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Nordic Journal of
MEDIA STUDIES

What would a Swedish mine be without a party? On metals, minerals, and love during the "green" transition

Climate propaganda in The Swedish Mine advertising campaign

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the growing field of critical studies about the visual politics of the green transition by highlighting the role of communication and the creative industries in promoting "green" ideologies. "The Swedish Mine" advocacy advertising campaign, launched in 2021, is presented as a case study to illustrate how lifestyle advertising genres are used to leverage the emotional engagement of progressive, mining-sceptical urban audiences to increase the social acceptance of intensified mining despite increasing climate awareness. Using visual culture studies, feminist, and critical race theory approaches to analyse the campaign materials, I explore how the campaign aestheticises "green" industrial progress by tokenising multiculturalism, fetishising consumption, and romancing national identity. As a counterpoint, I examine how social media reactions and activist responses illustrate tensions between mining acceptance and mining resistance in Swedish society. I conclude by positioning the campaign rhetoric in various forms of climate propaganda and highlighting the limits of the engineering of public consent for a "green" transition when such attempts use emotions as sites of "cognitive extraction" to cover technological and capitalist imperatives that ultimately promote Sweden as a leading mining nation.

KEYWORDS: advocacy advertising, climate propaganda, visual politics, green transition, mining resistance

Löfgren, I. (2023). What would a Swedish mine be without a party? On metals, minerals, and love during the "green" transition: Climate propaganda in The Swedish Mine advertising campaign. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, *5*(1), 194–218. https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2023-0011

Introduction

In 2021, as I was waiting for a train in Stockholm, a billboard depicting a scene with a Black woman putting on make-up and her friends dancing at a party, with the logo "Den Svenska Gruvan" ["The Swedish Mine"], caught my attention (see Figure 1). What seemed like a fashion advertisement at first glance was in fact part of an advocacy campaign commissioned by a consortium headed by Svemin (The Swedish Association of Mines, Minerals and Metal Producers), a civil society organisation representing the interests of the Swedish mining cluster.[1]

FIGURE 1 Billboard with "Party" tableau



Source: Photo taken by the author in Skanstull subway station, Stockholm, Sweden, December 2021.

According to Svemin, the goal of the campaign is to "make people aware of how important sustainable mining is for modern life" and targets urban audiences considered "ambivalent" and unknowledgeable about mining (Svemin, 2020, 2021; Bitz Magasin, 2020; Resumé, 2020). A friendly tonality introduces the campaign message on the billboard seen in Figure 1:

> What would a party be without metals and minerals? Whether on a regular day or at a party, we need metals and minerals. And they are a critical part in the transformation towards a sustainable society, for example, in electric cars. Besides, more of our needs can be met here in Sweden where we are building the world's most climate-smart mining industry [translated].

Even if parties are more dependent on people than mineral resources to succeed, this text helps anchor the Swedish mining industry's communication mantra: "Minerals are the heart of our vital material needs" (Olsson et al., 2019: 16). A social media and urban campaign in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö city centres included a series of billboards with multicultural characters engaging in Swedish everyday life rituals, such as house parties and *fredagsmys* [cozy Fridays]. On each billboard, tags with elements of the periodic table were placed on various props in each scene to remind the viewer that metals and minerals are everywhere. An informational website, *The Swedish Mine* (www.densvenskagruvan.se), complements the campaign with general information about the economic, social, and welfare benefits, and questions and answers about "green" mining.

More than 90 per cent of the European Union's iron ore comes from Sweden (Svemin, n.d.). In addition to the recent discovery of new mines, Sweden's increasing mining power in the region helps reconfigure Europe's geopolitical status by relying on inshoring to reduce dependence on imports (Riofrancos, 2022: 3). Svemin claims that strict environmental regulations delay the approval process for new mines, making Sweden less attractive for mining investments over the years (Svemin, 2019). Meanwhile, the "green" transition necessitates more rare minerals for electrification and digitalisation to meet climate targets. However, not all groups in society agree on how to achieve this, especially regarding the environmental risks involved, leading to "mining ambivalence" among critical audiences. This provides the mining industry with a communicational challenge to ensure broader mining acceptance in society.

In this article, I present The Swedish Mine advocacy campaign as a case study to illustrate how lifestyle advertising genres are utilised to exploit the affective registers of progressive, urban audiences and attempts to increase mining acceptance in Swedish society during the green transition. Drawing from visual culture studies, feminist, and critical race theory approaches in the analysis of the campaign materials, I explore how interpretations of cultural stereotypes (gender, class, and race) are articulated with national values in order to reify a top-down "green" ideology to ascertain Sweden as a leading mining nation. In addition, I examine how social media reactions and activist responses to the campaign illustrate tensions between mining acceptance and mining resistance in Swedish society. After summarising the main findings that position the campaign in various forms of climate propaganda (Staal, 2020), I question the limits of such engineering of public consent for a "green" transition premised on the ideological mobilisation of affects to support national, technological, and capitalist imperatives.

