Sustainability and the human/nature connection: a critical discourse analysis of being "symbolically" sustainable

Hélène de Burgh-Woodman & Dylan King

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Hélène de Burgh-Woodman[a]* and Dylan King[b]

[a]*School of Business and Economics, The University of Notre Dame, Australia;* [b]*School of Communication, The University of Newcastle, Australia*

Environmental sustainability as a social and marketing discourse has gathered momentum since the 1990s, forcing companies and consumers to consider how to apprehend this shift. However, this has proved to be challenging, given that sustainability itself remains a fuzzy concept. This paper argues that this fuzziness resides in the impetus for sustainability itself, suggesting that our concern for the environment is driven by an existing, historically embedded sense of human/nature connection rather than a concern for future decimation as typically thought. This paper performs a critical discourse analysis of Toyota's hybrid car website, showing how their discourses of human/nature connectedness and technological innovation draw from, and build, their participation in the sustainability conversation. It is argued here that Toyota's technology/ethical consumption discourse constructions are underpinned by the mobilisation of a "human/nature connection" that offers explanatory purpose as to why we should care about sustainability in the first place. The discourse analysis offers details on how Toyota has created an evocative campaign that tacitly connects with the broader social concern for sustainability while eliding the complications of its own position in this concern. The paper concludes that Toyota's marketing campaign provides an example of how the human/nature connection underpins or provides motivation for sustainability but also works to obfuscate sustainability as actionable agenda as a result.

Keywords: sustainability; advertising; discourse analysis; Toyota; hybrid cars; social responsibility

Introduction

Sustainability and, by implication, sustainable consumption have emerged in marketing scholarship as a pressing matter (Connolly and Prothero 2003, 2008; Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Prothero 1997; Peattie and Crane 2005). Captured via a number of frames, including ethical consumption (Borgmann 2000; Cohen, Comrov, and Hoffner 2005; Dolan, 2005) anticorporatism (Barclay, Skarlicki, and Pugh 2005; Thompson and Arsel 2004) and the term sustainable consumption itself (Cohen and Murphy 2001; Dolan 2002; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), this wave of consumer awareness has, to one extent or another, paralleled the evolution of a trend focused on "greening" products (Young et al. 2009), services and organisations (Harris and Crane 2002; Hass 1996; Pane-Haden, Oyler, and Humphreys 2009; Preus 2005; Purser et al. 1995).

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*Corresponding author. Email: helene.deburgh-woodman@nd.edu.au

However, the question of what sustainability means continues to go unanswered and the use of the terms sustainable and sustainable consumption remain largely unanchored to meaningful action in the marketplace (Murphy and Cohen 2001; Reisch 1998). Buying "green" is frequently abstracted from sustainable practice from both producers and consumers (Peattie 1999; Peattie and Crane 2005). Advancing on Peatties' (1999) premise that sustainability has not gained traction as a serious agenda for businesses or consumers, this paper aims to offer a new theory on why this is the case and to show what the ambiguity of sustainability as *symbolic discourse* rather than actioned agenda permits both marketers and consumers to do (or not do) in the name of environmental concern. This disconnect between discourse and action challenges the uptake of real sustainable practice and forms a core matter for marketing literature dealing with the related issues of "green" sales rhetoric (Peattie 1999; Peattie and Crane 2005) and selective consumer appropriation (Connolly and Prothero 2003). Sustainability has languished as a symbolic discourse enabling consumers to do their myth-making (Thompson 2004) around what it might entail for them (Connolly and Prothero 2003; Moisander 2007) and leaving marketers to envisage what a "green" consumer looks like (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Kilbourne and Beckmann 1998; Schaefer and Crane, 2005). Despite Dalys' (1990) suggestion that a lack of grounding definition of sustainability would give rise to an evolving conceptual consensus, this has not happened and the lack of conceptual development has left action behind. A plethora of signs (D'Souza 2004; D'Souza, Taghian, and Lamb 2006) like frogs printed on recyclable coffee cups or the trail of products that feature "green," "eco" or "sustainable" on their packaging circulate as part of an undifferentiated green narrative that facilitates any number of consumer identity-making (Connolly and Prothero 2003, 2008; Haanpa 2007; Moisander and Pesonen 2002) and marketing projections. While current research has identified these ambivalent practices (Connolly and Prothero 2003, 2008; Haanpa 2007), tensions and cynicisms around sustainability in the marketplace (Kilbourne and Beckmann 1998; Peattie 1999; Peattie and Crane 2005), it begs two important questions that form the basis of our investigation here: "what does sustainability really speak to and, in the absence of a clear agenda, to what kind of symbolic subjectivities does sustainability as discourse give rise?" In focusing on these two questions, the present paper contributes to the dialogue on a key issue facing marketing at this point in time – why sustainability (as a general idea) is a resonant discourse, yet appears to lack substantive action among consumers and marketers alike.

In the first instance, this paper makes a theoretical contribution to the current work on sustainability in marketing by re-theorising sustainability as an expression of a historically established human/nature connection. Sustainability is communicated as a discourse underpinned by future environmental risk (Hamilton 2010). Our alternative view poses that the broad stroke themes of sustainability (planet decimation, melting ice caps and environmental destruction that remain for the time being largely remote from the realities of everyday life) gain resonance from an *existing* human/nature connection rather than from the projection of future risk that constitutes current understandings of sustainability discourse. Our theorisation of sustainability also illuminates (and explains) the paradox endemic to sustainability discourse – that of identifying future environmental risk while valuing the fruits of modern progress with its damaging production practices, excessive consumption, reliance on technology for problem-solving and emphasis on growth. One answer to the question what does sustainability speak to is that we, as humans, already enjoy a historically embedded relationship with nature in either its literal or metaphoric sense, which has the effect of rendering nature a passive

constant – that is to say it is hard to imagine it gone. Rather than moved by the risk of future catastrophic outcomes, we suggest the greater resonance for sustainability as an idea among consumers resides in our historical and social recognition of nature as an imminent element and therefore constitutes something that is *just there*. We contribute further by using this theorisation of sustainability as human/nature connection to explain both the ambiguity of what sustainability means in the marketplace and the subjectivities that emerge. In addressing these questions, we offer a new theoretisation of sustainability that accounts for the inertia around sustainability action in the marketplace and provide insight into some of the symbolic purposes to which the sustainability discourse is instead being put.

