Tell the Truth:

Subvertising For the Planet

Confirmative Praxis



Zia Hall

'Why is the world so beautiful?'

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

'Brandalism is a revolt against the corporate control of culture and space.'

Anonymous, http://brandalism.ch/

'The voices of ordinary citizens are not reflected in the billboards of the public realm, and we don't even consider that odd. This is why I say we have been colonised. The corporations are not "us", they are "other", but they speak at us, and pretend to speak for us.'

Freire, Paulo

"I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom."

Noam Chomsky

'We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words.'

Ursula Le Guin, 2014

"The fight for truth... is not just our right as free citizens of free societies. It is our duty as citizens of the earth."

Vandana Shiva, Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace

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Decolonising the public realm with contemporary environmental propaganda

Confirmative Praxis

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My research for this project has led me on a journey that has made me question my very vocation. On the first day of my first degree, the tutor in charge said to us all; 'as graphic designers, everything you create will be to sell something'. I remember at the time thinking, rather disappointedly; 'oh'. I had perhaps been naïve not to realise that. I have got by in graphic design, trying only to 'sell' things I admire or approve of, but basically advertising, graphic design and capitalism all go hand-in-hand.

Banksy said: 'People are taking the piss out of you everyday. They butt into your life, take a cheap shot at you and then disappear. They leer at you from tall buildings and make you feel small. They make flippant comments from buses that imply you're not sexy enough and that all the fun is happening somewhere else. They are on TV making your girlfriend feel inadequate. They have access to the most sophisticated technology the world has ever seen and they bully you with it. They are The Advertisers and they are laughing at you.

You, however, are forbidden to touch them. Trademarks, intellectual property rights and copyright law mean advertisers can say what they like wherever they like with total impunity.

Fuck that. Any advert in a public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours. It's yours to take, re-arrange and re-use. You can do whatever you like with it. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head.

You owe the companies nothing. Less than nothing, you especially don't owe them any courtesy. They owe you. They have re-arranged the world to put themselves in front of you. They never asked for your permission, don't even start asking for theirs.'

(Banksy, 2019)

Subvertising, brandalism, flyposting, old-fashioned 'wheatpaste posters' (so-called because of the flour-and-water paste used to put them up, are all forms of guerrilla marketing. Flyposting for charities or for 'good causes' is still usually illegal, but, like all guerrilla activities, it is born from the feeling of desperation that comes from having no money or resources and having to do a battle of ideas, of 'hearts and minds' with a behemoth.

It can be seen as a response to control of the public realm by wealthy corporations and the local authorities they work hand-in-glove with. 'Subvertising is a reactionary practice concerned with the ongoing expansion of [the]… city's control over the communicative potential of public space.' Dekeyser, 2019

We may not immediately recognise our public spaces as having been taken over, or colonised by capitalism, but they have been. Messages to consume speak to us from every corner of the modern city, with hardly any dissenting visual apparatus. As Jenson says; 'Capitalism is colonialism. Its energy is a thrusting, taking, owning, conquering, colonising one.' (Jenson, 2010)

Different subvertisers define their remit in different ways, the site 'brandalism.ch' describes itself as 'an international collective of artists that challenge corporate power, greed and corruption around the world.' (http://brandalism.ch/)

To avoid getting told off by police, public or officials, '…subvertisers undertake an embodied performance of "hiding in plain sight" by simulating the garment, attitude and activities of official advertising workers.' (Dekeyser, 2020) I would argue that often, once the subvertising is installed, the work itself does the opposite – as if the designers are at pains to show that they are not mainstream, the work is often so 'punk' and so attention-grabbing that it draws attention to itself in a way that is more likely to cause offence than win 'hearts and minds', making it more likely it will be taken down quickly. However, this isn't always the case. The cleverest subvertising is, in my opinion, work where the message is subversive, but the aesthetic appearance is cleverly normalised and only stealthily subversive. As Hogre says; 'subvertising works better if you can't tell straight away if it is subvertising or not. It has to be illegal, of course, but it also has to be sneaky...' (Hogre, 2017)



A good example of this is the subvertisements by Matt Bonner for Banksy's Dismaland. Cleverly worded but designed to fit in seemlessly with the house-style of Transport for London, they draw attention to the taxpayer-subsidised DSEI arms fair, and aim to raise awareness of the UK government's links to atrocities committed using British-made weaponry. (See link below, see image in file). In such a way that only when you are actually reading the text of the subvertisement do you actually start to think; 'hang on a minute'.

http://www.revoltdesign.org/subvertisingthearmsfair

The first poster to inspire me what this one by Aleksandr Rodchenko. (see picture) In 'The Shock of the New', Robert Hughes writes: 'His images were as direct and arresting as a shout in the street'. The words Hughes uses to describe Rodchenko's work ('punchy, arresting, shout, unglamorous') make me uneasy. The world of political street art leans towards aggression, is if the posters were part of a war. And I suppose, in revolutionary Russia and (arguably) now, they sort of are. (Hughes, 1991) This brings me to the problem I have with some contemporary subvertising. Can subvertising be successful if done in a non-confrontational way? In my poster; ('Of Course We Will Lose') I tried to be confrontational, to try to show the peril we are putting future generations in. Yet I (honestly) feel it is my least successful.

Propaganda posters I admire from the past are; 'Women of Britain, Come Into the Factories' (see picture) and 'We Can Do It' (Rosie the Riveter), 'Votes For Women: Wanted Everywhere' and (though it isn't propaganda, but actually an advert for books) the Roschenko shouting woman. What these have in common is that they are a) positive b) visually striking and beautiful and c) accessible. I think they work. They aren't negative. Propaganda also has a history of deliberately being ugly and provocative, but those are the ones (from German soldier depicted as a 'mad brute' gorilla enemy to the sharp-toothed suffragette), that least stand the test of time. Now that time has passed, they look too 'try hard', risible, angry, sexist and racist.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti_suffragettes_postcard_(c._1909)_face_of_an_ugly_dimwitted_woman_with_sharp_teeth.jpg



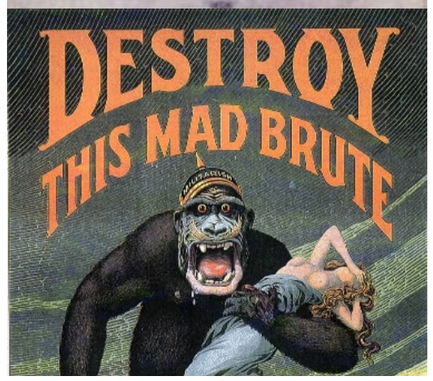


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda#/media/File:'Destroy_this_mad_brute'_WWI_propaganda_poster_(US_version).jpg

One illustrator I am influenced by is Eric Carle. I love the brightness, the vivid colours, the layers of textures, the obvious love of nature and the extremely accurate depictions of animals whether it's a ladybird or a penguin. Like Lil Tudor-Craig's work, (referred to later) his work is species specific. He takes pain to depict a particular animal, with all its colourings correct, even if the illustration is a board book for three year olds (see Eric Carle Sun Picture) from https://massmoca.org/event/from-paper-to-print/

I realised that the propaganda I admire most is often the simplest and the most graphic… this poster of the bull by Alexandra Clotfelter as part of the anti-capitalist 'Occupy Wallstreet' movement and this soviet poster of the





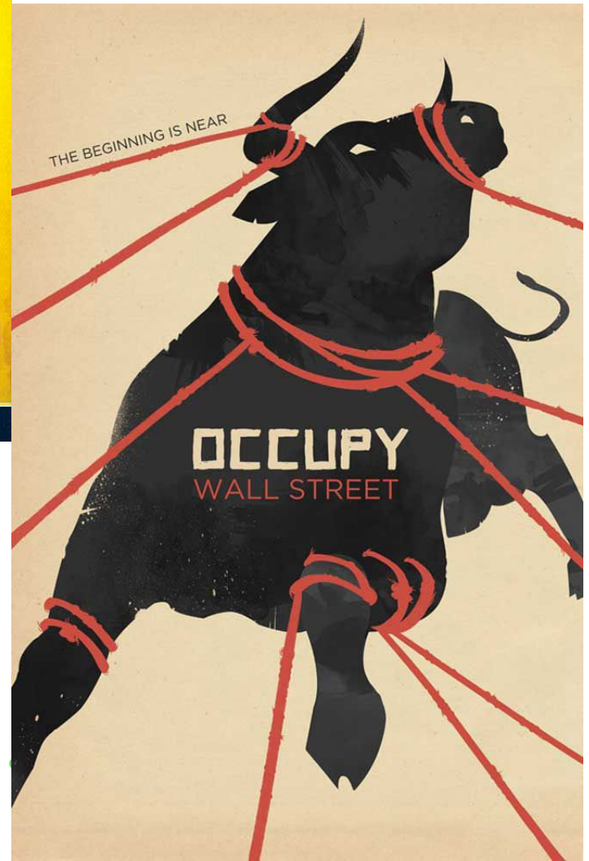






woman shouting (see books poster). I admire the constructivists, but although posters like Rodchenko's woman shouting inspire me, my work never seems to turn out like that. I like detail. Nature is messy, irregular, un-angular, and that is how my work emerges. I sometimes think I would like to be more angular, more graphic, but it doesn't come into my posters at all.

What I particularly like about the bull poster is that, although the bull looks like flat colour, it actually isn't flat. If you look closely it has the appearance of having been painting with black watercolour. This is refreshingly human-seeming, and, like the work of Eric Carle, looks as if the rough painted and splattered black texture has been painted separately, then cut to the correct perfect bull shape afterwards. I have tried to reproduce this in Bruce Shillingsworth's black t-shirt, and in other layered textures on my posters.



What I mean by the texture on the bull looking 'human', is that it is so easy to achieve a flat black in a shape via a computer and Photoshop, but this artist has decided that the bull will be black, but then achieved this with paint or ink with all the inconsistencies that involves. I think, for a slightly different reason, this is why I love areas where the artist has decided to insert an unrelated texture to an object (like Eric Carle's work). It is still surprising and beautiful.

A single image can shift a world view, and this is why I think environmental subvertising is worth doing. When the Indian activist Noor Hossain was pictured with pro-democracy writing on his torso, then later shot by police, it shifted public thinking (see link below).

