and clicking on ads and branded video shorts. By offering the Planet Green brand as a site at which users could cultivate, realize, and enact consumer-volunteer-philanthropist-activist-citizen selves, Planet Green positioned brands as an integral part of environmental action.

However, this third template for citizenship concerned not only providing the Planet Green community of viewers and web users with "news you can use" and a whole

[45] 1Sky was conceived by establishment environmental organizations and supports policy measures to curb global warming and create a "green economy" but claims to be "grassroots."

range of opportunities to put their informed citizenship into practice in branded volunteerism and activism. In addition, on TV and online Planet Green worked to instruct individuals in techniques of civil discourse and provide a platform on which they could do it. "Civil discourse," in the Lockean sense, is hardly associated with commercial media on which viewers are far more likely to see pundits going "head-to-head" in heated arguments designed to drive ratings, than to see thoughtful debate informed by relevant research or lived experience. Yet Planet Green's new environmentalism worked to cultivate just that kind of civil discourse—and make it useful to brands.

For example, on *Supper Club with Tom Bergeron* Planet Green offered viewers a chance to be a "fly on the wall" at a "Hollywood dinner party." A celebrity chef would cook an eco-friendly meal, occasionally offering mini-lessons on ingredients, agriculture, and cooking, as a range of celebrities debated topics like sustainability, organic food, and green politics and also plugged their lifestyle books, websites, radio shows, and blogs. While certainly this was about showcasing green-hued luxury living and providing an opportunity for the celebrities involved to build their green brands, it was simultaneously about demonstrating the skills of facilitating and engaging in friendly debate around the supposedly contentious topic of climate change.

Specifically, the show promised an evening of lively discussion and debate of the "full spectrum of green topics" and the "latest news and events in the green movement," like green baby products, biodynamic wine, bamboo dresses, carbon offsets, "green fatigue" and global warming. (As we listen to the guests banter, popups tell us how we can become more engaged: "Looking for a great way to get going on your green life? Go

to planetgreen.com, register, and a dollar will be donated to help the green rebuilding of Greensburg, KS.”) (Supper Club episode "Junk Food, Organic Vineyards and Green Fatigue" 2008).

On *Supper Club*, skills of facilitating—and engaging in—civil discourse are cultivated as part of a lesson in upscale entertaining. Bergeron played the facilitator and party host, his job ostensibly to keep things from getting too heated and to keep the conversation going. Bergeron begins by introducing the guests, while text appears on the screen emphasizing the relevant details, always including one tidbit clearly positioned to be inflammatory—but in a “friendly” and humorous way—for example, that conservative radio host Doug McIntyre “says an *Inconvenient Truth* is full of lies” or that TreeHugger.com founder Graham Hill “doesn’t cook.” We also learn about the menu and Bergeron goes on to ask a series of “provocative” questions inviting guests to debate. When things got too contentious, he offers a lighter-hearted topic or beckons guests to retire to the sitting room for another glass of wine—and more prepared topics including a party game called “hypothetical biodegradable” in which guests must choose between, say, giving up your car for a 20 percent raise, or keep the car and forego the raise—while they wait for dessert (Supper Club episode "Junk Food, Organic Vineyards and Green Fatigue" 2008).

Supper Club worked to collapse public discourse with the domestic setting of upscale entertaining, all encompassed within and enabled by the branded universe of Planet Green. The show gave successful people a platform to debate topics with which they may or may not have been familiar. Guests’ authority to speak on environmental

issues was granted by the particular convergence of cultural capital, publicists, brand strategies and chance that landed them a spot on a televised dinner party guest list. And guests invariably enjoyed great distance from the felt effects of environmental degradation, thus the stakes of the debate were always ethical and philosophical, not personally felt. Never did a guest who lacked the cultural capital and educated middle class or upscale sensibilities appear on the show. It would have been absurd within the logic of *Supper Club* and highly disruptive of its sensibility, to invite one of the poor South Bronx residents suffering from asthma that we saw on *Focus Earth*'s "Environmental Injustice" episode (though Majora Carter was a featured guest on October 16, 2008). Such distance from the felt effects of environmental degradation and climate change was a central condition of the kind of "friendliness" and "civility" that *Supper Club* taught. As a lesson on friendly debate, "tasteful" self-promotion, and upscale green entertaining, *Supper Club* elaborated a whole branded mode of green sociality that could be enacted in one's everyday life or in the Planet Green online community where one could find tips ad recipes for hosting green dinner parties, advice for talking to "climate skeptics," and a whole privatized public-style sphere, called the "Forums" in which one could put these skills into practice.

Specifically, when Planet Green launched, the website offered a platform called the Planet Green Community. The Community's "Forums" were "a collection of community-created discussions based on a range of topics that members post to get answers to questions, share ideas and projects, and even have a spirited debate." Aiming for a kind of privatized public sphere—complete with suggestions for civil discourse and

good community citizenship—the instructional page gently explained, "If you start or join a discussion, don't expect that everyone will agree with you. We like to foster a good environment for discussion and tend to allow the community to police itself as much as possibl." It offered a list of "best practices" like creating good titles, making "strong, salient points," offer "background information," "No Blatant Promotion or Advertising Please" and if "profanity, flaming, and insults" cause a thread to "get ugly" Planet Green may shut down the thread, though its decision-makers "hate doing that, so just be cool, okay?" Instead, they urge users to "Encourage Civility and Positive Discussion" and try not to "take anything personally." Users could start a brand new discussion thread, they could create new posts in ongoing conversations, reply to existing posts, and report abuse (Team Planet Green 2008d). The "community" created all kinds of topics not generated by Planet Green.

The open architecture of the forums was perhaps one of the most progressive and interesting parts of the Planet Green experiment—not directed through branded content, the forums had the feel of 90s-style comment boards. But in the context of a commercial enterprise, the limitations of this privately enabled public-style sphere are obvious—and would soon be borne out in Planet Green itself. As time went on, Planet Green struggled to generate advertiser support and as it began to alter its brand, the forums were one of the first things to disappear. As early as 2009, user Organic_Pet_Products reported difficulties in joining the forums, being redirected to inoperative links on the Planet Green site (Team Planet Green 2008d). When I revisited the forums in April 2010 the link brought me to TreeHugger.com, rather than a specific Planet Green forums page, as

it had been in 2008, though as far as I could tell, the content remained available. In March 2012, user llamastalker was unable to find the user-generated topical forums and when I tried to access the forums again in October, I discovered that they had disappeared entirely, even from TreeHugger, which had always professed a commitment to this kind of quasi-democratic dialog: clicking on the "forums" link brought me to a "page not found" message, though Planet Green quizzes, program information, and other content all remained available.

Nevertheless, Planet Green's effort to produce this space for civil discourse fully within its brand was as much a part of the brand project as anything else. It worked to incorporate all dimensions of individuals' environmentalist sensibilities in this project of brand building. Planet Green worked to transform the brand itself into a privatized public sphere, a site at which good eco-citizenship could be enacted. This was absolutely crucial to the convergence of branding and environmental governmentality. In branding environmentalism, Planet Green worked to situate brands as sites at which conventional forms of citizenship and public engagement could be carried out within proprietary branded spaces.

Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated the way in which, in Planet Green, governmentality and branding came together to elaborate a new kind of environmentalism. Planet Green worked to demonstrate, perform, and produce a whole branded context in which brands themselves would become environmental actors and authorities. By situating brands as

environmental authorities, Planet Green set the stage for its television programming and web content to operate as a cultural technology, in the Foucauldian sense, offering viewers tips and techniques to self-realize and self-govern as eco-consumer-citizens and members of the Planet Green community.

Planet Green was carefully constructed to invite individuals to co-produce its brand in very specific, though multiple and contradictory, ways. It worked to incorporate all aspects of environmental action—from everyday life to volunteerism to activism to conventional public engagement—transforming activities often presumed to be non-commercial into a new branded environmentalism. It did so by subtly guiding and shaping individuals' environmentalist sensibilities and everyday activities toward the aims of brand value. But doing so aimed not only to bring individuals into the Planet Green community, it also aimed to operate as a cultural component to governance by calling on consumers to help manage the environmental externalities of a radically deregulated market. In the neoliberal imaginary, for corporations, "doing environmentalism" through voluntary "self-regulation" is contingent upon the construct of consumer "demand" codified in TV business as the "eyeballs" available for delivery to advertisers. As a governmental project, Planet Green aimed, on the one hand, to guide individuals' environmentalisms toward this kind of "demand," and, on the other hand, to guide their consumer and media activities toward a new environmentalism.

In this chapter, I have focused mainly on how Planet Green's branded governmental project came together. But it is also worth noting that Planet Green was contradictory from the get go in ways that are inextricable from the tensions between

branding and environmentalism. While the next chapter delves more deeply into how Planet Green worked to manage these contradictions, I want to conclude this chapter by noting a few moments when Planet Green's contradictions ruptured the supposedly smooth meeting of commercialism and environmentalism—for these moments, I suggest, and will elaborate on in coming chapters, were as central to Planet Green's pedagogy as anything else for if, as I suspect, Planet Green's structuring contradictions were irresolvable, regardless of whether its decision makers were aware of this, the brand's very existence would become contingent on cultivating a comfort with these contradictions themselves.

Sometimes, for example, commercialism baldly trumped environmentalism. On *Emeril Green*, for example, despite the fact that the show's tagline claimed that the show "unleashes all the information you've ever wanted to know about green cooking" (On TV: Emeril Green 2008), in fact, the environmental politics of the show were all over the place (except to the extent that the ethical authority of the Whole Foods brand maintained a semblance of coherence). Topics ranged from heart-healthy cooking to wild game, anti-aging foods to vegetarian cooking, "sushi on a budget" to tips for solving common GI issues through diet. While Lagasse did occasionally insert words like "local" and "organic," or mentioned that he had been growing organic vegetables for twenty years, the vast majority of the lessons were tenuously, if at all, connected to environmentalism. The Whole Foods experts, for example, have very little to tell us about environmental consequences of food choices and typically inform us about cooking techniques, flavor profiles and beer and wine appropriate pairings, provenance, and nutrition of foodstuffs.

The fishmonger quite glaringly does not discuss questions of overfishing or contaminants like mercury and PCBs, nor does the butcher mention the environmental impact of various forms of cattle raising. Rather, they discuss cooking techniques, teach us fish identification, where on the cow common cuts of meat come from.[46]

And at times overcoming guests' food fears on *Emeril Green* is unambiguously contrary to "eating green." Elsewhere within the Planet Green universe, individuals can learn about the enormous environmental impact of meat production. On *Battleground Earth*, for example, factoids about the staggering resources required to produce a pound of beef. On the Planet Green website, an article headlined, "Meat and Climate Change: It's Even Worse Than We Imagined" points out that "Animal byproducts are responsible for 51 percent of annual worldwide human-caused greenhouse gas" (Z. 2010). Yet on *Emeril Green*, one young woman, Valerie, overcomes her fear and intimidation surrounding red meat. In the end, she feels "motivated and empowered to get creative and go into the kitchen myself." Triumphant, she tells us, "Now I'm able to work with meat because I have the education to back it up. I'm thinking about trying to cook a steak on my own!" (Emeril Green episode "East Meets West" 2008).

Other times, however, environmentalisms were featured that seemed to fit poorly with the broader governmental brand project. Some segments were loosely consistent with market-oriented personal responsibility. For example, the website urged individuals to shop at thrift stores and salvage found furniture, to make "easy, no-sew cloth napkins in five minutes!" and to "Get Recession-Ready: Live on Less and Love It!" From *G*

[46] There was a small handful of off-brand experts who offered more explicitly "green" forms of expertise: the president of a farmers market talks about its environmental benefits, an "Eco-Arts and Crafts Expert" Jenn Savedge talks about toxin-free kid activities, John Page Williams of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation discusses the effects of overfishing. This typically occurs in the small collection of episodes in which Lagasse takes viewers on off-site field trips.

Word, one could learn how to make biodiesel from scratch, fashion a low-tech air conditioner, or set up a worm composting system. But, in overt tension with consumer culture, others spots advocated withdrawing from the consumer economy entirely. The website offered tips on how to "barter creatively." *G Word* gave a lesson on freecycling, one on "slugging" (a free ride-sharing practice born during the 1970s fuel crisis and still used by DC commuters), and another very lengthy one devoted to profiling Dr. Milton Saier, Professor of Biology University of California, San Diego who, in his own words, has "been a freegan for 30 years." In a 70s-style polo t-shirt and bare feet, he takes on a tour to teach us everything we need to know about dumpster diving while *G Word* popup bubbles offer authoritative factoids like, "Milton saves over $10,000 a year by being a Freegan" or "FREE-GAN (n): Person who believes in minimizing waste and individual impact on the environment." Saier explains that "Freeganism in general is anti-consumerism" meaning that "you are supposed to reduce consumption whenever possible…reuse anything that you do have…and finally recycle it if you can't." Text boxes reading "reduce consumption," "reuse," and "recycle" appear on the screen, affirming Saier's advice. We hear from a number of students who have joined him on his dumpster dives, enthusing about the beer they once found. Finally, Saier gives us tips for determining whether dumpstered foods are safe. Fruits and vegetables are easy to assess by look, feel and smell, "if the meat is frozen then you know its good," and stuff without labels is just fine, "we call them mystery cans," he tells the assembled students. "Look at this!" he exclaims from a dumpster, "an absolutely magnificent mango. Sometimes I

wonder why they throw all this stuff away…" (G Word episode "Eco Drag Racing" 2008).

And there were not just anti-consumerist segments, but also features on anti-corporate activism. Online, Planet Green promised to help users "find out who's polluting in your neighborhood" and a *Focus Earth* feature on "eco-terrorism" offered an ambivalent lesson on what to do about it. While this *Focus Earth* feature emphasized eco-terrorism's "extremism" in a highly ambivalent manner, drawing on tropes from coverage of other "dangerous societal elements," the episode was unwilling to take a clear moral stance,[47] leaving an opening for eco-terrorism itself to emerge as yet another lesson in the Planet Green environmental curriculum. This, of course, wasn't remotely overt—and was almost certainly unintentional. But it is worth noting for it gestures to the ungovernability of the "green space" that Planet Green attempted to control.

While surely these apparent outliers were part of Planet Green's effort to subsume even anti-consumerist and anti-corporate sensibilities into the commercial project of brand building, it is also not difficult to see the problems that this might create. Calling out the consumer economy or corporate capitalism hardly makes for advertiser-friendly television to put viewers in what Joseph Turow calls a "buying mood" (1997). Nor does it advance Planet Green's case that the solution to environmental problems lies in strategies of everyday work on the self and lifestyle in ways that are uniquely enabled by brands.

The Planet Green project was rooted in the promise that environmental governance could be transformed into a "green space" of eco-friendly services, products

[47] But, as I discuss in Chapter 3, this ambivalence, filtered through an attachment to normative journalistic objectivity, was present in similar ways when the show featured climate deniers and big oil companies. The refusal to engage in investigation that would result in unambiguous reporting or news we could actually use was a prominent feature when the show tackled topics it presented as "controversial."

and lifestyles that could be fully controlled through good branding. It was also rooted in the fantasy that good branding would successfully enable a new kind of planet saving—one that would unfold seamlessly and require no intervention on the part of the state. Brands could do well by doing good thanks to consumers everyday lifestyle activities, and consumers could self-realize as green thanks to the resources and advice offered by brands. But while I have argued throughout this chapter that Planet Green's project must be taken seriously as productive—that is, productive of a green consumer-citizenship and a new environmentalism—by productive I do not mean that Planet Green was successful in achieving its intended goals. As the contradictions noted here suggest, and the coming chapters elaborate, environmental branding was a far more unruly project than its proponents would care to admit. In Planet Green, as we will see, it did not always go as planned.

Chapter 3: Anxieties, ambivalence and "posting" environmentalism

Introduction

In early June of 2008, Discovery Communications Inc. released a commercial entitled "Just Naked." In it, a young and attractive strawberry blond woman turns to make small talk with a professionally dressed, balding white man who happens to be standing behind her in line. They appear to be at a bank. The floor is carpeted with lush green grass, but otherwise the scene is suitably corporate and unremarkable. "Vvvv," she shivers. "It's frickin' freezing in here! It's like a meat locker." She smiles and returns to facing forward. "I guess so…" he mutters smirking, nervous, embarrassed. His eyes dart side to side.

The woman turns to continue addressing him. As she does so, the customer ahead of her steps toward the teller, thus revealing her naked back. Unperturbed, she goes on cheerfully, logically, "Did you ever think that if everyone wore a little less clothing we wouldn't waste so much energy *crankin'* up the AC? Right?"

"You might be alone on that one," the man responds miserably.

"Really? Look," she observes, gesturing, "the security guard cares about the environment."

The commercial cuts to a portly Asian American man, nude but for his belt and gun. "Nope," he says casually as he strolls by, "Just naked!"

The ad leaves us with the cheeky "Get exposed to a whole new green" in text across a white screen.

"Just Naked" was part of a series of 30-second spots advertising Planet Green in the initial days of its existence. The ads were characterized by a hip sensibility, working to appeal to upscale consumers while refusing middleclass forms of propriety. They "sexed up" environmentalism through the display of women's bodies and by appealing to heteromasculine "bad boy" sensibilities (Gajda quoted in Banet-Weiser, Authentic 2012). They were all committed to superficial forms of representational diversity, which seemed aimed at adding a layer of racialized urban cool or to a mode of address fundamentally structured by whiteness and affluence. If the joke was on anyone in the ads, it was on dorky middle-class white men, too out of touch or too square or too nerdy to invite even ambivalent identification.

In "Do Time with Green," for example, three enormous, heavily tattooed men in prison orange—one African American, two white—show off their shivs, made from eco-friendly materials, of course. One is a recycled toothbrush joined to the lid of a tin can with organic glue. Another is "carved from reclaimed hardwood." The last is fashioned from an old lunch tray—"locally sourced!" observes one of the inmates approvingly. "Beach" featured a nerdy white guy in a Speedo, the crotch of which is encrusted with a blinding array of miniature solar panels. He demonstrates his homemade "solar-powered swimsuit"—his "little gift to Mama Earth"—by grabbing an mp3 payer from a reluctant bikinied sunbather and plugging the device into his butt (doing so produces an awkward whimper of sensual satisfaction). "Feel the power of a whole new green," concludes the ad. The final spot featured Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee and rapper/actor/entrepreneur Ludacris aka Chris Bridges one-upping each other by showing

off to their recycled jewelry (Bridges) or soy ink tattoos (Lee), bragging that by filling a hot tub with "women instead of water" they "saved a hundred and fifty gallons!" (Bridges) or by not showering for seven days they "saved two hundred and seventy-six gallons, blam!" (Lee). With Lee's week-old body odor in mind, viewers are urged to "Get a whiff of the whole new green."

While the ads are wholly lighthearted, poking fun at the earnest and often bourgeois sensibilities that have come to be associated with "ethical consumerism," one can certainly critique their reliance on a number of gender- and race- and class-regressive representations. Their explicit humor relies on the viewers' distance from the thinkability of the prison context (which, as many scholars, as well as news story after news story have shown, is a distance that is both racialized white as well as classed). It relies on the salience of excessive and jokey objectification of women's bodies, as well as the naturalness of a white, heteronormative male viewer at the center of the imagined audience. Other viewers who can "take a joke" are, of course, also welcome to tune in. While the parodic and rehearsed awkwardness of professionalized white men in the ads might make the mockery appear to undermine dominant hierarchies, in the end, in fact, whiteness and hetero-masculinity are everywhere, albeit invisibly, and fully naturalized in the mode of address (see Dyer 1997).

My purpose, however, is not so much to locate racist, classist or hetero/sexist imagery in Planet Green promotional materials—not least because the heavy use of irony and multiple points of identification in these ads make them resistant to easy critique. Rather, I argue that the ad campaign hints at more general anxiety and ambivalence

surrounding the whole Planet Green endeavor—anxiety and ambivalence on the part of Planet Green as well as within the branding of environmentalism more broadly. And further, that these seemingly regressive representations are part of Planet Green's effort to solve an environmentalism that is approached as a problem.

In this chapter, I situate Planet Green as an example of the "branding of politics" in the sense written about by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012). Specifically, by working to brand environmental politics and produce a branded environmental movement (that is, a brand *as* a social movement), Planet Green participated in a broader tendency in brand culture in which politics itself is "harnessed, reshaped, and made legible in economic terms" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 127). But instead of positioning the branding of environmentalism in Planet Green as an achievement, I argue that Planet Green—along with green brands in general—is better understood as a site of struggle. While a brand like Planet Green is undeniably structured according to a commercial logic, this does not mean that it will materialize in ways that are "economically rational" in a pure and abstract sense.

On the contrary, brands are produced by decision makers with their own assumptions about what is (and isn't) commercially feasible. In the case of Planet Green, these assumptions were shaped by the fact that they were held by powerful actors operating within a firm that controls enormous amounts of money. As Planet Green attempted to bring environmental governance together with capturing the "right" kind of eyeballs to sell to advertisers, a whole slew of assumptions and anxieties—about

consumers, about advertisers, about shareholders, and about environmentalism—came to shape the brand on every level.

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, I discussed the way in which media firms' anxiety about the invisibility of the TV audience is central to the imperative to know the audience in finer and finer detail (through ratings, for example, and demographic and psychographic data). In scholarship on branding, this anxiety is acknowledge but rarely made central. Rather, successful brands are, more often than not, the ones that are highlighted—Nike, Sony, Dove, etc.—and analyzed for what they reveal about the logics of branding in contemporary culture. Yet, the success of branding is never guaranteed, as Celia Lury notes, "the brand is not a matter of certainty, but is rather an object of possibility" (Lury 2004, 2). The value of a brand is not simply given, Adam Arvidsson explains, but depends upon ongoing management of something that is "*external* to the brand-owning organization": consumer "attention" and what individuals "think of or do with the brand" (Arvidsson 2006, 7). This means that branding is always about administering a process that can never entirely be brought under a firm's control (Arvidsson 2006, 7). The brand's very existence as such, what Lury calls its "object-ivity," is realized through ongoing discursive and communicative practices: the brand is "an effect of performativity" (Lury 2004, 7, following Butler 1990). This ongoing performativity (by a range of producers and consumers) that brands require for their realization, the huge investment in branding across organizations, and the whole field of brand management, suggest that branding, like ratings discourse, is better understood as ongoing struggle for control than an achievement.

It is in this sense that the branding of environmental politics in Planet Green must be understood as a struggle. Planet Green was fully structured by an ongoing effort to overcome profound fears of consumer unruliness as they came together with equally profound worries about the compatibility of environmentalism and good television. These worries, as I will demonstrate, were expressed in the trade press, the popular press, and, albeit indirectly, within Planet Green's promotional discourse. And they came together to "problematize" environmentalism in a manner that disavowed these anxieties by refiguring them as something that, ostensibly, could be solved by branding. Planet Green problematized environmentalism as boring, unhip, "treehugging," "granola," anticonsumerist, "greenwash," hypocritical, or unconvincing. The struggle of branding environmental politics for television took shape as an effort to "solve" this problematization of environmentalism in a manner guided by the aims, interests, and assumptions of decision makers.

I follow Angela McRobbie (2004), Rosalind Gill (2007), and Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2007, 2012) work on postfeminism and post-racial culture to argue that, in a manner anticipated by the ad campaign described at the outset of this chapter, Planet Green as a whole would seek to solve environmentalism for television by bringing the governmental promises of "strong branding" together with an effort to "post" environmentalism. It would do so by strategically incorporating and repudiating aspects of environmental politics to remake environmentalism as a branded politics. Planet Green worked to post environmentalism with its ironic sensibility, its "aspirational" orientation, its ambivalent embrace of environmentalism as a cause, the way in which it favored an

entrepreneurial, can-do spirit over collective statements of environmental protest, preferred the purportedly neutral world of technoscientific expertise over the "biased" one of politics, and drew upon post-feminist and post-racial sensibilities to make the brand "hip" and "fun." Planet Green's branded environmentalism would be a "new and improved" response to a purportedly impotent, unhip, and "old" (and, implicitly, unprofitable) environmentalism. Posting worked to "move beyond" the "problems" environmentalism posed to branding by situating racialized, gendered and classed forms of entrepreneurialism, personal empowerment, and implicitly, ambivalence as key technologies of the post-environmentalist self.

Problematization, green marketing, and Discovery's anxieties

Planet Green was launched into a market in which actors were both anxious and deeply ambivalent about environmentalism. At the time, the ubiquity of green consumerism and often-dubious "eco-friendly" product claims made green marketing look like nothing more than an environmentally suspect effort to capitalize on an existing consumer fad. This assessment, however, disregards how wholly problematic environmentalism is for branding, for media firms, and for consumer capitalism. It also disregards the work that firms like Discovery undertook to overcome environmentalism's problematic character though ongoing efforts not only to actively construct a green market within this context, but also to fashion this market in line with their own objectives through strategies of branding and governance. In other words, reducing green

to a fad ignores the way matters of the environment are "problematized" in green branding discourse and the way solutions are proposed and enacted.