Public ambivalence towards mining

Despite the crucial role mining plays in the green transition and in Sweden's ambition to become the first fossil-free welfare state and to aid the Global South with the help of green technologies (Arora-Jonsson, 2019), political and economic motivations for meeting climate targets often differ from socio-environmental concerns and public perceptions (Crowley-Vigneau et al., 2022).

Achieving greater mining acceptance in society demands both popular approval and a positive relationship with communities in extractive zones, known as a "social license to operate" (European Environmental Bureau, 2021; Lesser, 2021; Poelzer et al., 2020; Tarras-Wahlberg, 2014). In Sweden, social movements of mining resistance by environmental activists, independent journalists, and Sámi Indigenous populations are a recent and growing phenomenon, with conflicts likely to increase (Beland Lindahl et al., 2018; Global Environmental Justice Atlas, n.d.; Gruvfritt JokkMokk, n.d.; Norrlandsparadoxen, n.d.; Suopajärvi et al., 2016; Zachrisson & Beland Lindahl, 2019). Issues like environmental justice, land and human rights, corruption and clientelism (Lawrence & Moritz, 2019), and terms like greenwashing and green colonialism are often raised in protests, denouncing land and people dispossession (Everljung, 2021a, 2021b).

Mining resistance underscores inextricable links between identity politics, minority rights, and mining expansion in increasingly contested socio-legal spaces (Raitio et al., 2020) sometimes referred to as "green extractive sacrifice zones" (Zografos & Robbins, 2020; Össbo, 2023). Moreover, there is concern that market pressures override concerns about environmental degradation and a sentiment that governments are complicit in corporate takeovers in breaking new mines (Everljung, 2021a, 2021b). It is also uncertain whether new working models and automation in mines yield added fiscal benefits for communities in mining localities (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2023), and frontline populations therefore often view corporate and government promises of work opportunities and improved welfare as false (The Swedish Mine Myth, 2022). In addition, recent controversial decisions regarding new mines such as Gállok in Northern Sweden have reached global audiences due to wide media coverage (Andersen, 2018; Dahlberg-Grundberg & Örestig, 2017). This includes a former industry minister's infamous claim, "I love mines!" (SVT Norrbotten, 2021, 2022) and mining executives' racial attacks on reporters (Röstlund, 2022), which escalated mining resistance in Sweden while The Swedish Mine campaign was active in 2021, prior to the Gállok mine approval in early 2022.

Less scholarly attention has been paid to mining resistance among metropolitan publics. Some industry publications claim environmental protesters mislead more generally environmentally conscious urban audiences into negative perceptions about mining (Bitz Magasin, 2020). Moreover, recent surveys linking consumer habits to environmental sustainability show that awareness of climate change differs significantly by gender, age, and political preference in Sweden. For instance, climate awareness and anxiety are higher among young urban women with high cultural capital who are more likely to adopt sustainable lifestyles and identify more with sustainable brands and products (World Wildlife Fund & Kantar-Sifo, 2021). Also, this group is politically more progressive and more likely to engage in climate action in civil society organisations and on social media (Fritz et al., 2021: 884–885).

The same younger audiences, influenced by identity politics and anti-racist movements, demand more diverse cultural, racial, and gender representations in media, and to mitigate representation issues, intersectional approaches have been

recommended (Sveriges Kommunikationsbyråer & Geena Davis Institute, 2021). In response, commercial actors have increased racial and ethnic diversity in advertising to reflect Sweden's rapidly changing sociocultural demographics. A study suggests, however, that people of colour appear mostly in the background or play minor roles, which is known as tokenism. It uses minority discourses and othered identities to fill representation gaps, leading to a structurally ineffective multiculturalism (Osanami Törngren & Ulver, 2020; Ulver, 2021). Kanai and Gill (2020) have included tokenism as part of "woke capitalism" in a critique of neoliberal exploitation of radical politics they define as a "dramatically intensifying" trend by power elites of featuring historically marginalised groups in advertisements in order to convey progressive values to socially conscious audiences.

Regarding increasing environmental awareness and a more complex digital media landscape reaching younger global audiences, the mining sector faces reputation risk due to the industry's potential to cause environmental damage (European Environmental Bureau, 2021: 3). Mining companies are therefore increasing their focus on ethical and environmental issues, and as a result, branding and advocacy campaigns have become critical to changing public perceptions about the mining sector (Lo, 2018; Skoldeberg et al., 2013). In this context, campaigns are often designed as a precautionary measure to influence public discourses and prevent negative consequences. Some critics, however, claim that mining companies' communication materials do not reflect actual mining practices and conceal realities in extractive zones (Lo, 2018), resulting in accusations of greenwashing that could backfire on expensive communication campaigns.

Climate propaganda

According to Marshall Soules (2015: 10), what distinguishes propaganda from advertising and advocacy is the aim of propaganda to achieve "moral takeover", which includes "the construction of an 'organized myth' acting as an anchoring belief" through mechanisms of "performative persuasion". To succeed, propaganda campaigns must have a clear intention to manipulate public opinion; a broad scope to dominate messaging in mainstream media; the financial and reputational power of its sponsors to conduct effective campaigns; and the high stakes in producing effects resulting in significant action (or inaction) based on changed attitudes or values. The timeliness of campaigns is also important to activate actions and attitudes in response to specific events (Soules, 2015: 15).