These questions are investigated via an analysis of Toyota Australia's hybrid technology campaign. The campaign exemplifies the theory that a symbolic sustainability discourse allegorises a human/nature motif without specifically referencing sustainability as an actionable agenda. We trace how Toyota actively weaves this human/nature connection into their hybrid marketing and the ways Toyota uses, intervenes upon and transforms this core motif. The campaign also highlights the ways in which modern production and consumption, problem-solving technology and emphasis on growth co-exist with sustainability precisely because sustainability as an actionable agenda is elided by sustainability as human/nature connectedness symbolism. In situating the human/nature connection as the underpinning logic for the resonance of sustainability, the case of Toyota illustrates the kinds of adoption, transformation and countervailing that characterises current marketing and consumer uses of the green narrative (Williander 2007).

This paper commences with a brief overview of the human/nature connection through the lens of the philosophical/scientific tradition that has dominated our approach to nature, pointing to an established history of a human reckoning with nature. This is followed by the introduction to Toyota's campaign and a sketch of the context, political and marketplace in which their discourse construction occurs. The method is then explained followed by the analysis of Toyota's texts and a discussion of implications. Some conclusions and future direction for research are finally discussed.

An overview of the human/nature connection

The human/nature connection has enduring presence as a construct in Western cultural history and as such the account given here is drawn from the major sociological and philosophical trends that have underpinned this cultural treatment of nature. The term construct is significant here in that the history of the human/nature connection is replete with myth-making, distantiation and imagining. Tracing the Western philosophical/scientific tradition and treatment of human/nature connectedness is the most relevant for our discussion here, since this tradition represents, along with our fascination, some of the more paradoxical or tenuous aspects of our relationship with nature. Reaching back to the gods of Greek mythology, this myth system symbolised an oft-tempestuous human relationship with the world of natural elements represented by each god and to which humans were subordinate (Redfield 1994). However, as Greek philosophy turned from the mythological to more rational inquiry, setting the early foundations for natural sciences, the perception of the natural world altered from a space of myth to inquiry. Aristotle (1971, 2008) was among the first to probe nature, or the natural environment outside of towns, villages and inhabited spaces, in more systematic

fashion, clearing the ground for subsequent treatment by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment (Russell 1999; Von Mücke 2006) such as Bacon, Newton, Diderot, Berkeley and Kant who turned their attention to nature as a site of scientific and philosophical interest.

In the Age of Enlightenment, where the perceptual field shifted from oral to visual (MacDonald 2003), reason rather than divine connection (Huppert 1999; Outram 1995) characterised the approach to the natural world, transforming it into a terrain for observation and investigation (Allert 1996; Yolton 1996). Implicit in the Enlightenment observational approach (Baxandall 1995) was a driving pre-occupation with controlling or ordering nature (de Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan 2010). Consistent with the view that reason and science would inform universal or absolute knowledge (Hunter 1998; Katz 2002; Roger and Benson 1997; Terral 2002) and mitigate civic risk (Halkier 2001, 2004; Tulloch and Lupton 2002), the erratic and mysterious natural world came under increasing scrutiny (Stroup 1990) and a separation of society/nature perpetuating into modernity emerged (Latour 1993). It was believed that keen observation would provide the key to ordered perspective and thus control of the natural elements (Merchant 1980; Wade 1998). Aristotle's metaphysics was thus subsumed by a project of scientific and philosophical control led by the primacy of human reason.

From a sociological view, the Enlightenment perspective continues to frame our contemporary relationship with nature (Kahn 2001). Recent popular trends towards "getting back to nature" notwithstanding (Dean-Moore 2011), from a general vantage point (with our continuing reliance on scientific knowledge and the establishment of universal truths), our relationship with nature is still one juxtaposed between fascination and control but nonetheless underpinned by a separation mediated by technology (Latour 1993). However, this paradoxical relationship, informed by the competing narratives of science/technology and fascination, gives rise to a complex appropriation of nature in the cultural imagination as part of a broader impetus towards the differentiation of social, intellectual and "natural" space (Levfebre 1974). For contemporary scientists, following the logic of Enlightenment science, nature is a space to be controlled and probed. The expansion of technological innovation as both a product and instrument of scientific inquiry (Callon 1986; Penn 2003) is an added dimension to this dynamic, in which it effects a mediated relationship between human/nature via technology (Giesler and Venkatesh 2005; Haraway 1991).

This may account for a second strain of the human/nature representation in the cultural imagination, captured as longing to return to less complicated modes of existence. Contemporary cultural theorists have repeatedly cited the complexity of modern life as the impetus to imagine a more simple life. "Nature" as a distant term (Haraway 1991) allegorises angst towards an increasingly technologised, structured existence; the nebulous imaginary Other in the face of modernity (Williams 2007). This position ironically echoes the early mythical quality of nature as a narrative and social construct (Baudrillard 1970). Starting with Romanticism of the nineteenth century (Levin 1999), the emergence of mythical nature as a site of retreat, open space in the face of ever-expanding urbanisation and untouched by the hand of modernisation (Adams 1979; Ferguson 1992), this concept of nature continues to provide symbolic counterpoint to the structures of modern life (Hewer 2003). This aesthetic–metaphoric relationship with nature, charged with the emotions of retreat and self-regeneration, provides the aesthetic and discursive grounds for a campaign such as Toyota's that works to mask the economic/technological elements that actually drives the company and its survival (Penn 2003).

Toyota's place in the Australian socio-political treatment of sustainability

The following discussion focuses on the Toyota hybrid marketing campaign launched in Australia in 2001. Toyota has promoted its hybrid technology in 70 countries (McGlaun 2011), using different campaigns in different countries to dominate the hybrid market. In 2006, Prius purchases represented 76% of the global hybrid market (Bonini and Oppenheim 2008). With worldwide sales of their hybrid cars hitting 3 million in February 2011, thereby indicating a level of success in their global marketing of the product (McGlaun 2011), the Australian campaign is distinctive for two reasons: its convergent political/company/marketing web content (Jenkins 2006) and the socio-political conditions framing the development of the hybrid Camry. The hybrid Camry was developed with the aid of significant federal government funding (Stanford 2008), thus aligning national politico-economic interests with Toyota's agenda (Toyota Australia 2009). Toyota exported its 500,000th hybrid Camry from Australia to Saudi Arabia in October 2010 (Davis 2010). As such, the marketing of Toyota's hybrid products in Australia represents a successful collusion of political interests, industry expansion and the co-construction of a sustainable innovation discourse amidst a cultural climate of ambivalence towards both groups. This merging of agendas makes Australia a small but unusual site of inquiry in the scheme of Toyota's global marketing.