Following Foucault, Jeremy Packer explains that defining something as "a problem" sets the stage to imagine that something "as governable." When something becomes "problematized" in discourse, or "thought of in terms of a problem to be overcome," its problematization can legitimate particular modes of "governance and self-governance" (Packer 2003, 136). The way Planet Green as well as the broader green marketing discourse defines the "problem" of environmentalism has a "productive capacity," in Jeremy Packer's sense, in that it structures thinking around how it will be solved" (Packer 2009, 238). Planet Green's problematization of environmentalism set the stage for how Planet Green's launch would materialize as a particular kind of solution. It would "legitimate authority, and, by implication, authorize certain solutions while invalidating others" (Packer 2009, 237). Planet Green promised to solve capitalism's environment problem for television. It is by examining the particular problematization of the environment (and the underlying ways in which it was *not* problematized through ongoing disavowal of a number of uncontrollable factors), both on Planet Green and in green marketing discourse more broadly, that one can gain insight into the ways in which Planet Green's structuring anxieties shaped the forms of eco-governance it aimed to enable. I argue that Planet Green's problematization of environmentalism worked to disavow the whole project's structuring contradictions by reducing them to a range of abstractions that could be overcome by good branding.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, despite the surge in green marketing across product categories, when Planet Green was conceived in 2007 advertisers were far from enthusiastic when it came to casting their brands in a green light. Consumers were "not as devoted to the planet as you wish they were" one *AdWeek* reporter cautioned, citing consumers' skepticism about corporate environmental efforts and reluctance to change their lifestyle practices (Dolliver 2008). Market researchers found that consumers were averse to the added labor and cost associated with green products and highly sensitive to greenwashing—all the more so if they were already environmentalists (Dolliver 2008). While corporate social responsibility campaigns remain a popular branding strategy, firms are extremely wary of attaching their brands to environmentalism for fear that consumers might cry foul—as one former Planet Green executive put it to me, if you make green claims consumers are going to "scrutinize your advertisers for sure" (Howell 2013).

Advertisers' eco-reluctance could to be ruinous to Planet Green. Although Discovery's enormous profits from its other channels would have enabled running the channel at a loss, since it became a publicly traded company in 2007 doing so would have violated its new responsibilities to shareholders. Turning a profit sufficient to Discovery's growth imperatives would be impossible without significant sponsorship dollars. And advertisers not only were worried about inviting consumer scrutiny, but they were also, of course, preoccupied with whether Planet Green would deliver consumers "in a buying mood" (Turow 1997) to their advertisements and branded entertainment.

Far from being guaranteed or surely profitable, the "green market" lacks stable thing-ness. On the contrary, it exists to the extent that is constantly being produced through ongoing work by marketers and firms aiming to make profitable the eco-sensibilities of the public by directing them toward the world of eco-friendly lifestyle goods and services. At the time of Planet Green's launch, doing so appealed to firms to the extent that the payoff could be great (green-skewing consumers were believed to be relatively affluent and talkative—if you pulled off successful green pitches, they'd promote you in their social networks (Zerillo 2008)). The risks, however, often seemed even greater. While any market solution to problems related to (if not directly caused by) capitalism's externalities is likely to be rife with contradiction, in the context of green marketing these contradictions seemed to be making marketers particularly nervous.

Out of these worries emerged a whole body of green market research preoccupied with capturing and managing the green market—a pursuit always haunted by its uncertainty. This discourse worked to name the risks associated with green marketing and offer instructions to minimize these risks—instructions that Planet Green followed to the letter. The arguments went as follows: green consumers were only just "awakening" they were "confused" and even "bewildered"; thus marketers ought to communicate with them with "clarity, candor, hope" (Hough 2007). Since consumers' commitments to green living were more "aspirational" than "actual," behavioral changes should be encouraged in "baby steps"; and given consumer sensitivity to greenwashing, corporations ought to address them "authentically and transparently" (Dolliver 2008).

The discourse also worked to slice up potential green consumers into groups and offered specific advice for effective targeting of each one. The attention on the household demanded from moms, for example, and their wish to set a "good example for their children" made them a good target audience; however, they were only likely to take up green consumer lifestyle habits if messaging was brought "down to the personal"—how a given product affected her immediate household and concrete action steps she could take. Although green marketers tend to be preoccupied with young people, the studies indicated that "Matures" (older than boomers) are more likely to be homeowners, purchase locally grown food and energy-efficient appliances so should not be ignored. "Conscious consumers" are likely to look "behind the label" at your business and production practices and blab about it on the internet, but they are also a crucial audience for the same reasons, so give them evidence backing up any environmental claims (Dolliver 2008).

In these ways, green marketing discourse struggled to tame consumers by disavowing their uncontrollability and refiguring it in terms of such seemingly remediable qualities as "awakening" and "confused" or situating them as an oft-ignored market: don't be a downer, don't overwhelm, don't forget about older people, do promote your eco-friendly efforts, and do rely on gendered assumptions. What this discourse fails to disclose is the extent to which this "green" target audience is not so much already there, but rather is being actively produced by this whole cluster of market research and branding practices. Further, it is being produced in ways that are shaped by the assumptions and anxieties of actors within marketing and media firms. By suggesting that

this knowledge about green consumers was simply "discovered," rather than actively produced (in the process of market research and trade reporting and using this knowledge in branding practices and so on), this discourse problematizes environmental marketing in terms of a cluster of "truths" about consumers, purportedly outside the world of branding and marketing. This is a performative process that works to allay industrial fears by disavowing consumers' essential unknowability through a proliferation of knowledge and tips aimed at rendering them knowable, predictable, and profitable.

And for Planet Green, these industrial worries about the potential for consumers to reject green TV were likely only heightened by skepticism in the popular press—skepticism that constituted a second discourse contributing to Discovery's problematization of environmentalism. Commentators predicted that environmental television would fail to entertain. For example, the *New York Times*' Brian Stelter opined that Discovery's attempt to make matters of the environment into "entertaining TV" placed the launch of Planet Green among the riskiest of the year (Stelter 2008). Karen Goldberg Goff of the *Washington Times* quipped "putting up solar panels, creating a compost bin or changing to cloth napkins" hardly sounded "naturally captivating" (Goff 2008). They also questioned whether Planet Green would be credibly environmentalist, pointing out that the celebrities featured on the shows were often dubious environmental experts. Goff wondered if the programming wasn't merely a platform for marketing, a chance for "companies to get out the message 'See, we're not so bad after all'"; she derisively pointed out that the first such company in line would be Wal-Mart (Goff 2008). Stelter likewise observed, "some of Planet Green's advertisers could raise

eyebrows," specifically Hummer manufacturer General Motors which was the channel's "exclusive automobile sponsor" (Stelter 2008).

As Discovery rolled out Planet Green, it worked to offer itself as a solution to the particular problematization that materialized where industrial anxieties about environmental marketing met popular skepticism about eco TV. Here, industrial wisdom about "strong branding"—already concerned with overcoming unruly consumers—came together with more specific efforts to allay worries linked to environmentalism in an elaborate performative endeavor. Through branding, Discovery would work to transform environmentalism into something that was not only safe for advertisers but also would deliver to them what Eileen Meehan calls "bona fide consumers" (Meehan 2005). It would also overcome the popular skepticism about whether a commercial TV channel could be "credibly" environmentalist and whether environmental television could be genuinely "entertaining."

In Chapter 1, I suggested that, in this context, it is useful to understand the task before Discovery as a highly choreographed performance designed to persuade advertisers to invest in the new channel. I pointed out that Discovery publicized its own (internal and unpublished) research to suggest that the market was unambiguously "ready" for green TV (Discovery had found that 40 to 50 percent of US residents were "armchair environmentalists" (Stelter 2008)). The forthcoming "eco-tainment" channel would simply target (rather than produce) "bright greens" or "people who are motivated by the idea that they can help the planet" and would "activate" this already-available audience "in the green space" of eco-friendly consumer capitalism (O'Neill quoted in

Stelter 2008) and "take green to the mainstream" (Carr quoted in Stelter 2008). Discovery described its target audience as one particularly interesting to advertisers: Planet Green was not developed for environmentalists, but for "awakening light greens" who were conceived more as a kind of blank slate, ready to have their environmentalist sensibilities "activated" while being entertained. These consumers were "college students, baby boomers and new parents"—groups known to advertisers for their disposable income and/or propensity for buying new stuff—"who have demonstrated an interest in improving the planet by changing their ways of living" (Levin 2008)[48]—or, as a *Wall Street Journal* reporter cheekily summed up, "advertiser-friendly viewers willing to pay extra for hybrid cars and organic food" (Schechner 2008).

I also pointed out that Planet Green promised to attract advertisers' key target demographic of 18- to 49-year-olds, but more specifically, "media-savvy, social-responsibility millennials… already engaged in the Internet as a resource" (O'Neill quoted in Kaufman 2007). Such viewers would not only consume advertisements on multiple platforms but would also provide advertisers free online labor as "greenfluencers" who eagerly promote their favorite green brands and products within their social networks (Zerillo 2008). In statements such as these, Planet Green spokespeople engage in performative declarations of knowledge aiming to demonstrate that launching environmental television was a good idea—a good idea for advertisers, for Discovery's shareholders, and for consumers. What I want to point out in this chapter, however, is that these statements were also anxious, engaging in ongoing disavowal not

[48] He is likely referring to O'Neill's statement that Planet Green targeted "boomers who look at longevity or legacy issues; first-time parents who want to do what is earth-friendly for their children; and college-age 20-somethings who have grown up in an environmentally conscious atmosphere" (Quoted in Blumenstock 2008).

only of Discovery's own efforts to produce "bright greens" but also of the essential impossibility of knowing whether it is possible to do so. This was an effort to allay advertiser anxieties about the particular risks of green marketing—situating "green" as a site of capitalist possibility.

As Planet Green began to materialize, Discovery addressed these anxieties through statements that were highly sensitized not only to advertiser worries that Planet Green would fail to deliver them bona fide consumers, but also to the popular skepticism that eco-TV could be entertaining and credible. As Discovery began to roll out Planet Green, it disseminated content and promotional language wholly organized around allaying these intersecting anxieties. Discovery spokespeople and press releases ritually repeated that Planet Green would indeed be "entertaining and credible," and that making it so was within Discovery's sphere of influence. "Planet Green proves that sustainable living is entertaining living," declared an early press release (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). In a quote that was printed and re-printed across a range of promotional and news spots, O'Neill affirmed and reaffirmed, "This is a new genre… People don't have any set expectations of what green media is, and we're defining it—as really funny, engaging, entertaining and definitely credible" (quoted in Stelter 2008, for example). For Discovery, producing "entertaining" and "credible" content was crucial to "solving" an environmentalism that was itself approached as a problem. In Planet Green press, as in the broader green marketing discourse, the environmentalist and environmentalism both emerge as potentially unruly entities that required management to align them with Planet Green's brand to add value and generate profits.

In addition, Discovery's discourse betrayed anxieties about the tensions between environmentalism and capitalism, which were likewise codified in the constructs of entertainment and credibility. Compulsively announcing environmentalism's potentially anti-capitalist associations, Discovery problematized green by citing a range of characteristics Planet Green would *not* have as it worked to contain "green" to maintain its alignment with the interests of brand value, lifestyle, and consumerism. Discovery CEO David Zaslav told the *London Times* that Planet Green would be "aspirational, not preachy" (Ashton 2008). Planet Green would not be about "perfection." Rather, as O'Neill explains, "We're thinking about everyone being better—not necessarily perfect" (Stelter 2008). Zaslav adds, "If the standard is perfection, we'll all fail. The journey is to do a little bit better" (Stelter 2008). "Our messaging" a spokesperson promised *TV Week*, "is about being better, not perfect. If we're all just a little bit better, we can make a big difference" (quoted in Kaufman 2007).

Hedging against "perfectionism" was not only a way to maintain Planet Green's appeal to a "can-do" spirit and avoid turning potential viewers off by setting the proverbial bar "too high" (thereby, perhaps, casting the consumer solutions offered on the channel in a dubious light and also making consumers feel powerless against depressing environmental realities), it was also a way of managing the criticism invited by sponsorship deals like that with Chevy/GM since cries of hypocrisy about, for example, GM's environmental record could be reframed as unreasonable perfectionism that ignored (or worse, failed to celebrate) its "baby steps" in hybrid car manufacture.

Not wishing to be associated with an anti-consumerist ethos, political liberalism, or negative messaging, Zaslav distanced the channel from an "old" kind of environmentalism that "was granola and left" (Levin 2008). Zaslav explained, "We're not going to be 'The ice is melting'… We want to engage people in a fun way and in the spirit of what we can all do together'" (Levin 2008). "Fun" is absolutely crucial, as Tommy Lee puts it, "[Environmentalism] is a serious sort of subject, but you got to make it fun or you freak people out" (quoted in Levin 2008) or as Adrian Grenier says of his Planet Green lifestyle show, *Alter Eco* (2008), "We're attempting to avoid the more boring parts of what this show could be" (quoted in Levin 2008). Yet this did not mean that the channel would be pure fun and commercialism, but would credibly "educate and inspire." Zaslav explained that the channel would serve a "higher purpose," operating on a plane above financial gain and commercialism (quoted in Siklos 2007). He promised programming that was "documentary" in orientation, not "reality," hoping that viewers would "[come] back [to Planet Green] for a bit of nourishment, along with your entertainment" (quoted in Ashton 2008).

In this performative discourse, Planet Green hedges against the potential to appear "granola" or "left," political (i.e., "biased"), unfun, unhip, "extreme," boring, "freaky," or too serious. Passionate investment in urgent environmental issues (such as melting polar ice caps) is framed as a kind of crisis-obsessed fanaticism. Yet this is not simply a delegitimation of politics, it is an effort to allay the anxiety that environmentalism itself—its seriousness, its potential to discourage, its potential to be unfun—is a threat to business. Planet Green promised to solve the "problem" of environmentalism for TV. It

would rescue it from its associations with the preachy, political, depressing, and "granola." It is worth noting that Zaslav assumed the term "granola" will speak for itself and does not elaborate, but it is difficult not to think of TV stereotypes in the 80s and 90s of New-Age, anti-consumerist, anti-materialistic, Birkenstock-wearing, TVP-eating, vegetable-juicing environmentalists. Almost always white, educated, middle class and middle aged, such characters were decidedly unhip. Though often heterosexually partnered, their non-normative gender performances—these gentle, feminized men, or women uninterested in the work of normative femininity—often rendered them non-sexual, if not sexually suspect. Although these stereotypes are only barely evoked in the Planet Green promotional discourse, the specter of this unhip, anti-consumer stands as the foil—if not threat—to Planet Green's edgy and fun brand of green. And as a foil it also stands alongside the outspoken political "lefty" and the environmental activist crying doom and gloom. Planet Green guards against these potential pitfalls by promising a fun, positive attitude and a can-do spirit. Yet Planet Green's refusal to identify with more conventional images of environmentalism stands awkwardly alongside its anxiety about its own credibility.

Of course, Planet Green did not invent these anxieties—nor did they dream up in a vacuum the strategies for overcoming them. Zaslav's comments about "nourishing" and "documentary"-style programming sought to differentiate the new channel from "trash" TV in ways, as I discussed in Chapter 1, that tap into longstanding discourses that elevate "nutritious" educational television over mass-appeal broadcast programming and its feminized and working class associations (see Ouellette 2002, 33). Planet Green's

anxieties also had much in common with worries set in motion during the Reagan administration. Reagan's campaign rhetoric, for example, "successfully linked an overall decline in America's international standing and the daily life of its citizens" to environmentalism, which, he argued would have Americans be hotter in the summer and colder in the winter; Reagan's campaign attacked environmentalists as a "special interest" elite constituency (Gottlieb 2005, 185 & 208) insensitive to the everyday comfort of ordinary Americans and out of touch with their concerns (Ehrenreich 1989/1990). Dismissals of environmentalists as a "liberal elite" stand alongside a long history of delegitimating them as fanatics and "longhairs" (Andrews 1999/2006, 190-191). This has occurred in even within "establishment" environmentalist organizations, often, not surprisingly, in the context of efforts to align the interests of industry with certain environmental goals. For example the National Wildlife Federation's Thomas Kimball called environmental activists, "extremists and kooks" and "screamers and yellers" when speaking to the electric power industry in 1971 (Gottlieb 2005, 214, Kimball quoted in Stansbury 1971).[49]

Although terms like "credibility" and "entertainment" are often positioned as having obvious and noncontroversial meanings, upon closer inspection it becomes quite clear that in the case of Planet Green they each constellate around managing a range of anxieties about environmentalism in ways that are informed by highly reductive

[49] Planet Green's promotional language also has precedent in things like the first Earth Day in 1970, which, as environmental policy scholar Robert Gottlieb explains, emphasized a "celebratory" dimension, rather than anything "adversarial" for the organizers didn't want to "alienate the middle class" (Hayes quoted in Gottlieb 2005, 150). Like contemporary "green" strategies, Gottlieb argues that the organizers of the first Earth Day sought consensus among the press, government and the private sector precisely by shifting the focus of environmental intervention from radical activism and structural critiques of the "urban/industrial order" and its environmental consequences *toward* questions of individual lifestyle (Gottlieb 2005, 150). Indeed, as historian Donald Worster observes, most speakers on the first earth day in 1970 called upon "the public to drive less, conserve more, and to question the automobile—indeed, to question a way of life that was based on maximizing the consumption of oil and other natural resources, on promoting private wealth and national prestige as the highest social goals" (Worster 1977/1994, 357). This tension between the fear of alienating the middle class and fear of appearing bourgeois is a tension that continues to haunt green branding, including Planet Green.

industrial beliefs about audiences. Indeed, the Planet Green project was altogether preoccupied with realizing entertainment and credibility in the brand. It did this through the ritualized assertions of its own certainty that it could make green TV into good TV, as cited above, but also by attempting to enlist individuals labor in producing the brand as such. In this way, Planet Green's strategy for overcoming anxieties about environmentalism must be understood at the place where the performativity of brands meets their governmental promises.

Posting environmentalism

I argue that Planet Green worked, on the one hand, to make environmentalism into good TV and, on the other hand, to make TV into good environmentalism, and that it did so through a process of "posting." The "post-environmentalism" that Planet Green worked to enact had much in common with—and in many ways occupied then same cultural space—as postfeminism and other "post" discourses. While much has been written on the proliferation of such discourses in contemporary culture, in order to understand their particular role in Planet Green, I find Angela McRobbie's and Rosalind Gill's work on postfeminism and Sarah Banet-Weiser's work on the meeting of postfeminism and postracial discourse especially helpful.

I find their work useful in this case because it illuminates posting as a process and, I would add, a struggle, much as branding is a process and an ongoing struggle. This struggle aims to simultaneously incorporate and undermine, for example, feminism, or, in the case of Planet Green, environmentalism. Posting is done through ritual and repetition,

through a whole vocabulary of "choice" and "freedom," and through technologies of distancing (such as "irony," cultural savvy, the ability to "take a joke," etc.). It celebrates the individual entrepreneur and personal empowerment; it centers the self as a site of work and it is intimately linked to neoliberalism.

In order to see how Planet Green posted environmentalism, it is useful to briefly review this work on postfeminism. Postfeminism, writes, Angela McRobbie, is "an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined"; it "positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force" (McRobbie 2004, 255). Postfeminism situates feminism squarely in the past while celebrating young women as privileged bearers of freedom and choice wherein "feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant"; "Feminism is cast into the shadows" (255).

Postfeminism also reacts against "political correctness" as an oppressive and humorless regime, tapping into an irony that relies upon generational difference and youthful cultural savvy—hipness and an ability to "take a joke" become an indication of one's "sophistication and 'cool'" (McRobbie 2004, 259) as well as one's difference from ugly and fearful figures like the "feminist killjoy." This kind of "irony and knowingness," writes Rosalind Gill (2007), is central to the postfeminist sensibility. Irony hails audiences "as knowing and sophisticated consumers, flattering them with their awareness of intertextual references and the notion that they can 'see through' attempts to manipulate them" (Gill 2007, 159, following Goldman 1992). Further, "Irony is used also

as a way of establishing a safe distance between oneself and particular sentiments or beliefs, at a time when being passionate about anything or appearing to care too much seems to be 'uncool'" (Gill 2007, 159).

And in postfeminist media culture in particular, "irony has become a way of 'having it both ways', of expressing sexist, homophobic or otherwise unpalatable sentiments in an ironized form, while claiming this was not actually 'meant'" (Gill 2007, 159), it is, borrowing David Gauntlett's (2002) term, a "knowing ridiculousness" to overt sexist imagery (Gill 2007, 160). For Gill, irony has the effect of making critique more difficult, as it anticipates and dismisses it in one maneuver; for Banet-Weiser, postfeminism situates irony itself as a politics, a "much more personal kind of politics than a more activist, public politics" (Banet-Weiser 2007, 212). Likewise, throughout its short existence, Planet Green was relentless in its derision of "treehuggers," yet was also continually working to position itself as credibly environmentalist in a repeated ironic maneuver that was similarly worked out through a personalized politics and what Banet-Weiser calls "commodity-driven empowerment" (Banet-Weiser 2007, 202).

It is not difficult to see how posting is useful to power (e.g., white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalism and its various manifestations in branding[50] and consumer culture): it promises to contain threats (like feminism, for example) by simultaneously incorporating and repudiating them. In the case of brands, the containment of such threats promises to manage market uncertainties and consumer unruliness in the interests of profits and brand value as it struggles to transform political activism and social

[50] Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) has demonstrated how post-feminism has become useful to branding more particularly in, for example, the Dove Real Beauty campaign. And as post-feminism comes together with post-racial discourse, she argues, "Popular discourses of race and images of nonwhites… become cultural capital in the contemporary marketing world" (Banet-Weiser 2007).

movements into a mode of individual empowerment achieved within and through the market. For this reason, "posting" can be understood as an ambivalent process that is laced with fear. This is much aligned with the way in which the process of branding environmentalism is shot through with anxiety, as I have been arguing throughout this chapter. McRobbie's formulation of this is especially evocative: postfeminism's repeated repudiation of feminism is indicative of anxiety about its "afterlife," a signal that feminism itself continues to instill fear (McRobbie 2004). Feminism haunts the cultural space of postfeminism. And as I will show, environmentalism haunted Planet Green.

Planet Green's particular brand of environmentalism, with its simultaneous incorporation and repudiation of environmental politics and its heavy reliance on irony—not to mention its insistence that the objectification of women's bodies and celebrations of heteromasculine excess ought to make environmentalism "fun" and "for everyone"—has much in common with postfeminism this sense. Planet Green was not simply "backlash" against conventional forms of environmental activism; it involved a process by which branding worked to undermine "treehugging" and "left" forms of environmentalism as "old," "unhip," and impotent—indeed, the feminist killjoy has a corollary in Planet Green's other, the preachy, tree-hugging environmentalist, turning down the heat in winter and the A/C in the summer, making everyday life less comfortable and more laborious. But Planet Green's repudiation of environmentalism was always ambivalent for it also celebrated environmentalism as a "mainstream" value and "common sense," stressing the importance of saving the planet, albeit through "new"

and advertiser-friendly strategies—strategies that often relied on the transformative promises of postfeminism to make eco-TV profitable.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will analyze Planet Green's effort to post environmentalism in its television programming and web content. In doing so, I will also attend to the contradictions that emerged in this process, the moments at which posting failed to contain industrial anxieties and failed to ease the tensions related to branding environmentalism for television. I examine the moments at which industrial anxieties about appealing to aging "affluents," upscale consumers, or "middle America" trumped the will to make environmentalism "hip and cool," as well as the moments when environmental politics refused to be corralled into a post-y narrative. I argue that Planet Green offers insight into an industrial "will to post" for commercial ends, as well as the limits of posting environmentalism in neoliberal brand culture.

Posting as an industrial strategy

I now shift from the industrial discourse issuing from Discovery spokespeople, toward the *stuff* of the Planet Green brand—the material with which individuals were invited to interact through the TV network, the websites, and the marketing events in the lead up to Planet Green's launch. It is clear from the promotional discourse—including the Planet Green commercials—that Discovery aimed to align environmentalism with a post sensibility to remake it in line with commercial goals. More particularly, this strategy came together with the governmental aims of branding, for posting environmentalism promised to help Planet Green address a range of industrial anxieties

by guiding consumer behavior toward the ends of brand value across an array of interactive platforms.

Specifically, Planet Green's effort to post environmentalism was fully intertwined with its brand strategy, fully intertwined with its effort to enlist individual's affective investments in the brand itself and invite them to incorporate the brand into their everyday lives. By making environmentalism "hip and fun" (among other things), Planet Green's launch, its initial slate of programming, and its website worked in tandem to create an "[ambience] for 'controlled forms of freedom'" (Arvidsson 2006, 16), to offer itself as a resource through which individuals could construct green "identit[ies], social relations and shared experiences" (3), and to insert itself as a valuable occupant "in the life-world (or to use marketing terminology, the '*minds*') of consumers… to subsume and appropriate what consumers do *with the* [*Planet Green*] *brand in mind* as a source of surplus value and profits" (7). By doing so, Planet Green attempted to "work as a kind of ubiquitous managerial devices by means of which everyday life is managed, or perhaps better, programmed, so that it evolves in ways that can potentially generate the right kind of attention (and hence, brand value)" (7).

Although brands always aim to structure consumers' activities, Celia Lury explains that the brand also situates itself as a site of "indeterminacy, openness or potential" (Lury 2004, 47) to be completed by the interactive labor of consumers. Brands work by *enabling* rather than shutting down forms of action. Brands rely on consumers' freedom and spontaneous activities for value (Arvidsson 2006). Planet Green worked to delineate an arena of freedom through a channel and websites that would have

"something for everyone" and "be like life, only greener" (O'Neill quoted in Goff 2008)—its tips, games, quizzes, and news were customizable along interest and lifestyle lines, and into the minute details of everyday life. But—in ways that, on the face of it, seem to undermine the "openness" and "freedom" that branding relies upon for value—Planet Green was also continually working to *shut down, repackage, and distance itself from* forms of environmentalism that were perceived to be bad for business. Planet Green was characterized by an irrepressible control impulse and was clearly not "for everyone" in a number of ways.