But how does propaganda play out in relation to climate debates and the "green" transition more specifically? Staal (2020) has examined the complex relationship between climate change discourse and the power dynamics embedded within it, arguing that while the urgency to address climate change is essential, the dominant narratives and strategies employed in climate communication often reinforce existing power structures and fail to bring about meaningful change. To distinguish between anthropocentric cultural narratives and narratives where planetary concerns have become central, Staal (2020) reframes "propaganda struggles" within climate debates as *climate propagandas* which are reproduced across a broad political spectrum.

On the conservative ideological spectrum, neoliberal and libertarian climate propagandas generally see climate catastrophes and climate change as another market resource to extract surplus values, whereas neoconservative, extreme-right, conspiracist, and eco-fascist climate propagandas use climate denialism and fear messaging to legitimise national or racial oppression régimes and justify new forms of surveillance. Liberal climate propagandas tend to centre on market-based solutions as a means to address climate challenges, where individual consumption is more often blamed for ecological collapse than the practices of extractive corporations or capitalism per se. In addition to deflecting corporate responsibility to individuals, corporate advertising and brand-building strategies aim to appropriate public sentiments of climate awareness to provide techno-optimistic "solutions" for climate mitigation, failing to recognise that those may be part of the problem. However, the overreliance on the belief that technological innovations will sufficiently address climate challenges often overlooks the social and political dimensions of the issue. This form of climate propaganda becomes susceptible to corporate co-option, where companies engage in greenwashing – using environmental messaging to enhance their reputation without genuinely committing to sustainable practices. In addition, liberal politicians also boast about their benevolence to "act sustainably" but are criticised by oppositional publics for not acting quickly enough.

Transformative forms of climate propaganda tend to emphasise systemic, holistic, eco-social, and Earth-driven approaches to climate change. They challenge the dominant economic and political systems that contribute to climate change, highlighting the need for a redistribution of power and resources. They are often aligned with progressive political ideologies in developing egalitarian approaches to global governance in various forms of "green deals". Social and environmental movements tend to adopt anti-capitalist, decolonial, and ecofeminist approaches that assess power asymmetries and consider racial and gender minorities in vulnerable zones to be disproportionately impacted by climate change, often connected to land dispossession by corporations and government complicity or inaction. Lastly, "outsider" environmental movements are voicing these concerns in transformative climate propagandas through collective actions, alternative media, cultural resistance, and demonstrations, among other tactics and strategies, seeking to address the root causes of environmental degradation and advocate for holistic solutions (Staal, 2020).

By situating The Swedish Mine campaign and its reactions within the ideological spectrum of climate propagandas outlined by Staal (2020), the main questions I respond to are: What are the key means and elements of performative persuasion and their ideological underpinnings in the campaign? Which myths about social, cultural, and national values are being reified by these devices? What are the implications of the use of these strategies and rhetorical devices in the context of mining acceptance and mining resistance during the "green" transition? To do this, I will look at how the campaign leverages the chosen mediums and uses specific symbols and meanings, and what forms of mining resistance look like in response.

Materials and method

This article analyses all six billboards from the first phase of the three-year campaign in 2021 (see Figures 1–5 & 7), as well as one digital billboard from the second phase of the campaign in 2022 (see Figure 6), and an example of a temporary online campaign in 2023 (see Figure 9). The informational campaign website, *The Swedish Mine,* is addressed to present further evidence of how the campaign is deployed in digital media (see Figure 8). Social media reactions and the activist website *The Swedish Mine Myth* (densvenskagruvmyten.se) are used to illustrate some effects of and reactions to the campaign (see Figure 10).

Through an examination of The Swedish Mine campaign's materials from the viewpoint of visual culture studies, I analyse how ideology is expressed through visual and textual elements as a form of "performative persuasion" that involves a balance between persuasion, deception, and trust through "deceptive devices, operations, or techniques" (Soules, 2015: x–xi). According to Karin Becker (2004: 151), visual culture studies consider "visuality as a social interactant" where "the conditions for seeing a particular phenomenon or artifact are not self-evident, but they are influenced by social, cultural, and political realities". Nicholas Mirzoeff (2006) defined visuality as a product of social and cultural realities manifested in the invocation of images, as well as other cultural forms, in different forms of power and visual régimes that determine specific practices of looking. This is embodied in the concept of the *gaze* that addresses the complex relationship between the observer and the observed.

