

## **Sustainable Innovation 2023**

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### **Challenge and Transform the Culture of Advertising.**

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Sustainability conversations on business and design are wide ranging. But there is very little dialogue or solution finding regarding the visual cultures we create to promote sustainability. I have worked as a stylist, creative director and visual communicator for 20 years. The last 13 years I have dedicated myself to working as ethically and sustainably as possible. Everyday we are hit by an avalanche of images that we haven't selected, vetted or asked for. From the smartphone, to bus stops to fly posting and huge advertising hoardings, the advertising image shadows us as we move through our day. Drip feeding us narratives of bigger, better, more.

With this research paper, I am looking to address the urgent need to challenge and transform the culture of advertising and how we need to transform the visual culture of advertising to support the fight for climate justice, champion sustainability and facilitate sustainable lifestyles, as honestly and holistically as possible. Contemporary advertising practice celebrates and promotes the high-carbon lifestyles of the wealthiest top 10% of people on the planet. I am arguing that there is tremendous scope for escalating sustainable solutions, promoting sustainable business and for driving real change. With this paper I am advocating for a regenerative, whole systems transformation to the production of our advertising and its visual culture. I believe that opening up a more critical inquiry into the role of advertising, its language and symbolism, will enable us to build a visual culture that is ethically and creatively aligned with the innovative sustainability landscape of the future. Clinical studies tell us that the average westerner sees between 4k to 10k advertising images a day. Fortunately, we have developed a way to filter these images so that less than 100 of them actually grab our attention. The majority of these images peddle aspirational products or lifestyles that our culture has programmed us to long for. Purchasing these status affirming products proves that we have made it. But in the era of climate emergency, with limited time left to reach net-zero, these images longer read as aspirational, they read as gauche and out of touch. Because aspirational lifestyles are also the High Carbon lifestyles of the richest 10% they represent 1% of people on the planet and are significantly contributing to the climate crisis. Oxfam's 2020 report, *Confronting Carbon Inequality*, assessed the consumption emissions of different income groups between 1990 and 2015 – 25 years when humanity doubled the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It found:

- The richest one percent of the world's population are responsible for more than twice as much carbon pollution as the 3.1 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity.
- During this time, the richest 10 percent blew one third of our remaining global 1.5C carbon budget, compared to just 4 percent for the poorest half of the population.

Advertising plays a huge part in perpetuating this unequal system of impact, because it mythologises the high-carbon lifestyles of the 10 and 1%.