The Toyota hybrid Camry was designed and now built in Victoria, Australia, with the assistance of the Labour Government, launching their first hybrid Camry in 2008. Equally, since the rise of Kevin Rudd as Labour Prime Minister in 2007 (and his spectacular downfall in 2010 being supplanted by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard), the current Australian Federal Government has attempted to claim a prominent position nationally and abroad as leaders in sustainable development and environmental agenda-setting. At the implementation level, the Australian Government has achieved little with a pale imitation Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) cast as a tax on carbon and ready for defeat at the next election as of 2011. Rudd's original major ETS initiative launched at the Copenhagen Summit was subsequently shelved due to the lack of popularity. Ironically, it was his perceived back down on an issue he described as "the greatest moral challenge of our time" that sealed his fate in the eyes of the Australian public. This tale of government support for industry, Rudd's rise and fall and the vague environment policies that have ensued under Gillard go some way to explaining the political and social conditions in which Toyota operates. These political dynamics, under which Toyota developed the hybrid Camry, speak to the contradictory nature of sustainable consumption as discourse versus action. While the political and industry rhetoric is intense, thus far the only concrete outcome is Toyota's sale of a partially government-funded car.

Government support for industry innovation (Australian Government 2009, 2010) is crucial to maximising profitability, market-driven growth and technology development (Coates and Leahy 2006, 2). Investment requires reliable consumer markets, qualified workers and the incorporation of market-oriented measures to ensure competitive and consumer satisfaction success (Hamrin 1981; Heaton, Repetto, and Sobin 1992; Mikler 2007; Vavonese 1994). Governments have funded innovation to the extent that it supports key market imperatives of "building competitiveness and sustaining economic growth" (Arndt and Sternberg 2001, 365), providing "employment opportunities and positive balances of trade, thus protecting the nation's standard of living" (Hage 1999, 598).

Their partnership suggests Toyota and government are co-participants in constructing "a mechanism for fitting together technological, ecological, and socio-cultural objectives" (Davison 2004, 142). This assemblage of political, industry and social actors clears the terrain for a range of competing environmental/economic/political power discourses that resemble biopolitics (Hardt and Negri 2000) as a collusion of organising power structures characterised by "hybridization of the natural and the artificial, needs and machines, desire and the collective organization of the economic and the social" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 407). These sometimes collusive, sometimes antithetical agendas underpin the attempted integration of a values system based on a "green" *political* agenda (as opposed to outcome) and increasing sustainable production across industry (Barry 1999; Davison 2004; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). These vague but nonetheless powerful discourses have come to frame the treatment of sustainability by political and industry actors. Moving between discursive polarities such as production/consumption, need/want, natural/artificial and ethics/expediency, the conflation of political, economic and social agendas (Grabosky 1995) has made the possibility of a visible and ideologically clear sustainability discourse virtually impossible.

While funding for so-called sustainable development is attached to a "green" political and corporate agenda (Wæraas and Ihlen 2009; Williander 2007), there is a schism between the discourse and reality for consumers as participants in the social collective organisation (Bonini and Oppenheim 2008; Leahy and Gow 2003). In the same vein that Connelly and Prothero (2003) cite consumption as continuing to be perceived as good for national economic policy, government funding for innovation is perceived to sustain embedded consumer greed (Trainer 1995). Through their ambivalence towards curbing consumption, political forces fail to facilitate a shift in consumption lifestyles, leaving consumer response at an impasse – what does it really mean to be "green"? Despite discursive noise that promotes a nebulous sustainability agenda, the traditional economic mechanisms that thrive on over-consumption and perpetuation of the economic system (Holmgren 2002; Trainer 1985) are left intact. In this respect, the sustainability discourse established by political and industry voices in Australia promote a tangled and contradictory image of what this discourse means in real social, economic and change terms.

Equally, alternative solutions such as public transport, walking and cycling (Borchardt 2009, 18) are struck down as problematic. It is repeatedly argued in corporate and political forums that consumers are unlikely to support real changes that restrict their consumption and may also reduce their standard of living (Connelly and Prothero 2003; Leahy 2003; Trainer 1995) but would also, in a twist of irony, bring them physically closer to the environment they seek to preserve. Therefore, government focuses on policies that enforce standards to improve vehicle efficiency or reduced emissions (Frey 2008, 39) rather than challenging existing consumption practices. This vexed situation provides the context for Toyota's hybrid programme in Australia. Governmental chariness of policies that force fundamental lifestyle change facilitates expanding production and at the same time producing a "green" political frame that transfers to corporate "greening". This collusion between political and corporate actors means that both parties can claim to be co-operating to develop environmentally sustainable innovation while, at the same time, sharing in a common desire to actually maintain the status quo, looking instead to mid-term economic growth and profitability. This is not to suggest that hybrid technology itself is not viable but rather that its development serves a number of other objectives.

The dimensions of critical discourse analysis

The present paper performs a discourse analysis of Toyota's website. Discourse analysis has gained increasing visibility in marketing scholarship (Caruana, Crane, and Fitchett 2008; Hackley 2002; Mitussis and Elliott 1999; Parsons 2010), enabling the examination of the relationship between marketing texts (in their various forms) and the powers, practices and discourses that inform and produce them. This approach has proved useful in apprehending discourses such as gender (Brownlie and Hewer 2007), culinary tastes (Wilk 2006) and consumer identity (Mitussis and Elliott 1999; Sitz 2008). This approach enables us to view Toyota's marketing text in the context of its socially embedded (Elliott 1996; Parsons 2010; Sitz 2008) function.

The analytical approach to Toyota's marketing campaign adopted here is Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) model (1990, 1995, 2001, 2003). Fairclough emphasises the connection between the text as discursively productive/produced and social practice (2004, 4) or "the articulation between the text and the social locus in which it is produced" (Sitz 2008, 180). Fairclough (2001) defines CDA as the analysis of "dialectical relationships between discourse (including language but also other forms of semiosis, e.g. body language or visual images) and other elements of social practices" (231). Semiosis here refers to the various sign systems (visual, textual, etc.) that work simultaneously or inter-discursively to produce a homogeneous discourse. Semiosis is also the basis of semiology or the study of signs and their signifying power. Working on the basis that discourse emerges from gender, social structures and the shaping effect of language on identities, relationships, and knowledge systems, CDA enables analysis to move between three inter-related dimensions of (a) the *intra-textual* elements of the object of analysis – the text, (b) the *extra-textual* practices of discourse production, distribution and consumption and (c) the broader *socio-cultural conditions* affecting discursive production and practice. These three dimensions are apprehended via text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation) to excavate the embedded power structures, practices and positionalities produced in and by the object of analysis.

CDA requires a clear object of analysis or a "manageable body of data with which to work which is both concise and coherent" (O'Sullivan 2007, 298). The object of analysis in this paper is Toyota's interactive website containing language and visual imagery. The language and imagery constitute two sign orders that interpolate upon one another to produce Toyota's form of sustainability discourse. Therefore, the analysis performed here reads the visual imagery of Toyota's campaign (Schroeder 2002, 2006) alongside language as two sign systems that work together to articulate Toyota's position as producer of a specific view of sustainability. The imagery used in Toyota's campaign works to complement and confirm the discourse work contained in the language use on the site.