To identify the key means and elements of performative persuasion, I begin the analysis by situating the billboards in the context of art historical genres that have long been incorporated into advertising and popular culture (Berger, 1972). This means looking at the material artifacts themselves, describing formal elements such as genre, style, composition, arrangement, characters, and actions that help frame social, cultural, and political values and beliefs. Next, I analyse how gender, racial, and national identity stereotypes become operational in the affective registers of these formal devices. To put it in historical and critical contexts, I rely on feminist and critical race theories (Azoulay, 2008, 2015; Habel, 2008; Holmes, 2016; hooks, 1992; Hübinette, 2013; Kanai & Gill, 2020; Mulvey, 1975; Táíwò, 2022) to first map out which gazes are elicited by the visuals that call out various forms of multicultural appropriation and appeal to gender normativity in the campaign, including how traditional advertising tropes (McLuhan, 1951/2008) are refashioned to create a climate brand for "green" mining. The second step is to present further evidence of affective devices that reinforce claims for Swedish mining hegemony and national values on the campaign website. Lastly, I also address counter-visuality practised by oppositional publics as strategies that counteract hegemonical visual régimes and present other worldviews (Debord, 1967/1977; Mirzoeff, 2011, 2016). This theoretical approach associates the "organised myths" (Soules, 2015: 9), values, and beliefs identified in the analysis to the framework of climate propaganda (Staal, 2020), which illustrates the tensions between mining acceptance and mining resistance and exposes the campaign's propaganda attempts more explicitly.

Campaign analysis

Urban diversity tableaux

My analytic perspective for looking at the campaign materials is to treat the billboards as "tableaux", a genre of paintings or photographs in which characters appear absorbed and unaware of the existence of viewers while arranged in a "setting" or "stage" for picturesque or dramatic effect, frozen in the middle of the action (Tate Gallery, n.d.). They act as "bounding frames" – a ritual setting, a stage with props – that define the performance space, where anything can happen (Soules, 2015: xi). Each tableau in The Swedish Mine campaign shows a diversity of characters engaged in typically Swedish everyday situations, such as partying with friends (see Figure 1), spending time with family during "cozy Friday" (see Figure 2) or snuggling inside a camping tent in front of a lake (see Figure 3). In each tableau, the mise-en-scène – or the arrangement of the scenery and props on the stage of a theatrical production – is overlaid with tags showing elements of the periodic table on several objects to signify the ubiquity and indispensability of metals and minerals in modern life.

FIGURE 2 Billboard with "Cozy Friday" tableau



Comments: Translated text: What would cozy Friday be without metals and minerals? Whether it's the everyday grind or cozy Friday – we need metals and minerals. And they are essential in the transition to a sustainable society, for example in wind farms. In addition, more metals can be mined in Sweden, where we are building the world's most climate-smart mining industry. **Source:** Photo taken by the author in Hötorget subway station, Stockholm, Sweden, December 2021.

Compositionally, the labels with elements from the periodic table dominate the visual appeal. Rather than the people themselves, the labels are intended to be the real subjects of the scenes. Unaware of our gaze, the people in the scenes become objectified. As viewers, we are positioned outside the scene, as uninvited guests at a social gathering (see Figures 1 & 2) or as voyeurs peeping into intimate scenes (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 Billboard with "Engagement ring" tableau



Comments: "Metals and minerals make our modern lives better and more fun. That's why we need a mining industry that continues to work both long-term and sustainably. Densvenskagruvan.se" [Translated]. **Source:** Resumé, 2020

This intrusive gaze causes estrangement but also elicits a libidinal curiosity to keep looking. However, the colour scheme in warm yellows and reds aims to quickly avert discomfort by stimulating feelings of happiness, optimism, and excitement – feelings that are also expressed in the emotional range of the characters. By connecting with our own sense of comfort and happiness, we begin to identify psychologically with the advertisement. As a result, it reinforces the message that metals and minerals are not only useful but can also be sexy and fun and "at the heart" of modern life.

FIGURE 4 Screenshot with "Car" tableau



Comments: "Metals and minerals make our modern lives better and more fun. That's why we need a mining industry that continues to work both long-term and sustainably. Densvenskagruvan.se" [Translated]. **Source:** Resumé, 2020

FIGURE 5 Screenshot with "Backyard" tableau



Source: Resumé, 2020

The billboards also reveal a careful orchestration of situations, social types, and stereotypes that seem to follow current trends of inclusion and diversity in Swedish media and advertising. Swedish audiences are familiar with this kind of presentation, for instance, in IKEA advertisements, which have used the tableau genre extensively to highlight furniture with names and price labels, and with similar multicultural character orchestrations to create an image of cozy and practical "Swedishness" (Garvey, 2017). At first glance, The Swedish Mine campaign seems to literally imitate this style, which signals the campaigners' strategic creative choice to use familiar styles used by well-established retail and commercial brands for similar target audiences but reinscribing them into a "green" or climate brand (Doyle et al., 2020).