I argue that Planet Green evidenced four anxieties. These were fears of being associated with (1) a "liberal elite," (2) an earnest, feminized/emasculating and labor-intensive environmental lifestyle, (3) anti-consumerism and asceticism, and (4) greenwash. The Planet Green brand worked to "post" each of these anxieties, or "move beyond" them, through a range of strategies that both incorporated and renounced a fearful other in order to make environmentalism advertiser friendly and respond to the skepticism in the green marketing and popular press discourse. This project was inextricable from Discovery's struggle to structure individuals' existing environmentalist commitments toward brand-building activities.

This four-fear schema is, of course, reductive. These anxieties overlap significantly and the programs I use to illustrate each one could often just as easily exemplify another. It is useful, however, because it helps to demonstrate how anxieties about environmentalism came together with anxieties about branding. It also throws into

sharp relief the way in which the contemporary impulse to "post" is intimately tied to anxieties and ambivalences that emerge in fantasies of saving the world through brands.

Planet Green worked to address each of these anxieties in ways that were both performative and governmental. They were performative in that Planet Green's strategies to assuage these anxieties was part of a brand-story aimed at advertisers to persuade them that Planet Green was a good investment; they were governmental in that Planet Green actively worked to enlist individuals in making it so.

However, neither advertiser nor individual compliance can ever be assured. This fact surely generated an additional layer of anxiety for Planet Green. And it also meant that no matter how much minute choreography and careful planning went into the brand, things might not go as planned.

Post-tree hugger. Or, fear of (classed) politics.

In the lead up to Planet Green's launch, Associated Press television writer David Bauder wrote of a recent conversation with Planet Green's Eileen O'Neill, "Planet Green doesn't want to be a network that appeals only to tree huggers and will always resist a heavy-handed approach… Instead of scolding people not to waste paper by using juice boxes, the network will profile a person who built a business upon recycling them" (Bauder 2008). In other words, Planet Green's aim to make green "mainstream" was not only about making environmentalism fun, entertaining, and consumerist. It was also was rehabilitative project that situated branding itself (which encompassed a can-do entrepreneurial spirit) as rehabilitative. In the lead up to Planet Green's launch, a

Washington Post reporter wrote, "It is a sign of the quickly changing ethos on the environment that until only recently, the term 'tree-hugger' was considered an insult in many quarters. Now, it is a valuable brand inside a global, mainstream television network" (Ahrens 2007a). Through branding, Discovery would rescue environmentalism from itself and, in the words of Discovery's president of digital media, Bruce Campbell "continue doing what it does best: bringing green living to the masses" (Ahrens 2007a).

And as the brand materialized, it became increasingly clear that Planet Green's effort to move beyond (i.e., "post") "tree hugging" and "heavy handed" environmental politics and make environmentalism "entertaining" for "the masses" meant something very specific. When Planet Green launched, for example, it worked to align the brand with purportedly "all-American" pastimes and "noncontroversial" fun. As I noted in Chapter 2, Planet Green reps attended the Indianapolis 500 and handed out T-shirts and beach balls, and sponsored a cleanup following the race (Stelter 2008). It staged "Get your Green On" events at Major League Baseball games in Washington, Milwaukee, San Diego, San Francisco and Oakland (Mark Award 2009). At the Washington Nationals game, Discovery CEO David Zaslav threw out the ceremonial first pitch and the National's LEED-certified stadium's JumboTron counted down to the 6 p.m. shift from Discovery Home content to the new slate of Planet Green programming (Stelter 2008). At a Milwaukee Brewers game, reps rewarded hybrid drivers with free parking, prizes for wearing "green clothing" and a "random act of green-ness" would earn one fan the privilege of throwing out the first pitch. Milwaukee's Klement's Racing Sausages

employees—wearing Planet Green t-shirts—greeted fans who arrived on mass transit, giving them a free ticket to a future game among other things (Fultz 2008).

In line with the wisdom on branding, these events and guerilla-marketing activities doubled as environmental activism and worked to position Planet Green as "fun" while enlisting individuals in a range of branded do-good activities (Maul 2008). In this way they sought to "incorporate not only (aspects of) the consumer, but also (aspects of) the context of use or wider environment, inserting itself into the activities and entities that exceed the individual consumer and are understood in terms of collectivities such as fans, lifestyles, or communities" (Lury 2004, 42).[51]

In this way, Planet Green worked to rescue environmentalism from the depressing environmental realties and associations with a liberal elite. In this way, posting environmentalism's associations with a liberal elite had little to do with casting a wide net to address the diverse environmental concerns of Americans positioned differently with respect to race, class, gender, geography, sexuality, ability, and lived experience. Rather, Planet Green aimed to refuse particularities of race, class, gender, sexuality, political commitment, and regional identity. Unsurprisingly, in the context of the hetero-patriarchal white supremacist assumptions that govern industrial fantasies about "typical" and American-ness, this refusal of particularity manifested in the channel's central programs, *Greensburg* (2008-2010). Produced by Leonardo DiCaprio's production company Appian Way, *Greensburg*, a 13 episode docu-series, followed the green rebuilding of a Kansas town devastated by a 2007 tornado. Planet Green framed the

[51] "Or, to reverse the point of view," Lury continues, "points of access to the brand have now come to include not simply the point of purchase and associated advertising and promotion, but also 'special' events" (Lury 42).

series as a story of the "rebirth of a rural town in Middle America into a model for the future" and a "story of a community coming together and facing the enormous task of greening a small city… an inspiring look into the human spirit" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).

But while *Greensburg* worked to democratize "going green" by disarticulating it from a "liberal elite," it did far more than this for it did so by positioning normative whiteness against "lefty" politics. For example, Greensburg is set up in terms of the town's "conservative" American typicality, which in addition to an exclusive focus on residents with white bodies (except brief feature on a Latina recipient of a Habitat for Humanity home in late-season episode), draws on white-centric narratives of place (disavowing histories of displacement that cut through the narratives of most Americans who are racialized non-white). In *Greensburg*'s first installment, City Administrator Steve Hewitt tells us, "Greensburg, Kansas is very typical of the average, small town American—Midwest American [sic]. Built in the eighteen hundreds. Traditional Main Street. Not real big. Not too small. Focused on family. We go to church. We go to school. We know our neighbors. We root for the high school football team…" The voiceover is set against footage of high school cheerleaders, children playing on a playground, elderly residents hugging each other, a grain elevator pouring out wheat. The voiceovers and interviews rely upon, reproduce, and endorse an all-white nostalgia, in which the wholesome and "typical American" is a white, church-going Christian, belongs to a particular kind of family, and for whom "school" can be symbolized by a throng of white cheerleaders and football players and fans. Other residents express similar sentiments,

often emphasizing a history of geographical place-ness and close-knit community over countless generations. “It’s a great place to have kids. You could let your kids walk down the street, not have to worry about them,” says Mary Merhoff. Another resident tells the camera, “Greensburg has been home to us for generations. And we’ve lived together as a community for so long. We are so close-knitted [sic]. We are such a big family. This is just our home” (Greensburg episode 1 season 1 "The Tornado" 2008). The show hedges against associations with the “liberal elite” by showcasing the “typical,” largely working class, white, Christian, and patriotic. It features stories of those who profess to strongly identify with normative values of multigenerational family togetherness. Worried, perhaps, about alienating an imagined “middle American” viewer uncomfortable with racial diversity, non-normative gender performance, and environmentalism itself, *Greensburg* offers viewers a way of being green that distant from “lefty” politics and urban sensibilities associated with the “liberal elite.”

By posting environmentalism in *Greensburg*, Planet Green did more than represent a post-environmentalism that repudiates liberal elitism in favor of white conservatism, it also produced this non-partisan middle ground precisely through enterprising individuals and brands: Greensburg’s green rebuild was made possible not through state intervention or collective action, but rather through the appeals of enterprising individuals to private corporations. Conventional political avenues were bypassed and a post-partisan solution to environmental problems was literally enacted in the show as SunChips sponsored the town’s new business incubator, Leonardo DiCaprio donated to overcome a “funding gap,” and the public school rebuild was enabled by

partnerships with the likes of Brita and General Motors. The town's apparent normativity—that is, the purported absence of particularities in a white, conservative, agricultural, Christian, family-oriented town—and the ruin that resulted when the 2007 tornado leveled the town came together to position Greensburg as an ideal site, a kind of tabula rasa, for this post-political intervention.

If Planet Green wanted to make environmentalism "hip" and "fun" the painfully earnest and glaringly white *Greensburg* seemed like an odd choice—especially at a time when racial diversity had become a kind of cultural capital in dominant media culture (Banet-Weiser 2007, 202). But in the end, it hardly mattered if *Greensburg* was entertaining—or, for that matter, credibly environmentalist, for what it could offer to sponsoring brands was enormous. It promised to "move beyond" partisan politics by positioning enterprise and branded intervention as the route to reconciling environmentalism with conservatism. *Greensburg* engaged in no analysis of the structural causes of environmental destruction or political obstacles to achieving a less environmentally destructive future. On the contrary, it celebrated the possibilities of "going green" through brands. While it seems unlikely that *Greensburg* could have succeeded in inviting consumers into activities that would co-produce the Planet Green brand, it did offer sponsoring brands a platform ostensibly safe from politics on which to add green value to their brands and deliver the "Middle American" eyeballs that industry presumed were less prone to scrutinizing corporate environmental records. In *Greensburg*'s post-partisan politics, offering viewers entertaining content mattered little when sponsorship was assured.

Post-granola. Or, fear of feminized earnestness/labor-intensive lifestyle

While Planet Green's preoccupation with "Middle America" and the "mass" audience may seem odd given Planet Green's status as an upper-tier cable channel and the more general belief among advertisers that educated, affluent, and politically liberal consumers are a safer audience for green messages, this preoccupation structured a great deal of the brand. And just as Planet Green would not be for "Tree Huggers," neither would it be what Eileen O'Neill called "finger-wagging"; instead, she said on the eve of its launch, "it's sexy, it's interesting, it's irreverent" (Bauder 2008). This may seem straightforward, but in the programming it becomes clear that Planet Green's effort to move beyond finger-wagging environmentalists was structured by anxiety about the feminized and earnest associations of environmental nagging and eco-lifestyle, anxiety that dovetails with worries about their emasculating effects. Alienating men on this basis would be a problem for brands seeking the valuable and elusive 18-49 year-old male demographic. Planet Green moves beyond environmental lifestyle's gender problem with celebrations of heteromasculine excess.

Thus, Planet Green worked to post environmentalism's gender problem. For example, in an online feature promoting a *G Word* (2008) segment, "Making Green Macho," a Planet Green writer asked "the ladies out there": "How many of you are getting the all-too-frequent eye-roll from your male mate?" presumably about their lifestyle environmentalism. *G Word* had the solution with a "manly meet and greet" with Jonathan Goodwin and his "biodiesel muscle car" (Billera 2008). While the feature was

almost laughably heteronormative, it was far from a one-off in the larger context of Planet Green. Rather its structuring logic characterized an enormous part of the brand.

Implicitly, this hypothetical eye-roll responds to such unbecoming feminized behaviors as nagging and being preachy or shrill (about, perhaps, turning off lights or leaving the water running or eating local, organic, or vegetarian cuisine). It also responds to the stereotype that green lifestyle itself is "girly," or, if not explicitly feminized, then at the very least associated with a liberal professional middle class *habitus* often attacked from the right on the basis of effeminacy, helpfully illustrated by one conservative blogger who argues that the liberal professional middle class bastion National Public Radio is characterized by a "highly feminized, pantywaist perspective" and presumes to speak to an audience of "effete, soft, balding, granny glasses-wearing, oh-so-intellectual, cultured sophisticate[s]" (xPraetorius 2014). In a related manner, the anxiety about green's girly-ness is wholly intertwined with the anxiety that "green living" is a matter of special concern for a "liberal elite" out of touch with "mainstream" American men.

On Planet Green, entire series were devoted to fending off masculinized eye-rolls. In them, worries about associations with a "liberal elite" came together with worries about green's feminized connotations. Although Planet Green aimed to appeal to the growing popular green sensibility characterized the mid-2000s—a sensibility that marketers agreed had special resonance with women and the liberal middle classes—in a way that seemed paradoxical it put what appears to have been a great deal of effort into refusing green's feminized and liberal professional middle class associations.

Shows in this category were characterized by an assertive masculine ethos that flew in the face of professional middle class sensibilities and puritan forms of restraint. Careful not to make eco-lifestyle appear too labor intensive for male viewers or interfere with an imagined independent spirit, Planet Green's male-targeted shows typically positioned the work of lifestyle as a kind of raucous play, often performed through irreverent humor, aggressive risk-taking, testing the limits of techno-scientific innovations, spectacular displays of laziness, and objectification of women's bodies. These shows hedge against the elitist, feminized (or emasculating) aspects of "green lifestyle" by inviting viewers into a branded fantasy centered on raucous play and flexing technological muscles in extreme experiments in green technology.

While on the one hand, this strategy reflected industrial assumptions about how to make environmentalism "entertaining" for a "middle American" mass assumed to be suspicious of "good for you" TV, on the other hand, it worked to situate branding itself as the rehabilitative technology for bringing green to the mainstream.

The quiz show *Go for the Green* (2008), for example, was hosted by actor/comedian Tom Green (famous for adolescent bathroom humor such as his 1999 hit "The Bum Bum Song"). The show promised to bring Green's "irreverent sense of humor" to a "fast, furious, fun and unpredictable half-hour" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008) with categories like "BEER!," relentless teasing of contestants, and violently shoving ten-dollar bills at audience members who answered eco-questions correctly (winners were sent on eco-getaways to places like Costa Rica).

Mean Green Machines (2008) promised that green vehicles would be no less "fast

and furious" than their eco-unfriendly counterparts, and pit them against one another in an "adrenaline-packed fight to the finish line" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). These "turbocharged thrill ride[s]" tested the limits of "rough rugged and mean" hybrid and solar-powered vehicles in an "all out drag race" or a "high stakes competition" or "no-holds barred battle" with conventional ones (On TV: Mean Green Machines 2009). With episodes ranging from a drag race pitting a canola-powered SUV against a conventional Hummer, a "Smart Cart Smack Down" to an "extreme motocross" (in which "the sleek and electric Zero Motorcycle" goes head to head against "the reigning champ of motocross - the Honda CR250V") to a "Snowmobile Shakedown," "Sun fueled Showdown," to an "Airborne Extreme," "Truck Stomp" (June 19, 2008), an "All Terrain Trample" (June 24, 2008) to a "Red Rock Rumble" ("When it comes to rough, rugged and mean, not much compares to the Land Rover. But even this vehicle is put to its limit" when it is raced against "a team of tough talking roadsters and their old electric Land Rover") (Team Planet Green 2008e). The episodes did double duty by not only showcasing sponsors' products, but also recasting green living as a form of raucous masculinized play.

Likewise, *Battleground Earth* (2008), a 10-episode, cross-country "eco face-off" between Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee and rapper/actor/entrepreneur Chris Bridges aka Ludacris, also worked to guard against the specter of the "hippy" granola figure through hetero-masculinized forms of excess. Both celebrities offer a hip edginess thanks to their association with highly sexualized music videos and lavish lifestyles. Bridges' performance as a famous rapper whose videos have been the object of controversy and

censorship (notwithstanding his capitalist cred as an extremely successful businessman) is perhaps assumed to add racialized "hipness" to a slate of reality programming that is otherwise almost entirely white. On the show, Bridges and Lee, accompanied by their "ecorages," compete in a range of challenges to "battle against the toxic forces destroying Mother Earth" (About Battleground Earth 2008), in such activities as planning "green funerals" for the "death of rock" and "death of rap" respectively, "eco-races" of solar powered vehicles, and rescuing recyclables from trash cans and dumpsters around Oakland, California.

The show is structured around ambivalently celebrating Lee and Bridges' "hard-charging, hard-partying, carbon-laden" superstar lifestyles (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008)—on the one hand, the fun of the show invites viewers to be entertained by Lee and Bridges excessive objectification of women while on the other, viewers are invited to distance themselves from these celebrities and their cushy lifestyles and enormous carbon footprints. For example, while an online promotional article opens by asking, "Is it true? Have Tommy Lee and Luda traded in their bad boy ways and cute music video girls for a responsible, greener way of life where water conservation becomes sexier than lathered up babes?" (Root 2008), on the show it soon becomes quite clear giving up "babes" and "bad boy ways" was never on the table and, in fact, not doing so hardly precluded the forms of environment saving on *Battlground Earth*.

The sole woman in the "ecorages" is Danish singer/actor/model Nina Bergman (consistent with the show's commitment to racialized segregation, she is on Lee's team). Much of the horsing around on *Battleground Earth* revolves around jokily harassing her.

At one point, Ludacris' team kidnaps and mock-tortures her. At another, Lee theatrically drags her into his bunk on the tour bus. And at yet another, Lee's ecorage member, Diggity Dave Aragon, clambers into a camping tent shouting, "I want to get on top of Nina!" Likewise, many of the eco-challenges center on objectifying women's bodies—albeit always incorporating an ironic distance as viewers are invited to be entertained by our understanding of celebrities as excessive. When persuading Lee and Bridges to "spread the word" about water conservation, pollution, and the plight of Las Vegas reservoir Lake Mead, for instance, Comedian Wayne Brady promises them "bikinis, drinks, beautiful ladies" and air conditioning. When Lee proposes his Guinness record-breaking largest-ever group shower—a sexy water-conservation extravaganza—Bridges responds, "If it's all women, I'm down." The show also delights in the stars' spectacular displays of laziness, as, after a night of partying, Aragon is too hung over to participate in a nature challenge or, after an hour-long hike, group members grumble, "I almost died out here!" and "We've been walking for like three days!" Throughout the series, the stars engage in a continual stream of derisive verbal abuse and one-upmanship: Lee is ridiculed for his infamous homemade sex tape, the teams hurl insults back and forth, Bridges' ecorage pokes fun at their dorky nature guide, Ranger Matt, and Lee and Bridges place $1000 bets on the challenges to raise the stakes already in place on the show, dubbing each other "Toxic Tommy" and "Luda the Polluta" (Battleground Earth 2008).

In both *Mean Green Machines* and *Battleground Earth*, going green is offered as a gendered form of play. Viewers are invited to be entertained by hetero-masculinized

forms of excess. On the former (and later Planet Green shows, like *Coolfuel* (2009), *Future Food* (2010), *Planet Mechanics* (National Geographic Channel UK 2008, Planet Green 2010), *Ultimate Power Builders* (2009)), men push the boundaries of the possible with "extreme" machines. While the show does offer green "lessons," the lessons are not really for viewers to take up at home, for they involve greatly exceeding legal speed limits, access to high tech machinery, and risky, unapproved alterations to off-the-lot vehicles. Instead, for viewers, the act of watching television, going online, and adopting particular orientations toward the promise of technological innovation and brands are offered as practices of citizenship. *Mean Green Machines* is explicitly positioned as a male-targeted show and offers a template for a male-gendered eco-citizenship that is distanced from everyday work on the self or home. It offers male viewers a form of eco-citizenship positioned against the Birkenstock-wearing "lefty" hippy in an ambivalent discourse of class that celebrates the excess of capitalist production while tapping into an anti-elite, populist masculinity.[52] Like the NASCAR media analyzed by Mary Vavrus (2007), in *Mean Green Machines*, Planet Green worked to attach white, hetero-patriarchal forms of masculine "cool" to a potentially "uncool" subject (environmentalism) in order to enlist the elusive and highly valuable 18-49 year old male demographic in the brand and at the same time persuade advertisers to buy their eyeballs.

Although half the cast of *Battleground Earth* is made up of Black men from the Southside of Chicago, this does little to undermine Planet Green's structuring

[52] It thus draws upon on notions of "authentic" white masculinity that Mary Vavrus has written about in her work on NASCAR dads—attempting to capitalize on the kind of "masculinist spectacle" (Burstyn in Vavrus 248) often used in commercial media to "[sell] sports and their fans to advertisers" (Vavrus 2007, 245-261).

whiteness.[53] Rather, the show combines a post-racial logic with strategies for targeting a white male demographic by bringing racial difference to the audience as, in Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2007) words "a commodity" that is, "a street style, an individual characteristic, and a commercial product" (202) in a narrative that markets racial difference, particularly Blackness, "as cool, authentic, and urban"—a commercial strategy that has "proven to be incredibly lucrative economic tools for marketing to broad, especially white, audiences" (204).

More particularly, *Battleground Earth* enlists postracial represenations to move beyond environmentalism's association with uncool and implicitly white granola-type greenies and assure male viewers that eco-lifestyle can be cool. And it does so in ways that shore up a gendered division of eco-labor. That is, *Battleground Earth* does offer viewers tips on water conservation and changing incandescent light bulbs for compact fluorescents; it encourages the use of refillable water bottles, and teaches viewers how to recycle old electronics, purchase "greener" ones, make biodiesel, install solar panels, and promises "behind-the-scenes product info" on a "waterless" carwash/bike-wash spray to help "save mileage and money while keeping your hybrid sparkly and clean" (Root 2008). However, it is clear that the work of changing light bulbs, washing cars, purchasing and reusing water bottles, cleaning homes is not really *for* celebrities like Tommy Lee and Ludacris or those who are called upon to identify with their

[53] However, the unpredictabilities inherent to the reality genre do create ruptures to the invisibility of Planet Green's whiteness, as one of Ludacris' ecorage members points out the whitened assumptions embedded in an eco-challenge involving riding a chairlift at a ski resort. As the groups head up on the chair lift, three of Ludacris' ecorage members ham up their terror of heights on the lift. "Have you ever been on one of those? Have you ever been skiing? Nina Bergman asks, incredulous. "No!" shouts Big Willie Box. "You're from the Caucasus Mountains! We're from the west side of Chicago. There's a big difference!"

masculinized excessive ethos—and likewise, the ways in which the stars enact eco-tips, such as the world's largest group shower, are likewise not intended for *us* to do at home.

These shows hedge against worries that programming about "green lifestyle" might be elitist, feminized or "boring" by offering a version of eco-citizenship that frames masculinized work as raucous play. The show operates as platforms for advertising products at the same time that it worked to cultivate a specifically masculinized template for eco-citizenship that rejects the everyday labor of green lifestyles.

The contradiction, of course, was that most of the programming on Planet Green and much of the web content was precisely aimed at feminized individuals, inviting them to do the work of lifestyle. Although the site insisted that this was "easy" and "anyone can do it" this was clearly not the case. Thus Planet Green's worry about keeping masculinized viewers involved in the brand, assuring them that the work of green living was not really for them to do, beyond watching the shows and going online, was in fact a Janus-faced one; this anxiety's other was a constant preoccupation with enlisting viewers into the (historically feminized) labor of green lifestyling and consumerism, a governmental project aiming to invite individuals to become green consumers and do the labor of brand building for which advertisers will pay.

Much of Planet Green's pedagogy for green consumer citizenship and self-realization concerned everyday work on the self and home. It aimed to guide individuals toward "green" products and practices in order to transform various labors of lifestyle—decorating and design, cooking, shopping, cleaning, entertaining, doing laundry, as well

as consuming related media—into brand value. But if, as green marking discourse cautioned, consumers were wary of green lifestyling on the basis of its presumed drudgery, Planet Green had to make it "easy." If they were prone to getting derailed, "confused" and "overwhelmed," by green information, Planet Green would provide a handful of experts to guide them toward appropriate conduct by "translating" green jargon into lay-speak and simple tasks. Although the programs maintained a resolutely gender-neutral mode of address—hosts exclaimed, "anyone can do it!" and shows featured male and female guests in nearly equal number—Planet Green worked hard to recast what was, for the most part, the historically feminized labor of lifestyle as "simple," "easy" and "fun" things you can do at home. And it did so overwhelmingly through expertise that was professionalized, whitened, and gendered male.

On *Emeril Green* (2008-2010), for example, celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse would help a guest pupil overcome "food fears" and "intimidating" ingredients (cooking fish or vegetarian cuisine, for example) in a Whole Foods Market-based cooking lesson. Donning his chef's whites, Lagasse would take his guests on "shopping trips" introducing them to local, organic ingredients (as well as faddish health foods that raise complicated environmental questions, like quinoa) and techniques for preparing them. On *Renovation Nation* (2008-2010), Steve Thomas (former host of the PBS series *This Old House*) promised, "Whether your house is new or old, your project big or small, Steve shows just how easy it is to go green." Thomas visited people "all over the country renovating green" and taught renovators and viewers mini-lessons about green building materials and reuse and recycling strategies. On *Stuff Happens* (2008), host Bill Nye (most famous

for the PBS children's educational science program, *Bill Nye the Science Guy*) showed viewers "how simple, easy changes can reduce the environmental cost of things we love," teaching them the "do's and don'ts" of cleaning products, toothpaste selection, moth prevention, etc. (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).