As mentioned, the integration of "analysis at the macro level of social structure with analysis at the micro level of social action" (Henderson 2005, 13) is specific to the CDA framework. Toyota's website as the object of analysis is embedded in the extra-textual and broad socio-political conditions surrounding its production. Toyota draws on existing cultural, political and economic discourses about sustainability to inform the web content (the representation of nature, technology, social usefulness etc.), thus providing a liminal (Buchanan-Oliver, Cruz, and Schroeder 2010) framing context for the meaning and interpretation of the web content. The way in which Toyota co-opts a larger social sustainability narrative to position its own discourse plays out the

dialectical relationship between discourse and broader social practices of which Fairclough speaks.

Therefore, as analytical procedure, the current analysis firstly focuses on the object of analysis and its visual/language content (the website), secondly contextualises this object within the conditions in which it was produced, distributed and consumed (Toyota's interest in building a market of hybrid consumers and assuming control over the sustainability narrative) and finally traces the macro-socio-political factors (the Australian government and the effort to appropriate a socially acceptable sustainability narrative, the industry status, social attitudes and practices, etc.) that inform the discourse presented by Toyota. The analysis section is primarily concerned with the first of these two steps – the object of analysis and the micro-conditions of its production, distribution and consumption. The ensuing discussion focuses more on the connection between the second and third steps – the conditions surrounding the website and their embeddedness within a broader socio-political context.

A CDA of Toyota's interactive website

The promotional component of Toyota's Australian website is divided into the sections "Philosophy," "Environment," "Hybrid synergy drive" and "Technology." The sequence of these categories constructs in the first instance a binary tension between "philosophy–environment," reflective of an emotive/humanistic discourse, and "synergy drive-technology" as mediating rationalism. Not surprisingly, "hybrid" is situated in between as the nexus between the two, interpolating the themes of humanity and the discourses of science and technology into one signifying term – hybrid is science *and* humanity combined.

Philosophy

The language use in this section adopts an interpersonal language function. Speaking directly to the reader, Toyota declares "we've made a commitment to manufacturing, innovative technologies and social contribution that enhance the quality of your life and those around you."

The first page of the site is entitled Hybrid Synergy Drive Philosophy. The sub-heading reads 'For Toyota, quality is not just a promise; it's a way of life' followed by the text:

> Nothing is so good that it cannot be made better. That is why we strive for constant improvement in everything we do, it is not a motto. Or a mission statement we hang on the wall and forget about. It is simply the way we do things. We have a word for it "kaizen". It means "continuous improvement".

> We've made a commitment to manufacturing, innovative technologies and social contribution that enhances the quality of your life and those around you. This is evident in our pursuit of sustainable alternatives. And through Hybrid Synergy Drive we've developed a better way of motoring that we've been perfecting for over 30 years. Even before anyone had imagines the changes to our energy reserves, the environment or fuel costs that would force others into action. (Toyota.com.au)

At the top left of the page, a young girl blows on a dandelion while standing in a field, on the top left a hand is raised to the sun through a sheet of red fabric and in the bottom, some Chinese text appears (presumably "kaizen") (Toyota.com.au).

Toyota's "pursuit of sustainable alternatives" and "continuous improvement" constructs a technological innovation discourse. Simultaneously, participation in the project to "enhance the quality of your life and those around you" proposes a more humanistic reasoning or purpose for technology, thereby situating Toyota as tenuous mediators (Cronin 2004) between humans and technology. Toyota is here to improve their technology and, in the process, make our lives better. However, this human/technology discourse is paradoxically played out against the background of a contesting human/nature connection that resides in the visual imagery. Images of a girl in a field blowing a dandelion and a second image of a hand reaching for the sun offer little support for the textual content, juxtaposed against text that espouses the virtues of the human/technology connection.

This fragmentation of text and image occurs on several levels. Sustainable only means something if it is allegorised as nature. In speaking of sustainable alternatives, Toyota weaves a liminal visual narrative (Buchanan-Oliver, Cruz, and Schroeder 2010) that calls on existing cultural constructions to enable the reader to make sense of the term sustainable. This returns to the earlier question of why do we care about sustainability? Toyota makes us care through the deployment of a liminal human/nature connection captured in the visual imagery. Without directly referencing sustainability, the human/nature connection drifts in the margins of visual imagery allegorising the idea that we care because we like to stand in a green field or reach for the sun; scenes of the kind of retreat, escape and denial of the modern reality that drives the idyllic rendering of human/nature connectedness. This blurring of sustainable/nature is made possible by this pre-existing human/nature metaphor, exploiting the various associative experiences (such as standing in a field not a city) that operate somewhere between myth and reality. It is possible to conclude that Toyota is not asking us to care explicitly about sustainability, instead asking us to simply re-visit a connection that already has its grounding in our perceptual, imaginative and social spheres.

Environment

In the "Environment" section, Toyota claims "we're not resting on our laurels we're out to continually craft and refine our vision towards a zero emissions vehicle. And that's good news for all of us. And the planet." Although the text appears under "environment," the reference to the planet is arbitrary at best. Zero emissions are somehow good for people more so than the environment. This is compounded by the absence of any strong visual reference to the environment. Instead, children and leisure shots (a given in any Australian promotional campaign appealing to a national image of sun, sea and fun) visually dominate the space. Pictures of leaves, small plants and birds sit awkwardly under these dominant leisure images. How are we to interpret this strange hiving off of people and environment in the pursuit of zero emissions? The clause "our vision towards a zero emissions vehicle" underpins the technological innovation discourse that makes possible the aim of zero emissions. However, the foregrounding of people as the main beneficiaries of the technology and zero emission agenda suggests that environmental responsibility is about making things "good" for us – with the added benefit of aiding the planet. The cohesive clause "good news for all of us" represents the producer, consumer and society yet leaves the main actor – the environment – dangling as a discursive and visual afterthought. The second page of the site is entitled Hybrid Synergy Drive – Environment. The subheading reads Aim: Zero Emissions.