Casting gender and race

Let's explore the cast of characters and actions in each tableau. The "Party" (see Figure 1) tableau depicts a group of Black and mixed-race women putting on make-up and dancing in what looks like a house party. In the "Cozy Friday" tableau (see Figure 2), an interracial family is depicted, with a "fun dad", wearing bunny ears, and his child dancing in front of a large projection screen in a well-furnished living room, watched by the blonde assumedly wife and mother who sits on the couch with a dog and a second child holding an iPad. The "Engagement ring" tableau (see Figure 3) shows a snuggly inter-racial lesbian couple admiring their engagement ring – indicated by the element "Au" (gold) – while camping in front of a lake. Next, the "Car" tableau (see Figure 4) shows a man with a presumably Middle Eastern background eating a hot dog, talking on the phone, and fumbling with party balloons, while charging an electric car in a parking lot. The "Backyard" tableau (see Figure 5) shows a grandfather

pushing a lawnmower while his grandson plays with a remote-controlled toy car – both characters are white. Finally, the "Office" tableau (see Figure 7) is set in an engineering or architectural office with a Black man holding a cup of coffee in the foreground, while the remaining three white or mixed-race female colleagues examine an architectural model.

Although the casting choices seem to convey Sweden as a multicultural and diverse nation, each tableau reinforces the link between recognisable social rituals and racial and gender stereotypes. They depict women dancing (see Figure 1), women with engagement rings (see Figure 3), men with cars and machines (see Figures 4 & 5), boys with toys (see Figure 5), as well as heteronormative stereotypes of the nuclear family (see Figure 2). Moreover, we see racial stereotypes sometimes combined with gender stereotypes, such as Black women putting on make-up and dancing (see Figure 1), and white males tinkering in a backyard (see Figure 5).

In the specific case of the "Party" tableau (see Figure 1), the representation of Black women reminds us of the historical exotification and objectification in media representations of Black subjects, which has been extensively critiqued by eminent Afro-feminist critical race theorists (e.g., hooks, 1992). Fetishising, objectifying, and denying agency to Black female bodies has historical underpinnings rooted in imperialist narratives and colonial legacies of dispossession, often linked with extractivism, which validates the "legal and societal sexual exploitation and debasement of Black women in the modern era", as Holmes (2016: 7) has pointed out. In my view, the depiction of a Black woman putting on make-up at a party is indeed an aptly ironic metaphor for how power elites capture anti-racist and decolonial discourses (Fanon, 1967/2008; Táíwò, 2022) to create a façade for their political and cultural dominance.

Moreover, this is made even more evident through the voyeuristic gaze where Black women, or even the lesbian couple, become sexualised objects that satisfy a male gaze and are objectified for the "visual pleasure" of the viewer, which, in Laura Mulvey's (1975) psychoanalytic approach to cinematic representation of women, is considered a scopophilic practice of looking. Here, the viewer (usually assumed to be male) is an active observer and the female characters become passive objects to be visually consumed. In a critical response to Mulvey, Ariella Azoulay (2008) has questioned this passive act of visual consumption related to viewing photographs. In defiance of a normative passivity in the act of looking, she proposes an active viewership that requires us to relinquish our gaze as consumers that validates a market logic of seeing. To reject the act of being consumed by images, she proposed that we enter a "civic visual contract" with photographs that circulate in the world. This includes addressing images humanely to break the frames of representation, whereby she invites us to consider all images as political artefacts.

If we consider the tableaux as political images, it opens up for interpretations of ideology, especially regarding what kind of ideals, values, and myths of Swedish society are being typified by this form of presentation. In this case, I observe that the racialised characters, who are the most expressive and overtly "happy"

in each mise-en-scène, are presented more like caricatures embedded in a mythical Swedish everydayness. Furthermore, the cultural myths of "coziness" and social comfort, performed exaggeratedly in the "Cozy Friday" tableau (see Figure 2), are suggested as synonymous with the country's high living standard and social welfare that has created an affluent middle class. These social benefits, in turn, have indeed been historically powered by revenues from the mining industry, and they connect to the foundational myth of Swedish society itself. On the one hand, when used intentionally for comic effect, exaggerated moods may express a self-distanced irony, which may, on the one hand, lead to more empathy with the campaign's message. On the other hand, when unsuccessful, they may turn into gratuitous pastiche, alienating the viewer and opening for criticism and counter-campaigns (Hobbs & Swiatek, 2019: 7). The Swedish Mine campaign also rolled out on several social media platforms – Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter – using short ten-second videos of the same mise-en-scène in slow motion, where all the caricatural features appear augmented.

By casting seemingly assimilated multiethnic characters, the *appearance* of racial or gender equality, social inclusiveness, and sexual diversity shows the idealised image of a post-racial and fundamentally integrationist society – indicating that the mining sector wishes to be associated with a modern, tolerant, and multiethnic Sweden. However, this appearance of multiculturality can also signal what Swedish critical race scholars have termed "structural color-blindness" (Hübinette, 2013), or a "whiteness which may be believed to be more enlightened, more democratic and more tolerant than in the rest of the world" (Habel, 2008: 42). But according to Kanai and Gill (2020), after the turbulent 2010s marked by the rise of right-wing nationalism and a global pandemic, this type of "woke advertising" is also emblematic of post-race, post-feminist, and post-queer discourses, and that affirmative advertising operates through an aestheticisation of difference, where "nondominant people are recast as visible neoliberal subjects of potential value, their historical histories of oppression intertwined with an associated generalized send of positivity, possibility and belief in capitalist futurity" (Kanai & Gill, 2020: 24). Furthermore, the billboards being placed mostly in affluent city centres – and less so in multi-ethnic suburbs of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö – show how the strategic placement of the billboards themselves contrasts with stark social realities increasingly defined by class and race inequalities in Sweden's largest cities (Löfgren, 2020).