Planet Green was heavily reliant on enlisting these feminized forms of labor in the production of its brand value. But given that Planet Green was structured by anxiety about consumers' aversion to labor, its efforts to achieve this aim became wholly intertwined with its efforts to alleviate this anxiety. And thanks to the larger context of industrial assumptions about feminized audiences, the "safest" solution, it seemed, was to disavow the laborious nature of these activities while simultaneously reinforcing a regressive sexual division of both labor and expertise. Viewers are addressed as "confused," and are called upon to submit themselves to these forms of masculinized professional/credentialed knowledge. Drawing upon historically normative white- and male-centric signifiers of credibility and expertise,[54] in these didactic how-to programs, eco-lessons were dispensed by professionalized white male hosts—Nye, for example, is described in Planet Green press as an award-winning scientist, engineer, comedian, author and inventor (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).[55] These programs showcased the expert hosts engaged in voluntary, pleasurable or "helping" work. These performances of leisured labor—Lagasse sampling gelato at Whole Foods, Nye in humorously excessive protective gear examining a pest problem in his attic—disavow the

[54] Signifiers including the tropes of educational television—even enlisting these experts who got their starts on PBS shows—*Bill Nye the Science Guy* and *This Old House*.
[55] In this way, the channel plays on assumptions about "credibility" and avoiding the feminized associations with "preachiness" thanks to industrial assumptions about "objectivity" in hosts who inhabit normative white, professionalized masculinity—something I will return to later in this chapter.

laborious character of the tasks recommended. There seem to be no embodied or personal stakes for these hosts and the work they do is framed as a pleasurable kind of leisure. In fact, they don't even seem to be working. Grinning at the camera, Thomas endlessly exclaims, "it's easy" and "anyone can do it!" while Lagasse insists that making fresh local food at home is "very very simple" as he relished the sensory pleasures of Whole Foods Market. Nye is only shown working in humorous, scripted segments pouring coffee at a diner or carrying boxes out of his attic; his role is to instruct from above, not act as a site of identification for those responsible for everyday caring/cooking/cleaning routines. Indeed, emphasizing Nye's distance from everyday forms of household labor, the show inexplicably brings in scantily clad women, who ask innocent questions to receive Nye's expertise or demonstrate eco-don'ts by confessing that they had been secretly joyriding their polluting ATVs; scolding and deep remorse ensues.

In these ways, labor is officially denied as the work of being green is presented as "not-work" by male hosts. Yet at the same time that viewers are urged to retrieve Lagasse's recipes on the website or seek out the products and services on Thomas's show or follow Nye's tips to go through the items in their bathrooms, kitchens, and garages to root environmental contaminants out of their lives. While the expert hosts perform teaching or demonstrating labor, the ongoing labor of lifestyle not for them to do, but rather for viewers to take up at home in the context of existing household and caring routines. Given the preoccupation with masculinized leisure and fun in Planet Green's brand story, the brand's reliance on feminized forms of household labor haunts its insistence that the fun of post-environmentalism is for everyone.

Post-asceticism or fear of anti-consumerism

At the same time that Planet Green was worrying about the elitist associations of green living, a great deal of its programming had everything to do with not only enlisting upscale consumers in the brand, but also cultivating consumers whose fantasies about class distinction would come together with a green good life—what Planet Green called "aspirational" green consumers. The strategy of course worked toward brand value in a direct sense, as these consumers were best positioned to buy pricy green products and renovate their homes. It also, however, worked to cultivate green sensibilities that would allay industrial anxieties by disarticulating green from "granola," "tree-hugging" environmentalists and anti-consumerism and rearticulating it to consumer culture and class distinction.

Simultaneous with its emphasis on masculinized, quasi-populist excess, Planet Green peddles an extremely expensive green good life in which pleasure—and pleasure in the knowledge that one is being green—takes precedence over all other concerns, especially financial ones. The promotional discourse ritually repeated how hip and wholly pleasurable the new lifestyle would be. The magazine show, *G Word* (2008), for example, promised to demonstrate that "Being green is no longer just for granola-loving hippies"; thanks to Planet Green it is now "a lifestyle, an attitude, a state-of-mind, and it's shaking up the pop-culture landscape" (On TV: G Word 2009). On *G Word*, green living would be neither about sacrifice nor asceticism, for it promised to teach viewers "about preserving the environment and enjoying life at the same time" (Planet Green Defines

Eco-Entertainment 2008). On *Alter Eco* (2008), for example, Adrian Grenier and some famous, young and beautiful friends promised to demonstrate the practical, everyday details of how to live a green life "as they help both celebrities and ordinary people… transition their lives to green bliss" and "a hip green lifestyle" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008). *Emeril Green* whose promotional material asks readers to lose themselves in a delicious fantasy as they imagine the show's possibilities: "Picture an ultimate foodie fantasy store" (Whole Foods Market) and learn how to cook green with "a gourmet touch" and "hundreds of delicious recipes" (Emeril Green: Inside the Show 2008). For viewers who "Think it's impossible to be green and glam" *World's Greenest Homes* (2008-2010) will make them "think again!" (Planet Green's Fall Schedule 2009). By taking viewers on an "exclusive tour" (Planet Green's Fall Schedule 2009) of the inside and out of "high-concept, one-of-a-kind homes to die for" ranging from "high-tech superhomes fit for a Hollywood star" to "experimental eco-dwellings" boasting "mind-blowing eco-innovations" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008) "on the cutting edge of sustainable building technology" (Planet Green's Fall Schedule 2009), *World's Greenest Homes* would show viewers "how to coexist with the environment without leaving a great impact or sacrificing comfort" (Planet Green's Fall Schedule 2009). *Hollywood Green with Maria Menounos* (2008) would "Always fun and informative" and with "VIP access to celebrities living the sustainable life" host Maria Menounos shows us what "celebrities do to help the environment, from trips to farmers' market to the hippest trends in eco-friendly fashions" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008).

Supper Club with Tom Bergeron (2008) promised viewers a peek into the lives of the rich and famous, inviting them to be "a fly on the wall at a Hollywood dinner party"; a guest "renowned chef" (Planet Green Defines Eco-Entertainment 2008) showcases haute green cuisine and fine organic beers and wines while Bergeron attempts to facilitate salon-style discourse among guests from a range of political and ideological persuasions. Viewers are offered tips for "sustainable" entertaining and taught how to "prepare memorable green recipes" and "select eco-friendly wines"; the tips and recipes featured on the show are available on PlanetGreen.com and include "cutting the waste from your next dinner party" including "ditch the disposable dishes" and use an Evite instead of paper; another page recommends purchasing recycled glassware from a few featured manufacturers. A buying guide for choosing eco-friendly fish, and a "100 mile Challenge" page with resources for eating locally; eco-friendly party favors like personalized cards containing seeds to plant, or local handmade soaps (avoid the "excess waste" associated with "unnatural wrapping paper" by just passing them out as is). Here's an "easy" and whimsical DIY idea: "Pick one of your favorite simple recipes to pass on to your lucky guests. Write out the recipe on high quality recycled paper and then package all the dry ingredients in a fanciful reused jar. Tie with a rustic ribbon and you're done" (Team Planet Green 2008f). These shows work to enact the green good life, demonstrating the pleasurable possibilities of green living and offering viewers resources to cultivate their aspirational eco-capacities.

The contradiction, however, was that anti-consumerism—the environmentalist who was not aspirational—was always lurking in the background, as anti-consumerism is

so tied to low-impact living and environmental sensibilities. The anti-consumer had to be incorporated and managed. Planet Green did so through strategies of ironic distancing and normative assumptions of gender. For example, one of *G Word*'s "eco-experts" was CEO-turned-cheap lifestylist, Jeff "the Ultimate Cheapskate" Yeager. Yeager would take us "Freecycing" and on trips to thrift stores, pick up curbside cast-offs in his neighborhood, and recommend using old rags instead of paper towels. These tips, however, are couched in a hammy persona: Yeager offers tips that individuals can take up in their everyday lives, but they are not invited to aspire to be *like* him. In one of Yeager's Ultimate Cheapskate segments, for example, he visits a laundromat. Yeager, gangly, mustachioed and balding, explains, "there's two things you should know [about me]: I'm a green guy, so I want it to be environmentally sensitive and I'm America's cheapest man!" He gives us a few helpful tips about what to look for in a detergent—usable with cold water, phosphate-free (no brands are named and he carries his in a nondescript Tupperware-type container)—and recommends washing only full loads. All the while he remains in character as "American's cheapest man": "This is the part that I hate worst!" he gripes as he walks over to the laundromat's change machine, "the part when you have to get out the old wallet. I don't get mine out very often—whoa, there's my Woodstock ticket!" He dances a jig as the change clangs into the basin. "That was a good sound!" he exclaims. Through Yeager's performance on *G Word*, the cheapskate is incorporated and contained through this parodic representation. His expertise is presented with ambivalence, cloaked in campy excess.

On Planet Green, the anti-consumer was positioned as one of a range of expert voices instructing viewers on green living, but the asceticism of some of its advice risked seeming "preachy" and could interfere with normative gendered performances. Thus, incorporation strategies involved not only parody, but also gentle discipline. For example, narrative drama on the reality sitcom, *Living with Ed* (acquired from HGTV in 2009), was structured around clashes between actor/environmentalist Ed Begley Jr.'s purported eco-extremism and his wife Rachelle's commitments to aesthetics and consumer pleasures. Rachelle, for example, "puts her foot down" about Ed bringing home a "hideous" rain barrel. Ed's unstylish, ancient khaki shorts, his 30-year-old desk chair, his plastic composter, and his solar oven all become the objects of feigned marital tension and gentle ridicule. These conflicts aim to simultaneously discipline Ed's unfashionable, granola, vegan non-consumerism, while also allowing the show to be a platform for his eco-advice. When Ed's items and habits emerge as "problems" within the narrative, they are remedied by acts of green consumerism. A special guest, for example, solves the issue of Ed's "revolting" desk chair, presenting him with a replacement Herman Miller chair—not only stylish and ergonomically correct, but also made from recycled materials. On Ed's birthday, Rachelle buys him a brand new "green" electric bicycle, despite the fact that Ed stressed that he needs nothing and that his preferred method of transportation is walking, followed by his bicycle.

However, even in the show, this gift is not uncritically embraced, for the episode closes with a "family bike ride" on which Rachelle rides the new bike while Ed returns to his trusty ten-speed. This narrative is wholly reliant regressive gendered meanings.

Rachelle's performative ethos cares only about fashion and aesthetics. She is a nag and a little lazy, the rationale for Ed's lifestyle choices escapes her. Although in *Living with Ed*, Ed's "extreme," anti-consumerist, unfashionable, less "hot and fun"—perhaps even "granola"—brand of environmentalism is positioned as expert, it is simultaneously disciplined. While Ed is incorrigible and exasperating to Rachelle, he is also the source of information. It is under his tutelage, not that of Rachelle, that viewers may take up techniques for living a greener life. The disciplinary modes are never successful, thus can be enacted anew in each episode. And an ongoing gendered dichotomy of feminine consumerist triviality versus masculine expertise, that ironically operates to keep Ed in line, is repeated again and again.

Post-greenwash/fear of greenwash

The fourth and last anxiety concerns the fear of greenwash. Advertisers fretted that presence on an eco-channel would invite accusations of greenwash. As a corrective, part of Planet Green's brand strategy was to situate itself as "credible." It worked to create a post-greenwash sensibility. As I have already demonstrated, Planet Green worked to establish credibility by tapping into and reinforcing the white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalist association of professionalism, whiteness, and masculinity with expertise and objectivity.

Planet Green worked to cultivate "credibility" by tapping into a range of normative constructions of expertise, objectivity, and political neutrality. It promoted its own "seriousness" about environmentalism as a cause by partnering with 13

establishment environmentalist not-for-profits organizations and by promoting its historical brand positioning (nature and earth-focused) as well as its green headquarters renovations. It also assembled a "strategic Board of Advisors" which, it argued, "represent[ed] a broad spectrum of thought leaders in the fields of science, academia, technology, business, environmental advocacy, government and media" (World Class Board of Advisors 2008). When Discovery spoke of "preeminent scientists, researchers, innovators and environmental leaders" who would make up the board, its diversity was limited, not surprisingly, to establishment environmentalists, STEM researchers, media higher-ups, a few celebrity environmentalists, and otherwise conservative republicans who had broken rank to, for example, launch climate change legislation as did Minnesota's then-governor Tim Pawlenty.

In Planet Green's brand strategy, credibility thus was acted out not on the basis of expertise in environmental thought, policy, or science nor was it acted out on the basis of involvement in environmental movements nor was it granted by lived experience of environmental degradation; rather, it was performed in racialized, classed, and gendered ways by celebrating "value neutrality" and an "unbiased" perspective granted to a range of authoritative discourses in neoliberal culture. This strategy, not surprisingly, extended to the programming. Shows about "serious" (i.e., potentially divisive) environmental subjects like climate change, pollution, or habitat destruction were invariably hosted by figures who enjoyed the great distance from environmental problems that accompanies the social and economic power bestowed by wealth, professionalization, whiteness and male gendering—people like war correspondent Bob Woodruff, news anchor Tom

Brokow, and a host of guest experts.

But even Planet Green's seemingly thorough project to construct credibility in brand culture was unable to fully contain its contradictions. In what I call Planet Green's "post-greenwash" programming, it is not difficult to see that Planet Green's wide-ranging and elaborate struggle to achieve environmental credibility was structured by the same profound fears of politics that shaped the brand as a whole. In Planet Green's effort to create post-greenwash television, anxieties about alienating conservative viewers came together with mandates to stay advertiser friendly.

In coverage of climate change and industrial pollution, for example, news conventions of "balance" took precedence over sustained analysis in a manner that created confusing and ambiguous stories. It is generally quite clear that Planet Green is fully on board with the scientific consensus on climate change—always offering global warming near the top of the litany of reasons to "go green" in one's everyday life, even dispensing advice on "What to Do if Your Date Says, 'Climate Change is Fake'" (Peterson 2009), publishing features detailing global warming's impact on coral reefs and melting tundra (DeFranza 2009) or asking, "How is Climate Change Affecting Your Region? Find Out with Terrifying Interactive Map" (Merchant 2009b). Nevertheless, when addressed head-on, programming on climate change centered on the "debate" over its existence.

In a *Focus Earth* segment entitled "Climate Change and the Weather" (2010), for example, anchor Bob Woodruff gave equal air-time to the famous climate change-denying MIT emeritus professor Richard Lindzen and Chris Field, professor of

Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies at Stanford who was award a Nobel Peace Prize in connection with his work on the intergovernmental panel on Climate Change. Although clues such as a well-lit, fancy atrium setting and cuts to footage of collapsing ice frame Field in a friendlier and more credible light (Lindzen on the other hand is filmed in his messy office, books and papers strewn everywhere, he himself looks rather disheveled, and he is shot in low-light, his shadowy face in extreme close-ups), the episode takes no explicit position and, significantly, makes no mention of Lindzen's industry ties which were exposed in *Harper's Magazine* in 1995 (Gelbspan 1995).[56]

Focus Earth typically evaded taking a political position by setting up questions that, within a fully naturalized free market logic, were unanswerable (what introductory communication studies textbooks call "false dilemmas"): would, for example, a rural Perry Country, Alabama's Arrowhead landfill would accept many tons of "arguably toxic coal ash" from a spill the previous year? The poor county would be compensated $3 million, inviting the dilemma: "Is it a health risk? Or is it a financial boost that helps the town?" (Focus Earth episode "Environmental Injustice" 2009).[57]

A particularly illuminating example is Woodruff's investigation into Shell Oil's sustainability claims, "Shell Oil: Are they Greenwashing?" (Focus Earth episode "Greenwash" 2009). The question in the episode is not so much whether Shell's environmental record is bad, that is a given, taken as a natural fact of the industry ("the

[56] Author Ross Gelbspan pointed out that when Lindzen testified before Senate committee in 1991 on behalf of Western Fuel Association, "a $400 million consortium of coal suppliers and coal-fired utilities," he had been hired as an expert witness and Western Fuels paid for his trip, that OPEC had underwritten his 1992 speech, "Global Warming: the Origin and Nature of Alleged Scientific Consensus," and that Lindzen had worked as a consultant for the oil and coal industry, charging $2,500 per day (Gelbspan 1995).
[57] However, and unsurprisingly, the show feels no need to offer a counterpoint or opposing view when the market-based, voluntary incentive program is working, as in a segment on a program incentivizing recycling in Everett, MA with points redeemable at chain stores (those pictured are Bed Bath & Beyond, Target, Famous Footwear, Panera, but the program says it includes "local and national retailers"), and lots of testimonials about how well it is working and how much residents like it ("It's MAH-velous," says one Everett resident).

oil and gas business have what many environmental watchdog organizations consider to be the worst environmental record of all the big industries," says Woodruff). Rather, the central question is whether the company is "greenwashing" or being "transparent" about its operations. The show sets up a two-sided debate with those Woodruff describes as "critics" and "environmentalists" on one side (as in, "critics say" or "environmentalists say") and Shell's president, Marvin Odum, on the other.

Throughout the episode, the show cuts in footage of dirty extraction and refinement operations, Greenpeace's Claudette Papathanasopoulos talks to the camera about Shell's investments in oil sands in Canada, "it's a very dirty process. We're talking some estimates would say 3 to 10 percent more dirty emissions than traditional oil refinery, and so if they care about climate emissions, it seems unusual for them to be investing in dirtier technologies with bigger carbon footprints." Woodruff adds, "yet for all of the talk about investing in cleaner technologies, Shell commits about 1 percent of its overall budget to developing them." The author of *Greenwash* (and NYU adjunct professor) Kenny Bruno calls Shell is "a master of greenwash" with "very clever rhetoric."

In the face of all this apparently unambiguous evidence damning Shell's operations, the interview between Woodruff and Odum is chummy. They are perched, side-by-side, on the front edge of an enormous boardroom table surrounded by chairs, turned slightly to face one other. While the "critics" who appear in the show are alone in the frame, either in a book-lined office, as in the case of Bruno, or in close-up against a black background, as in the case of Papathanasopoulos, Odum is in this social situation.

He says very little of substance, but goes on about his personal commitment to "integrity" and Shell's to "transparency" (evidence for this "transparency" combines promotions of Shell's "sustainability initiatives" combined with solemn admissions of Shell's own environmental shortcomings and pledges to do better).

As the segment draws to a close, Woodruff notes, "And [Odum] reminds critics who say Shell is not doing enough, that their primary business is providing the oil that powers our lifestyles." Odum gets the last word: "as an energy company, that purpose is to provide the energy the world needs today, to have vision about where that energy mix needs to change over the future, and to work on both of those ends. And that's what we're doing."

This highly ambiguous conclusion speaks volumes about Planet Green's ambivalence about environmentalism. While from the clip, viewers learn that Shell's operations are clearly terrible for the environment. But since the question driving the segment was less whether Shell's operations were harmful than whether the company was being "transparent," viewers are invited to be satisfied, comfortable, even, with this ambiguity since we need oil companies to "power our lifestyles."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Planet Green emerged as a solution to a particular problematization of the environment. This problematization was a meeting of, on the one hand, profound anxieties about unruly consumers among marketers and media firms and, on the other hand, popular skepticism about whether eco-TV could be

entertaining and credibly environmentalist. For Planet Green a process of posting environmentalism in a multiplatform media brand promised to overcome unruly consumers and, in the same maneuver, to resolve the contradictions between commerce and conservation, activism and consumerism, and profits and planet saving by making environmentalism "fun."

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Planet Green emerged at the intersection of a crisis in cable business—the sense that consumers had become especially uncontrollable in the multi-platform, multi-channel era—and public worries and outrage at environmental destruction, the intensifying effects of global climate change in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and 8 years of Bush administration policies further dismantling the already weakened environmental policy apparatus. By posting environmentalism, Planet Green worked to "solve" capitalism's environment problem by enlisting TV viewers in a highly gendered, racialized, and classed project of eco-citizenship aimed at managing the contradictions that emerged as the imperatives of brand value came into conflict with environmental activism. This was a highly structured project seemingly at odds with the openness[58] that branding relies upon for value (and the "freedom" that governmentality relies on for civic management).

Planet Green's programming was a constant dance, continually moving between advancing and undermining environmentalism. As it acted out its ambivalence about environmentalism, Planet Green relied upon and reproduced anxieties and assumptions

[58] As Celia Lury puts it, the brand-object "does not tend towards full determination or closure; rather, it exists in a state of indetermination, a situation of (un)control. This is what makes it an increasingly important object of contemporary capitalism. But to describe it as an object into which possibility has been introduced is not to imply that the brand is, or even may be, any-thing. The indeterminacy of the objectivity of the brand is not absolute; uncontrol is not the same as lack of control. There is instead limited possibility designed into the brand… The brand is not an unfortunately deteriorated objectification of perfect flexibility, but rather the objectification of a manageable flexibility, of indeterminacy within limits" (Lury 151).

about gender, race and class, through which the channel defined both "credibility" and "entertainment." This resulted in programming that attempted to tightly control every aspect of how this "green" brand got produced. Planet Green's ambivalence about environmentalism resulted in a top-down brand-building strategy, which is at odds with much of the wisdom on branding, which states that brand value is reliant on consumer co-creation, what consumers spontaneously do with the brand in their everyday lives (Arvidsson 2006). Conversely, Planet Green worked to constrain the possibilities of what consumers might do or think with the green brand at every turn.

Planet Green materialized around efforts to contain "green"—as well as the conduct of "green consumers"—to maintain their alignment with the interests of brand value and profits. In these ways, Planet Green's was an environmentalism *transformed* through branding in ways that were shaped in fundamental ways by the anxieties and ambivalences of Planet Green decision makers. In Planet Green and other green brands, the labor of resolving these contradictions is offloaded onto consumers.

From the get-go, Planet Green was structured by anxieties generated by the contradictions and tensions that emerged in the process of branding environmentalism—tensions, for example, between citizenship and consumerism, politics and profits, activism and commerce, conservation and consumption, and education and entertainment. Planet Green took shape in ways designed to manage these tensions through a process that disavowed their irresolvablility by reducing and refiguring them in problematizations that could be solved by television. Posting was an industrial strategy that attempted to re-define environmentalism as good TV while simultaneously working to manage both

industrial anxieties and the potential for consumer unruliness in such minute detail that the contradictions between branding and environmentalism could be held in check. The project centered on the belief was that overcoming unruly consumers was absolutely crucial to resolving these tensions (despite the fact that an at least as convincing problematization of green TV's viability was advertiser reluctance and profit imperatives). By refiguring the external problem of consumer uncontrollability as an internal problem of content, Planet Green's preoccupation with "post"-resonant forms of "entertainment" and "credibility" was part of an ongoing process seeking to contain the incredible threat unruly consumers posed to green TV's viability within a radically deregulated media environment.

Chapter 4: Planet Green's demise

Introduction

On Memorial Day of 2012,[59] a brand-new mid-level cable channel launched with an all-day marathon of reruns. The new channel was Discovery Communications' Destination America, and the reruns were from the series, *BBQ Pitmasters* (2009-), a reality competition show originally produced for and aired on TLC (also a Discovery network). The program showcases the "high-stakes world of competitive barbecuing" (Ito 2012), travelling to barbequing competitions around the country and letting the cameras roll. In true reality-competition form, editing favors moments when "nerves and patience get tested" and "tempers flare" but it is also what a friend of mine calls "meat porn": the show lovingly films enormous quantities, fine cuts, and unusual varieties of meat while celebrating the "legendary" talents of the (overwhelmingly) men who cook it. The new channel would soon add shows like *United States of Food* (2012), also featuring copious amounts of meat, *Fast Food Mania* (2012), which celebrates America's fast food chains, new episodes of *BBQ Pitmasters*, *Epic* (2012-2013) featuring "epic," i.e., superdeluxe and enormous RVs or epic log cabins, *Super-Duper Thrill Rides* (2012) on "extreme roller coasters" (Ito 2012, Levin 2012), as well as *Buying* Alaska (2012-), *Cheating Las Vegas* (a 2000 documentary) and *Ghostown Gold* (2012-).

Destination America's launch is noteworthy for several reasons, two of which are especially glaring. First, it replaced cable television's one-and-only foray into a fully

[59] That year, Memorial Day was May 28, but several sources report that Destination America launched on the 26th. While this may be just sloppy reporting, it also speaks to the extent to which the launch was a non-event.

environmentalist channel: the eco-lifestyle network, Planet Green. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, Planet Green offered DIY projects, news on global warming, and tips for a "less is more" lifestyle and home energy saving. Its content coaxed viewers to bike to work, shop at thrift stores, change their light bulbs, curb their online shopping, eliminate toxin-containing products from their homes, cook and garden, visit farmers markets, and even dumpster dive. It offered a range of resources for individuals to self-shape as good environmental consumer-citizens, calling upon them to reflect continually on the environmental impact of the mundane details of their everyday lives and establishing a quasi-public sphere in its privatized online universe for civil discourse and debate. In an apparent 180-degree flip, Destination America would be "dedicated to the bigness of America in all its forms" and "[offer] up a vision of a land where everybody barbecues, no one eats greens, and there's a 36-foot-long Winnebago in front of every home" (Ito 2012). Destination America's macho celebration of patriotism—one which seemed to applaud the very kinds of excess that Planet Green cautioned viewers against—couldn't have been more different from the quirky, gently disciplinary, and feminized lifestyle programming on Planet Green. This contrast was not lost on the press: the "unabashedly patriotic" Destination America (Levin 2012), with its "red, white and blue" (de Moraes 2012) celebration of carnivory, was "anathema to… the tree huggery" (Owen 2012), "pinko-liberal" (de Moraes 2012) Planet Green, reporters wrote.