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-55177686

I was influenced by the idea of this young man with the pro-democracy slogans on his body. How to get the public to identify with the protesters? And listen to their words? Xenophobia is rife, but as Katherine says in The English Patient 'We are the real countries, not the boundaries drawn on maps with the names of powerful men'. (Minghella, 1997)

I settled, after some experimentation in the Explorative Praxis module on the idea of 'portraits' of environmental protestors, with the place they loved, the animals, plants, rivers, seas they are protecting, arranged around them, drawn as realistically as I could manage, and with their own words 'marked on their bodies'. (Minghella, 1997)



It's a sad indication of how separated we are from our own nature when people mis-identify plants in films. I notice it all the time. Or when an artist uses generic 'leaf', 'tree' or 'flower' for a piece of work. It really bugs me when designers, designing, say, a pattern for a child's buggy or toy put in a generic flower or plant, which doesn't look like any flower or plant on Earth. How much more effort would it take to choose a particular one and illustrate it? Yet it happens all the time… generic pink flower, generic petals, generic-shaped leaves supposedly = any-flower, but, actually = no-flower. It's lazy designing.

In this respect, I am inspired by, and looked a lot at the work of artist Lil Tudor-Craig (see image from file of Hawthorn leaves, see link below to her website). Her work is the antidote to the current trend for homogenised portraits of 'leaf' or 'flower'. Painstakingly exact, as if afraid to miss a single hair on an insect's leg, her work, to me, explains that slight feeling of pain when we see something beautiful in nature. Perhaps the pain is knowing that everything is fleeting, and sometimes the most beautiful things are the most fleeting. Her work is connected to loss, and in particular, the loss of habitats and the doom that spells for the niche plants and animals that live in those habitats. She depicts flowers in the correct habitat, with other flowers of that habitat, and with the insects that feed on those specific flowers. As she says 'Each picture shows a particular place at a particular time of year with some of the creatures which can be found there at that time. Some of the creatures are dependent exclusively on the plants in the picture… The pictures are about the interconnectedness and interdependence of life, our connection and our loss. The natural world, the humble one on our very doorsteps, that is sometimes not obviously beautiful, holds delight, magic and importance and can be greatly healing to us.' (Tudor-Craig, 2021)



Like Tudor-Craig's work, my depictions of plants, animals and people are specifically those plants, animals and people. The posters are designed to be seen at standard six-sheet advertising hoarding size (think: bus shelter sides). I want people to stand at eye-height (4feet – 5 feet 6 inches) and see a hummingbird or a butterfly as realistically drawn as I can manage because that is the message – away from homogeny – towards homogeneity and specificity and thus (hopefully) towards empathy through the realisation of the 'interconnectedness and interdependence of life, our connection and our loss' (Tudor-Craig, 2021). Part of the message of the posters about saving our own habitat is that each plant and animal is unique and worthy of individual attention. Perhaps identifying them will equal identifying with them.

that had gone to fruit (little black berries so beloved of blackbirds) and the post they wrote was 'are these black berries edible on this plant?' I mean no disrespect to them – it's good to ask and that's how you learn, but how did it come to this in the UK that our natural knowledge is so entirely gone? Ivy is one of the most common poisonous plants in the UK. I know I'm in a minority here, and that not many people see this as bad, but I honestly think that's a catastrophe. I see blackberries rotting and an apple tree I walk past in Carmarthen every year create amazing loads of fruit that just drops off, unpicked. No-one picks and eats nettles anymore, yet they are free and delicious in soups and quiches, can be dried, made into tea, they protect the body against immunological over-reactions (like hayfever) because of their high histamine content. They are a wonder plant, yet they are ignored. We have lost our country's heritage of knowing what we can forage.

Humans are acting like we have somewhere else to go. We don't. This is it. This super-thin sliver of crust and blue troposphere on an average-sized planet where everyone and everything that we know lives, is the only place we have.

Another twist on the theme of depicting nature in (literally) perfect detail is this piece of subvertising from France. (see image of actual pressed camelia inside bus stop hoarding). It may be just a plant in a plastic box, but it effectively subverts the space in a way that challenges the mind to think; what is usually there? Who puts the images there usually? Why does the public accept, without thinking, an advert, but is surprised to see a flower? (https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/des-fleurs-a-la-place-des-affiches-ils-agissent-contre-la-publicite-a-nantes-1615295142)

The flowers wake up the passers by. They break the spell of the sacrosanct-ness of the advertisers' bus-stop altar. As Dekeyser describes: 'It is only once a sacred space… is profaned, Agamben shows, that it can be opened up to scrutiny and may emerge as "false or oppressive".' (Dekeyser, 2020), (Agamben, 2007)

Subvertising is in many ways an antidote to the ubiquitousness of advertising messages in the cities. As Dekeyser says 'Moving through the city by car, foot, bike or public transport, one inevitably negotiates a plethora of advertising spaces… hoardings, bus shelters, scaffolding, interactive billboards, large high-way billboards, banners behind airplanes, phone-boxes, buses, touchable screens, bicycles, pavements and just about any surface that can be projected upon. This is the advertising city. Subvertising is a reactionary



practice concerned with the ongoing expansion of this city's control over the communicative potential of public space. Subvertisers ask: who has control over the textual, affective and aesthetic landscapes of urban surfaces? What is the embodied and psychic toll of an uneven access to these landscapes? To subvertisers, outdoor advertising haunts progressive dreams of the city as a space supposedly accessible to all.' (Dekeyser, 2019)

Who owns the public realm? Is it a free place? Can anyone put posters there? There are rules about what can be exhibited there. Money must be paid, and the advertising must not break laws. If no money is paid, the work will be considered graffiti, no matter how wholesome or helpful the message, and, if money is paid, the work will be left up for all to see (as long as it breaks no Advertising Standards laws) no matter how harmful the message. The work may make fat women feel they are unattractive, it may tell people to consume more when that is hurting the planet, it may make a poor father decide to gamble or drink away the money he saved for Christmas. All of that is fine. We indulge capitalism like a cruel child 'he can't help it, we say, he's young – he'll grow out of

it,' when all evidence is to the contrary. The cruelty isn't a bug, it's a feature.

Environmental subvertising is also concerned with the ongoing fight to present unpalatable truths about capitalism and our way of life, and the likely outcome of the effect on life on Earth, as Chomsky says; 'to speak the truth and to expose lies.' (Chomsky, 1967)

Some examples of subvertising can be brutal and rather uncompromising. (see bomber subvert) This is perhaps only because what they are fighting against is perceived as equally unrelenting and aggressive. As Hogre says:

'The constant imposition of advertising in front of our eyes is an oppressive, dictatorial and violent act. Subvertising reacts to this visual pollution with an equally violent and direct aesthetic, without asking for permission or waiting for consensus. Removing, replacing and defacing advertising is an act of civil disobedience that is both legally and morally defensible.' (Hogre, 2018)



I can't agree with Hogre about the 'visual pollution' of city advertising being 'violent'. Hyperbole is unnecessary to describe the bind humans who live in the developed West find ourselves in. Violence is violence. Words have meanings and those meanings are important. Other humans, in other countries are subjected to actual violence by their states and the capitalist bodies that control them and bearing in mind people have actually been killed for defending their lands, their water supplies, calling advertising violence seems attention-seeking for privileged Westerners. We aren't overtly oppressed or attacked, but oppressive, dictatorial and psychologically damaging advertising

is also pretty bad. Europe and 'high income countries' in general have the highest suicide rates in the world and one sixth of Americans is currently taking a psychiatric drug. Our psyches are in poor shape.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_suicide_rate

The psychological effect of advertising in public spaces seems unlikely to be beneficial. As anyone with young children knows, the effect of someone repeatedly trying to get your attention and interrupting your train of thought is somewhat mentally shattering, and wears people down, as parodied here in the piece of subvertising by Mobstr

https://designyoutrust.com/2017/10/british-street-artist-mobstr-has-an-awesome-collection-of-sarcastic-art-pieces-aprawled-across-the-uk/

https://www.occupy.com/article/activists-reclaim-public-space-through-advertising-takeovers%E2%80%93come-learn-how#sthash.IMB5RQuu.dpbs

If we see the public realm as invaded or colonised by advertising, and we see that advertising as damaging, psychologically. It makes sense that, for our own sanity and as an act of resistance we might try to poke fun at our invaders. 'Through public acts of "subvertising", where through spoofs, parodies and other message-changing/obscuring alterations, activists seek to use a brand's own marketing channels to make a statement against the brand itself.' (Smith-Anthony, 2015)

The act of subvertising is political because it: '…typically involves artwork commenting on consumerism, cultural values, debt, the environment, body image or specific political messages placed over existing billboards at bus stops and other public spaces.' (Smith-Anthony, 2015)

The subversive act of daring to interfere with capitalism's message, 'The blatantly illicit nature of …[a subvertisers'] scrawl, for instance, forces into view the legal enforcement and material management making possible the advertisement's untouchability. Likewise, when a subvertiser installs her own poster, it stands out as that which is most commonly not there: a yearning not to buy, a call for solidarity, a reminder of exploitation, a poetic assault on borders.' (Dekeyser, T. (2020)

Angry, aggressive, or (obscene) subvertising (see 'M*ther F*ckers billboard – in file) often comes from a place of genuine anger at injustice, as with the M*ther F*ckers billboard installed by Manchester Climate Action.

They complain; '"The Big Six – EDF, Centrica (British Gas), Eon, RWE Npower, Scottish Power and Southern & Scottish Energy have increased energy bills by as much as 22% this January 2012, while profits have soared to a record five-year high. Government statistics show that every year, around 2,700 people, mostly pensioners, die from coldness-related diseases like pneumonia." And "I just wanted to come out and say it. The energy companies are ripping us off big time and making





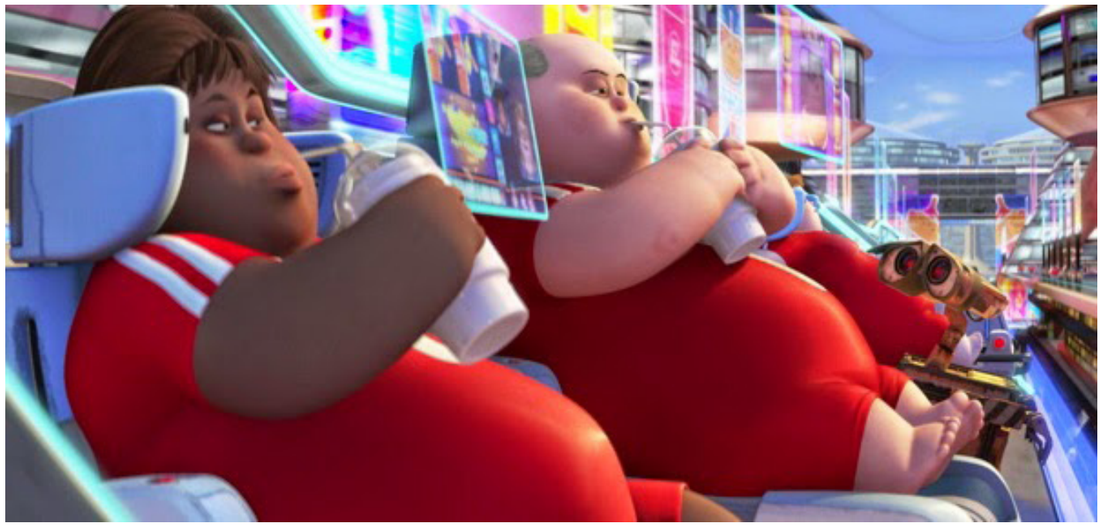
a fat buck off it. But it's about much more than prices. It's about big corporations dominating our energy supply. We need democratic community control over how we heat our homes" and "It's not just people in the UK who are dying because of the energy companies selfish obsession with profits – people around the world are dying from climate change resulting from the government and energy companies refusing to make the change to renewable energy"… The group accused the government and energy companies of a "deadly obsession with making money.'