Down the left side, a menu of Toyota's initiative can be clicked on. They include "our commitment to the environment," "what we are doing in Australia," "what we are doing around the world," "Planet Ark" and "eco driving tips." The main text reads:

> Toyota recognizes that motoring, though a permanent fixture of our societies, is widely associated with producing many harmful by-products to our planet's eco-system. With this understanding, long ago, we recognised our responsibility to providing a sustainable transport alternative for drivers.
>
> Since our first hybrid was unveiled at the Tokyo Motor Show, our engineers have strived to dramatically lower emissions, increase fuel efficiency and ultimately improve performance.
>
> This resulted in a truly unique solution, Hybrid Synergy Drive, where rather than compromising or sacrificing, it seeks synergies. But we're not resting on our laurels, we're out to continually craft and refine our vision towards a zero emissions vehicle. And that's good new for all of us. And the planet. (Toyota.com.au)

On the top right hand, a photo of a young child playing in a pool brings a burst of colour as does the photo beside it of a hot air balloon with its many colours. Situated in the textbook beside the text, there are four photos wedged together. The first is a small seedling resting in a human hand, the second is a leaf with the sun behind it, the third is a bird flying behind a bright, blue sky and the fourth is a child's hand reaching up to the sun, thus connecting with the similar imagery from the previous page.

The visual imagery offers some clue as to what "the environment" means and why we can focus on us rather than the planet. In a further iteration of the visual rhetoric found on the philosophy page, leaf, plant and bird imagery employs a familiar aesthetic of "nature." While the images as signifiers in themselves are relatively indiscriminate, when read through the prism of the human/nature connection, they begin to garner meaning as metaphors for the natural world and re-mobilise the human/nature trope used on the philosophy page. This allusion to a human/nature connection also explains the emphasis on humans in the text, since humans are one half of the metaphor. Again, the sustainable/nature analogy sees the sustainable element disappear into the liminal nature narrative that frames, explains and makes resonant the otherwise fragmented and meaningless "sustainability" referent.

But we also see the return of a dominant technology discourse. Starting with the statement "Toyota recognises that motoring . . . is widely associated with producing many harmful by-products" goes on to advocate Toyota's commitment to technological solutions. Toyota identifies their manufacturing operations as part of the environmental problem and, in anticipation of obvious critique, sets about making a case for their responsible approach to getting more people on the road – a contradiction in itself. They take a sustainable approach to "development" that links their operations to the environmental preconditions for development (Barry 1999, 205–6). Furthermore, this discourse construction reflects Toyota's rejection of restructuring transportation networks or encouraging a shift to different transport modes since "motoring" is "a permanent fixture" – particularly if we keep saying it is.

Hybrid synergy drive

In this section, we expect to see a re-articulation of the grand scale technology narratives found in the philosophy and environment sections; this expectation is flagged by the dramatic shift of colour scheme. The evocative nature shots, while present, are embedded in an intense, dark background, suggesting that we are moving to the

serious stuff. Yet, the opening phrase adopts a diminutive approach to technology, claiming "We didn't set out to create an alternative solution. We set out to find answers to smaller questions." The third page of the site is entitled Better together. The world leading hybrid technology. The text reads:

> Hybrid Synergy Drive is not just a clever combination of petrol and electricity. It's a collection of smart ideas. Smart ideas that make as much sense now, as when we started thinking about them – over 30 years ago. We considered the car. We thought about how it moves, how it drives, and how you drive it. We didn't set out to create an alternative solution. We set out to find answers to smaller questions.
>
> Why should the engine move when you're not? Can we store the energy normally lost during braking and deceleration to give you additional power later? Is a petrol engine really always the most efficient way to move? What if your car could choose from two sources so it was always at its most powerful, cleaner and efficient?
>
> We wanted to create the ultimate solution not just because we could, but because we should.
>
> Join us in wondering why nobody ever thought of this before.
>
> Discover Hybrid Synergy Drive… Click through the headings to discover what makes Hybrid Synergy Drive the world's leading hybrid technology. (Toyota.com.au)

In the top left hand, against a black background, the Toyota Hybrid Synergy Drive logo is placed with the slogan "the future of driving" written below it. On the bottom half of the page, under the text, that has some click through sections. These clicks are entitled "dynamic," "powerful," "efficient," "intelligent," and "cleaner." Each link has an image attached to it where dynamic and powerful show parts of the car, efficient and cleaner show a hill and the sky respectively while the image behind intelligent is unclear. There is also an additional section, mounted on a black background, describing the technical capabilities of the engine.

Apparently, the hybrid technology happened by accident in the course of looking for answers to small questions – these questions are unclear. This diminutive claim to humble pursuits is then eclipsed by the subsequent statement "we wanted to create the ultimate solution not just because we could, but because we should." The collusion of moral and technological imperatives accelerates Toyota's rush to find the ultimate solution to the big issue of … efficiency. Again, the direct confrontation of sustainability and an articulated commitment to sustainability as the platform upon which Toyota operates is averted, channelled into analogous territory of efficiency, power and clean drive. Just as the philosophy and environment section inscribe liminal nature narrative in the visual content to make sense of the oblique language use in text, we see this tactic employed in the technology section. Pictures of blue skies and a mountain serve as signifiers for clean and efficient motoring so that we can enjoy the benefits of a clean world and an explicit sustainability discourse is left untended.

The text in the technology section also sees Toyota lay claim to the origins of the sustainability issue "before anyone had imagined the changes to our energy reserves, the environment or fuel costs that would force others into action." Situated at the vanguard of an unnamed discourse, Toyota again retreats from explicitly framing their participation in solving energy, fuel and environmental concerns as leading a sustainability discourse as such. These concepts are emphasised through the use of force "wondering

why nobody ever thought of this before" but it is not clear what "this" actually is. Is it a sustainability discourse, is it is technological innovation? The blurring of these lines enables Toyota to move between their explicit technology discourse and their visual representation of a pre-existing human/nature connection, but this is only tenuously connected to an ostensible sustainability discourse.

Technology

This section sees a return to the same imagery and aura of the philosophy and environment sections. Recapturing the light, fun mood of these previous pages (temporarily ruptured by the dark, serious synergy drive page), technology is visually represented in the same thematic frame as the disparate themes of philosophy/environment. The same references to the girl in the field, children in a pool and the hand in the sun featured on the philosophy page are used as background referents to the pre-established human/nature connection. The more explicit nature imagery is replaced by a shot of the car, indicating its various technological innovations. The visual content establishes a connection between human/technology while still reminding us of the human/nature connection as motivator. The fourth page of the site is entitled: Hybrid Synergy Drive – Technology. The text reads:

> Technology. It's that wonderful thing that creates a smile in the mind when nobody's looking. Lights up the most skeptical eyes. And often has people scratching their heads and wondering "whatever will they think of next?"
>
> Toyota is committed to producing technology that you can actually use. So instead of lumbering the rest of us with baffling acronyms and tech-speak, Toyota has flipped the equation and asked "what's in this for the driver?" How does this technology benefit them?" Or in the case of Hybrid Synergy Drive, how does that extend to the world around us all as well? (Toyota.com.au)

On the left hand side, the menu entitled Not all Hybrids are created equal gives viewers the option to click through to "not just lower fuel consumption," "performance without compromise" and "over 2 million reasons and counting." Picking up the menu theme, beside the click through menu a box with the heading "not all Hybrids are created equal" emphasizes the "core technology at the core of Toyota's hybrid model range. Exclusive to Toyota, Hybrid Synergy Drive guarantees performance without compromise and is the smart choice when making a hybrid purchase" (Toyota.com.au). The tech specs of the car and its key features via a diagram of the car are situated next to this text.