The second striking thing about Destination America's premiere is that an all-day rerun marathon is hardly consistent with industry mandates for "big and loud" launches to "break through the clutter" of the hundreds of TV channels and the proliferating online

content-delivery platforms that characterize the contemporary media landscape. Many media industry insiders concur that one can no longer expect viewers to just happen upon a new network or show simply by "surfing." On the contrary, media firms often assemble special marketing teams to figure out how to get viewers to actively seek out a new channel. As one former Planet Green executive explained,

> there's hundreds and hundreds of channels…you're competing for the same, what we call eyeballs… same people to watch your programming and it's harder and harder to get attention for channels today than it was fifteen/twenty years ago. So, the louder you are, the more exciting you feel, the more relevant you feel, the more likely you are to attract that group coming in at the start… People get very comfortable in their channel set… 10-15 on their personal, internal channel list… And you tend to go to those channels first before you'll go anywhere else. So, also when your launching a new channel, you tend to be higher up on the dial and that means, so instead of channel 4, 8, 7, even 25, 30, 50, you're, like, 472… you can't just count on people surfing through all those channels to find you. And that means the louder you are in the launch, the more likely you are to get someone to look for you, instead of find you. (Howell 2013)

As I have already discussed, Planet Green, premiered with an enormous launch. It advertised in magazines, on television, and on billboards in New York's Times Square. Its stars made appearances on daytime broadcast television to promote the channel. It held brand events like a "green carpet" launch party filled with environmentalist celebrities and a rock/rap concert headlined by Tommy Lee and Ludacris and featuring a

good number of other big-name acts. Planet Green representatives carried out guerilla marketing tactics at professional baseball games and the Indianapolis 500, passing out eco-friendly prizes like public transportation passes along with Planet Green t-shirts. Discovery played the brand changeover from Discovery Home (the channel's previous brand) to Planet Green on the JumboTron at the ball games and staged a bicycle give-away with News Corporation's *New York Daily News* (the *Daily News* also raised a green flag during the week of Planet Green's launch and published an adver-tainment section promoting the new channel's shows and brand events). Destination America's comparatively monotonous and lackluster launch is, if this wisdom is to be believed, astonishing.[60]

This chapter seeks to understand how this happened. Why, after such an expensive and successful launch (one which won several advertising awards), did Discovery decide to cancel Planet Green and replace it with what in many ways appears to be its polar opposite? And why did it determine that Destination America needed so little in the way of promotion when Planet Green needed so much?

When Planet Green was rebranded as Destination America, Discovery and press voices explained that eco-programming failed to draw viewers, pointing to a lack of "entertaining content," "poor ratings," and the decline of the "green [consumer] movement." This chapter refuses to take these explanations for granted, despite the tone

[60] On the 4th of July, the new channel did sponsor an "apple pie dive" (it is what it sounds like—contestants dive into an oversized apple pie for prizes up to $5,000) as part of the festivities in the lead up to the Coney Island Nathan's Famous annual hot dog eating competition, but this quiet launch with a single, month-and-a-half delayed brand event was still miniscule by comparison to launches like Planet Green's. But, as I will discuss later, in the multi-channel, multi-platform era, big, loud, and expensive launches are only one strategy for maximizing profits and minimizing risk. As I will address later in this chapter, it is crucial to note that Destination America's launch was also very cheap. Cheap rerun-heavy launches are also common—some because many new networks lack the huge sums of money of a firm like Discovery, and others because even large media firms regularly engage in practices to minimize costs, often to recoup the costs of mergers and acquisitions.

of obviousness with which they are made. Rather, I argue that these explanations, far from being straightforward, involve messy and contradictory constructs (e.g., ratings, entertainment, what is "trending") that are made and remade by industrial actors in an ongoing struggle to bring the essential unruliness of consumers within their sphere of influence.

First, I examine the changes in Planet Green's television and web content over its four-year run. In general, Planet Green's programming moved away from the explicitly pedagogical and environmentalist "how-to" shows toward what its president/general manager called "green adjacent" and "storytelling" programs—docu-series on experiments in living, spending a month living as someone else (the 2005-2008 FX series *30 Days*, aired on Planet Green 2010) or trying out homelessness (the 2009 BBC1 *Famous, Rich & Homeless* BBC aired on Planet Green in 2010)—that were often unconnected to environmental themes (though this shift did not always unfold in a linear or consistent fashion). However, I argue that the channel remained both pedagogical and governmental in ways that are intimately connected to anxieties and contradictions that had dogged Planet Green from the get go. Second, I delve more deeply into Discovery's explanations for Planet Green's cancellation, situating them within larger discourses of entertainment, ratings, and trends that aim to predict consumer behavior. I complicate the certainty that characterizes Discovery's argument that "green" was a passing consumer fad by situating it within a larger green marketing conversation that retained the same outsized optimism, coupled with profound anxieties, that characterized it when Planet Green was conceived in 2007. Finally, I insist that Discovery's assessment that Planet

Green was simply "not entertaining" be understood against the backdrop of Discovery's astronomical success on Wall Street. If Planet Green represented Discovery's foray into "the new public service" wherein private firms step in to fill the gaps left by deregulatory policies and a shrinking social safety net, I argue that placing Discovery's financial gains alongside Planet Green's cancellation casts the contradiction between profits and public service in a deregulated market into sharp relief—and does so in ways that are made even more apparent when the question of advertiser dollars is considered. I close by reflecting briefly on the question of "failure" in brand culture, asking what it can tell us about the limits of branding environmentalism in neoliberal times.

Branding environmentalism for the "crisis" in cable

Planet Green's unraveling over its four-year run must be understood in the context of commercial television and brand culture. More particularly, it requires that I return to my discussion of the contemporary "crisis" in US cable business, which I laid out in Chapter 1, and the way in which branding has come to appeal to cable TV's decision makers as a strategy for managing this crisis. This crisis, as I mentioned, concerns industrial anxieties about attracting consumer eyeballs to sell to advertisers in the context of enormous numbers of content delivery options—from the hundreds of television channels to the proliferating online video services—and a tapped out (and now shrinking) US cable market. Since audiences are television's core commodity, the sense that their eyeballs are increasingly scarce has generated a great deal of anxiety. This is not to say that feelings of crisis for the TV industry are new; industry has long been plagued by

worries about audience unpredictability and has worked endlessly to bring audiences under control by rendering them visible through things like ratings data and other audience measurement techniques (see Ang 1991). As feelings of crisis within cable business have intensified over recent years, the practice of branding has become a darling of audience management culture. Planet Green's initial design reflected this. In 2007, Planet Green promised to help Discovery manage the crisis in US cable; through "strong branding" it would not only overcome the uncertainties of the market, but also overcome the particular challenges of making environmentalism profitable. In Planet Green's realization, however, this process proved enormously difficult.

The promises of branding for a US cable industry in crisis are expansive. On a basic level, branding promises to differentiate channels in this cluttered media environment and to involve consumers more deeply in the objects of commercial culture by offering them a sense of belonging (in a "brand community," for example). Planet Green hoped to break through the media clutter by differentiating its brand on the basis of green living and inviting individuals to act out their eco-commitments in and through Planet Green, becoming part of its brand community. But branding is also more than this, as I have argued, for brands only come into being through an ongoing performative process (Lury 2004, Moor 2007). In the case of television brands like Planet Green, this performativity involves a discourse about consumers and markets characterized by what Ien Ang calls "rhetorical certainty" (Ang 1991); in this discourse, TV firms still use things like ratings data, stereotypes, and market research to make unequivocal statements

of "fact" about consumers to persuade advertisers that the brand will render them predictable and profitable.

The performativity of branding is not just rhetorical, however. It is made material in branded content that similarly seeks to overcome consumer uncontrollability. Specifically, branding seeks to use these same forms of knowledge about audiences and fold them into projects aiming to "govern at a distance." To make sense of the way brands work to do this, branding scholars have turned to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality: the dispersion of governmental functions across the population and societal institutions that aims to aid individuals in governing themselves, guiding them toward certain objectives without intervention from the state; this is the sense in which I will use the terminology of governance through this chapter. Likewise, branding seeks to guide and shape what consumers do with brands—not through coercive means, but by inviting consumers to become active members of a brand community in their freedom (see Arvidsson 2006, Lury 2004, Moor 2007). Branding thus works to overcome unruly consumers through an elaborate performative and governmental endeavor to garner advertiser dollars and increase brand value; this ongoing project works to position both ratings and "strong branding" as practices that can both manage and predict viewers' behavior and the value of their eyeballs.

However, as Liz Moor points out, brand management always contends with a central problem: that brand value depends on "the successful appropriation of externalities" (Arvidsson 2006 and Slater 2002 referenced in Moor 2007, 72). In the case of Planet Green, "the qualities assumed to reside 'in' [potential green consumers had to]

somehow be extricated and isolated and made to be compatible with other qualities assumed to be qualities 'of' the brand." This process, not surprisingly, is "fraught with problems" and by no means guaranteed and "for this reason brand managers must rely on estimates and indicators [e.g., ratings, market research, etc.] whose use is secured by their legitimacy – that is, their acceptance by other actors – rather than their accuracy" (Moor 2007, 72). To set the stage for Planet Green, as I have already discussed, Discovery announced to advertisers the existence of what it called "armchair environmentalists"—nearly half of the US population ready to be "activated" and "awakened" as "bright green" consumers. The Planet Green brand would do just that by inviting these consumers to involve the Planet Green brand in the details of their everyday lives, from cooking, cleaning and shopping to activism and volunteering.

But, as I will show, despite the careful planning, the detailed market research, and the elaborate and interactive brand content, Discovery could never fully contain the ways in which individuals took up (resisted or refused) the Planet Green brand. Thus, what I wish to center in this discussion of Planet Green's demise is that, no matter how sophisticated techniques of audience governance become, they can never bring audiences fully under control: media firms will always contend with viewers' essential uncontrollability and thus will always be characterized by anxiety about this ritually disavowed reality (see Ang 1991).

Ang's observation that the late twentieth century's "relentless search for technological sophistication" in the production of more and more precise ratings data can be likened to the contemporary industrial pursuit of sophistication in brand management

(which does not abandon the search for "accurate" ratings, but elaborates how this data is put into practice). For Ang, this pursuit of precision has less to do with the possibility of achieving control over the unruly entity that is "the audience" than it "betrays a sense of desperation over the very possibility of designing a proper map of the streamlined audience in the crowded and chaotic television landscape" (Ang 1991, 89). Likewise, Planet Green's sophisticated brand management and statements about market readiness were as much about disavowing consumers' unmanageability as it was about managing them.

The question of unruly consumers—and all the work devoted to bringing them under control while simultaneously disavowing their unmanageability—is crucial to understanding Planet Green's demise in the larger context of the crisis in US cable. The problem of consumer unruliness was where governance met performativity in Discovery's pursuit of ad dollars. And when it came to branding environmentalism for television, the always-already unruly character of audiences was met by a number of anxieties and contradictions specific to environmentalism. As I have argued in previous chapters, Planet Green had been bedeviled by worries about its eco-brand identity from the start. Discovery was worried about the politically charged character of green TV, about the feminized connotations of ethical lifestyling, about being associated with "treehuggers," "granola"-type environmentalists, or a "liberal elite." Many of these anxieties constellated around the tensions between, on the on hand, enlisting consumers in an eco-governmental project, urging them to self-shape as green consumer citizens, and on the other hand, persuading sponsors that this was fully compatible with a project

that would deliver "bona fide consumers" (Meehan 2005) in a "buying mood" (Turow 1997) to their advertisements and branded entertainment. The contradictions in this project are in many ways obvious: conservation and consumption, public service and profits, activism and advertising are difficult pairs to reconcile, especially in the context of a radically deregulated market.

When Discovery rolled out Planet Green in 2008, it took aim at these contradictions by doing everything "right" according to industrial branding wisdom. Planet Green's marketing team offered consumers branded resources and activities to take up in their everyday lives, it multiplied the opportunities for what marketers call "attention and engagement" with Planet Green and its sponsors' brands by encouraging individuals to move between Planet Green's branded media platforms, and it folded sponsor's brands into television and web content in a way producers viewed as "tasteful" rather than annoying, since it also promised not only to "educate" by showing how these brands were "doing well by doing good," but also participate in and enable environmental action (Thomas 2013). And Planet Green was as attuned to advertisers' anxieties about green marketing as it was to these beliefs about "strong branding." Nearly all of Planet Green's content choices were part of an elaborate effort to assuage industrial worries—endlessly reiterated and specified in trade journals—about aligning corporate profits with environmentalism (in ways that were often reliant on regressive racialized, classed, and gendered assumptions about audiences, "entertainment" and environmentalism). It worked to distance its "new," "hip," and "fun" kind of environmentalism from granola and tree-hugging hippies, from girliness and earnestness, and from preachiness, partisan

politics, and pessimism. In this way, industrial fantasies about the kind of media content that could deliver "valuable" eyeballs to advertisers—packaged in industrial constructions of entertainment—were enlisted in an attempt to resolve tensions were in many ways fundamental to the branding of environmentalism itself.

In these ways, Planet Green's project was two-fold: first, it was about overcoming the essential uncontrollability of consumers by governmentalizing them toward the aims of brand value and green(ing) brand culture; and second, it was about persuading advertisers that doing so (that is, getting consumers themselves to resolve these contradictions by becoming members of the green brand's community) was within Planet Green's purview—even in a realm as fraught with contradiction as environmental consumer capitalism. despite the detailed, calculative approach that Discovery took to environmental media, before Planet Green completed its first year, it was clear that something was amiss. Shows that had structured Planet Green's brand identity at the time of its launch were not renewed (though a number of them continued to be played in reruns throughout Planet Green's existence). According to the Futon Critic website, of the original lineup, *Greenovate*, *Hollywood Green*, and *Mean Green Machines* were canceled after their very first season (2007-2008). *Alter Eco*, *Battleground Earth*, *G Word*, *Go for the Green*, *Stuff Happens*, *Supper Club*, and *Total Wrecklamation* were also not renewed, ending after the 2008-2009 season. And Planet Green's remaining initial shows, *Renovation Nation*, *Wa$ted!*, *Emeril Green*, *World's Greenest Homes*, *Greensburg*, *Focus Earth* and *Living with Ed* (not original, but brought on just after the

launch) were renewed one or two times, but were all canceled by the 2009-2010 season (Showatch: Planet Green 2008-2011).

Although, as I discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation, Planet Green's early programming went to great lengths to avoid being "preachy" or "political," from the perspective of Discovery decision makers, the way it had done so had not, in fact, solved environmentalism for television. As early as 2009, the channel was already making moves to shift away from green instructional content toward what Planet Green's new President/General Manager Laura Michalchyshyn[61] called "green adjacent" programming that emphasized "storytelling" rather than explicit lifestyle advice. Planet Green's problem, Michalchyshyn explained, was that it was still airing "lecturing series" that were "hitting people over the head about green" (Michalchyshyn 2013). (However, it is worth remembering that Planet Green's initial programming strategy was also completely preoccupied with making green living fun and hip, promising Planet Green would contain "absolutely no lecturing" and would "resist a heavy-handed approach"; Planet Green's Eileen O'Neill told NBC in 2008 that the channel would be "not only not finger-wagging" but "sexy… interesting [and]…irreverent" (Bauder 2008).) While Planet Green's initial lineup had all been commissioned in line with a more or less consistent vision for the overall green brand, the new programming strategy was largely one of acquisition. Increasingly cobbling together a brand identity from existing content purchased from a range of other networks and at documentary film festivals, Planet Green's environmentalism—and its governmental project—became less and less

[61] Former President/General Manager of Planet Green, Eileen O'Neill had moved to TLC not two months after Planet Green's launch and the channel was without a permanent president/general manager until Michalshychyn arrived in February 2009; prior to her stint at Discovery, Michalshychyn had been an executive VP at Sundance Channel, where she oversaw environmental programming, and returned there after Planet Green was canceled.

coherent.

A brand makeover

But Planet Green's changing brand did not completely lack coherence. There were two broad tendencies that characterized its changes over time. On the one hand were unabashedly advertiser-friendly shows that contained no environmental critique but rather celebrated "visionaries" who seamlessly melded entrepreneurialism with pro-social goals. These shows explicitly targeted gendered niches to cultivate and sort eyeballs for advertisers. On the other hand were independent documentaries acquired at film festivals around the world—documentaries that were often quite critical of corporate and consumer capitalism as well as the political apparatus that enables them. Certainly, this new programming departed sharply from the how-to consumer and lifestyle advice in Planet Green's initial slate of shows. And the juxtaposition of the two apparently contradictory strands of programming may seem at odds with the mandates of "strong branding." Still, though, I argue that the new shows offered a pedagogy for green consumer citizenship that, however sketchy and (most likely) unintentional, can be viewed as a rarefied and even more ambivalent version of that which Planet Green had offered at its start. Planet Green's evolving pedagogy can be understood as a kind of result—or perhaps even byproduct—of a reactive process wherein Planet Green decision makers changed its programming in the face of a struggle to garner both ad dollars and viewers for branded environmentalism.

Advertiser-friendly television

In the former category were what Laura Michalchyshyn called "storytelling" shows—mostly docu-sitcoms and docu-dramas—that were structured by a gendered mode of address. Sometimes these shows had environmental themes and sometimes they didn't. Many of the "female-targeted" shows "conceptually incorporated multiple philosophies of environmentalism and community and back to the land, and farm-to table, and eating organic…" said Michalchyshyn (2013) while backing off of the advice and highlighting "compelling characters." For example, *The Fabulous Beekman Boys* (6/16/10 - 5/17/11) chronicled the misadventures of city slickers-turned-farmers, couple Josh Kilmer-Purcell and Brent Ridge, who purchase and attempt to run an organic farm in upstate New York (plus undertake a handful of value-added cottage industry activities like making goat milk soaps under the now-valuable "artisan brand" Beekman 1802 carried by retailers like William Sonoma and Target, and writing a cookbook celebrating "heirloom" recipes and produce). Kilmer-Purcell and Ridge dramatize the financial toll that starting a farm can take—not to mention the strain it can put on a relationship—while viewers learn about entrepreneurializing small town, hobby-farm living and are invited to cultivate skills for becoming upscale "conscious" consumers: knowledge about foodie buzz words ("heirloom," "heritage breed" etc.) and the Beekman brand itself.[62]

Later, *Dresscue Me* (4/19/11-6/9/11), a docu-series in which self-taught designer and owner of several vintage clothing stores, Shareen Mitchell, a helps "ordinary" women (though on the show her customers are often celebrities) realize themselves

[62] There was also *The 100 Mile Challenge* (10/12/09-11/16/09), originally aired on Food Network Canada, followed six families from Mission, British Columbia who "have accepted a challenge" to limit themselves to food and drink grown and processed within a 100-mile radius of their homes for a full 100 days. Billed as "a food revolution" the show documented "the ups and downs, and downright creativity" of the challenge participants (Planet Green Heads Into 2010 with New Series 2009).

through recycled fashion. Viewers watch her business and personal ups and downs (they learn about the challenges of opening a new store across the country and watch as she learns strategies for self-care and work-life balance). Viewers also get to hear her "[dish] out her styling secrets" (On TV: Dresscue Me 2009) and can thus take up her tips for eco-chic in their everyday lives. *Dresscue Me* was far more centered on cultivating upscale "ethical consumer" sensibilities than environmental activism, though it was ostensibly about recycling (and also a platform for Planet Green's partnership with Goodwill Industries). Reacting to this, one reporter wondered, "what the heck is this doing on Planet Green?" balking at the "upscaling" of thrift store finds into pricey designer duds for celebrities like Katie Holms, Cat Deeley, and Katy Perry (McDonough 2011).

This programming had its counterpart in a range of new "male-targeted" eco-themed shows. These were largely concerned with pushing the boundaries of techno-scientific (and in one case, financial) innovation and celebrating the (almost exclusively) men who are doing it. Unlike Planet Green's original lifestyle advice, these programs showcased experiments specifically *not* to be tried at home. *Ultimate Power Builders* (12/11/09-3/14/10), for instance, launched with the bombastic promise to "def[y] all four basic elements (earth, air, heat, and water) to engineer big, ambitious and environmentally-friendly projects that will shape the Earth's landscape for future generations, while providing unlimited sources of energy." On *Coolfuel* (9/8/09-10/20/09), Australian eco-adventure seeker, Shaun Murphy set out on a 16,000-mile road trip—a man-and-his-dog-on-the-open-road-type journey—driving "across America in vehicles run on anything but gasoline." On *Planet Mechanics* British engineers, Dick

Strawbridge and Jem Stansfield took "viewers on a wild journey of cutting edge technology and elbow grease" creating things like "Britain's first street legal, air driven motorbike," a truck powered by wood and a fully cow manure-fueled farm (9/8/09-11/3/09). *Nature, Inc.* (10/14/09-11/18/09), a 6-episode BBC docu-series asks, "How much is nature really worth to the world economy?" assigning economic value things like honey bees, coral reefs, biodiversity, etc., to enact a new kind of environment-saving through the financialization of everything and the scientists, economists, and "biosphere bankers" who can make this possible (Planet Green's Fall Schedule 2009).[63]

The female-targeted programs showcased practices that could certainly be tried at home in personal projects of eco-lifestyle entrepreneurialism—gardening, crafting, thrifting, cooking, etc. However, the male-targeted shows constellated around the much more anxious project of capturing male viewers addressed more as couch potatoes than as latent eco-entrepreneurs. This cluster of shows speaks to the gendering of the concept of advertiser-friendly television, for while male viewers are invited to just plop on the couch, tune in, and fantasize about planet saving through dangerous or high stakes innovation, female viewers were invited not only to watch, but to retrieve recipes online, make them, engage in vintage self-fashioning, and self-realize through upscale shopping practices.

But the advertiser-friendly programming did more than divvy up consumers into gendered niches and step back from environmental critique. In addition, this

[63] There were also *Cops*-style series. *Operation Wild* (1/8/10 - 12/17/10) followed the day-to-day operations of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. *Coastwatch* (7/2/10 - 12/10/10) chronicled the work of New Zealand's Ministry of Fisheries and the Maritime Police protecting New Zealand's waterways from (largely small-scale, recreational) poaching. (Both of these series, however, lacked the high-impact drama of the genre they sought to imitate—on *Operation Wild*, officers are often shown arresting inebriated boaters and collecting alligators from Florida residents' yards; on *Coastwatch*, poachers caught red-handed usually sheepishly accept the penalty, pack up and go home).

programming became increasingly insistent that planet saving ought to be conceived as a personal project that was less about everyday work on the home and self than it was about self-realizing as a "visionary." In the press release announcing the programs, Planet Green's Senior Vice President of Production and Development Jeff Hasler explained that this programming would be about "passionate people engaged in forward thinking activity," Planet Green wanted to "help people start thinking of 'the' environment as 'my' environment" (Planet Green Heads Into 2010 with New Series 2009). This "visionary"-led "storytelling" lent itself nicely to a retooled and highly gendered pedagogy. Instead of encouraging individuals to do their bit for the environment by recycling, installing energy-efficient light bulbs or driving less, the new programming worked to cultivate a new sensibility in which individuals would come to view themselves as big-thinking change-makers: "The visionary responsible for the future is you" proclaimed 2010 Earth Month feature (DeFranza 2010). In this way, Planet Green recast green living away from lifestyle and toward the equally individualized constructs of "visionaries" and entrepreneurs—proposing technical and profitable "innovation" as forward-thinking environmentalism.

The "visionary" theme that governed Planet Green's new programming strategy gave a strange coherence to new shows that had no connection to environmentalism. Michalchyshyn explained to the *New York Times* that the programming changes reflected her view that Planet Green was "actually a channel for conscious living, a channel… about moving forward" (Stelter 2010a). On *Dean of Invention* (10/22/10-12/3/10) billionaire-inventor Dean Kamen travels in his helicopter to sites of "cutting edge"

innovation in robotics with military applications and medical technology (particularly prosthetics, which often promised to rehabilitate injured troops for redeployment). On *Future Food* (3/30/10-5/18/10), celebrity chefs/restaurateurs Homaro Cantu and Ben Roche, billed as "molecular gastronomists," complete spectacular feats of food preparation. The narrative is largely unconcerned with social responsibility, but episodes often conclude with untenable ideations about "feeding the world" by transforming non-foods into edible substances.[64] On Morgan Spurlock's FX series *30 Days* (premiered on Planet Green 3/29/10), narratives are structured around self-reflection and personal growth, each episode of *30 Days* chronicled a kind of walk-a-mile-in-their-shoes, 30-day experiment: a mom worried about her college-aged daughter's alcohol consumption binge-drinks for 30 days—ostensibly to scare her daughter into responsible decision making; Spurlock and his fiancée live on minimum wage for a month; Spurlock spends a month in jail; middle-class professionals learn what it is like to live off the grid.[65]

But even "conscious" television (that is, these not explicitly environmentalist shows) ran into problems as their pro-social goals came into conflict with their advertiser-friendly ambitions. This was most apparent in a cluster of BBC shows in which, thematically continuous with *30 Days,* privileged people were confronted with adversity. These shows repeatedly invited viewers to watch as spoiled brats get their comeuppance (or, depending on how you look at it, experienced profound ethical and personal growth). *Blood, Sweat and Takeaways* (premiered 1/4/10), billed as "shock

[64] For example, when Cantu and Roche make a peanut butter substitute out of peanut shells or remove intolerable flavors by fooling the taste buds with a "miracle fruit" that makes bitter taste sweet, the nutrition of the final products is usually not mentioned in the episodes and the concluding hopes often come off sounding like a reflection on how to feed "first world" garbage to starving people.
[65] On *30 Days*, experiments aimed at challenging religious prejudice were a staple: a "God-fearing 24-year-old conservative homophobe from red state America" lives, works, and plays (he joins an all-gay sports team) in San Francisco's Castro District for a month in an episode entitled "straight man in a gay world." In another, a Christian man does a cultural immersion stay in a Michigan Muslim community. And in yet another, a "freethinking" atheist does a home-stay with a family of evangelical Christians.

therapy," brought six young "fast food junkies" face to face with the poor pay and working conditions as they "live and work" alongside fast food workers. *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts* (premiered 2/1/10), followed much the same structure, sending six young "fashion victims" to learn "first hand" what it is like to work in the garment sweatshops in India and live on their meager earnings. On *Famous, Rich and Homeless*, five of Britain's "rich and famous" (ranging from a retired tennis star to a disgraced royal) sign up for an experiment to sleep on the street as if they were homeless. Each is paired with a homeless "buddy" to learn, not only the ropes of "sleeping rough," but also to cultivate compassion for their buddy's circumstances.