https://manchesterclimateaction.wordpress.com/tag/subvertising/

The problem is that the 'enemy' (capitalism) is literally money, and the subvertisers have none. I was speaking to a right-wing friend the other day. She doesn't believe in the climate crisis. She thinks it's a left-wing conspiracy. 'The planet's greening, I read' she said. I love her, but she is utterly misguided. She has been misled by capitalists seeking to keep extreme capitalism going just a little bit longer. If you want to see who is telling the truth – look to who is admitting the truths that make them sad, or even inconvenienced. Truths that go against what they want, but they are admitting them anyway. On the other hand there are the people who tell stories that massage their own egos and make their own ways of life seem good. It's the first group you can trust, I think. The group saying; 'look, I wish this wasn't true, but…'

The right wing press (e.g. Breitbart, Fox News, and The Daily Mail) is very biased against revealing the true extent of the Climate Crisis, selling 'significantly misleading' stories. (Nuccitelli, 2017) The US media is becoming more and more consolidated into large, corporate massive entertainment/news companies. (Rapp, N & Jenkins, A. 2018)

Extinction Rebellion receives no public funding and doesn't sell any merchandise. Neither does it want anyone else to sell merchandise based on their visual identity. Unfortunately, they are cool, they are easy to copy. They follow none of the rules of capitalism: their logo cannot be used for financial gain. There are no Extinction Rebellion badges, mugs or t-shirts. They encourage their followers to make their own… everything. They encourage self-reliance. I believe that shopping and TV has replaced foraging and thinking creatively and making. Our fairly recent ancestors could pluck a turkey, catch a fish, make a (fitted) dress, use herbs. We are very weak by comparison. People are fond of saying how hard life was before heated towel rails and power steering. All I can see is how weak we have become, and, coincidentally, that is how capitalism needs us to be. Extinction Rebellion doesn't want to look like capitalism in any way. The perfect human from capitalism's point of view is the Wall-E human; obese, obsessively consuming, inert, immobile, bored. As Chomsky describes it: 'All over the place, from the popular culture to the propaganda system, there is constant pressure to make people feel that they are helpless, that the only role they can have is to ratify decisions and to consume. (Chomsky, 1995)



Subvertising is the antidote to this apathy. It says: 'get the tools, reclaim your town – don't ask permission – just get off your arse and do it!' Which is similar to XR's statement at the end of the booklet I made for them: 'Do you commit to non-violence? Do you agree to follow our principles? If so, you are Extinction Rebellion and you can act in our name..' It's quite an empowering notion. (Extinction Rebellion, 2020)



Although I believe in subvertising (leaving legal considerations aside), I question the logic of replacing one set of 'oppressive, dictatorial and violent' (Hogre, 2017) images propagandising capitalism and its legion products with a new 'enlightened' anti-Capitalist set of images which are 'equally violent and direct'. (Hogre, 2017) I am reminded of countries where a civil war rages. Although this isn't literal physical violence, the public realm still becomes the visual battle ground. The public spaces are the field of battle, the public consciousness the prize.

War despoils the ground it's fought on, ideological war is no different. Doesn't that mean that Hogre's statement about 'violent' images leaves the public realm constantly besieged by violent imagery advocating for either side? Some of it even inappropriate for children? (see photo from Advertising Shits in Your Head of abusive priest) I believe this is harmful and can put people off. I think 'equally violent and direct' images win fewer people over. Capitalism is crafty, so anti-capitalist, pro-environmental subvertising should be crafty, too. Environmental subvertisers are not selling something they have to lie about. They are selling saving the planet from heat-death. This seems, objectively, pretty essential. If possible, I think they should avoid the desperation, fear and anger they perhaps feel from spilling into their work. I think, almost, an artist's desperation about a cause affects their ability to create good work. If one is too earnest, and the cause too worthy, it is perhaps harder to be loose and playful with ideas. The muse comes, creativity flows, when the vice of desperation is undone. It is a playful thing, like a butterfly. It can't be forced. The harder you try, the more it flutters away.

Nevertheless, capitalism is, as Hogre says 'oppressive, dictatorial' (Hogre, see above). I would add to this; highly organised and coordinated. I can't agree with the neo-liberalist notion that capitalism is just a haphazard, random, rag bag of unorganised companies and billionaires. It suits them that we think of them like that. As Gail Dines says in her lecture; 'From the Personal is Political to the Personal is Personal':

'Neo-liberalism acts as if we're all individuals. There's nothing collective. There's no class interest, there's no collective interest. But I'm going to argue that that's only true for the oppressed, believe me, the Oppressor Class know that this is full of shit [she indicates to Thatcher's quote about society, [see below]]; they understand what it means to act as a class. It's only us, the oppressed, who are not meant to act as a class… In neoliberalism, there is no such thing as structural inequality, there are no systems of oppression… except we know the Oppressor meets regularly in Davos, Switzerland… what do you think they're talking about in Davos? They're planning; how to basically control the world for the next year.' (Dines, 2012)

'There is no such thing as society. Only individual men and women.'
(Thatcher, 1987)

The personal is political, as many feminists, Marxists and Dines would agree. Society, such as it is, still hangs on, somehow, rather threadbare and tired. Artists and activists should be standing together and acting as groups. Groups are threatening. Unions are threatening. Operating as individuals we pose less threat to any authority and its dominance in the field of ideas.

As Marx put it: 'Insofar, therefore, as they [the ruling class] rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.' (Marx, 1970)

Extinction Rebellion (XR) tries to operate a non-hierarchical structure, like other protest movements before it. A friend of mine is a veteran protestor from the days of the Newbury Bypass (when she lived in a tree as a young woman), to the recent 2018 XR protests (where she glued herself to a pink boat in central London in defence of her children's future). She told me that, during protests the police always deploy specialist 'friendlies' into the crowd to try to engage the protesters in conversation and therefore, unwittingly, give the police valuable info about what the protesters are planning. 'They want to find out who is in charge' she said, 'and they find it very hard to accept when you tell them; "no-one is in charge; we all act how we want. There are no orders. It's not top-down"'. The police, so immersed in a top-down, hierarchical organisation, can't even imagine a horizontal hierarchy where everyone makes decisions democratically but hopefully with consensus. It may be clumsier sometimes, and decisions may be harder and take longer, but it also means XR can carry on without a leader.

Letting people make their own decisions because they 'act in' XR's name has backfired a few times (not least, the action to climb on tube trains, instigated by some XR members during the 2018 uprising, which many XR members disagreed with, but which the people involved decided to do anyway) but that is only because what they are trying to do, and the methodology they are using to do it is truly radical. At XR's training sessions they genuinely talk and agonise about their principles in such a way that it's hard not to respect their earnestness. They debate things like: what does non-violence really mean? Does it mean only violence to people and animals? What about danger? What about violence to property? They actively discuss their principles and try to stick to them.

XR believes 3.5% of the population on the streets, protesting, is all it takes to 'persuade' any democratic (non-dictatorial) government that they will have to listen to the demands of the protestors. It's that 3.5% mobilisation that they are working towards.

https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/about-us/

When I talk about capitalism, I often feel as though it's quite hard for us to 'see' it. It is as if we are fish, and capitalism is the water we swim in. I believe that quite a lot of the non-advertising (i.e.; just the way people's houses are so clean and designed in nearly every television programme and film – full of fashionable curtains, cushions, furniture etc and full of the latest gadgets) is the most harmful. This sets the norm for what an average house should look like. This, in itself, is also oppressive. It sets the bar very high for families who are struggling just to buy food and clothes. It starts children from poor households off on a lifetime of realising that the way they live is considered 'lesser'.

While Western climate activists often crusade for the whole world to be saved (perhaps because their particular bit of the world is currently okay and because they live in the West and are well informed/educated about the rest of the world), indigenous climate activists generally act to protect their own area; a river or a forest that they know and love and perhaps depend on. These indigenous activists are much more likely to be killed, especially in right-wing regimes which seem to see indigenous people as less 'evolved' or valued. To some indigenous climate activists, protecting 'Earth' is perhaps not very meaningful, or may even seem conceited (just as, in Australia, there is no one word which is a translation of 'Australia'. The indigenous people don't over-reach. Their land is often the area they know and can map/memorise). Their activism is more like a war against capitalism on their doorstop, and, just like a guerrilla war, capitalism appears to be trying to kill them (especially if it thinks no-one is recording the actions and no-one from The West is looking their way). The idea that we all protect our own area is a seductive one, and the answer to the Climate Crisis is certainly that we all think, buy, grow, act, move and work locally. However, capitalism moves and acts globally, so activism against it must too. Also, we in The West, with money and political clout need to amplify the voices of indigenous climate protectors and lend what power we have whole-heartedly to their cause. Their fight is more personal and more dangerous, and when they are killed, their local judiciary often have to be convinced to seek justice. The very worst thing is if capitalism thinks it can get away with killing dissenting voices in remote countries (remote from the West). The worst thing for capitalism is if we harp on about climate activists that have been killed in order to silence them or to gain access to land for mining, logging, damming etc. Our purpose should be to raise them up, repeat their words, never forget them, until they become what they are: climate martyrs.

Many climate activists in the West think what we need is an 'ecocide' law (which may well be on its way). Then we would be able to prosecute the big businesses who ruin and destroy lives and are destroying the planet. Like slavery before it, climate-destroying capitalism would suddenly become illegal and therefore not-profitable.