At the top left hand of the page, the previous photos of the girl with the dandelion and the girl in the pool are overlaid one another. We also see the return of the hand reaching to the sky through the red fabric image.

This human/technology connection is re-enforced in the textual content. However, Toyota situates its technology discourse as a facilitator for human emotion – happiness, wonder and smiles. These emotions might also be said to characterise our engagement with nature. Distancing itself from the rationalising discourse of production and expansion, Toyota instead makes an argument for technology as a conduit to lifestyle development, identity-making and consumption. There emerges though a schism between the "behind the scenes" techspeak, or the backchat of economics, politics and expansion, and the social image of technology as helpful. In this respect, Toyota posits

their technology discourse as benign, socially beneficial and the key to identity-making projects in the guise of "what's in it for the driver?"

The human/nature connection returns in text as an afterthought, sharing here similarities with the environment section. This connection operates as a vague, framing logic for the entire page, foregrounding the more pressing discourse of technology. Technology steps in as mediator between human/nature, thus constructing a human/nature/technology paradigm. The benefits of technology "extend to the world around us *as well*" remind us of our place in the human/nature continuum. The term sustainable is not used at any point in the text, since the objective is to show the beneficial role of technology as mediator. However, there emerges a tension within the text and imagery. While the human/nature connection returns in the guise of the images and the last minute reference to "the world around us," this connection become confused by technology as the dominant discourse. It is not clear to what we are anchoring our dreams, hopes and smiles – is it technology in all of its wonder or is the closer connection to nature that technology facilitates? Technology as a non-specific, mediating term emerges as both the means and the end.

Discussion

The intervention of technology on the human/nature relationship

The Toyota hybrid site is organised according to four themes. Bringing together the disparate threads of philosophy, environment, technology and product, Toyota populates all four spaces with one dominant discourse – technology. In this respect, we see the politics, social discourses and industry interests specific to Australia played out in the campaign since the political support for hybrid technology is linked to a broader innovation agenda. Technology is allegorised as a gateway to a more promising future, solving problems and making driving more fun.

On the one hand, sustainable development might involve integration of "ecologically sustainable . . . development that is consistent with external, natural and ecological constraints and limits" (Barry 1999, 205). In recognising that the human development of technology has contributed to environmental problems, the means to tackle sustainability might be found within technology (Davison 2004; Fricker 2006). This possibility of technology as both means and end represents a point of confusion in Toyota's discourse construction, opening up a deliberate void for the consumer to fill with their own intervening imagining.

On the other hand, this prevalence of a technology discourse subsumes both the reason why we need new technology (because of companies like Toyota producing polluting cars and consumers like us buying them) and any direct apprehension of sustainability as a real or immediate consideration. This brings us back to the economic and political conditions in which Toyota's operations are framed in Australia and the political sharing in an agenda that co-opts the new in order to preserve the *status quo*. The implicit focus on economic and growth goals validates an emphasis on the technology discourse at the expense of the tensions this entails when set against a counter-discourse of sustainability. Toyota does not construct a sustainability discourse. They construct a visible human/nature connection discourse that backhandedly *suggests or refers to* a more oblique sustainability discourse, leaving invisible social referents found in other quarters of the marketplace to fill in the gaps. The occasional and strategic textual use of the term sustainable keeps this navigation of the invisible on track.

Any latent or passive sustainability discourse, liminally framed as a human/nature connection, avoids the ethical entanglements created by technological, economic and production imperatives and the paradox these imperatives inherently represent in mobilising a sustainability discourse. Toyota retreats to more generalised notions of "nature" so as to avoid these compromising discursive complications. The human/nature connection inscribes a technology discourse to produce something that more closely resembles a human/nature/technology connection that places technology at human service (to master nature) and sits comfortably within existing cultural narratives around nature. We are versed in our human/technology connection, since we are the creators of technology, and understand our human/nature connection as peripheral to our daily lives, thus ameliorating any tension between these three elements. The technology discourse frames, and is framed by, the human/nature connection, creating fusions between human/nature, nature/technology and human/technology. Although Toyota exploits a human/nature discourse to provide impetus for a more obliquely referenced sustainability discourse, this human/nature element plays out across a human/technology connection, thus re-iterating our relationship with nature and perpetuating our treatment of nature as something outside our daily lives. By extension, our connection with nature requires technology (such as a car to get there) to facilitate it – a nature/technology connection. Cast against a broader social context, this movement between human/nature/technology as collectively implicated in constructing a visually idyllic reality reflects a larger apprehension of the human/nature connection in late modernity as abstracted from the material conditions of modern life but evocative or meaningful as a discursive trope. It is precisely because of this situating of nature as "outside" the daily space of urban modernity, a void to be filled and mediated by technology, that the human/nature connection gains resonance. Nature, though frequently out of our reach, is embedded as a possibility, a return metaphorically (if not actually) realised by Toyota's control of technology.

Sustainability as liminal narrative

Sustainability operates as a liminal narrative in Toyota's campaign. Given that hybrid technology is widely promoted (and socially accepted) as a sustainable option, the absence of a visible narrative that explicitly uses concepts such as "sustainable," "environmentally friendly", "green", etc. in Toyota's campaign is striking. At no point on their website devoted solely to hybrid technology do they actively propose sustainability as motivation for purchasing a hybrid or offer a clear definition of what sustainability means. The explicit connection between *technological* innovation and hybrid as a *solution* that reduces environmental impact (which is questionable given that Prius production has been criticised for being worse for the environment, Kiels 2010) disappears into the slippages of the "nature" imagery. While environmental concerns appear in ambiguous references or as afterthoughts, the exact connection between hybrid and sustainability as an articulated agenda as such remains unclear.

Toyota bypasses direct confrontation with sustainability as a specific concept. Sustainability exists in the airy margins around the nature imagery and in the social framing that contextualises their product and communications. The human/nature connection instead operates as an organising idea that explains and narrates a series of dissociated, de-contextualised images that otherwise have no meaning. It also gives tangible form (in language and image) to an otherwise liminal, unfixed sustainability narrative. The human/nature frame provides a more powerful reference precisely because it connects

with existing cultural narratives and embedded sensibilities abut nature – it provides clear directive about why we should care. We care about buying a Prius because we care about our existing connection with nature. While broader social sustainability discourses are implicated in this concern for our connection with nature, it is not the driver in the first instance.