In all of these shows, the narrative is driven by the testimonials of the privileged participants narrating their ethical growth and up-close experiences. The shows offer minimal commentary. Instead, over the course of the series, the participants' assessments come to take on explanatory weight and they opine authoritatively on "root causes" and offer solutions. Paradoxically, however, the shows also set up the participants as hopelessly out of touch with reality. Viewers are alternately invited to laugh at and identify with the participants, dismiss them and submit to their (often-dubious) authority.

But are viewers really to find authoritative, for example, the hopelessly privileged celebrities' conclusions that social services are merely a "band-aid" that fails to address the "real" problems of community breakdown, fractured families, and drug addiction when they are simultaneously brought face-to-face with the humanity and complex histories of individuals struggling with homelessness who would quite clearly be helped by assistance? Are they to take seriously that "sleeping rough" for a few nights is a

tenable form of activism to fight homelessness? Or that "first hand" experience in a sweatshop—and "raising awareness" of its working conditions through television—will reshape the garment economy?[66] In many ways, attempting to answer these questions misses the point. On the contrary, the shows themselves make a spectacle of the irresolvability of a number of contradictions that emerge when self-reflection and ethical growth are proposed as solutions to forms of suffering that arise from the intensification of deregulated global capitalism.

In other words, these shows flirt with structural critique by bring viewers into intimate contact with inhuman living and working conditions and connecting these conditions with forms of privilege that coexist with and enable them. They thus are different from shows that actively participate in social service delivery by inserting volunteerism and branded intervention as solutions to a wide range social and environmental problems—the Planet Green docu-series, *Greensburg*, which I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 is a useful example of this kind of programming. On the contrary, these new shows were not aimed at "solving" these problems, but rather the more ambivalent goal of awareness-raising—a solution that becomes obviously insufficient

[66] However, a number of shows offered "solutions" to these problems as well as big-thinking "innovators" enacted profitable and technical programs on television. *Conviction Kitchen* (1/6/10 - 2/15/11) offered itself as a televised form of privatized public service. Originally aired on Canada's Citytv, the 8-episode docu-series was a rehabilitative drama in which recovering addicts and ex-convicts—none of whom have prior culinary training—work as the kitchen crew with a "world renowned chef" in an "emotionally charged" and "risk it all" attempt to open a high-end restaurant in a mere three weeks (Entertainment Business Newsweekly 2011). Likewise, *Big Chef Takes on Little Chef* (premiered 1/6/10), in which "world-renowned" and "Michelin-starred" chef Heston Blumenthal revamped Britain's fast food chain, Little Chef, into healthier, higher quality menu, to rescue it form financial ruin and return it to its "former glory" appealing to nostalgia for the British breakfast joint. There is also a lesson in it for Blumenthal. The show seems to want to take him down a notch: he "must forget fine dining and get a grip on the real cuisine ordinary people want to eat" at affordable prices, explains the Discovery press release. And *The Woman who Stopped Traffic* (2/3/10 - 2/17/10) (aired on PG as the *Woman Who Stops Traffic*) "Kris Murrin takes on the traffic problems of England's three most congested towns and attempts to stop the madness for one day. The obstacles are tremendous, but if she can succeed, she shows us all that anything is possible with motivation and innovation" (DeFranza 2009). "Professional trouble-shooter and creative problem solver Kris Murrin is on a mission to stop traffic for just one day in three of England's most congested locations: Marlow, Boston, and Durham. Each city poses challenges ranging from resident objections to concerns from the city councils to bitter businesses worried about their bottom line" (Discovery Corporate 2010)

and unsatisfying during the course of the shows. On *Blood, Sweat & T-Shirts*, for example, as the show drew to a close, the participants increasingly came to conclusions that situated the status quo as inevitable, as one "fashion victim" explains: "we're being a massive help to [sweatshop workers] because if it wasn't for us buying their clothes, these guys wouldn't have a job." in the interest of narrative coherence (i.e., what Planet Green leadership called "compelling storytelling"), the show then abandons the critique of the garment industry and its concern for adult sweatshop workers and moves on the purportedly more unambiguous question of child labor (abstracted from its larger context and solved through English classes to facilitate upward mobility in global capitalism). But the humanity of the adult sweatshop workers who cease to matter in the narrative continues to haunt the show. The show has given us a glimpse of the enormity of the problem of sweatshop labor and its deplorable conditions; and the insufficiency of the solutions proposed on the show is all too clear.

In this way, Planet Green's television shows became less and less environment-themed over time and the tension between profits and planet saving (as well as the tension between profits and the less ambitious and less commercially risky "conscious television") became more and more apparent. This was not an rigidly linear process, as evidenced by the air dates above, but a general tendency that describes both the programming specifically launched on and for the Planet Green brand as well as what was actually aired in each 24-hour cycle: Planet Green's lineup became increasingly rerun-focused with shows borrowed from other Discovery-owned networks on topics ranging from human sexuality to space aliens and the supernatural. In its last 9 months,

Planet Green aired such shows almost exclusively (Levin 2012).

I am interested in this programming trajectory not because it exposes Planet Green's hypocrisy, but rather because it gestures to the way in which Planet Green's structuring tension—that between advertiser-friendly television and environmentalism—intensified over time. This tension is thrown into sharp relief when the shows de-emphasizing environmentalism are placed alongside Planet Green's concurrent acquisition and airing of a range of independent environmental documentaries that were often highly critical of corporate power and capitalist business-as-usual. Far from an outlying trend in Planet Green's overall trajectory, I argue that these documentaries were just as central to its brand identity as the "green adjacent" shows. Further, I argue that the juxtaposition of these documentaries with the celebrations of profitable technological innovation and the mish-mash of "conscious" offerings was crucial to Planet Green's effort to resolve its central paradox through pedagogical means.

Specifically, in her effort to improve Planet Green's ratings, Michalchyshyn introduced a primetime block of documentaries called Reel Impact. Most of these had been acquired from film festivals and would make their cable television "world premieres" on Planet Green. A handful of them even offered sustained analysis and structural critiques of issues with enormous human and environmental consequences. The Reel Impact block included calls to action on global warming, such as the Leonardo DiCaprio-narrated *The 11th Hour* (2007) and Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). It aired Barbara Ettinger's *A Sea Change* (2009), which looks at the threats ocean acidification poses to fish populations globally. *The Last Beekeeper* (2009) and *The*

Colony (2009) both focused on the havoc wrought on bees and beekeepers by colony collapse disorder (Levine 2009). *King Corn* (2007) and *Big River* (2009) looked at the environmental impacts of industrial corn farming. *Split Estate* (2009) was on the environmental impact of natural gas extraction. The movie *Coal Country* (2009), a rallying cry against mountain top removal, was even identified as a "security threat" by the Pennsylvania Department of Homeland Security after its airing on Planet Green (McDermott 2010).

Who Killed the Electric Car (2006) is a devastating exposé of the way in which the auto industry sabotaged the viability consumer electric vehicles, taking Planet Green "premiere sponsor" General Motors to task for shutting down its electric vehicle (EV) program, laying off workers associated with it, and taking back all the cars; it also exposes the "revolving door" between the auto and petroleum industries and government regulatory agencies and the way in which oil industry front groups pose as grassroots opposition to policies designed to enable consumer electric vehicles. *Black Wave: The Legacy of Exxon Valdez* (2008), about the 1989 oil spill, is a damning indictment of corporate lies and greed, and the complicity of the government and legal system in enabling them. It pointed out Exxon's willingness to put people and ecosystems at risk to maximize profits. Viewers learn about Exxon's old, sub-par equipment, poor oversight of personnel, and government failure to regulate the operation in the lead up to the spill. Viewers hear from fisherwomen and men who lost their livelihoods, cleanup workers who developed debilitating illnesses from toxin exposure, scientists who explain the

effect of the spill on ocean life, and those engaged in 18-year struggle to get Exxon to pay damages awarded to those whose health and livelihoods were harmed.

Reel Impact worked to establish itself as a mediated film club and privatized public discussion forum. With the tagline, "Watch at eight, talk at ten," Planet Green invited viewers into its online universe to participate in discussion forums with fellow documentary enthusiasts. Through the site, users could also access additional video clips related to the movies, read blogs of filmmakers, play "educational" online games specific to each film. In this way, the Reel Impact block sought to "engage and provoke" individuals to move between media platforms in ways that simultaneously added brand value and cultivated engaged eco-citizenship (Michalchyshyn quoted in Golding 2009).

Not surprisingly, many of the documentaries ended on a hopeful note, offering consumers suggestions for making change "one person at a time" with additional resources on the Planet Green website to help them do so (for example, a online feature invited individuals to "take part in 8 days of no impact" (Heimbuch 2009) after the airing of *No Impact Man* (2009) chronicles a New York City family's yearlong experiment to try to eliminate its carbon footprint). Given this emphasis on individual action, it is easy to critique the documentaries for reinforcing troubling neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility. And certainly such a critique would not be unwarranted. However, it would be a mistake to reduce the significance of these critical and progressive documentaries to this concluding narrative device that has so much purchase in contemporary documentary filmmaking. On the contrary, I argue that these documentaries exemplify one of the central contradictions of Planet Green, one that is

often resolved through appeals to viewers to cultivate a comfort with this contradiction itself: the documentaries are part of a broad project in which viewers are called upon to reconcile the enormity of environmental destruction—especially with respect to the devastating consequences of corporate power and deregulated capitalism—with the limitations of consumer citizenship.

This is not to say that this was deliberate project on the part of Planet Green decision makers. Rather, I want to stress that, however unintentional, a distinct pedagogy was embedded in struggle to make environmental TV advertiser friendly. Indeed, I argue that the new shows and the Reel Impact block remained both pedagogical and governmental in ways that are continuous with the "how-to" shows aired at the time of Planet Green's debut. Initially, Planet Green worked to enact an environmentalist brand that would provide a platform and disseminate resources, lessons, and tips through which advertisers, celebrities, eco-entrepreneurs and individuals at home could self-realize as neoliberal eco-citizens and members of a green brand community. When the content shifted, the pedagogy was less overt. Nevertheless, it was still aimed in crucial ways at the same broader governmental project. Planet Green's very existence had always hinged on a paradox: the channel needed viewers who not only would watch environmental television and click on links to help them go "no-impact" (fundamentally incompatible with "high-impact" electronic media) but it also needed viewers for whom advertisers were willing to pay big money on the off chance that they would be brand loyal and purchase products. Planet Green's evolution from environmental "how to" to "green adjacent storytelling" then can be viewed as less a break from Planet Green's initial

project than as an intensification if it: Planet Green's programming changes were an outcome of an ongoing effort to make environmental television advertiser friendly and the governmental project that would make this possible involved a struggle to cultivate viewers who are comfortable with the ambivalent character of green consumer citizenship in neoliberal times. While this was almost certainly never a conscious agenda, I argue that it is quite legible in the shows—particularly in their ambivalence about social and environmental change—and that it emerged from Planet Green's structuring tension.

Discovery explains Planet Green's demise

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, at the time of its launch, Planet Green worked to make its entire slate of programming *both* environmentalist *and* advertiser friendly: each program represented different line of attack to bring these apparently contradictory projects together. As Planet Green evolved, however, it abandoned its effort to reconcile the two and instead increasingly split environmental activism off from the overtly commercial in two separate categories of programming. Nevertheless, if the programming move I discuss in the next paragraphs is any indication, even this failed to resolve the tensions internal to branding environmentalism for television. In 2011 Planet Green premiered two new shows that unambiguously sounded its death knell. In December, it introduced *Suzilla: the Mouth that Roars* and *Midnight Snack*. Both were LA-based reality shows. In *Suzilla* professional competitive eater Suzanne French (who also happened to have the decidedly non-green occupation of "contract lawyer for oilfield services company" (Grinberg 2011)), visits various greasy

spoons and BBQ joints challenging regulars to eating contests. *Midnight Snack* follows "night owl with a killer appetite," former VH-1 VJ Steven Smith, as he prowls around the city in search of the best spots to indulge in "a fourth meal of the day" (Planet Green Pigs Out 2011). Explaining the shift, a Planet Green's Marc Etkind called the new shows "the first step in Planet Green's evolution, bridging its eco-centric roots into a destination for lifestyle and entertainment seekers" (Etkind quoted in Planet Green Pigs Out 2011).

Aiming to target "entertainment seekers" rather than "armchair environmentalists," in Discovery's estimation, meant something very particular. This audience didn't include Planet Green's progressive or feminized viewers, nor its DIY, off-the-grid eco-living contingent, nor its Christian survivalist following (a number of whom vehemently objected on Planet Green's comment boards to the celebrations of gluttony in the new shows). Etkind's comments anticipated Discovery's rationale for Planet Green's rebrand as Destination America that would follow a few months later. And what remained unstated in the discourse surrounding the changes, of course, was that entertainment seekers promised to be far less commercially risky than armchair environmentalists.

In the section that follows, I lay out Discovery's explanations for Planet Green's cancellation, highlighting the certainty with which these explanations are made by a range of Discovery actors to audiences ranging from the industry, to popular press readers, to Planet Green fans, and to me in interviews. I point out the way in which these explanations are part of a performative project—that drew upon abstractions like ratings, entertainment, and trends—aiming to control a segment of the cable market by promising

to offer up predictable and valuable consumers to advertisers. I also point out that Discovery's explanations were in fact never based in certainty, which becomes obvious when its constructions of "entertainment" are unpacked and its arguments about trendiness are placed against a larger green marketing discourse that remained as wildly hopeful and deeply anxious as it had been in 2008—in fact, I could find no radical breaks in the general green marketing wisdom over in the four years that had elapsed; on the contrary, the tendencies already in motion intensified as new research produced increasingly specific and detailed knowledge about slices of the green consumer market and "discovered" new green niches.

I argue that Discovery's process of explaining the cancellation of Planet Green and the debut of Destination America reveals less about the "reality" of, for example, "what consumers want" or what makes for "entertaining" content, and more about Discovery's ongoing effort to produce knowledge and transform markets and consumers into manageable entities. In this discourse, Discovery worked hard to produce and reproduce the fantasy that the failure of environmental television was, on the one hand, due to the "fact" that environmentalism just wasn't entertaining and, on the other hand, the fault of viewers too capricious and too entertainment driven to sit still through boring and educational eco-television (an explanation that relies on highly classed understandings of "taste" as well as the collapse of consumer choice and democracy, a construct crucial to both neoliberal rationalities of rule and media culture). While I situate these explanations as both performative and productive, having tangible effects for media, brand culture, and environmentalism, I also argue that part of their productivity

involves a disavowal of the structural impossibility that environmental television could be commercially successful in a deregulated market where advertiser dollars make or break a media brand. The initial promise of Planet Green was rooted in a control impulse, that a brand could overcome this structural impossibility through governmental means, working to shape and guide consumers' everyday activities (as well as the behavior of advertisers) in order to do so. In the end, I argue, this pursuit proved too challenging and advertiser-friendly television won out.

Ratings

When Discovery announced Planet Green's impending demise on April 4, 2012 (Levin 2012), explanations for the decision constellated around ratings, entertainment, and trends—all positioned as unambiguously revealing of TV market truths. The popular narrative of Planet Green's failure was dominated by the question of poor ratings. Although, as Annie Howell (2013) told me, Planet Green's the launch, "We got lots of awards we got big buzz, we had excellent ratings on [Planet Green's] first shows." Laura Michalchyshyn (2013) later explained, "The reality of it was, when you looked at the internal ratings—we didn't have external—its like it started at a top—like a bar graph—it starts high, and then boom, within a week [of Planet Green's launch] it was, like, right down." By March of 2010, according to the *New York Times*, Planet Green had still "hardly made a dent in the ratings" (Stelter 2010a)—information the *Times* must have gotten from Discovery itself since the channel wouldn't become Nielsen rated until the following month (Planet Green Unveils Bold Programming 2010). By the time of its

cancellation, the *LA Times* reported that Planet Green "failed to find an audience over its [four-year] run" (Ito 2012); it had "floundered with low ratings," said the *New York Times* (Stelter 2012).

Discovery executives cited these low ratings in its explanations for Planet Green's cancellation. Michalchyshyn explained:

> the ratings just weren't [high] enough—not enough people were watching. And in a democratic society where our entertainment—its like with the box office, you know, in the first three days an opening film, we can take whether its going to be a successful film of not. It doesn't necessarily mean it's a bad film, it just means that it doesn't have commercial success and, you know, someone has to pay for this programming. It's very expensive. So if people aren't watching, no one's paying for it. (Michalchyshyn 2013)

The notion that cable programming is a democracy in which viewers are equally valued by cable companies and their advertisers has been debunked by media studies scholars again and again. Television ratings are less revealing of "truths" about audiences than they are a discourse that transforms an audience into what Ien Ang (1991) calls "a unified totality… that can be known in terms of size, profile, and demographic composition." Through ratings discourse, the audience becomes "a target, a commodity that can be bought and sold… delivered" to advertisers. As Ang explains, although ratings discourse has a productive capacity—it has the "ability to define a certain field of empirical truth"—the audience-as-commodity "is a fictive entity," a construction of ratings

discourse that "smooth[es] out of problematic subjectivity and translat[es] it into ordered and regular instances of viewing behaviour" (Ang 1991).

In this way, ratings are highly reductive of audiences and crucial to an ongoing project aiming to render messy and unpredictable subjectivities predictable and manageable: ratings aim to bring unruly consumers under control. When media firms use ratings to bring audiences under control to sell them to advertisers, they are interested not simply the number of viewers tuning into a program, as Eileen Meehan points out, but the viewers' "quality" with respect to their ability and propensity to consume. In this way, what media ratings systems aim to measure is *not* a show's popularity or success at producing a pleasurable viewing experience for a general audience (perhaps what Discovery spokespeople are calling "entertainment"). On the contrary, they aim to measure a show's success at delivering advertising content to "bona fide consumers—people with disposable income, desire, and access to the retail system [who would]… buy brands loyally as well as impulsively" (Meehan 2005, 33).

Discourses about TV brands' success draw upon ratings in a performative endeavor that plays a productive role in media markets. Through ratings, a firm like Discovery can perform its certainty about audiences—certainty about audiences' behavior, their likes and dislikes, and their value—for advertisers, shareholders, and multi-system operators in a broader project aiming to maximize profits and minimize risk. While ratings are also often enlisted in explanations to fans when a show or network is canceled—people just weren't watching, Planet Green executives told me—in reality, the success or failure of a network hinges far less on viewers "voting" with their eyeballs

than on media firms' success or failure to sell these eyeballs to advertisers. Nevertheless, Discovery's narrative of failure positioned ratings as a stable truth discourse. And, if Discovery was to perform its brand as a profitable place for sponsors to advertise, it would have to reassert mastery over these numbers and this market.

Trends

It did so first, through appeals to trendiness. In a message to disappointed fans, for example, the Planet Green website explained, "Planet Green was launched in the midst of an exciting environmental trend in the U.S." (Team Planet Green 2012). It was "the height of the green movement… everybody, everything was going green" a former Planet Green executive reiterated (Howell 2013). But that trend declined. (She added with real regret: "Green was a trend. Environmentalism and love and care for the environment, should be a lifestyle forever. So giving it a name, 'Planet Green,' I think, was a mistake" (Howell 2013)). Discovery CEO David Zaslav confirmed that Planet Green seemed like "a great idea" at the time, but "it turns out that it wasn't" (Levin 2012).

This self-referential argument—that the Planet Green experiment proved that a fading green fad caused its demise—ignores the fact that the larger trade discourse remained characterized by profound *un*certainty about green marketing in a manner that continued to be struggled over through market research and analysis seeking to get this market under control.

During Planet Green's run, for example, rather than turning away from the promise of green consumerism, industry journals reported on the ongoing promise of

green marketing for companies wanting to "do well by doing good." Although in 2008, *Advertising Age*'s John Neff (and others) worried that the end of green and ethical marketing was nigh given the economic downturn, in 2009 he heralded "green" as "recession proof" (Neff 2009). Authors of a 2009 green marketing handbook affirmed this, noting their "surprise" that green marketing was "likely not a fad," that its "time in the sun" might be "closer to the start than to the end" (Environmental Leader LLC and MediaBuyerPlanner LLC. 2009, 6). By 2011, as Planet Green's cancellation was already in the works, trade journalists still perceived advertisers as single-mindedly focused on mobile devices and green lifestyle (Bulik 2010). Rather than recommending that advertisers give up on green consumerism, market research continued to specify narrower and narrower slices of the green market with more and more specific advice for effective targeting (Four Tips for Green Marketers 2009, Dolliver 2010, Banikarim 2010, RedKite Advisors 2011, Holland n.d.). By 2010, trade journalists were reporting on a whole "spectrum of green [consumers] -- stretching from the darkest who are willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly products in order to help stem global warming to the lightest who are primarily interested in saving money on their energy bill, as opposed to saving the planet" (Banikarim 2010). Marketers could find special instructions for speaking to dark-green "Alpha-Ecos," self-interested "Eco-Centrics," hip, young, and networked "Eco-Chics," pragmatic "Economically Ecos," and family-oriented and cost/health-conscious "Eco-Moms" (Banikarim 2010).

On the one hand, this larger trade press discourse on green marketing suggests that Discovery's conclusion that the "green" trend had passed was far from industry

consensus. On the other hand, however, the increasingly narrow lifestyle clusters that green market research continued to specify, along with the detailed instructions for effective targeting of each cluster is also a performative discourse that worked to make green marketing commercially viable while managing profound anxieties that cropped up near-continually. For example, marketers worried that the explosion of green marketing in 2007 had resulted in "green fatigue" among consumers[67] (Kenyon quoted in Neff 2010b) as well as heightened consumer sensitivity to "greenwashing" (corporate exploitation of consumers' interest in eco-friendliness with bogus green claims) (Heimert quoted in Shah 2010). There was worry that the US population didn't care about environmental issues and recent green marketing campaigns had gone awry, such as major Planet Green sponsor SunChips' compostable chip bags—consumers didn't like how noisy they were (Can Green Marketing Work? 2010). And consumers weren't the only source of anxiety for green marketers. In 2010, the Federal Trade Commission began revising its "Green Guides"—which specify how existing laws are enforced—making them more stringent and doing so a year ahead of schedule. "Agencies beware," warned *Advertising Age* (Parekh 2011): The guides "could radically reshape how far marketers can go in painting their products, packaging or even corporate images green" (Neff 2010c). The revisions would mean closer scrutiny to root out false advertising claims (regulatory action against such claims had become rare since 70s and 80s), the guides would render both the client (advertiser) and the agency accountable for false

[67] Green fatigue refers to growing skepticism among consumers about whether "green" products were better for the environment and objections to their cost.

green claims, and communications between client and agency would now be subject to scrutiny (Parekh 2011).[68]

Against the backdrop of the larger green marketing discourse, Discovery's decision to cancel Planet Green ought not be understood as a one based on the passing of green's "time in the sun." On the contrary, the green marketing discourse shows not that individuals were ceasing to care about the environment, but that the seams holding green marketing together (tractable consumers and a market-friendly state, for example) were—and are—always under stress. No matter how detailed, specific, and sophisticated green market research became over this time period, it never overcame consumer uncontrollability (though it also never ceased to try). Planet Green's cancellation is thus better understood as a decision, made by Discovery, to withdraw from a space that it was unable to control; as a governmental project, Planet Green failed to guide either advertisers or consumers toward conducting themselves in a manner that would make Planet Green profitable.

Entertainment

Planet Green was unable to guide and shape consumers' everyday conduct toward brand-building activities, assist them in conducting their conduct in a manner that would

[68] Parekh cites the American Association of Advertising Agencies Washington Office head Dick O'Brien, was defensive: "We believe that our own self-regulatory efforts and the existing regulations meet most of the concerns expressed by the commission in their new proposals. Green marketing is fragile and can be harshly affected by too many rules that make it almost impossible to discuss the environment benefits of products and services" (Parekh 2011). For O'Brien, regulations hurt industry's ability to do environmentalism. Other agencies worried that the guidelines would cause court battles that would in turn "hamper creativity." What is new and alarming to Parekh is that agencies, not just advertisers, are being held accountable for the advertising content they produce. The author advised agencies to "be cautious" because "a little paranoia could go a long way in terms of helping an agency avoid an unnecessary headache" and closes with an insider quote from a Mr. Cole, who is more pointed in his warning: "be really careful what you say in electronic communications, whether in an email or a text message… "It can be retrieved after the fact, and it could come back to haunt you" (Parekh 2011). What is incredible about these concluding remarks is the extent to which they indicate that breaking the law is not only common, but entirely normative and normalized. There is no suggestion that there might be an ethical problem with these modes of operating.

help them self-shape and self-govern as the kind of green consumer citizens that advertisers would be willing to purchase. This "ungovernability" of the green market and green consumers undermined Planet Green's performative project that aimed to realize brand value by persuading advertisers that it could deliver predictable and valuable green consumers. Although such "ungovernability" can be linked quite clearly to Planet Green's demise, this fearful fact, along with Discovery's own power to make decisions about programming, was always disavowed in Discovery's explanations for Planet Green's cancellation. Instead, Discovery used the ratings as an objective measure of consumer choice: viewers did not want environmental television. Through ratings, the people had spoken clearly and unambiguously that green TV was "just not entertaining." Discovery was only following suit, giving the people what they wanted. In this way, Discovery represented Planet Green's failure as a problem of demand, not a decision made by industrial actors (see Ouellette 2002), and it posited "entertainment" as an objective fact rather than something subjective and unstable. As Laurie Ouellette has observed, the equation discussed above of "ratings with people's democratic participation" that characterized Discovery's messaging on Planet Green's cancellation has a long history in discourses of television's quality; and this equation has long allowed industrial actors to "[obscure] their own powerful role as the commercial shapers of television culture" (Ouellette 2002, 37) while attributing decisions about content to "mass tastes." Discovery explained Planet Green's demise in terms of these two tropes—ratings-equals-democracy and entertainment-as-objective fact—enlisting them in its performative efforts to maintain control of a market.