I chose to do a poster of Australian artist and climate activist Bruce Shillingsworth. In a debate on ABC Australia he said; 'the impact of the water mismanagement, and the corruption, and the corporate greed and capitalism in this country has killed our rivers. They have killed our communities.' His people's water was basically stolen and then sold back to them at a profit. As he points out, without water, communities are destroyed and aboriginal people end up moving to towns and cities. He mentions people not even being able to run dialysis machines. The effect of the toxic Western legal highs on indigenous people (previously not exposed to them) such as sugar and alcohol are well documented. When indigenous people give up on living rurally, next to their land and their rivers and move to towns, we all lose their precious inherited knowledge – how to forage, navigate, stop wild fires etc and they lose their communities and end up, like us Westerners, depressed, drinking, separated from our people and



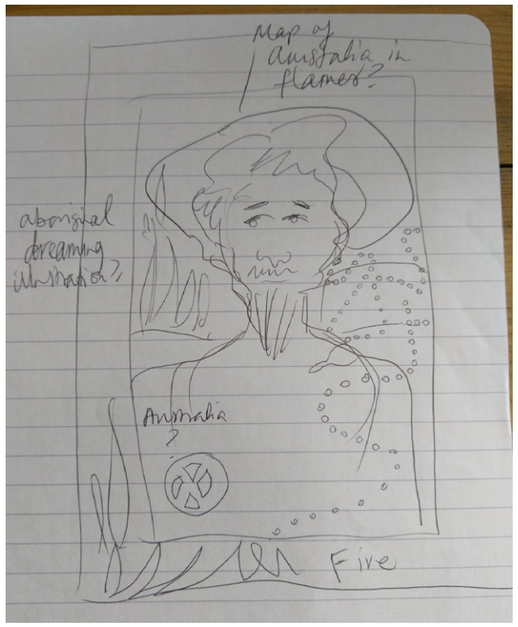
our children and from nature herself. Eventually becoming afraid of nature.

ABC Australia
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOmP7J7VLY0

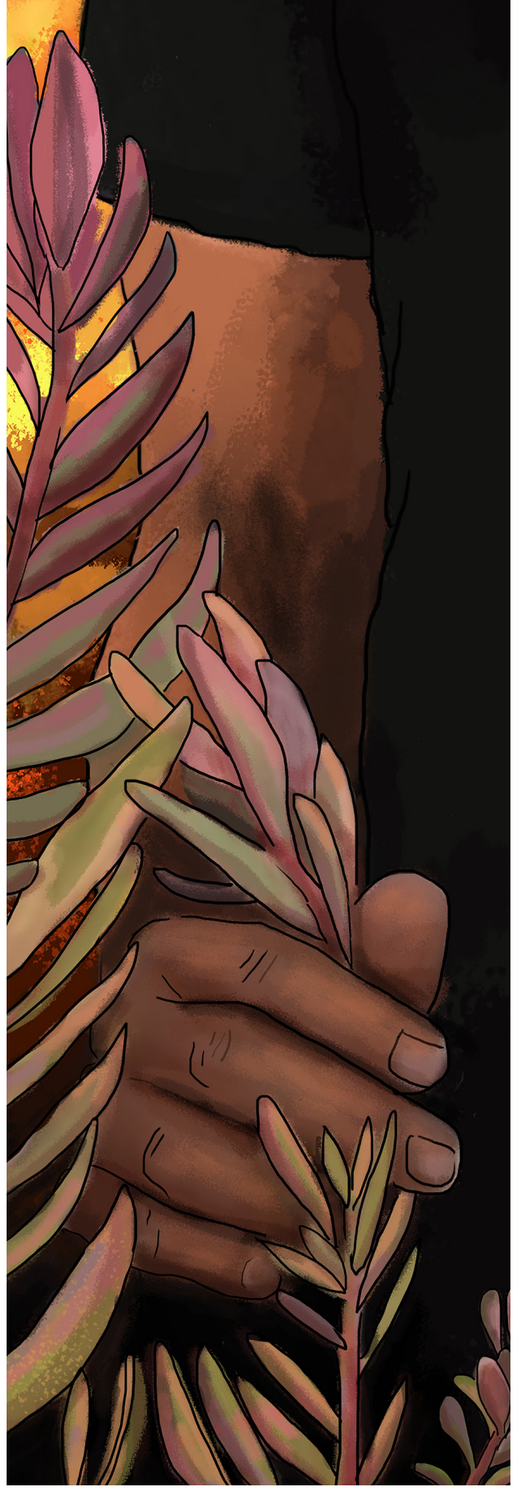
As you can see from an early rough, I was originally (see rough of Shillingsworth with dots) going to include a visual reference to aboriginal art… I like the idea of a spray-painted hand outline or the dots that symbolise the paths in the dreaming. I did some roughs around it, but when I came to paint the poster, it went a simpler way and the aboriginal art seemed too 'added', contrived, even appropriated, when I put it in. I also changed the quote to a longer one that is more descriptive about how Bruce feels, but I slightly regret losing the original quote because it makes it very clear how he sees the connection between capitalism and the planet's crisis, which I think so many people still miss.

The bird on Bruce Shillingsworth's shoulder is the Regent Honeyeater. The poster was inspired by the gut-wrenchingly awful wildfires that started in Australia late in 2019. The fires killed three billion animals. The image hopefully speaks for itself.

The plant in the poster is Leucadendron; a plant that grows wild in the bush and is very common. Some variations of it are called 'fireglow' so I thought it was apt. I love the way the colours range from green to mauve to pink to orange, depending on how much sun the leaves have had. In all my posters I have worked







hard to choose appropriate indigenous plants and to depict them with accuracy.

I designed the background to look like eucalyptus trees on fire but to have echoes of tall chimneys smoking. Drax power station was in the news a lot after the 2019 fires in Australia. Also in my mind were the 'Dark satanic mills' of William Blake's 1808 poem. Blake saw the collieries and cotton mills of his time as a way to enslave people into dangerous, dirty, drudgery when their true destiny lay in 'the green and pleasant' countryside, growing food. (Blake, 1808)

When I thought I had finally finished the painting for Australia I became increasingly concerned about the kangaroo. In all the posters I have been slavishly careful to avoid anthropomorphising the animals, by making them cute or cartoony. With the kangaroo there was something wrong with the eyes. I did more research and realised that what was wrong is that, in an attempt to make the kangaroo look intensely out at the viewer, I had given him forward-facing eyes – the eyes of a predator. I looked at lots of kangaroo faces on the internet and re-drew the



eyes. They can look forwards, but their eyes are not positioned facing forwards, as they are herbivores and don't need to hunt.

I also had a problem with the XR logo. I had chosen black for the logo because it went well with Bruce Shillingsworth's black shirt and looked stark and dramatic against the fire. It also brought with it a feeling of foreshadowing; the black of charcoal, of parched ground, of blackened vegetation. But, I was working on the poster and my son came in and observed that the logo looked 'sort-of evil, like a logo for a fossil-fuel corporation or something'. I had a long think and look at it and then I Googled 'swastika' and I realised that the 'sort-of evil' look may originate from the stark, angular black lines of the logo have a passing similarity to a swastika. Add to that the flames behind and there is a 'jog' in the mind to make it seem visually evil. So – although black was the striking option. It had to be changed. I went through every colour from white to orange to teal and everything drew too much (or not quite enough) attention to the logo, or made it jar with its setting. In the end, the right choice was a warm dark brown, the colour of chocolate, and, as everyone knows, there is nothing evil about chocolate.

For the title of the country, I wanted to put the Aborginal name for Australia above 'Australia', but, on researching it, I found that the Aboriginal people don't think of Australia in that way, and so don't have a name for the whole continent. This is such an interesting point, because it really underlines the difference between indigenous attitudes and Western ones. The western mindset values human knowledge by how many places you've visited 'oh? You've never been to Cuba? Oh! You simply must go!' say the chattering classes. We fly over the Earth, polluting and releasing carbon as we go, visiting everywhere but truly connecting with nowhere.

The Aboriginal mindset values knowledge of the earth based on the actual local earth. It isn't so long ago that we, in Wales, did similar things. Women would pass on knowledge of useful areas for elder, blackberries, hazel nuts, men would go back to places good for rabbits or trout or salmon. That is how indigenous people think and it's also how they campaign. They campaign for a particular river that they need and love. The river is like a person to them. We all should become more indigenous and less global in our thinking. Get your food locally and you will be more resilient, but also get to know who is near you. We haven't just lost food sovereignty, we have lost our communities. The Aborigines don't have a word for the continent of Australia, because, in a way, the continent was not their business… the watering hole, the next ridge, an area of forest good for witchetty grubs or yams – those will have names. The continent is too big to name. It's only Westerners who think that bigger is better – we may have visited 200 countries and have 800 books, 2 cars and 600 'friends' on Facebook but, if the global food system broke down, could we feed ourselves? Could we light a fire? Do we have people who love us and we love them? Do we really look out for our neighbours?

In January 2020, when climate activist Vanessa Nakate was cropped from a photo of young climate

activists it made me want to make posters of the indigenous activists even more… the over-looked ones, the ones Davos considers not worth putting in social-media photographs. They have no money, no power.

Should the people with all the money and all the power be the only ones with a voice, with an advertisement? No; in fact, the opposite is true. If we had the advertising hoardings we, as a society, actually need in cities, we would have adverts saying: 'eat more apples!', 'get an allotment!', 'come and volunteer at your local food bank!' We must try to give a voiceless to the people with no power and money. Guerrilla propaganda is propaganda for those with no power.

Chomsky says; 'The enormous public relations industry, from its origins early in this century, has been dedicated to "the control of the public mind", as business leaders described the task. (Chomsky, 1999), and '…we find it hard to induce people to accept [the] doctrine that the rich should plunder the poor, a public relations problem that has not yet been solved.' Like a card shark, the public relations industry is to distract our eye away from what is really happening; to the exploited poor, to the planet. Look at this instead! Shiny things to buy!

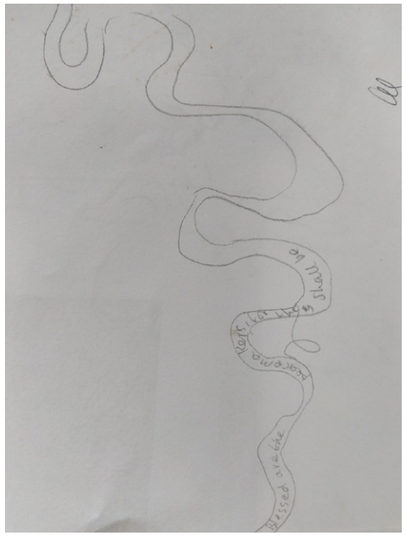
Researching environmental campaigners, the American nun; Dorothy Stang was an intriguing candidate for a portrait poster. She was very involved with helping the small farmers in the forest in Brazil. The small farmers are very much 'in the way' of loggers and cattle ranchers who want to turn the forest into ranches. The small, subsistence farmers have to keep moving deeper into the forest as it is destroyed.

There is obviously some controversy here as many people believe that missions are a bad, imperialist idea. Who are we to say that people in far-off lands should be Christians? On the other hand, I don't claim that the subjects of my posters are perfect, only that they cared about the environment. Sister Stang did a lot of good: opened community centres, represented the poor farmers, organised practical help. She was hugely loved by her community and gave her life to their service for 40 years. Also, she was brave and genuinely loved the environment and the area she learned to call home.