The metaphoric movement between sustainability and human/nature is no accident in Toyota's approach and goes towards answering the question of why Toyota does not explicitly map a sustainability discourse *per se*. The direct apprehension of sustainability is potentially an alienating discourse for a company whose production practices and domination in the marketplace are open to question. More significantly, though, is perhaps the recognition that sustainability alone has limited resonance among consumers, failing to adequately motivate consumers to care and, by extension, buy a hybrid? The question then becomes if we are mobilised by our existing human/ nature connection, can this translate to a committed consideration of the future? This question might take some time to answer as environmental destruction draws closer and impacts more directly – we will certainly have a human/nature connection then.

Consumer motivation and the meaning of sustainability

The elision of sustainability as an explicit concept begs the question of what the motivator for buying hybrid cars is. One answer is that the appeal of Toyota's marketing resides in the ease of "being green" in the most abstract sense. Consumption behaviours that mask paradoxical ideas such as "greener" cars (Shaw and Newholm 2002, 171, 179) reflect the ambivalences upon which Toyota capitalises. In this respect, it is possible to trace the tensions that emerge between sustainability as an unchallenging, symbolic idea and an articulated agenda that prompts material practice. Some consumers participate in sustainability dialogue but then circumvent it, since "consumers, even when they are environmentally concerned, are still consuming, only they consume perceived green products and recycle more. The actual level of consumption is not identified as a problem" (Connolly and Prothoro 2003, 288). Toyota's discourse diminishes the inconvenience of sustainable choices (Bratt 1999; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Shaw and Clarke 1999; Shaw and Newholm 2002), promoting a nebulous form of "green" consumption through obscure references to the environment while leaving consumption itself an unchallenged idea/practice (Connolly and Prothero 2003). This dual benefit ("ethical" consumption that requires no sacrifice) is persuasive in the decision-making process, identifying benefits and conveying the importance of personal responsibility (for nature?) without cost (Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Shaw and Clarke 1999; Shaw et al. 2004). This oblique ethical consumption discourse invites symbolic engagement on moral or socially responsible grounds without forcing any difficult choices or sacrifices. It is also left open to individual interpretation as to what moral ground is being laid – is it our responsibility to engage technology, to buy new cars or to mobilise our human/nature sensibility in the service of a more distant notion of consuming sustainably? The meaning of Toyota's campaign is left consciously unclear, offering generalised motifs about cars, nature and society as the terrain upon which consumers must enact their own meanings.

While Toyota presents an unproblematic view of sustainable consumption, consumer response to this convenient rendering of sustainability may be far more complicated. Toyota's discourse does not go without critical negotiation in the marketplace (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2010; Izberk-Bilgin 2010). A growing sensitivity to the

meaning of corporate language such as "sustainable" and "going green" has been critiqued (Bonini and Oppenheim 2008) and, in some cases, rejected by an increasingly engaged consumer community. At the minimum, awareness of environmental issues encourages consumers to question and evaluate their own consumption behaviour (Connolly and Prothero 2003; Shaw and Newholm 2002).

One view, maybe optimistically, suggests that Toyota participates in a society more responsive to social, environmental and political stress (Franklin 2002). Toyota's campaign comes at a time of emergent tension between global corporations and their growing awareness of countervailing social discourses that genuinely challenge the *status quo* of post-industrial consumer society and the credibility of claims to corporate responsibility. The increasing visibility of consumer resistance (Izberk-Bilgin 2010; Penaloza and Price 1993) leading to anti-consumptionist practices such as voluntary simplification (Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin 2003; Etzioni 1998; Zavestoski 2002), downshifting, voluntary dispossession (Brace-Govan and Binay 2010; Cherrier and Murray 2007) along with more corporate-focused resistance such as corporate retaliation (Barclay, Skarlicki, and Pugh 2005), boycotting (Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001) and anti-brand activism (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) supports the suggestion that, among a growing number of consumers, the relationship between symbolic and material practice is being drawn closer.

While much of the current anti-consumption and consumer resistance literature focuses on more concentrated, local or self-conscious behaviours (Cherrier 2010; Doane 2001; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Moraes, Szmigin, and Carrigan 2010; Szmigin, Carrigan, and Bekin 2007) environmental sustainability has pierced the consciousness of certain consumer communities (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), who, in turn, construct their own identity projects around rejection of non-sustainable consumption. These communities could not be described as mainstream – yet. They nonetheless represent clear and direct threat to the idea that consumption and sustainability can continue to co-exist so long as the package is recyclable. This group does not come into focus in a campaign such as Toyota's that clearly targets more ambivalent consumers. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge and identify the emergence of more active consumers and their voice in the sustainability dialogue. Their voice in the coming years could well become louder and their position considered more mainstream.

Some hold that increased awareness of environmental problems "will translate into both personal and political behaviour changes" (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 218) in mainstream society. Franklin (2002) asserts that this is achieved through participation in ethical consumption discourse since this social practice prompts the formation (and transformation) of identities and relations. Through engagement in discourse, consumers are "embedding" their social relations and identities in an appreciation for nature and, by extension, preserving the planet. This challenges traditional consumption's hold over social relations and cultural values (Cunningham 2005; Frank 1999; Holmgren 2002). At first glance, this would seem a difficult shift to achieve if the dialogue required for transformed consumption is elided by tacit strategies such as Toyota's that at once benefit from and constrain a sustainability agenda.

However, the surrounding social conditions prove useful to consider here. Toyota's goal is selling their product by utilising some sort of unfocused environmental concern to achieve the consumer's acceptance of the product. For the consumer, though, maybe this interaction with the product constitutes participation in discourse, since hybrid is more broadly socially constructed as analogous to "sustainable" (Bonini and

Oppenheim 2008) – precisely the latent connection upon which Toyota capitalises without having to say it themselves, thereby sidestepping a range of contradictory issues. The discursively engaged consumer conveys the knowledge produced by discourse and brings this frame of reference to the marketplace and their subsequent consumption. This represents the formation of social identity through the consumer's negotiation with the marketplace as they become a conduit for discursively produced knowledge (Franklin 2002; Potter and Wetherell 1987). At core, this might mean that although Toyota eludes any direct claim to sustainable practice, the broader social framing of "hybrid as sustainable" draws in consumers who in turn perceive themselves as participants in discourse and, over time, transform sustainability discourse from rhetoric to action – bringing us back to our earlier consideration of anti-consumptionists as the vanguard of sustainability discourse. While this is probably not Toyota's intended outcome, it offers one possible way of envisaging future consumer negotiation with Toyota's "sustainability by stealth" approach.