Despite the fact ratings data has little to do with democratic representation of what people "want," for Discovery, the equivalence of these two things was nevertheless ritually performed through appeals to entertainment. For Laura Michalchyshyn, Planet Green's early ratings drop-off "just said to me, and everyone, this programming is *just not entertaining enough*. The channel was failing. Period. Simple. No one was watching… there's a lot of places where the green message and environmental activism has been a lot more successful. It's not in long-form television programming. It's just boring, I'm sorry. It's dull and does appeal" (Michalchyshyn 2013, my emphasis). David Zaslav told *USA Today*, "The feedback from viewers was that programming about the environment was not entertaining enough" (Levin 2012) and Discovery executives told the *New York Times* that Planet Green floundered due to "a lack of entertaining eco-themed shows" (Stelter 2012).

Although of course the obviousness that characterized Discovery's conclusions about entertainment was performative—as was the discursive collapse of "objective entertainment" with ratings and consumer choice—it nonetheless gained purchase across press sites and seemed to have real resonance with the executives with whom I spoke (though some qualified their opinions about entertainment by listing shows that they had in fact enjoyed—and even found "fun" in the case of *Battleground Earth* and "hilarious" in the case of the *100 Mile Challenge* and the *Fabulous Beekman Boys*[69]). Richard Dyer

[69] Annie Howell, for example, spoke directly to the wholly subjective and confounding nature of "entertainment" in a comment about her own viewing preferences: "[Green TV] sounds boring and unless you tuned in and watched some of the stuff—I mean, some of the stuff that they had was really interesting and really cool, but I'm interested in that topic. If you're not, even to get someone to sit down for even half an hour is almost impossible… And they had a bunch of acquisitions from Canada that I thought were just fantastic. Really interesting, fun, clever shows. But you had to be into it. My husband was like, "eugch, who watches this?" I'm serious! I hate to say it, but it's true. You know. I mean, you had the *100 Mile Challenge*, which I thought was a hoot, which was a town in British Columbia decided that for an entire month they could only eat or drink products that could be found within a hundred miles… And it was hilarious watching the ones who could do it and the ones who were just buckling under the pressure because

has pointed out that what is "entertaining" is often taken for granted and dismissed. One need not answer "why" something is entertaining, or what makes it so, because it "just is." To say that something is "entertaining," then, is often understood as "an end point" or "obvious" (something is "just entertaining") (Dyer 1992). Dyer, however, insists that entertainment be "made strange" (7). What is "entertaining" is not natural, but produced in particular contexts at particular times in ways that have implications more significant than a throwaway chuckle: "entertainment offers certain pleasures not others, proposes that we find such and such delightful, teaches us enjoyment – including the enjoyment of unruly delight. It works with desires that circulate in a given society at a given time, neither wholly constructing those desires nor merely reflecting desires produced elsewhere" (7). Planet Green's shift to Destination America constructed "entertaining" content by tapping into the anti-elitism/populism of a carnivalesque aesthetic that did less to subvert dominant hierarchies than it did to shore up hetero-patriarchal white supremacist capitalism while flying in the face of middle class propriety. (Interestingly, Destination America ambivalently claims and reshapes class struggle in line with status quo economic arrangements in a way that mirrors what Planet Green attempted with environmentalism.)

Discovery's construction of "entertaining content" was wholly bound up in its desire to capture white, "Middle American," male viewers and deliver them to advertisers—a desire that was absolutely central to the anxieties that structured Planet Green throughout its existence. Given this, the appeal of a network like Destination

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there's no coffee grown in British Colombia. You know, so these men without their coffee. And, it was a really clever idea. It didn't do well" (Howell 2013).

America is obvious. Seeming to speak directly to Discovery's ambivalence about the politically charged character of "green" television, Destination America's Henry Scheiff explained, "Americans may be divided by politics, but we are united by our love of country… As a network inclusive to all, Destination America will celebrate this connective spirit by curating the common ground among us: the pluck of the worn saddle, the promise of exploring new territory and the diversity that has made this nation great" (Scheiff quoted in Planet Green Rebrands 2012). Unlike scary stories about global warming and the gentle scolding of American mega-consumers that viewers saw on Planet Green, Destination America's content would be "quintessential counterprogramming to many of the negative stories" and "a one-stop destination for all of these stories from an American perspective," ostensibly recuperating the negative image of "Middle America" by giving it positive spin (Levin 2012). Zaslav explained that Destination America aimed to target "a manly version of TLC's audience…with shows about food, travel, adventure and natural history aimed squarely at a between-the-coasts crowd"; Discovery had "became convinced," perhaps thanks to its experience with Planet Green, that "there was an opening there to build a channel based on Middle America, strong values, behavior and customs" (Zaslav quoted in Levin 2012).

Poking a hole in Etkind's argument that Destination America would be "inclusive to all," an *LA Times* reporter asked him "whether there would be anything for vegetarians to watch" (Ito 2012). Missing the point, Etkind responds, "If we can find something that's going to appeal to everybody that's vegetable-based… by all means, we'll do it" (Ito 2012). But "How many actual, everyday blue-collar Americans can go home and do that

crap they do over there at Food Network?" asks one of the judges from *BBQ Pitmasters*, "None of 'em! Who is gonna make foam and gel, and then string that crap across the plate to make it look pretty? But everyone can go out and grill a burger, they can go do pork chops, they can do ribs. And they do it" (Mixon quoted in Ito 2012). Here, guaranteed appeal is bound up in a reclamation of "ordinary" American sensibilities laced with racialized, classed, and gendered assumptions in ways that are extraordinarily *ex*clusive, not inclusive. Exclusivity, of course, is neither unusual nor surprising for niche media, on the contrary it is central to the business model, but here it is wholly disavowed by Discovery's discourse; unacknowledged is that Destination America seeks to appeal not to "everyone" but to a specific target audience of 18-49 year-old males who can be sold to advertisers skeptical about the future of cable TV.

Thus, in the discourse of the Planet Green's demise, the commercial logic governing the changes was inextricable from industrial assumptions about Middle America. Further, there is a not-so-subtle suggestion that this "Middle America" is somehow to blame for the failure of environmentalist television. The Planet Green team did everything they could, one former executive told me, "they tried to give it [their all]—they had a significant programming budget…they were given everything that was necessary to try and launch and run a channel, but it was just hard to attract an audience to 24/7 environmental content. It just was. It sounds boring and unless you tuned in and watched some of the stuff… I think that's why the channel did well on the coastline where people are a little bit more environmentally conscious or in big cities" (Howell 2013). "If you had green spinach fed to you everyday on a platter and its boiled with no

accoutrements, salt or pepper, are you going to eat it? And enjoy it?" another former executive asked me. "I don't think so," she concluded. "That's what this had done" (Michalchyshyn 2013). She added, "There's this endless list of—Honey Boo Boo on TLC—I mean, successful programming draws in audiences. It doesn't always mean it's the same quality-wise, but it's just what appeals" (Michalchyshyn 2013).

In this way, the dominant narrative describing Planet Green's replacement by Destination America rehearses the same 60s-era anxiety about "childlike" mass audiences choosing "candy over spinach" in their television viewing that, as I have already demonstrated, haunted Planet Green (Gould quoted in Ouellette 2002, 33). By doing so, this discourse "[blames] issues pertaining to cultural production and control on viewer self-discipline" (Ouellette 2002, 33). Instead of the reform impulse that governed such critiques in the 60s, Discovery decision makers resigned themselves to this "reality" and gave the people what they (supposedly) wanted. While Discovery's emphasis on pleasure was potentially progressive, in the end, the question of viewing pleasure was hardly relevant as it was governed entirely by a commercial logic and highly reductive and exclusive assumptions about mass tastes.

Destination America's exaltation of excess may seem strange for a media firm that was so recently professing its investment in greener futures; and its unextraordinary launch might appear surprising in the multi-channel, multi-platform era. These choices, however, were almost certainly based on three factors. The first factor is that this new "entertaining" television was far cheaper than Planet Green's initial slate of all-original shows. Destination America's launch surely made sense to Discovery because it was also

very very cheap. With a slate of reality reruns, Destination America's launch drew upon very common strategies US television firms use to minimize risk, as Ted Magder (and others) have pointed: "First, to deliver audiences in a 'buying mood' to advertisers. Second, stick to established program genres and avoid challenging the genre's expectations of viewers. Third, recycle and copy successful shows" (Magder 2009, 148). The second factor is that Destination America's content was surely chosen in part based on industrial stereotypes that appeals to "ordinary" and "blue collar" American masculinities would resonate *naturally* among viewers. However, since TV—and more particularly, reality TV—does not give us what we want, but rather reflects the needs and desires of advertisers, the third and most decisive factor is that first and foremost for Discovery was the belief that Destination America's unambiguous celebration of American capitalism would inspire little anxiety among potential sponsors. Discovery did not worry that Destination America needed a boost to "break through the clutter" nor did it need to demonstrate to advertisers that it could.

Profits trump planet saving

Although the relative absence of anxiety in Destination America's launch represents a sharp departure from Discovery's approach to Planet Green, I argue that Destination America is best viewed, in fact, as *continuous* with a struggle that was already in motion when Planet Green launched not four years prior. While much of the press coverage of Planet Green's switch to Destination America represented it as a total reversal, as I discussed above, to anyone who had been watching Planet Green's

evolution over its short time on air, its cancellation cannot have come as a great surprise—by the time of the 2012 re-branding, Planet Green hadn't aired eco-content for about nine months (Levin 2012). Online commenters had been complaining at least since 2010 about Planet Green's airing of non-environmentalist shows from other Discovery-owned channels: *What Not to Wear*, *Miami Ink*, *Tuna Wranglers*, and programs on ghosts, aliens, and mummies, to name a few. Discovery's de-emphasis on environmentalism on Planet Green and the transformation of the channel into Destination America was part of a larger industrial process seeking to manage a crisis of ad dollars on the one hand, and, on the other hand, deprioritizing a risky brand in the context of enormous commercial success elsewhere within the Discovery universe.

Ad dollars

Given the centrality of pleasing advertisers to media business, it may seem surprising that the question of ad dollars was almost entirely absent from the popular and industrial conversation on Planet Green's failure. This is not to say that the industry insiders are lying to the press. Rather, within performance of TV brands, ratings bring in ad dollars in a straightforward sense. The legibility of "failure" within branding and media discourse relies on a collapse of ratings and advertiser support, despite the well-known fact that media firms engage in an ongoing struggle to transform ratings into ad dollars through the hard work of, in the case of Discovery, ad teams paid on commission who are charged with convincing advertisers of the value of the "eyeballs" they may be

able to deliver. Yet, the public discourse focuses single-mindedly on the problem of ratings and viewers (coded as "entertainment").

The few published accounts of Planet Green's success with advertisers sounded quite positive. A 2007 *Washington Post* story described the initial advertiser interest in purchasing time on Planet Green as "intense" (Ahrens 2007a) and Planet Green's launch was deemed a success according to measures such as "engagement" and "attentiveness," as the marketing team reported in their Mark Awards application:

> PG ranked as the #2 network for viewer engagement and #4 for viewer attentive to ads. Conversion rate of those aware to those intending to view was very high. Conversion rate of awareness to intent-to-view was the highest of all Discovery Communications Networks at 67% based on DCIC / OTX Marketing Evolution Study, May and July 2008. (Planet Green Launch Marketing Team 2009)

Planet Green's ad team also reported that ad sale commitments had increased two fold over the ad sales when the channel was still Discovery Home (Planet Green Launch Marketing Team 2009) and Planet Green's launch campaign won several awards: it was not only designated the "Consumer Launch Campaign of the Year" by *PR Week* (Launch of the Year 2009) but also recipient of a 2009 Gold Mark Award in the "Brand Image and Positioning: Campaign" division.

But a few days before Planet Green's June 2008 launch, one media buyer "on condition of anonymity" revealed to *Media Week*'s Anthony Crupi that ad time on Planet Green was "not selling like they hoped… Clients have some misgivings about aligning with a concept that might leave them open to all sorts of unwanted scrutiny," the buyer

explained (quoted in Crupi 2008). Indeed, as I later learned in interviews, Planet Green's cancellation was less about viewers than it was about the difficulty in generating enough ad dollars to run the channel at all. Throughout its short life, as one former executive remarked, "for the most part, [the response to the channel from viewers] was very positive. But you know, people who are in that environmental space and know it, they will scrutinize your advertisers for sure. And that's why getting the right advertisers with the right records was extremely important but very hard" (Howell 2013). And indeed, "ad sales was a challenge," she went on. "Companies were very leery of how much they wanted to put their brand against something that was so completely tied to the environment… I think there was concern that that would call into question their own practices… there were many many advertisers that were mainstream advertisers on TLC, Animal Planet, Discovery that didn't want anything to do with Planet Green. It was too scary for them" (Howell 2013).[70] In hindsight, despite the initial excitement, "within a year, it was clear that [Planet Green] was going to be a much harder thing to pull off long term. People didn't want to give that up, but I think when you realize that you're not going to be able to generate the revenue that you need to sustain a business, you've got to cut, you've got to cut deep, you just do" (Howell 2013).

Despite Planet Green's marketing awards and an ad team that one executive called the "best in the business," its ad revenue was dwarfed by that of other similar networks because, despite new "green advertising budgets" in fact, corporations were

[70] "You know, you have, for instance, Dow, okay, well great, they have all this, they have a whole line of environmentally friendly products, you know, windows and whatnot, but we all know that Dow also has a horrendous track record for pollution. So that was really tricky. Automotive, I mean, Ford was very involved, you know, a great company, but there were many many advertisers that were mainstream advertisers on TLC, Animal Planet, Discovery that didn't want anything to do with Planet Green. It was too scary for them" (Howell 2013).

unwilling to risk the heightened scrutiny of their business and manufacturing practices invited by green claims. And when the housing sector crashed in 2009, things only got worse, as *Renovation Nation* host, Steve Thomas explained:

> By the time they got into the belly of the recession, virtually all of our advertisers—I mean, our principle advertiser was Saturn, the car company, and they folded. And I've been through a number of recessions in my adult life and this was by far the worst, by an order of magnitude… the advertiser base simply disappeared. Windows and doors, home products of various sorts, big box stores—Home Depot, Lowes and so on—their day-to-day sales dropped precipitously. Basically, the whole housing category was down by more than 50 percent, windows, doors, appliances… everybody from Whirlpool to Subzero, they're not advertising… banking services, mortgage services, real estate services—none of those people are advertising. Ford trucks, Chevy trucks… advertising to contractors: not advertising.

Thomas explained to me that Planet Green sold the bulk of its advertising around *Emeril Green* and *Renovation Nation*, so when the housing market plummeted and the advertisers withdrew their sponsorship, this represented a significant portion of the channel's overall revenues:

> I think what happened at Discovery was they looked at the numbers and looked at the hemorrhaging and just said, we're going to pull the plug… and they pulled the plug on the whole network… [*Renovation Nation*] was a great show. It had a growing viewer base, a loyal advertising base… they had to cut their advertising

> when their businesses evaporated… I think that [Planet Green's cancellation] was purely fiscal… look, you know, they're [Discovery's] in the business to make money and Planet Green was doing well and my show was doing great. You know the VP, the senior VP of ad sales for planet green said there's two shows that I need, I need you and I need Emeril [*Emeril Green*], because he sold most of the advertising around those two shows, but that all changed when the economy just—you know, I think they just didn't want to sustain the network through a series of losses. (Thomas 2013)

Ad sales are not only crucial revenue for a channel, but they are also key to justifying carriage of a network to multi-system operators (like Comcast, for example). Without sufficient advertiser interest, channels risk being dropped from their "dial position" (a term that bears the legacy of analog TV and refers to the channel number a network occupies) by service providers. Planet Green's dial position was designated "lifestyle," which meant it was contractually obligated to have a certain distribution of food, travel, home shows, etc (Howell 2013). Destination America's programming promised to rework these lifestyle categories—away from everyday feminized work on the self, home, and family and away from environmentalism—for a demographic more desirable to advertisers (Howell 2013).

Wall Street and other priorities

While it may be tempting to see Planet Green's struggle with ad sales as a definitive explanation for its cancellation, doing so fails to situate Planet Green's demise

in the context of the operations of commercial media in a radically deregulated market. The direct relationship between ad sales and the viability of television networks is not a natural fact but rather the product of a very particular media environment in which maximizing profits trump all other concerns. When placed against the backdrop of Discovery's business decisions behind the scenes and enormous commercial and financial success, Planet Green's rise and fall unambiguously demonstrates the limits of branding as a mode of environment saving in contemporary culture.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Planet Green was launched simultaneous with Discovery becoming a publicly traded company under new CEO David Zaslav. Although, as I noted, there is some evidence to suggest that Planet Green had initially been part of Discovery's efforts to demonstrate "responsibility" to Wall Street, as time went on, in the discourse surrounding Discovery's growth efforts, the Planet Green brand was seldom mentioned. On the contrary, both the trade press and Wall Street celebrated Zaslav less for "responsibility" than for aggressive and risk-taking business moves. In September 2009, *USA Today*'s David Lieberman called him to a "tenacious corporate animal poised to challenge the kings of television"; Discovery's re-branding and expansion projects over the preceding years had caught the attention of both Wall Street and industry for transforming itself from what Lieberman called "an also-ran television service into a vigorous worldwide rival to giants including Disney, NBC Universal, News Corp., Time Warner and Viacom" (Lieberman 2009). The value of Discovery shares had gone up dramatically over the year, less because of Discovery's environmental commitments than because it was a pure-play cable company, which, as Lieberman

explains "look good in a recession because about half of their revenue is guaranteed [since] it comes from payments by cable and satellite operators."[71] Bernstein Research (self-described as "Wall Street's premier sell-side research firm") was predicting that Discovery's net income would reach $559 million on revenues of $3.48 billion by the end of the year (Lieberman 2009). Discovery's reputation on Wall Street was improving—without, it seems, any discussion of Planet Green.

In July, 2008, not two months into Plant Green's run, Zaslav removed Planet Green's President/General Manager, Eileen O'Neill from Planet Green's helm so she could devote her talents to more urgent projects at sister network The Learning Channel (TLC).[72] O'Neill would be charged with returning TLC to cable TV's top 20, Discovery's "priority No. 1," according to Zaslav (Schneider 2008). Zaslav explained, "The recent strategy for TLC did not meet our ratings or operational goals. I am committed to improving upon these processes and lessons learned and restoring TLC to its full creative and business potential" (quoted in Schneider 2008). (The "commitment" to TLC's survival is notable in the context of a lack of such commitment to Planet Green's. What are the criteria that make for a brand that a company is willing to take a loss on, sometimes for several years?) When O'Neill left Planet Green, according to *Renovation Nation* host Steve Thomas, the channel lost one of its most passionate supporters, "a real powerhouse" with a clear "vision" for the channel, she was

[71] Further, Discovery's ownership of its programming and content (unusual in TV business) and its internationalization efforts were bolstering its reputation among investors (Lieberman 2009)

[72] O'Neill replaced TLC head Angela Shapiro-Mathes (who had been hired the year previous in Zaslav's initial "restructuring"). While Discovery searched for a Planet Green replacement, Clark Bunting, a Discovery higher-up who'd been with the company for over 20 years, would be acting prexy-GM.

"instrumental" in making the programming successful, he said (Thomas 2013).[73] Another Planet Green star agreed that O'Neill had "a vision for [Planet Green], and then she left… everybody was kind of floating"; as an aside, she added her sense that O'Neill's departure "coupled with… the economy and the green advertising dollars" created a "perfect storm" for Planet Green's cancellation (Murphy 2013).

The backdrop to O'Neill's move and Discovery's diminished focus on Planet Green was Discovery's single-minded focus on aggressive growth—both on Wall Street and in terms of international market share. The company continued to rebrand channels—for example a 2009 partnership with Hasbro toys to rebrand Discovery Kids as the Hub and one with Oprah Winfrey to launch OWN (Yourse 2009). In addition, Discovery was ramping up its internationalization efforts.[74] As Discovery became what *New York Times*' Brian Stelter called a Wall Street "favorite" and "the subject of envy" among TV companies in 2010, Planet Green was increasingly absent from Discovery discourse, including promotional releases, annual reports, and statements to the press (Stelter 2010b).

Analysts were less interested in environmental responsibility than in the fact that Discovery owned most of its content—something quite unusual in TV business—Discovery could thus replay this content in its international markets and monetize it in

[73] *Renovation Nation*'s Steve Thomas explained in an interview that, with O'Neill's departure, Planet Green lost its most powerful champion. *Renovation Nation*'s Steve Thomas called O'Neill "a real powerhouse" and "instrumental" in making the programming successful. He called her "the genesis of Planet Green" and said that "she understood exactly what she wanted to develop in terms of Planet Green… what we did conformed to her vision… She was great to work with" (Thomas 2013).

[74] On July 28, 2009, the *New York Times* reported that Discovery had just signed with Baidu, what is sometimes referred to as "the Google of China," to partner in the production of a "science and adventure" website. Zaslav explained that Discovery's content spoke a "universal language of satisfying curiosity," which the Brian Stelter speculates "may not run the same censorship risks as Western culture or news programming" (Stelter 2009) Zaslav's statement, here, is revealing about the business assumptions attached to "quality" and "educational" television: they are central to producing ostensibly "non-offensive" programming, defined according to a set of assumptions about normative moralities. One might extrapolate from this statement that Planet Green's do-good "edu-tainment" had originally promised to serve a discursive function for the expansionist projects, but was now taking a backseat.

any number of other ways (Howell 2013). Stelter attributed Discovery's success (in the US and internationally) to this and to the fact that Discovery relies heavily on cheap-to-produce reality formats. Over the year prior, the price of Discovery stock had doubled, doing better than shares of most other cable companies and Zaslav continued to be intently focused on increasing Discovery's international market share: international revenue had gone up significantly and in Latin America in particular, distribution of Discovery content had increased some 70 percent over the preceding three years. In the context of this commercial success, Discovery decided to "ease up" on Planet Green's environmental theme (Stelter 2010b).

Although the trade press offered little explanation, it is worth noting that at the same time that Discovery was de-greening the network, Planet Green higher-ups were leaving Discovery. On January 3, 2011, Annie Howell, a senior VP of communications and public affairs at Discovery and a member of Planet Green's launch team, left Discovery to join Crown Media Holdings (which owns and operates Hallmark Channel and Hallmark Movie Channel) (People on the Move 2011). On January 4, *Daily Variety* reported that another Planet Green higher-up, Rachel Smith, would also be leaving, this time to join the BBC as VP of original programming (BBC America 2011). Were they leaving a dead-end brand? Or abandoning a project that Discovery had ceased to support? Disillusioned? Or encouraged to seek employment elsewhere on the eve of Planet Green's demise? Or was it just coincidence that they both landed top positions at other media firms at the same time? The best we can do is to speculate about the internal conditions that precipitated these moves. But what is certain is that all the while,

Discovery was waffling about whether to maintain the Planet Green channel. In January 2011, the *New York Times* reported that "Discovery [had] been trying to figure out whether to rebrand" Planet Green (Stelter 2011). On February 14, Zaslav told *Variety* that Planet Green was slated for a "re-think," explaining, "We feel like we could something else more meaningful" with the channel (More OWN Coin 2011).[75]

Planet Green's "re-think" was not a completely linear or straightforward process at Discovery Communications Inc. In March, the company hired two new executives to manage Planet Green and Discovery Fit & Health (now managed as a "dual network"). Michalchyshyn commented that the new hires would "further [strengthen] what is already a top-notch senior team for Discovery Fit & Health and Planet Green… as we continue to build these two young, emerging networks" (Powers 2011). At the same time, thanks to Planet Green's investment in original programming, the 2011 Harris Poll EquiTrend study—a study that evaluates and ranks brands—named Planet Green among the most improved "Topical Interest" TV brands (Harris Interactive 2011) and by the summer, industry news was reporting that Discovery planned to continue to invest in "further growth" of the channel.[76]

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[75] This announcement came at the same time that Discovery announced its plans to invest another 50 million dollars in Winfrey's OWN, Daily Variety, "MORE OWN COIN AHEAD; Discovery to invest another $50 mil," *Daily Variety* (Reed Elsevier Inc.), February 2011: 5., and FiTV had been rebranded as Discovery Fit and Health.