I also felt worried about celebrating a white 'activist' in a country where most of the population are shades of brown. It did seem adjacent to racism, but I fully intend to celebrate indigenous people too. Her story was unusual, and I was drawn to it. I also thought it might encourage white right-wing Americans to see the battle to save the environment as their fight too.

Because she was helping and representing the small farmers, she received death threats. She carried on with her work, despite knowing her life was at risk (as the quote on her poster shows). One morning, as she walking through the forest, two men who worked for a livestock company blocked her path. They said her name, they were carrying guns. She held her bible and started to recite the

Beatitudes:



‘[4]…Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
[5]Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the Earth.
[6]Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
[7]Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
[8]Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God...’
Matthew 5:3–12 (NIV)

They shot her in the stomach, she fell, they shot her twice in the back. Then they shot her in the head.

As with the story of Berta Cacerés, I couldn’t help but become emotionally involved with this project. The more research I did, the more involved I became. There is a photograph of how her body looked when it was found. It is so small and crumpled. White shirt, beige trousers, grey/white hair wet with the night’s rain. It felt transgressive to see the photo, and I wished I hadn’t seen it, but it may have made me want to do a better job on the poster for her, and her sacrifice.

With the Dorothy Stang poster I had a dilemma. I wanted to somehow include The Beatitudes in the poster, particularly ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.’ (NIV)

Because I felt that those words really applied for Sister Stang, and I had the idea that the words could somehow be handwritten, following the line of the river in the rainforest. (see rough) The silvery line the river makes in the forest is so twisting and shines such a different colour from the rest of the forest that is looks like a line of liquid silver when the sun shines on it. However, I also knew that Christianity is a major turn-off for a lot of people and young people in particular. In the end, there wasn’t room. It was such a detailed and rich story and I felt like I really wanted to be true to it, but I couldn’t fit the Beatitudes in. I hoped people might look her up and read about her, but I suppose that’s unlikely.

For the background composition for the Dorothy Stang poster I knew I wanted to have the rich greens of the Amazon rainforest as seem from above. I had seen photographs in the past of the Amazon from above. On the left I wanted the ever-encroaching deforestation as Brazil puts more and more forest to the axe and to fire in order to have more farming space. I knew I wanted to have something to



represent the arid-looking fields that the forest is being turned into. I saw this photograph of what deforested land looks like after its been turned into fields and (see square fields photo) that inspired me. I thought about it a lot and was planning just to do a visual representation of the fields – they look a pale beige-y-green colour from above. Unlike the deep green of the forest, they look dusty and like they would need a lot of irrigation. Then, by chance I saw a dollar bill, and noticed that the beige-y-green colour on the dollar was the same. I actually got quite excited at this point, because the dollar is what they are trading centuries, millennia-old irreplaceable forests for. The dirty dollar, the crumpled dollar: was worth these acres full of life; the lungs of the world. In the end it wasn't just the forest that was exchanged for dollars; it was Dorothy Stang's life. The men who killed her were payed to do so. (Reuters, 2013)

I cut the dollar into segments to look like the field-and-track system used after deforestation in Brazil. I also put three layers of beige of the dollar, partly so it wasn't immediately apparent what it was and partly to make it look faded and dirty and partly to make the fields look dry and arid. I was really pleased with how it looked. After I had a think about it, I changed the dollars to 'Réals' – the Brazilian currency. I altered the illustration of a woman (I researched her, she is just 'a young woman' and no woman in particular) on the 50 Réal note to make it look as though she is looking with grief at Dorothy's impending murder and the destruction of the forest. I added tears, changed her eyes, eyebrows and mouth shape and turned her to look in the reverse direction.









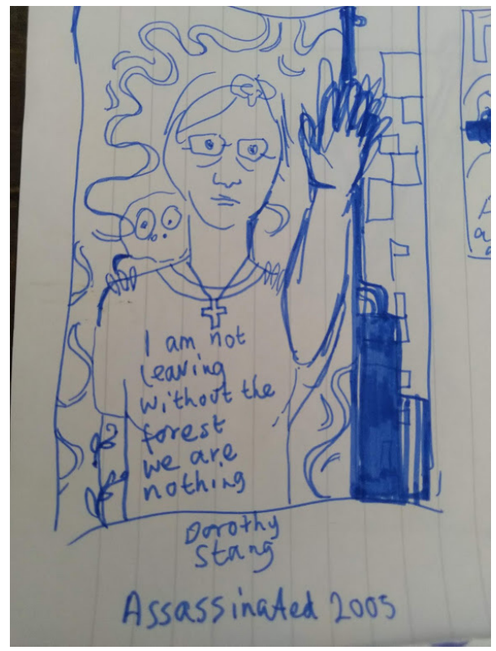
The design has turned into a design of four elements in the corners: the XR logo, the marsh deer, the two guns and the fields. I used a model in her 70s to help me get the stance of Dorothy Stang, with one hand held up, and one holding her book, just how I wanted it. I feel it balances well – two pro-environment elements and two anti-environment elements. Compositionally-speaking, I think it is my most successful poster.

The deer is the marsh deer, and extremely endangered species in Brazil.

I worried about not giving Dorothy a crucifix. It wasn't because I thought the propaganda wouldn't work with a symbol of Christianity in the way, because Christianity isn't 'cool'. It was more that I could feel the design getting cluttered and busy. Also, although some of the reference photographs I have of her have her wearing a cross, most of them do not. In the end, the eye needs some places to rest. I chose a white shirt, despite my mother and children pointing out that it's unlikely she had a washing machine and it's probably quite hard to look so white in the forest. The white shirt wasn't for authenticity but for the design. It creates some 'whitespace' and stops the composition looking too cramped. It also is a symbol of purity, along with the blue of her shorts and her butterfly. I did toy with the idea of giving her only blue to wear (traditionally the colour of the virgin Mary), as she was a Catholic nun, but decided against it.

In my research I found out Dorothy Stang was often to be found in her day-to-day life and work wearing a t-shirt that said 'A Morte da floresta é o fim da nossa vida' which is Portuguese for "The Death of the Forest is the End of Our Lives" which seemed to me to be a close variation on what Juan Chávez, a Shipibo Indian from the eastern Peruvian region of Ucayali has been quoted as saying:





‘Without the forest we are nothing – it’s like losing life itself,’ (Chávez, 2013)

As with my Berta Cacéres poster in the previous project, I really wanted to weave flowers and butterflies in Dorothy’s hair, making her look ‘of the forest’, but I knew it wouldn’t be right. I had read about her, listened to interviews with her colleagues and siblings. She cared immensely about the forest, the small farmers living there, and about God. I couldn’t, in all conscience, doll her up like it was Mardigras. One anecdote stuck in my mind about her. One of the farmers said she had a favourite rock in the river and, at the end of a long day she would go and sit on it, and if she was really hot and tired; dive into the river for a swim. I loved that she was a nun, an older woman and a missionary, but still felt free enough to go for a swim. I loved that she was from Ohio, but spent her life protecting a forest 4,000 miles from where she was from, because it seems, she fell in love with it and the people who were of it.

It reminded me of what environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill said about her time spent living in a tree in the 1990s; ‘activism is about a spiritual practice as a way of life… I realized I didn’t climb the tree because I was angry at the corporations and the government; I climbed the tree because when I fell in love with the redwoods, I fell in love with the world’ (Hill, 2018)

This exact feeling of ‘falling in love with the world’, though it may sound romantic, is why I think environmental subvertising should depict the beauty and magic of what we are losing, more than it should depict the horror and ugliness of what is killing the world, and our grief and anger at losing it. Having said that; love and grief go together, so, if the artist communicates their love for what they are depicting being lost, there will inevitably be grief connected to that: what Tudor-Craig calls: the ‘interconnectedness and interdependence of life, our connection and our loss’ (Tudor-Craig, 2021).

‘Julia Butterfly Hill spent two years living in a redwood tree she named “Luna.” Her goal was to save it from being cut down by a logging company. She succeeded both literally and mythically. Luna was spared from death, as was a surrounding three-acre swath of trees. Hill became an inspiring symbol of artful, compassionate protest.’ (Kemister, 2020)

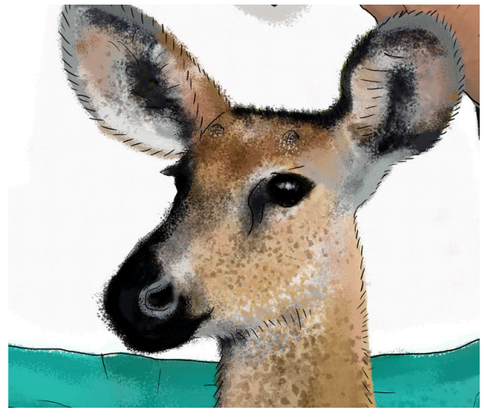
She later told Benjamin Tong in an interview: ‘So often activism is based on what we are against, what we don’t like, what we don’t want. And yet we manifest what we focus on. And so we are manifesting yet ever more of what we don’t want, what we don’t like, what we want to change… So it is my feeling of “connection” that drives me, instead of my anger and feelings of being disconnected.’ (Hill, 2018)

When depicting Dorothy Stang, I wanted her to look vulnerable and chose the deer and the Blue Morpho butterfly for that effect too. Blue also seemed to suit her, being traditionally a colour of spirituality and ‘grace’. Although she is defenceless against the men with guns, she is also strong in her will. The quote from her on the poster shows she knew her life was at risk. In the image, I am imagining

her looking the gunmen straight in the eyes as if to say ‘I am ready to die. Are you sure you want to do this?’ I am imagining her looking unafraid, but sad for the killers. She holds up her hand, like a saint’s statue would, as if to protect the forest and the small farmers and wildlife that live together there. I have tried to make her look confident and composed, because when you shoot someone and leave them in the mud you do the opposite to them. Sometimes I think art can be, for a moment, magic. For a moment it is perhaps as if it didn’t happen. The men stopped her on the path, she looked at them confidently and recited the Beatitudes and the men felt ashamed and let her pass. I would like propaganda to show us a better world – what Charles Eisenstein calls; ‘the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible’. (Eisenstein, 2013)

In obvious contrast to the Blue Morpho butterfly, the white of Stang’s shirt, her neat book, her composure; I wanted the grey/blackened area on the left to look chaotic and apocalyptic – like a war had happened there – a battlefield where the war was against the living creatures, trees and farmers who lived there. In terms of sheer numbers of different organisms, Brazil is the most biologically diverse country on Planet Earth and 70% of the world’s known animal and plants live here. (UN)