Future directions

In this paper, we have sought to make a contribution to a growing body of sustainability literature oriented towards the success (or failure) of sustainability as idea and as practice in marketing. Prior research on sustainability in marketing has frequently focused on the extent to which companies and consumers have modified their behaviours, the kind of consumer to which sustainability gives rise (anti-consumptionist, responsible consumer, symbolic consumer or one who enjoys the label of sustainable consumer, etc.) and how marketing might "green" its own activities. This prior research has provided valuable insights into how sustainability as a social and marketing narrative has evolved and the range of subjectivities, identities and imaginings to which it has given rise. However, this existing research has largely left sustainability as a core concept unproblematised, assuming it to signify, in one form or another, an ethical system (of belief and/or behaviour) underpinned by concern for the *future* survival of the earth's environment.

We have challenged this understanding of sustainability by asking, is it really the future that drives a sustainability concern? We have shown that projection of future risk to the environment as momentum for "going green" requires further interrogation and that sustainability has more resonance as a narrative underpinned by pre-existing historically and socially embedded human/nature connection. This alternative theorisation of the impetus towards sustainability and its concomitant practices consequently presents several important developments in our understanding of what sustainability actually represents, why companies such as Toyota stop short of committing to a clearly articulated agenda and what this elision of a clear sustainability agenda might mean for companies and consumers alike.

In the first instance, our proposition that sustainability is driven by an existing human/nature connection fundamentally transforms what sustainability represents in real terms. If sustainability represents existing connections rather than future risks, this enables us to draw several possible conclusions. Firstly, it may account for why many consumers find the symbolic aspect of sustainability appealing but do not feel the need to compromise their consumption behaviours. The symbolic resonance of nature (captured in the kind of now clichéd imagery seen in the Toyota campaign) is an open terrain for myth-making, aesthetic contemplation and identity-building. It permits any number of projections and makes no demands. By contrast, the risk of future environmental demise demands definitive action with radical shifts in both

production and consumption practices. It requires more than buying coffee with frog symbols or goods labelled as green or eco. The fact that, for many consumers, these required changes are too extreme and they are provided with the option to be "softly sustainable" (such as buying a Prius or frog coffee) means we should consider whether a sustainability discourse in the way it has been typically treated and understood (i.e. based on future risk) really exists in the mainstream marketplace at the moment? The findings of the present paper would suggest that the answer to this question is no and that the human/nature connection is a stronger explanation for the symbolic appeal of sustainability.

This may also account for why companies such as Toyota reference a sustainability motif without really committing to a visible agenda, changing material practices or setting measurable outcomes. As discussed, sustainability as discourse and practice is awash with political, commercial and economic interests that must meet contesting imperatives such as economic growth, popularity in the electorate, profit and marketplace expansion. However, these imperatives must also remain invisible in the social arena for fear of being seen as politicising an ethical issue and alienating the consumer. This is a paradoxical dynamic in its own right in light of the fact that many consumers themselves have a passive connection to sustainability yet demand an "ethical" outlook from corporations. Therefore, we conclude that the use of the human/nature connection serves the purpose of alluding to sustainability without having to commit to what it should entail, instead accessing a compelling extant cultural narrative to symbolically sate consumer demand for apolitical, ethical corporate citizenship. This enables companies to pursue competing political and economic imperatives while appearing sufficiently "responsible" and apolitical to a symbolically driven marketplace. Toyota has identified that sustainability has symbolic resonance in the marketplace but that this resonance resides in the human/nature connection, a connection passive enough to leave consumption behaviours essentially unchanged. To this extent, we conclude that any impetus to authentic corporate responsibility, which would implicitly require an active commitment to clear environmental objectives and outcomes, is compromised both by competing corporate agendas and a mainstream marketplace content to participate in a symbolic rather than material sustainability discourse.

What does the elision of a real sustainability agenda mean? Does it represent a simple disconnect between company rhetoric and practice or does it represent a more fundamental cultural ambivalence? By way of conclusion, we suggest that the schism between rhetoric and practice subsumes a simple disconnect to represent a deep ambivalence among both companies and mainstream consumers. For companies, sustainability means subverting the embedded production/profit logic that drives a capitalist market, socio-political relations and economic super-structure. We can see from the relationship between Toyota and the Australian government that the motivation to innovate but also maintain growth, perceived stability and profit are ingrained values. Likewise, for consumers, the lifestyle, freedom and expectation made possible by an expanded marketplace have come to be regarded as necessary. As mentioned, this also serves to make political discourse chary of proposing radical policy change because, at core, mainstream consumers are not able to yet conceive of a lifestyle constituted by conservation. This is not a matter of being greedy or resistant to change. Rather, it is matter of having to re-evaluate the fundamental nature of what we need, what we value as a society and how we see our lives unfolding. Thus, both companies and consumers are at the precipice of fundamental philosophical break from modernity's core tropes and the assumptions that have framed our social, political and

economic organisation since the early nineteenth century. That being said, sustainability has gained momentum over recent years and the emergence of groups such as anti-consumptionists, self-identified sustainable consumers, downshifters and so forth provide various frames of reference for cultural and behavioural change – even a little. It is possible to conclude then that if companies and consumers re-evaluate core assumptions, behaviours and expectations that a real, actionable environmental agenda might eventuate.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on sustainability as a term of reference and tried to cast more explanatory light on what this term represents via an analysis of mainstream marketing – for a mainstream consumer responsive to the symbolic discourse of sustainability. However, the treatment of sustainability in this context by no means accounts for all renderings of sustainability and thus further research into consumers who more fully embrace sustainable consumption and also see themselves as mainstream consumers (as opposed to, for instance, anti-consumptionists who have received attention because of their self-stated break from the mainstream market) would give a more complete picture of how sustainability is practiced in the mainstream marketplace. Further, it would be fruitful to see where the human/nature connection fits as a theoretical or ideational foundation for this consumer. This "middle ground" consumer has tended to slip between the polarities of mainstream versus extreme (the far end of anti-consumptionism) and a re-focus on mainstream consumers who are prepared to look at really changing behaviours would be beneficial.

Further, the present paper is concerned with companies and consumers who are mutually engaged in at least a symbolic (if not actual) development of a sustainability discourse. Further consideration of whether this symbolic exchange is enough for consumers over time and whether, as an increasingly educated marketplace emerges, there may be a rejection of sustainability as a disingenuous discourse would be an important addition to our understanding of what sustainability really means and how it waxes and wanes as a social concern. The rise of sustainability as a social issue, aided by frequent media and political commentary (Australia now has a Climate Change Minister), has certainly grown over the last few years. As consumers become more educated into these issues, symbolic discourse, currently framed by the term sustainability, could be subsumed by a more definitive discourse that compels significant action. This will be an important development worthy of continuing research over time as the shifting significance of the sustainability discourse and just what it really means will define our future social, political and economic management of this issue.

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