Fetishising props

While the voyeuristic aspect is made clear by each mise-en-scène, erotisation and fetishisation can also be applied to some of the props in the scenes. For instance, in the "Engagement ring" tableau (see Figure 3), metals and minerals are presented in a similarly eroticising way, with the label "Au" (gold) placed near the engagement rings on the couple's hands connoting the symbolic importance that binds precious metals to social rituals. In this case, it celebrates the future union of a gay couple, presumably to appeal to LGBTQIA+ and allied audiences.

Furthermore, in the "Car" tableau (see Figure 4), a fashionable man appearing to be of Middle Eastern origin charges an electric car in the foreground while fumbling with a hot dog and a mobile phone and clumsily holding birthday balloons. Aside from the phallic connotations attached to eating hot dogs in an advertising photograph, smartphones and electric cars are also being fetishised as battery-powered, "green" consumer goods. Here, I am reminded of Marshall McLuhan's (1951/2008) observation of the car being turned into an erotic object in 1950s advertising, highlighting the relationship between technology and gender. McLuhan considered the car a "hot medium" of progress and mobility associated with what we today call "fossil-fuel" capitalism, which exemplifies the messianic zeal with which modern societies continuously embrace autonomous technologies. The worship of the electric car illustrates how twentieth-century fetishisms, and their advertising tropes, are seamlessly repurposed into the twenty-first century.

FIGURE 6 Digital Billboard with "Mine" tableau



Source: Photo taken by the author in T-Centralen station, Stockholm, May 2022.

In the second phase of the campaign, the electric car becomes the main character. During the Stockholm +50 environmental summit in May 2022, Svemin unveiled a new series of billboards featuring an electric car prototype called "Mine", to be made exclusively from minerals sourced in Sweden. The ads encourage the viewer to sign up for a test drive in 2035 – when national climate targets are supposed to have been met. On the billboard (see Figure 6), the genre changes from lifestyle to aspirational advertising, using a climate futuristic visual style where "Mine" is placed centre-stage at the bottom of a snowy open-pit mine that is reminiscent of a lunar landscape. In this mise-en-scène, the copper-coloured car contrasts with the cool hues of the scenery. The car is flanked by two models dressed in futuristic winter clothing, reminiscent of car advertising clichés featuring cars and women that McLuhan (1951/2008) once analysed, and not unlike

how cars are displayed alongside beautiful women in trade shows. This also confirms modernist stereotypes of women and cars as male accessories (Berger, 1972) – where the objectifying male gaze completes the setup once again.

Unlike the other tableaux, the characters are not engaged in a specific action, and the models, though immobile, confront us, ready to seduce us into their world. Further, instead of the winding texts praising Swedish mining's "climate-smartness", as seen in Figure 1, the slogan in large type is now unambiguous and even patronising: "No mines. No electric cars." – *period*. Moreover, the slogan adds to the double erotism and fetishism of the car and the women and invites a third element of fetishisation: the mine itself. Just like its fossil-fuel ancestor, the electric car is presented as the main symbol of a new industrial era: the new consumer dream *powered by* the Swedish mine. In addition, this illustrates the endorsement of liberal and neoliberal ideological emphasis on individual consumption as a key factor for climate mitigation to the detriment of more systemic, collective, or anti-capitalist approaches (Staal, 2020).

Normalising first-world consumption

Since Swedishness, lifestyle, and consumption appear to be intimately connected in the various tableaux, this begs a question: What kind of sustainable consumption is Svemin advocating? When looking at the overall décor and props in the scenes (see Figures 1–5), one realises that they do *not* actually reflect what is commonly assumed as sustainable consumption, which can be characterised as frugal, conscious, and waste reducing. There is a lot of "stuff" in each mise-en-scène, reflecting the current high consumption habits of Swedish middle-class urban and suburban lifestyles. Even though high consumption and resource-intensive standards of living in developed countries such as Sweden are known to be a contributing factor to the global climate crisis (Svenfelt et al., 2022: 5), the billboards depict Sweden's high standard of living and materialistic way of life as a desirable goal for all people. Therefore, depicting high-consumption lifestyles reveals both a classist and nationalist claim that Sweden, as a "green" welfare state, represents the ideal for all modern societies. Apart from changed perceptions of the mining sector, which could influence voting patterns for political ideologies supportive of the intensification of mining in the long-term, there is no real claim for changing lifestyles from what they currently are. Indeed, as John Berger (1972: 114) famously claimed, "publicity is effective precisely because it feeds upon the real". Therefore, even though the campaign wants to be innovative in terms of presentation, the values it advocates seem rather conservative. It seems like the brand is telling us: "We will take care of the green transition, so you don't have to. No need for climate anxiety – *keep dancing and carry on*".