I partly chose Dorothy Stang because I really wanted to do a poster portrait of an older or middle-aged woman. Recently, there was a Rosa Parks (race activist) doll released. Rosa Parks was middle-aged when she did the protest on the bus. She had grey hairs, a characterful gap in her front teeth and a lovely smile. The toy makers made her a homogenised pretty woman with paler skin than she had. This is obviously problematic on many levels,





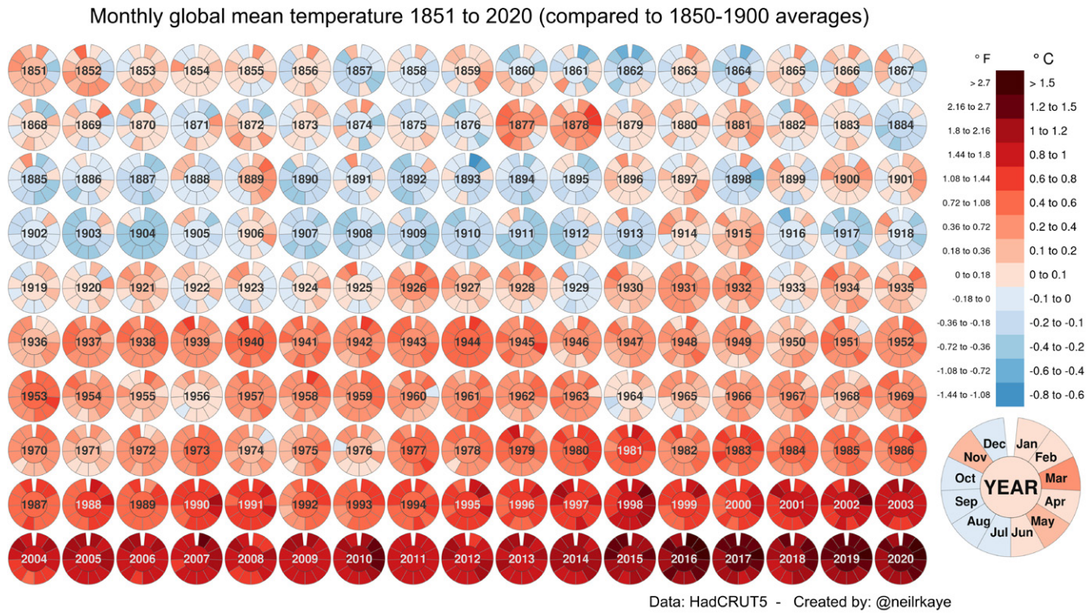
not least to do with skin colour, but also, from my own point of view (being a middle-aged woman), to do with the erasing of middle-aged women. Our culture puts great emphasis on sexiness and fertility for women. Once they are obviously menopausal or post-menopausal, women in all sorts of careers and walks of life, are overlooked. We become, not even hated, just irrelevant; boring; not considered. It's no surprise, then, that many women try so hard with make-up, surgery and hair dye, to appear younger than they are. (Marcus, 2019)

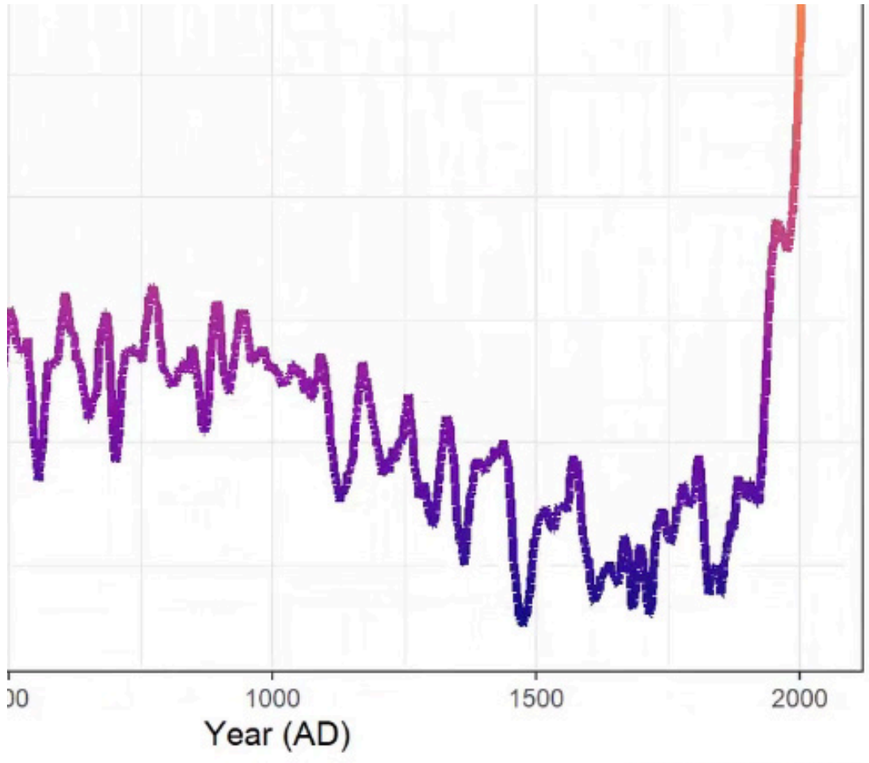
Sister Stang had none of that. At the time of her death she was 74, no hair dye, no make-up, no need to look sexy. I love drawing a woman who looks older and at-home in her olderness. Indigenous societies (and Brazil in general) are more likely to respect and 'embrace' (Faller, 2017) their elders, women included. Our society used to, and has a history of revering 'the crone', but we are now completely colonised by capitalism which sells us pictures of young, beautiful, thin, fertile women more than anything else.

As I mentioned in the Explorative Praxis module, I have had a yen to make a poster called 'Of Course We Will Lose' as my feeling about the environmental movement versus capitalism worldwide has been quite bleak since I started researching it properly. As these graphs show, runaway temperature changes are pretty much on top of us. (see 2 graphs in folder – from https://www.visualcapitalist.com/global-temperature-graph-1851-2020/

In addition to this, I had it explained to me that, fires such as the Australian ones, have been breaking out in the warmer months all over the world, even in places like Siberia and Canada. The fires themselves release carbon, thus warming the planet and making more fires more likely, thus releasing more carbon (and so on). As I realised this, my heart sank. As Bookchin explains eloquently: 'Capitalism's grow-or-die imperative stands radically at odds with ecology's imperative of interdependence and limit. The two imperatives can no longer coexist with each other; nor can any society founded on the myth that they can be reconciled hope to survive. Either we will establish an ecological society or society will go under for everyone, irrespective of his or her status.' (Bookchin, 2017)

Bearing this information in mind, it's hard to design with a light touch, because of what's at stake. Environment activist Vandana Shiva was asked; 'How do you carry on? And replied; 'I do not allow myself to be overcome by hopelessness, no matter how tough the situation… I've learned from the Bhagavad-Gita and other teachings of our culture to detach myself from the results of what I do, because those are not in my hands. You want… a better world, and you shape your actions and take full responsibility for them, but then you have detachment… I think what we owe each other is a celebration of life and to replace fear and hopelessness with fearlessness and joy.' (Shiva, 2002) This sense of joy