[76] Despite the planned makeover, Planet Green embarked on a partnership with Goodwill Industries International to support the charity's "Donate Movement" a branded platform for activism that "encourages consumers to consider the positive impact their donations have on both people and the planet." The "donate movement" also partners with "iconic brands" like Hanes, Family Circle Magazine, Levi's). Goodwill calls it "a global movement inspiring consumers and businesses to join Goodwill in promoting the positive impact donating has on people and the planet," refashioning the notion of a social movement in line with the demands of branding. Such a movement offers "education" on what kinds of socially responsible activities are appropriate as well as an opportunity for individuals to "do good" through the brands themselves: "Planet Green and Goodwill are working together to educate the public on ways they can actually make the world a better place," writes the author. Michalchyshyn offered: "It's the idea of conscious living… As partners of the Donate Movement, we are asking viewers to consider the small ways they can help their community and the environment by giving to reputable organizations like Goodwill that turn donations into jobs" (Wireless News). Planet Green stood to promote its new programming though the announcement and add "socially responsible" value to its brand. A new docu-series, *Dresscue Me* (a show in which "self-taught designer" and owner of several vintage clothing stores, Shareen Mitchell, a helps "ordinary" women realize themselves through recycled fashion) would be involved in the partnership. For Goodwill, the

Despite this continued investment in Planet Green and some success by industry measures of brand value, by September Laura Michalchyshyn, too, had resigned from her Planet Green post (Benzine 2011). It was evident to anyone watching the channel that around this time Planet Green ceased to be in all but name. At some point Discovery decided that it was not worthwhile to run Planet Green at a loss. Unsuccessful brands are viewed as a liability and now that Discovery was a publicly traded company, it was mandated to maximize profits for its shareholders. As noted in Chapter 1, cable companies are now operating under the belief that the US cable market is "saturated"—most households who are likely to subscribe to cable already do, so little expansion of this market is possible. On top of this, the market is expected to shrink as people—and young people in particular—get more and more of their content online, some never subscribing to cable in the first place and others, "cord cutters," cancelling their subscriptions. This is the context in which Discovery's internationalization efforts (driven by the promise of untapped cable markets) and its emphasis on cheap-to-produce, advertiser-friendly brands makes sense. It is also the context in which risky projects like Planet Green are less and less appealing. Initially, Planet Green, with its mantle of "responsibility" and its copious online and interactive content promised to solve to this set of industrial problems for a cable company on the brink of going public. And in some ways, Planet Green's failure can be understood as a failure in these terms: it didn't

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partnership contained the promises of media generally and lifestyle television more specifically for extending its brand and offering viewers tips on how to incorporate Goodwill into their everyday lives. According to a Goodwill spokesperson, "Planet Green will enable us to channel our 'repurpose' message to millions of viewers who understand what it means to give a new purpose to existing material" (Wireless News 2011).

manage to solve these industrial problems sufficiently. Growth, it turned out, did not require green TV.

Conclusion

While Planet Green "failed" in market terms, for Discovery this failure was far more ambivalent. Foucault has pointed out that the productivity of a governmental project may have an ambivalent relationship to its ostensible aims. This is most clear in his discussion of the prison in his 1977 *Discipline & Punish*. I am not here comparing the governmental project of Planet Green to that of the prison in Foucault's work; however the instrumentalization of failure for broader aims is relevant, here. Specifically, Foucault points out that "If the law is supposed to define offences, if the function of the penal apparatus is to reduce them and if the prison is the instrument of this repression, then failure has to be admitted" (271) but if one asks "what is served by the failure of the prison" which "is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them" (272) in a process that is exceedingly successful at producing and instrumentalizing delinquency (Foucault 1977, 277). Similarly, when it comes to brands, As Liz Moor argues, "the *effects* of branding should perhaps be construed less in terms of the 'effectiveness' of particular branding campaigns (which, as we have seen, are prone to considerable error), and more in terms of the impact of branding upon a wider environment" (Moor 2007, 64). Although Planet Green "failed" in the sense that Discovery decided to discontinue the brand, it nonetheless participated in broader tendencies in ways that have a number of implications. Moor reminds us that

"Brands may not always work in practice in the ways intended by those who create them, but the effort to cultivate brand identities, and to use these as a means to organize production, exchange and management, structures a growing range of social and political as well as economic activities" (153).

Discovery spokespeople performed Planet Green's failure as market research—offering up unambiguous and objective knowledge about consumers—in ways that added value to Discovery's other TV brands, particularly Destination America, and shaped industrial beliefs about television and the branding of environmentalism. The failure of Planet Green was remarkably successful in garnering profits for Discovery and confirmed and bolstered a range of existing hierarchies. In its first year of existence, according to Nielsen ratings, Destination America "experienced 11 consecutive months of year-over-year gains in Prime delivery among P25-54" and "Since its launch on 5/28/12, Destination America ranks #1 in Prime for M25-54 delivery among ad-supported cable networks with 65M subscribers or less" (Bibel 2013). At the time of Destination America's launch, all of Planet Green's advertisers stayed with the channel, and 12 additional advertisers signed on "including marketers of food and beverages, auto makers, insurance companies, and makers of home-improvement products such as Mitsubishi Electric, which will advertise a new cooling and heating system," *Advertising Age* reported (Steinberg 2012).

And just as "failure" as a concept does little to get at what is produced by a failed governmental project, brands included, Miller and Rose remind us that "Government is a congenitally failing operation" anyway: "Things, persons, or events always appear to

escape… the programmatic logic that seeks to govern them" (Miller and Rose quoted in McCarthy 2010, 7). In the case of Planet Green, people at Discovery attempted to enact a context in which advertisers and viewers would align their conduct with the invitations of the green brand community. In both cases, they refused. But, Anna McCarthy adds, "if the world in which we live is not [as Miller and Rose write,] 'a governed world so much as a world traversed by the "will to govern," fueled by the constant registration of "failure," the discrepancy between ambition and outcome, and the constant injunction to do better next time,' this does not mean that the will to govern is impotent or ineffectual, particularly when it comes to the distribution of resources and access to power" (McCarthy 2010, 7, quoting Miller and Rose where noted).

Perhaps Planet Green's failure should be understood less in terms of whether it successfully governmentalized consumers toward good green consumer citizenship and more in terms of the particular way that television's usefulness as technology of governance under US neoliberalism maintains a seductive pull on media decision makers. When television took hold as such a technology in the postwar era, and sponsored programming attempted to guide individuals toward the emerging ideals of neoliberal citizenship, Anna McCarthy argues that significance of this programming was not that it had any hope of achieving "the Orwellian goals of total propaganda" (7). Rather, and much in line with critiques of Planet Green's "boring" green vegetable programming, she adds "it is hard to believe, given the often soporific nature of [the postwar sponsored TV shows] produced with the goals of governance in mind, that such endeavors had much direct effect" (7). Nevertheless, she writes,

> If television helped to implant the neoliberal program in U.S. political culture, it was not via its influence upon the so-called masses, but rather in its capacity to galvanize elites. From its inception, television assembled and connected members of distinct sectors of the governing classes who were seduced by, or at least curious about, its potential as an instrument for inculcating the values of liberal capitalist democracy. (McCarthy 2010, 8)

Of course, we cannot equate the postwar context with contemporary forms of governmentality. Planet Green had different aims and objectives from postwar television, less concerned with ushering in liberal capitalist democracy than with working to create a template for eco-self-governance amenable to the contemporary form of US neoliberalism as it comes together with brand culture. Planet Green's aims were much more overtly and purely commercial—cable, unlike broadcast television, has never been beholden to serving the public interest. But McCarthy's insight about the seductive appeal of governing through television remains relevant.

Although Discovery abandoned the Planet Green project when it didn't prove profitable, there is a good deal of evidence that the promise of eco-governing through do-good media continued to exert pull among industry insiders. For example, Planet Green won several awards throughout its existence. I mentioned the launch awards above. Additionally, at the 2010 News and Documentary Emmy Awards, Planet Green received awards for the Reel Impact series, and the documentaries *The Last Beekeeper* and *Split Estate* (Weiswasser 2010). Ed Begley Jr.'s *Living with Ed* won an Environmental Media Association award (Lacher 2010). The reality series, *Wa$ted!* won a bronze at the 2011

Telly Awards, and the Planet Green website won an outstanding achievement award in entertainment from the Interactive Media Council (Winners 2009). Further, although Planet Green failed, green and 'ethical' marketing and media show no sign of abating. Celebrity chefs emphasize local and organic ingredients, "green" product lines proliferate, "fast fashion" retail chain H&M recently introduced its "Don't Let Fashion Go to Waste" recycling program, Wal-Mart publicizes its sustainability initiatives, and the EPA even has downloadable eco-apps for mobile devices.

Additionally, even as it was taking Planet Green off the air, Discovery continued to assure Planet Green fans that it "still cared about the environment." When Discovery announced the 2012 rebranding, there was a groundswell of outrage. The Planet Green website tried to ease the transition with a FAQ page: "7 Common Questions about Changes at Planet Green." The questions ranged from, "So, what's happening? Is Planet Green going away?" "Will I still get PG on my TV?" "Why is this happening? Why not keep Planet Green on TV?" "Does Discovery not care about the environment? Where can we find environmental news and information moving forward?" The answers promised that Discovery-owned media would "continue to be a great source for news and information about important environmental issues": sites like TreeHugger.com and Discovery News would publish information on "environmentalism and sustainability" and Planet Green video content would remain available on PlanetGreen.com, Planet Green's YouTube channel, and on iTunes. Discovery also took the opportunity to publicize its "plans to continue to invest in environmental programming and initiatives, such as the epic series, Frozen Planet" (Team Planet Green 2012).

But even this modest promise had limits. When Planet Green was canceled, all of its partnerships with environmental organizations "just kind of [went] to the wayside" unless they had a partnership with another Discovery brand (like Animal Planet) (Howell 2013). For a number of years after the TV network's cancellation, Discovery did in fact maintain the PlanetGreen.com and the TreeHugger.com websites. However, PlanetGreen.com was soon subsumed into the still Discovery-owned TreeHugger.com site (at the address PG.TreeHugger.com) and eventually, all Planet Green web addresses were redirected to the Mother Nature Network[77] homepage where there wasn't a trace of Planet Green's content (something I first observed on February 16, 2013). Some of the Planet Green website was transferred to other Discovery-controlled websites: bits of its science and technology content moved to the website HowStuffWorks while pieces of its lifestyle advice began appearing on the TLC site. But this content is far less interactive than the original and all of the critical content—the environmental news and open-ended comment forums—are gone.

Further, Discovery's promise to invest in "environmental programming" like *Frozen Planet* (2011) generated its own environmental controversy. The David Attenborough-narrated BBC series was produced as a 7-episode nature documentary, the last episode of which explicitly addressed the impact of climate change on the ice caps. When Discovery announced its plans to air the documentary, there was public outcry over its decision to air only the first 6 episodes (Climate change episode of Frozen Planet 2011). In the face of this outcry, Discovery back-peddled and decided that it would air

[77] The process by which Planet Green became Mother Nature Network is pretty opaque, as far as I can tell; when I spoke with them in 2013, former Discovery executives still thought Discovery Communications owned the web address.

the last episode (Associated Press 2011), but after the documentary ran, commentators noted that there was no mention of the causes of climate change and the discussion of the effects of climate change was accompanied with the morally ambiguous commentary, "Whether or not [the melting of the arctic ice sheet is] a good or bad thing, of course, depends on your point of view"; activists mounted a campaign urging Discovery acknowledge anthropogenic climate change (Kuipers 2012).

It is easy to be cynical about this kind of "self-regulated," volunteer, privatized environmentalism—and Planet Green's replacement with Destination America spectacularly demonstrates its limitations. On the one hand, it is only lasts as long as it remains profitable. On the other hand, it is an environmentalism that is shaped at every turn by efforts to contain it within existing the requirements of neoliberal citizenship and white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalist assumptions about what "works" on television.

But one would be remiss to ignore the ambivalence about abandoning the green project among the higher-ups with whom I spoke. A will to "bring green to the masses" launched Planet Green in 2008. And while Planet Green itself fizzled, threads of this governing impulse continue to be shot through the discourse of Planet Green alums. Eileen O'Neill, for example, insisted on the value of *Frozen Planet* because viewers are faced with seeing "an environment that's changing, if not disappearing, in our generation" (Associated Press 2011). Although Discovery executives told the *New York Time*'s Brian Stelter privately that the ambiguous portrayal of climate change in *Frozen Planet* stemmed from anxiety about alienating skeptics in Discovery's audience, O'Neill said the

airing *Frozen Planet* was about an environmental and governmental imperative: "You've got to get them to care," she told Stelter (Stelter 2012).

Likewise, Laura Michalchyshyn who assured me, "by the way, I consider myself an environmentalist, an advocate for all things green," but environmental goals, she explained, were always at odds with the imperatives of television business. "I've… been a programmer for 17 years on cable channels and producing content for over 17 years and now I'm on the independent producing side" she told be, and despite her personal environmentalist commitments,

> I was actually one of the biggest advocates when they transformed that channel [into Destination America]… It does the movement no good to have a green channel, a cable channel, that is not drawing advertisers or viewers, it just says failure failure failure, and you don't want that in the movement… I'm a total supporter of what Discovery did, you know, it was a very noble and, you know, and incredibly brave gesture… I don't believe television channels are meant to be a platform for dark green activism. I think [Planet Green] utterly get that message out… Green is not about watching a one-hour weekly show on TV. It is about some kind of mindset, you know, it is a way of living, not a television channel. (Michalchyshyn 2013)

For her, strategies like Occupy Wall Street and online platforms were better suited to advancing the green movement.

While the environmentalist impulses of Planet Green decision makers could certainly have been sincere, and their arguments that Planet Green failed because its

content was boring and failed to draw viewers are probably not disingenuous, it is more accurate to understand Planet Green's demise in terms the tension that structured the brand from its inception. Planet Green was organized around overcoming a specific cluster of industrial anxieties that emerged at the place where fears of unruly consumers met worries about environmentalism. Planet Green worked to overcome these anxieties through the performative and governmental operations of branding. But easing the tension between profits and planet saving proved beyond the capacities of even the strongest branding. In the end, the failure of Planet Green to garner advertiser dollars came together with the fact that the green brand had become irrelevant to Discovery's economic growth, a meeting that spelled Planet Green's certain demise. Planet Green's unraveling over its short time on air demonstrates the limits of branding environmentalism in neoliberal times.

Conclusion: What can we learn from Planet Green?

On Wednesday September 1, 2010, around 1pm Easter Standard Time, James Jae Lee, proprietor of the environmentalist website SaveThePlanetProtest.com and long-time critic of Discovery and Planet Green, gained entry to Discovery Communications Inc.'s Silver Spring, Maryland headquarters. According to news reports, Lee was armed with a handgun and explosives and he took three Discovery employees hostage. After several hours, the standoff ended in tragedy when Lee was shot and killed by police; the hostages were unharmed.

Before entering the building, Lee had posted an urgent call to action on his website: "The debate about the state of the planet is done… Global Warming is a reality. The massive extinction of animals is happening all over the world. Now let us begin the debate on how to save the planet. We can't wait anymore, something must be done immediately! Let's act on it right away; let this be a new chapter in the earth's history. As human beings we must join together to save it" (Lee 2010).

Lee was deeply disturbed by global warming and equally preoccupied by Discovery as a specific and powerful agent in whether the planet would be saved or destroyed. "The Discovery Channel is a big part of the problem, not the solution," he wrote. "Instead of showing successful solutions, their broadcast programs seem to be doing the opposite." He argued that many programs "serve as diversions to keep the focus off what is really important, which is Global Warming and Animal Extinction"; other shows "like 'Future Weapons'… only promise to destroy the planet even more." Of

Planet Green, he wrote, it "is all about more products and other substandard solutions" (Lee quoted in Knickerbocker 2010).

Lee appealed directly to Discovery to solve global warming and non-human species extinction and made a series of demands. Some were deeply troubling from a social justice standpoint, such as his urgent concern with "over-population," couched in an extreme version of deep ecology that he credited to Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael*. For example, Lee insisted that Discovery "stop encouraging the birth of any more parasitic human infants and the false heroics behind those actions" in shows like *Kate Plus 8* and *19 Kids and Counting*. In their place, he demanded "programs encouraging human sterilization and infertility… All former pro-birth programs must now push in the direction of stopping human birth, not encouraging it" (Knickerbocker 2010). But Lee also demanded less disturbing (though, often, equally propagandistic) actions: that Discovery "Find solutions for Global Warming, Automotive pollution, International Trade, factory pollution, and the whole blasted human economy… Find solutions so that people stop … using Oil in order to REVERSE Global warming and the destruction of the planet!" He went on to insist that Discovery "find solutions for unemployment and housing" and "develop shows that would dismantle the "dangerous US world economy" and put a stop to war and the environmental destruction it leaves in its wake. "You're the media," he wrote, "you can reach enough people. It's your responsibility because you reach so many minds!!!" Appealing directly to the power of television, he added, "The world needs TV shows that DEVELOP solutions to the problems that humans are causing… I want the new shows started by asking the public for inventive solution ideas

to save the planet and the remaining wildlife on it" (Lee 2010). Over the years, Lee had pitched a number of shows to the company, particularly competition game-docs, that he hoped would do these things.

It may be tempting to disregard the Lee incident as a sad story that, while surely very scary for Discovery personnel, had no broader implications: Lee was likely a troubled and terrified man who, on a fateful afternoon in 2010, became a threat to Discovery and its workers and, in the end, lost his life. Such was the attitude of much of the mainstream press, dismissing Lee, along with his demands, as "paranoid" and unhinged, calling him "a man obsessed with programmes on the Discovery Channel" (Razaq 2010) and even quipping that Discovery should have had the cameras rolling for an "eco-nut doc" (Stasi 2010). His website was described as, "essentially a rambling screed" against the cable company (Choney 2010) and when summing up Lee's aims in protesting, reporters placed the word "demands" in scare quotes (Discovery hostage update 2010). They also positioned Lee's analysis as hysterical personal "beliefs," oddly, often highlighting two of his least radical claims: that Discovery's environment-themed shows were not working since environmental degradation and global warming were getting worse and that Discovery is driven more by profits than environmentalism (Choney 2010). Sarcastically bemoaning that the incident wouldn't be made into scintillating television content, the *New York Post*'s Linda Staci wrote, "Too bad, because nearly everyone at Discovery had already been familiar with bomber James Lee, who'd been causing problems since the launch of Planet Green, which he thought wasn't green enough!" (Stasi 2010).

But I think discounting the incident in this way misses something crucial that it can teach us about the limits of branded planet saving in neoliberal times. Painting the fact that Lee directed his protest at Discovery as "absurd" sits uneasily in the context of contemporary culture. Anyone immersed in media-saturated US neoliberal culture lives in a world in which individuals are regularly invited to circumvent the state by appealing directly to brands to solve various social and environmental problems (Ouellette and Hay 2008, Ouellette 2012). Indeed, Planet Green made just such a proposal in its very realization. It enacted a whole media universe, with co-branding opportunities, that aimed to offer themselves as a privatized form of eco-governance that was fully geared toward an environmentalism that would not only add value to a range of brands—from the brands of advertisers and celebrities to those of Planet Green and Discovery themselves—but also would construct a world in which doing so would unfold seamlessly and profitably with no obstacles from the state, recalcitrant advertisers, or unruly consumers. Planet Green worked to situate brands as actors and authorities in a new environmentalism. It was structured by a control impulse, an investment in the fantasy that brands, if sufficiently expansive and detailed, could organize the everyday activities and environmentalist sensibilities of consumers in order to overcome the tensions between profits and planetary health.

And although reporters professed incredulity at Lee's accusation that Discovery could or should do more for the environment (look at Planet Green!), I argue that it is precisely this incredulity—especially placed alongside the simultaneous and widespread insistence that branded and private-sector interventions are the most effective way to

address social and environmental problems—that marks a rupture, not just in Planet Green's environment-saving promise, but to the broader possibilities of addressing environmental crisis through media in the context of a radically free market.

I argue that what the papers termed Discovery's "hostage crisis" begs the question: what can television really do for the environment, anyway? As I discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, Discovery attributed Planet Green's failure to the impossibility of making environmentalism "entertaining" enough for television. With the enormous resources of Discovery Communications Inc. and an elaborate programming effort that involved multiple tacks as various branding strategies failed to draw sufficient sponsor dollars, there was a kind of "if Discovery can't do it, no one can" sense at the end of it all. Planet Green's former President and General Manager said that Discovery "utterly" proved that TV was no place for "dark green" content (Michalchyshyn 2013). While from my own perspective, one shaped by my own life experiences as well as my position as a scholar, I can certainly see how some of the programs were less-than entertaining. Personally, I was bored by both the cops-style eco-shows and the upscale green living shows, but I was entertained by the campy DIY and lifestyle programs. A series that was supposedly successful, *Greensburg*—renewed for not only a second season, but also a third, and highly profitable as "branded entertainment"— was, for me, insufferable for all its earnestness. But this is neither made Planet Green radically different from other networks nor are views about entertainment rooted in "objective" or universal truths.

But even if Planet Green had been able to produce a media brand that was "entertaining" enough to be successful in its aims of bringing advertiser-friendly content together with a pedagogy for green consumer citizenship, what of all the other obstacles to what Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller (2012) call "greening the media"? Although electronic media technologies are often invoked in waste-free fantasies of a paperless future, there are all kinds of environmental consequences, from the toxic components of screens that harm workers and ecosystems when extracted and processed in recycling and waste disposal to the enormous amounts of electricity they use, to the resources consumed and waste generated by film and television production. Given this, Maxwell and Miller insist that information and communication technologies as well as consumer electronics be analyzed in terms of their materiality and material effects, that media ought to be understood as "intimate *environmental participants*" (9).

Planet Green was such an "intimate environmental participant." The network itself likely had a huge carbon footprint, with its extensive, resource-intensive multi-platform content. The brand was fully implicated in Discovery's growth in online, digital, and mobile device content, acquiring popular websites and building its own in connection with its cable networks and populating these websites with seemingly endless news bits, consumer advice, interactive games and quizzes, and lots and lots of video content. In 2009, the company bragged to its shareholders that its "online digital media properties, consisting of 16 U.S. brand destinations, including Discovery.com, TLC.com, AnimalPlanet.com as well as HowStuffWorks, TreeHugger and Petfinder, reached an average of more than 38 million cumulative unique monthly visitors in the first half of

2009" (Annual Report 2009, 11), all of which surely demand enormous energy demand in servers. Even creating shows around planet-saving projects consumed resources and generated waste, an obvious example being Tommy Lee and Ludacris's water-conserving "largest group shower ever," which one blogger pointed out, was probably attended by people who not only showered that morning, but would shower again following the event (dEstries 2008).

Further, as part of a rapidly and aggressively globalizing media corporation whose only responsibility was to generate profits for its shareholders, Planet Green had a vested interest in a number of contemporary tendencies that Naomi Klein argues "fundamentally conflict" with the things that are necessary to reduce emissions and combat global warming: "deregulated capitalism" and, more particularly, its manifestation in corporate globalization, the privatization of economies, and the expanding reach of free trade (Klein 2014, 18). And, as we have seen, this was borne out in Planet Green: in the end, Discovery's growth imperatives trumped the environmental brand, which was canceled when it could not longer be justified as part of a growth strategy. Environmental goals could not be pursued it they interfered with the company's bottom line.

More specifically, in the case of US cable companies, growth strategies themselves have materiality and, hence, environmental impact. As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, the US cable market is "saturated" and now, shrinking. Because of this, companies are in hot pursuit of "new" markets. Discovery worked to establish its television brands in markets with emerging communications infrastructure, sometimes participating in the building of this infrastructure, as it has done through its Discovery

Channel Global Education Partnership with USAID in Egypt, for example. It also worked to move into privatizing national systems, to which its rapidly increasing market share in the Asia-Pacific region as well as in a number of Latin American markets attest (Annual Report 2009), a project that is inseparable from a whole range of extractive industries, polluting manufacturing, and waste processing/disposal that expand their reach and increase their impact alongside globalization of capitalism. Such an analysis would highlight even more contradictions than the ones I have addressed in this dissertation.

This dissertation has examined Planet Green, and perhaps even more importantly, Planet Green's failure, as an ideal case study for examining the contradictions that emerge when environmentalism itself is branded as a market commodity. Discovery's attempt to create a green brand is the most extensive such example to date. Its breadth makes Planet Green a rich text for investigating green branding. At the same time, however, the fact that decision-makers at Discovery ultimately concluded that the channel was not a viable brand also marks Planet Green as a "limit case" for the possibilities of green branding. Planet Green's ostensible failure points to the limits of branding and consumer citizenship in the face of present-day ecological crises.

Planet Green promised (to Discovery, its sponsors, and its fans) a space in which individuals' environmentalist commitments and activities could, at one and the same time, be good for the planet and good for business. Yet in the context of the particular imperatives of present-day cable business in a deregulated and globalizing media environment, this proved untenable. The Planet Green brand's cultivation of individualized consumer citizenship—realized through engagement with the Planet Green

brand and its sponsors—did not generate sufficient value for Discovery and this seeming site of environmental possibility was shut down.

Planet Green's failure, and the myriad contradictions that emerged during its brief tenure, can be instructive for environmentalists as well as scholars of brand culture. While its contradictions (such as advertising Chevy trucks and air fresheners during a program that exposed the negative environmental impact of large vehicles and formaldehyde, one of the four main ingredients in fresheners) might suggest hypocrisy and nothing more, they can also be read as fissures in brand culture that are uniquely opened up by environmentalism. On Planet Green's website, such contradictions generated heated online conversations and coexisted with other online opportunities to struggle against capitalist business as usual—some intentional, such as petitions to legislators, and others unintentional, as when individuals used Planet Green's comment boards to talk to each other as they railed against the channel itself.

Although Planet Green took great pains to mitigate these contradictions—through branding, through posting, and through a departure from green content, branded environmentalism refused to materialize in line with a pure free market logic. But despite Planet Green's failure, this kind of environmental branding should nonetheless trouble environmentalists for it circumscribes environmental authority within the bounds of profit-maximization in ways that allow the biggest brands to have the loudest voices and leave no room for concerns—from social justice to species extinction—that brand-owning organizations/individuals do not perceived to add value to their brands.

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