In fact, the only indication of something "green" in the tableaux is in the smaller texts at the bottom corners, when words like "sustainable" and "climate-smart" are sometimes used. Without these words, we are left with disparate visual connections between the compositional elements – the mise-en-scène, the labels with mineral elements, and the logo – which help to establish the climate brand,

but which may not necessarily fill a knowledge gap about mining. Paradoxically, this dissociation between visual and textual elements may lead the viewer to linger in the image long enough to access the informational campaign website, but it is not evident that all viewers move on to this next step.

The campaign website

In contrast to the lively and performative visuals in the tableaux, the official campaign website presents a corporate, business-as-usual visuality, mainly to promote the mining consortium's "green" mining innovations. The website's opening image changed seasonally to reflect the most current version of the campaign. In the first phase of the campaign in 2021, the website opened with the last image in the series of tableaux, "Office" (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7 Home page with "Office" tableau



Source: Image captured in December 2021 from densvenskagruvan.se

In this mise-en-scène, the multiracial approach continues in the setting of the architectural office associated with convivial Swedish working cultures. As we scroll down the page, our emotional attachment to the tableau is dispelled by generic panorama photographs of wind farms, snowy mining landscapes, or cityscapes that illustrate short blocks of informative text.

The tonality on *The Swedish Mine* website is mostly personable as in the billboards, with the frequent use of the pronoun "we", used as multiple personas to suggest yet another play with (self-)identities. "We" is used as The Swedish Mine consortium is used interchangeably with "we", as in Sweden, which lays claims for green mining as the *Swedish* solution to climate change. A short text explaining the 2021 campaign reads:

> With *our* ads, we want to show and remind *you* how important metals and minerals are to *us*. *We* also want to spread knowledge about how *we in Sweden* develop the *world's most climate-smart* mining industry, which *the whole world* can benefit from [emphasis added]". (Den Svenska Gruvan, 2021)

FIGURE 8 Questions & Answers page for The Swedish Mine campaign's website



Source: Den Svenska Gruvan, n.d.-b

The rest of *The Swedish Mine* website contains several short texts and a page with Questions & Answers (Q&A) that reveal further evidence regarding the underlying ideologies and the mining sector's geopolitical positioning about ownership, regulations, sustainability, and Indigenous rights. Here, sustainability is largely understood as part of industrial and technological innovation, providing the material foundation for society, employees, and communities through jobs, infrastructure, and welfare. In some texts, there are suggestions directed at policy-makers to review environmental regulations and to remove obstacles in granting new mining concessions in order to minimise dependency on imports – which we understand as a form of lobbying. Moreover, in a small section, "Indigenous people and mining", the national interests of mining are addressed with great caution in relation to the national interest of reindeer husbandry and Indigenous governance regarding mining activity in northern Sweden. Here, Svemin suggested greater "mutual understanding" between mining companies and reindeer herders and made an appeal to the media and to society to help in reducing conflict in mining zones – but without suggesting how this could be done concretely. The Sámi are never mentioned by name, only referred to obliquely by the term "reindeer husbandry" in the text, thus focusing on economic activities rather than communities themselves. This indicates a more formal need to include this item rather than expressing an actual concern for the matter.

Loving the mines

FIGURE 9 Home page of *The Swedish Mine* with Valentine's Day campaign



Source: Image captured February 2023 from densvenskagruvan.se

A recent addition to *The Swedish Mine* website in February 2023 showed how affective registers are being mobilised more explicitly in temporary campaigns. For Valentine's Day, a heart in the form a gemstone, on a red background and engraved with the phrase "I also love mines!"[2] invited users to download a love letter from the mine addressed to audience and to decision-makers (see Figure 9). Here, the mine was personified as a misunderstood lover trying to reconquer its love object – presumably mining-sceptical audiences – after a break-up, or to create a lobbying stint to romance politicians (Svemin, 2023; Tidningen Näringslivet, 2023). The campaign's intention is reaffirmed as *feelings*, and mining ideology is reframed using the literary archetype of unrequitted love. It also makes explicit what Hobbes and Swiatek (2019: 7) wrote about how "ambivalent" publics are to be *conquered* by lobbying and propaganda. In a comic play ranging from self-delusion to complete insecurity, the "lover" tries to convince the reader that mines are worth loving, just as mining executives do. Some passages read: "Don't let appearances fool you, I'm greener than you think, perhaps greenest in the world"; "You think I'm the solution to your problems, you're right. I am"; "Sure, I have […] a bad reputation. But […] see me for the person I am investing so much to become"; "I want to build the phone you call me with!"; and "I promise you not only gold, but also green forests, maybe a family" (Retrieved February 14, 2023, from densvenskagruven.se). In my view, this love letter is a continuation of the "Engagement Ring" tableau (see Figure 3), which taps into the myths of romantic love and the social symbols of gold to create a romantic connection with the viewer which plays on self-sacrifice and objectification to "conquer" the heart of the beloved.