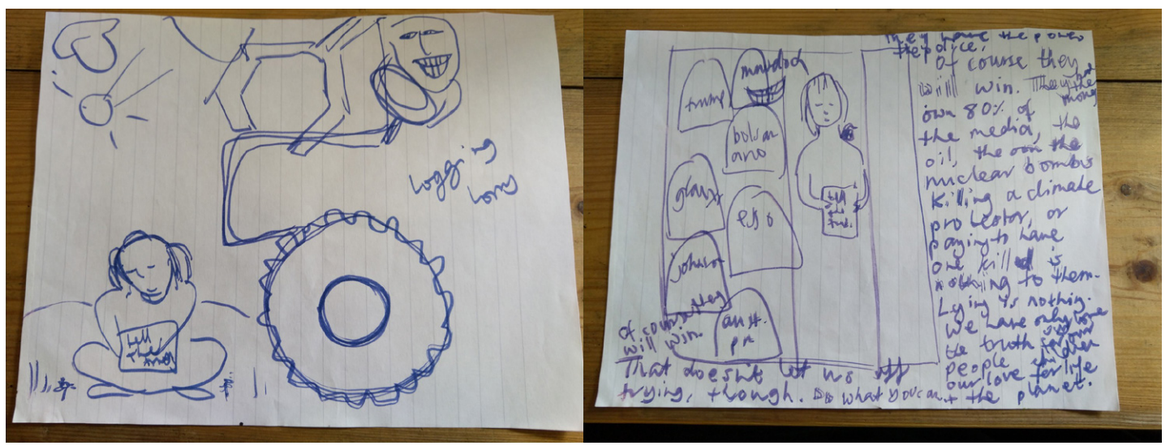


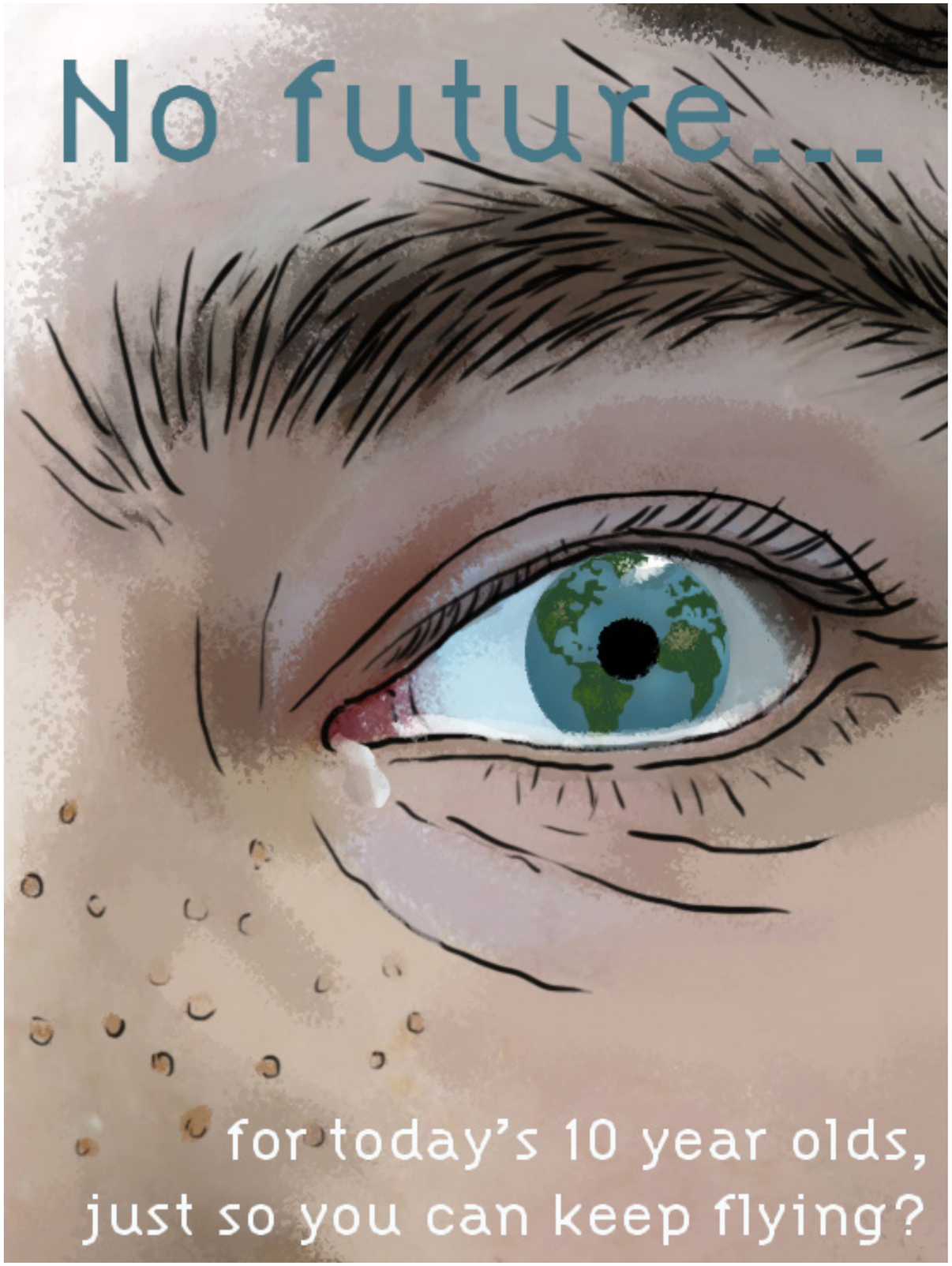
and fearlessness is what I have tried to lean towards in my earlier subvertising posters, but for my final poster I realised I had a darker idea brewing; called: ‘Of Course We Will Lose’.

It is very hard to get movement and discussion on climate issues from the UK government that isn’t just lip service. The power and money is all on the other side. I was thinking I would like to design a poster of a young girl or boy holding a placard that says something like; ‘Of course we will lose, Earth will lose. They have the press, the money, the power and the force. We have only the truth, our love for each other, the planet and for life.’ Behind the child is a bulldozer. I was researching what types of bulldozers there are and I stumbled across the armoured bulldozer. It has a gun on top and wire all the way round. It’s unstoppable; perfect for stealing land, destroying ecosystems.

As I designed the ‘Of Course We Will Lose’ poster I was reminded of the part in The Fellowship of the Ring where Frodo and Gandalf are talking about the dark times that have come to Middle Earth.







‘I wish it need not have happened in my time,’ said Frodo.

‘So do I,’ said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.’ (Tolkein, 1997)

I included the quotation with the poster, and a copy of The Lord of the Rings is in the poster, too. In a way, it feels like that time for us on Earth now, and deforested areas of South America and wildfire-affected parts of Australia look like scenes from Mordor under Sauron, or Isenguard under Saruman.

‘Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell’ (Abbey, 1977). I wondered how I could expand on this idea and use it as a quote for a pro-XR, anti-capitalist poster. I thought something like “‘Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell’. Capitalism is cancer. Capitalism is killing us and the world.” Another idea I had for a more ‘emotional’ poster was ‘No Future for Today’s Ten Year Olds, Just So You Can Keep Flying?’

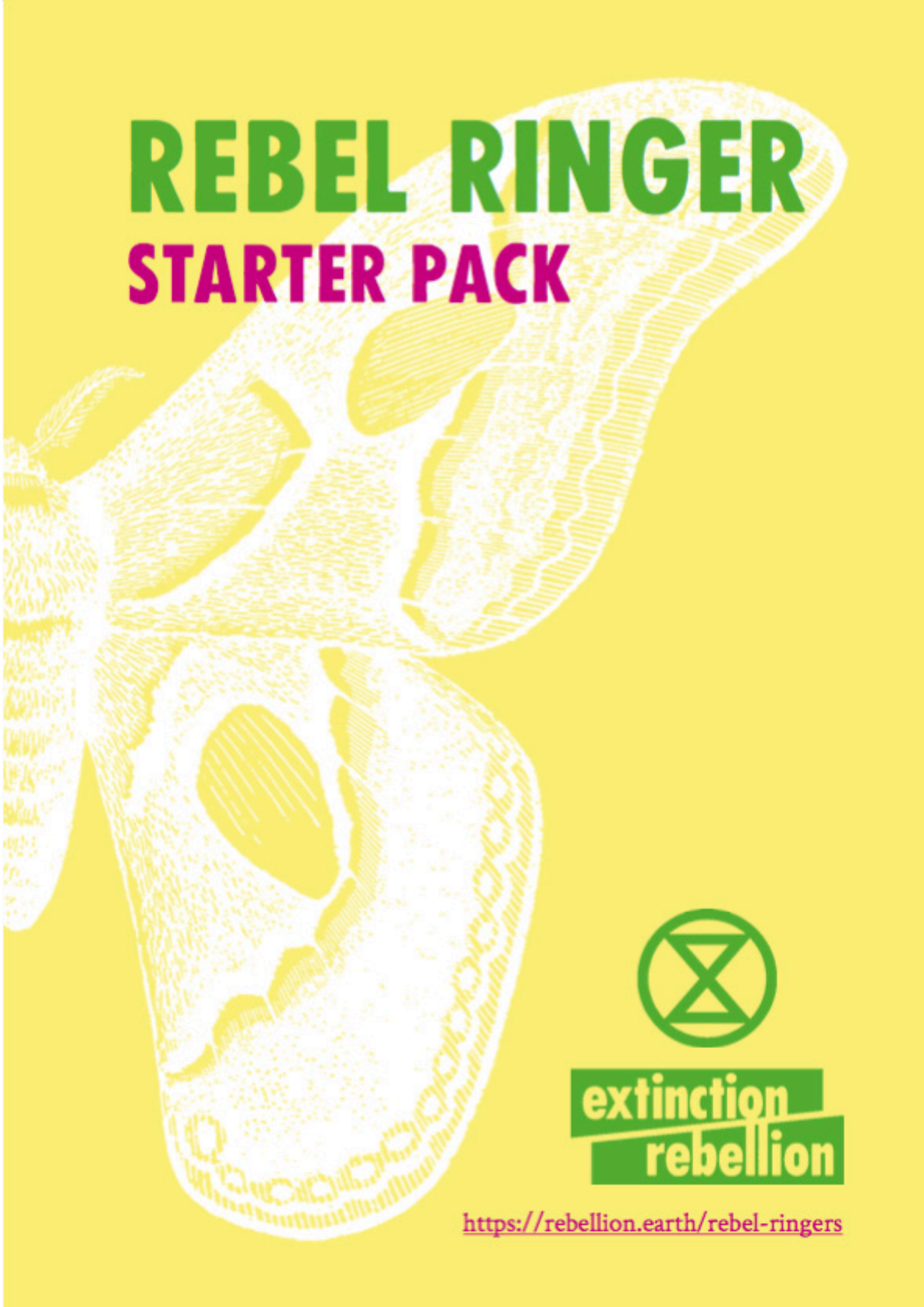
After I started my research, and realised how serious and imminent a threat the Climate Crisis is, decided to volunteer to work for Extinction Rebellion. My first big project for them was the Rebel Ringers Guide. The Rebel Ringers are the telephoning branch of XR. People volunteer to ring people who have previously said they wouldn’t mind being contacted to see if they could do something – take part in an action etc.

In the work I did on the Rebel Ringers Guide I was able to use my love of the graphic constructivist posters (mentioned at the beginning) more, though still connecting it with XR’s house style (Victorian etchings) and their house colours. You can see the booklet I made for them here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cTWyUrcgzPCpksxLVYuiLzUZt9OIhH75/view

I tried to be optimistic and even light-hearted and witty in my design. The people who volunteer as Rebel Ringers are often young and I wanted the work to be fresh and youthful. The Rebel Ringers are also a way that people who are stuck at home due to caring responsibilities or a disability can do to help mitigate the climate change. The ‘ringing’ is an important job and has a big effect.

After the posters, which are more illustrative than ‘designery’, it was nice to do pure design/layout again. I sourced copyright-free images from various Dover Pictorial Archive books that were similar to the images XR already uses and they have since added those to their database. I learned a lot of new skills in the process of making the pdf. It made me realise why they had chosen the design style they had for XR, and, despite the criticism I levelled at their house-style in my last project, I actually now think it’s very clever. I still think they were over-using ‘negative’ imagery in their designs (e.g. multiple skull patterns) (see 3 images in file) and I think my concerns about ‘negative’ imagery and an over-use of skulls has been borne out by public opinion of XR in some areas. I have heard XR called a ‘death cult’

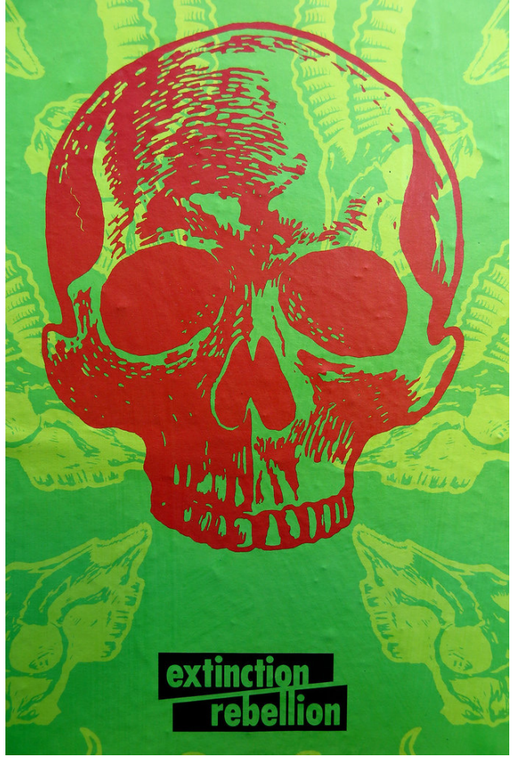


(Telegraph, 2020) which is so different from its cheerful, careful, informed, caring approach it's genuinely sad they are misperceived (perhaps deliberately, in the case of the right-wing press) in this way.

However, they have created a design framework which works brilliantly – meaning that professional designers and complete amateurs from New Zealand to Zimbabwe can download XR's images, typeface, logos and colours and create posters, banners and leaflets in their style. It's actually a very clever way of using a coherent designed 'look' to spread an ideology across the world. The internet makes this possible, and cheap to do. This seems to be somewhat of a new phenomenon: the Dog section Press (subvertisers) also has friendly free guides on how to do subvertising, just as XR has guides on how to do activism.

It is the opposite of normal corporate design – their designs have been downloaded from their open source design site 6000 times – the font, the colours – and that means it's worked.

As XR's guide for designers says 'By following just a few key guidelines, we can be







We call on everyone (and call everyone) to come and join us.

REBEL FOR LIFE.
FOR THE PLANET.
FOR ALL OUR FUTURES.

There is much work to be done.

We need to contact, inform and engage as many people about XR as we can. This Rebel Ringer Starter Pack provides all the information you need to become a Rebel Ringer: independently at home when you have a spare moment; or as part of a Party of Rebel Ringers in your community.



seen to be amazingly diverse at the same time as being understood as a single movement.' It may be the first time this has been done. I read through their advice for designers before designing and laying out the Rebel Ringer's Guide. The XR logo cannot be used for any kind of money-raising (even for XR) but apart from that, they are very free with their instructions, except that they encourage XR-supporters creating art and design to work together and collaborate. They have resources for rebels on their website here:

https://rebellion.earth/act-now/resources/art-group/

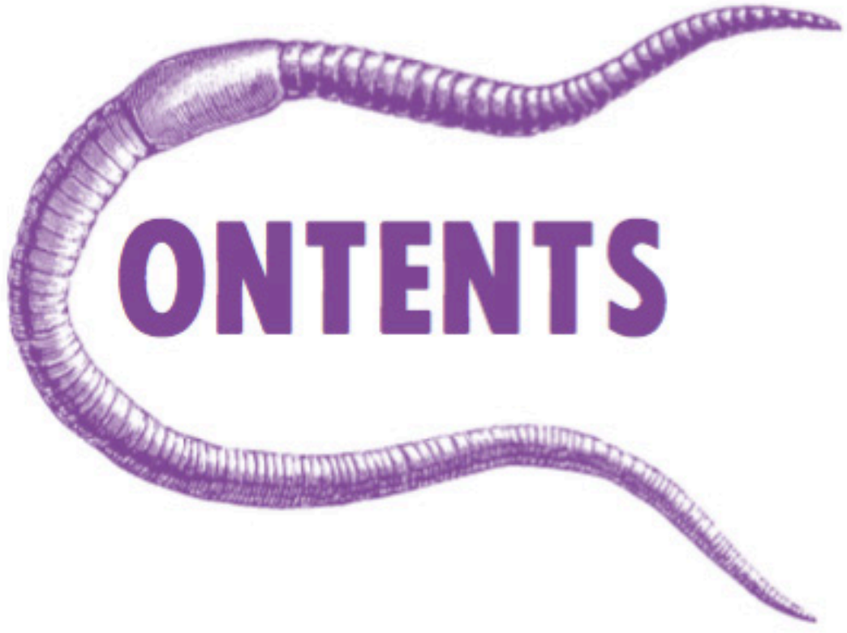
The design programme (guide for designers) can be downloaded here. https://extinctionrebellion.nz/portfolio-items/xr-design-programme-v1-0-pdf/

The downsides of giving free access to all to all their logos, text and imagery but not offering any merchandise or seeking to make any profits is obvious as soon as you look up XR on Amazon or ebay or Redbubble. Vast quantities of ripped off 'XR merchandise' is being sold by illegal traders, with none of the money going to XR or towards stopping the Climate Crisis. It's possible that, in this respect, XR are too idealogical for their own good, especially bearing in mind that we currently live inside extreme capitalism. XR's thinking is that if you want a hat, a banner or a poster with the XR logo on it, YOU should make it. It chimes with their beliefs about self-sufficiency, and on not relying on capitalism for everything.

This demonstrates the contradiction at the heart of anti-capitalist posters. If they are home-made, well and good, but if they are professionally printed, aren't they contributing to the very system of throw-away messages and throw away items they claim to despise?

The problem with any movement that is anti-capitalist, is that capitalism is the water we swim in and the air we breathe. How do we support a cause? By giving capital. How do we show our friends and neighbours we support a cause? By exchanging capital for a bumper sticker, mass produced in some hyper-polluting factory in Taipei or Guangzhou, or by exchanging capital for a mug, a badge – any mass-produced token to show we support the cause. Any capitalist movements have the challenge of trying to undermine a system, whilst still existing within the system. XR were recently criticised for publishing and allowing the marketing of a book with a mainstream publisher (Penguin – arguably THE mainstream publisher). Capitalism is the ultimate chameleon. Its genius is in its ability to assimilate and even consume all other ideologies: 'Anti-capitalism?' it says, with a cheery, white-toothed smile. 'Sure – we can accommodate you!' You want anti-capitalism? How about a nice, 100% organic cotton anti-capitalist t-shirt with a lovely anti-capitalist slogan? Best quality! Great value! Two for one offer on now!'

Of this tendency of capitalism to eat every movement, every piece of art or well-intentioned activism, Hogre said; 'it's important in a political struggle to not provide an identity, not just for legal



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reasons, but because every new identity, every new style, every rebel attitude is easy to reproduce for the market, and then easy to be sold. That's also why I use different styles, why I experiment with different mediums, to avoid generating images that are all the same.' (Hogre, 2017)

In an article in the New Statesman, Clive Russell who invented XR's style along with his partner Charlie Waterhouse and from the design agency This Ain't Rock and Roll says '"From my point of view as a designer, every single green movement up until now has been rubbish – it's been dreadfully designed, it's appealing to its own internal audience, not looking outward… It was really important to make sure that we got across the idea that we're a non-violent movement, but that doesn't mean we're not actually angry – we are really angry…"' (Morgan, 2019)

The design is 'consciously intersectional,' Waterhouse says. '"We need to make sure that we have a welcome mat for everybody, so that you can have someone in a twinset and pearls from Tonbridge Wells on the same protest as someone who might lock themselves to a tree."' (Morgan, 2019)

I agree with this. I don't want people to have a degree in pretentiousness to be able to understand the message. It's Visual Communication, for God's sake, not Visual Secrets. Communicate! When I make a poster, I want it to be understood by everyone what it's about. I don't want anyone excluded, it's pointless.

In their talk (see below) held by Bis Publishers at Pakhuis de Zwijger in Amsterdam on January 2020 Clare Farrell said she wanted to have XR posters with words like 'Empathy' and 'frugality' – and she though these might seem very cool words, but they do explain how our society needs to change. (Farrell, 2020)

The designers also mentioned they were influenced by Bauhaus and by punk ; they wanted a clear graphic identity. The house colours for XR have some similarities to the bright colours of the punk movement – the fluorescent 'spray paint' pinks and acid greens.

If I had to criticise contemporary subvertising as a genre, I would say it can be quite reactionary, but which I mean it reacts to the existing advertising. I find it quite macho, quite masculine. I find it quite negative. As Russell from XR's design team says; '"we are really angry"' (Morgan, 2019) It shows. It holds up or reacts against examples of bad things happening in the world. There's nothing wrong with that, in effect, it is a form of contemporary satire working against capitalist hegemony, but it seems to me that it works better when it uses wit, a lighter touch as opposed to anger. And, I think what's lacking from much of it is any sense of what an alternative would look like, by which I mean – where are the positive messages? Where is the beauty? In the case of environmental subvertising; where is the beauty of the natural world we are trying to save? The beauty of the natural world is, to me, the elephant in the design studio. Why is it missing?

Much of contemporary subvertising is so busy being hip, punk, subversive, clever, cynical, knowing, sarcastic, challenging and downright aggressive, it doesn't win us over. It's alienates. It forgets (and fails) to convince or even remind us of the blindingly obvious facts that we all already know, deep down: we love the world, we want to save it.

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https://www.clientearth.org/bp-greenwashing-complaint-sets-precedent-for-action-on-misleading-ad-campaigns/?fbclid=IwAR0Lr4CcOjpcgKngwpBSRwU3qSCoHSUI56t-Ez29Vqw4BZTZdpSX-nRSIFQ
17 June 2020

ACTIVISTS RISK JAIL FOR POSTER CAMPAIGN

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/activists-risk-jail-poster-campaign?fbclid=IwAR1DdWdOZV9orL1KQ6h5Z8vMpRBw9ajo2sR0bj0lv8hlJlcaA57pMaUzt8c
15 June 2020

In the heart of the Amazon rainforest, an alternative climate conference is taking place

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtnroQG55vI
12 June 2020

We will 'fight to the death' to save the Amazon rainforest

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-51489961
12 June 2020

'Every time an elder dies, a library is burnt': Amazon COVID-19 toll grows

https://news.mongabay.com/2020/06/every-time-an-elder-dies-a-library-is-burnt-amazon-covid-19-toll-grows/?fbclid=IwAR3ASaoeyqb0g31G2BAsgglaT1uQDmIsGUNg7iMoiWLe-xxUw569EdKZsng
11 June 2020

Thousands of Species Are Fleeing to Earth's Poles en Masse, And a Pattern's Emerging (seal photo)

Sixth mass extinction of wildlife accelerating, scientists warn

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/01/sixth-mass-extinction-of-wildlife-accelerating-scientists-warn?CMP=twt_a-environment_b-gdneco&fbclid=IwAR1_o59KDFZc-NR1pUa_9n49AdSBNduizK8KaRYplmI_4H2ppcD0YKyiXkc
11 June 2020

Thousands of Species Are Fleeing to Earth's Poles en Masse, And a Pattern's Emerging (seal photo)

https://www.sciencealert.com/as-the-world-gets-hotter-thousands-of-species-are-fleeing-to-earth-s-poles?fbclid=IwAR1c-Y4Zi2mUd0XWuJMIPhItryVzxhJi71RY6oRiZJTS9nYMjQO-vmG3vGI
11 June 2020

Indigenous leaders are calling for help to stop oil companies drilling in the headwaters of the Amazon river

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-environment-amazon-indigenous-idUSKBN22Y1OU?fbclid=IwAR1SwU5gP9J14ObX4NWBWVF393oMpThEptrxuiC1k_mYWpoO8DFjLrDoOV0

10 June 2020

Police raided an activist's home and arrested her for allegedly breaking into 15 bus stops.

https://oko.press/kajdanki-za-plakaty-o-szumowskim/?fbclid=IwAR0tYpUKfGI26XULtkISmntPxPsYyDjNQPm-x9qgQ3U7XXdBm8vcTfJV3zM
9 June 2020

Ghost, angel, martyr: the brutal brilliance of George Floyd murals from Syria to Belfast

https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2020/jun/05/george-floyd-murals-worldwide-street-artists?fbclid=IwAR2-T1HKTU1p6-5-Z_