The Swedish Mine Myth

Contrary to the considerable investments in urban advertising, The Swedish Mine campaign's integrated social media strategy seems to have received far less atten-

tion. After observing the campaign on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for more than a year, I noticed infrequent postings, low user engagement, and comments being removed successively. Today, the Instagram profile @*densvenskagruvan* has been completely suspended. Nonetheless, Twitter posts with campaign images still appear in Svemin's profile, @*svemin*, and in reposts by other companies in the mining sector, all searchable with the hashtag #densvenskagruvan. Nearly two years after the campaign's first roll-out, it is possible to see how some visual elements of the billboards – such as the tags with periodic table elements and even the gemstone hearts with "I also love mines!" (as seen in Figure 9) – have been incorporated into Svemin's events and merchandise. Speakers at Svemin's events can be seen dressed in satin red suits to create this emotional connection among peers, showing that the campaign has indeed succeeded in creating a strong brand identity within business and industrial communities.

However, a hashtag search with #densvenskagruvan also shows tweets with criticism that seem to have energised movements of mining resistance. For instance, environmental defenders, such as Friends of the Earth, nominated the campaign in the 2021 Greenwashing Prize, winning second place (Jordens Vänner, 2021). Criticism of the campaign also appeared in oppositional publics on Facebook groups (Gruvfritt Jokkmokk, n.d.; Norrlandsparadoxen, n.d.), where news and opinions about conflict-ridden dilemmas between communities in extractive zones and mining companies are shared.

The most scathing reaction from movements of mining resistance came from the activist group The Bedrock Group [Urbergsgruppen] (www.urbergsgruppen.se) with the website *The Swedish Mine Myth*. Using the situationist practice of *détournement* (Debord, 1967/1977), it offered an example of counter-visuality (Mirzoeff, 2011, 2016) and activated a defiant, oppositional gaze (hooks, 1992) to expose hegemonic "green" ideologies presented in campaign.

FIGURE 10 Home page of the The Swedish Mine Myth



Comments: *The Swedish Mine Myth* website is managed by the Swedish activist group Urbergsgruppen. **Source:** Den Svenska Gruvmyten, n.d.

The activists mimicked *The Swedish Mine* website layout and subverted all content with new textual and visual material articulated from a civic positionality, as suggested by Azoulay (2008, 2015). Generic images of industrial landscapes were replaced with images of untouched nature from contested mining zones in Northern Sweden (see Figure 10), and the friendly tone from the The Swedish Mine campaign was replaced with an earnest, confrontational tone. The [translated] text on the activist home page read:

> Resources are necessary for people to live their lives. We get resources from agricultural products, minerals, metals, and water. We need those to lead our modern lives. In Sweden and elsewhere in the world, we need to help each other to make a transition for more sustainable living. But did you know that the mining industry and mining companies in Sweden are doing campaigns and putting pressure to change legislation and make it worse? Here you can read more about The Swedish Mine Myth! (Den Svenska Gruvmyten, n.d.)

Here, we evidence a holistic and non-consumerist approach to resources viewed as necessary to "live", including agricultural products and water, in addition to minerals and metals. It expresses an internationalist stance, in contrast to a hegemonic nationalism. Furthermore, it calls for a solidary and collective decision-making to make a "transition to sustainable *living*", to counterweigh Svemin's more speculative claim of a "climate-smart future" by "sustainable *mining*" [emphasis added]. In addition, the activist website exposes the mining sector's advocacy campaign as a mediated lobbying attempt "to make legislation worse." On *The Swedish Mine Myth* website's Q&A section, all texts offer a critical rebuttal to every item on *The Swedish Mine* website, from the perspective of mining resistance movements. If we look at both websites side by side (see Figures 7 & 10), the differences between worldviews become evident – the former with an anthropocentric, cultural-appropriationist style aligned with liberal and neoliberal climate propagandas that appeals to social rituals and emotions; and the latter with a nature-centric approach of transformative climate propagandas that appeals to an ethos of the commons (Staal, 2020).

Conclusion

In this article, I highlight how The Swedish Mine campaign uses advocacy advertising to serve national interests that help establish Sweden's geopolitical dominance in mining during the green transition. I also illustrate how climate propaganda struggles play an important role in the visual politics of climate change. The disruptive creative approach used in The Swedish Mine campaign's tableaux establishes a public voice for the Swedish mining industry that attempts to address mining scepticism in Swedish society and avert reputational risk associated with the mining industry. The devices, operations, and techniques employed in the advocacy campaign exploit the public's affective registers and aim at a moral takeover anchored in dominant social, cultural, and political beliefs. The campaign aestheticises "green" progress by tokenising multiculturalism,

fetishising consumerism and technological solutionism, and romancing mines and national identity.

My analysis shows how the campaign materials present lifestyle justifications that connect social, gender, and racial stereotypes to everyday rituals ("What would a party be without metals and minerals?"); social dreams as seen in the erotisation and fetishisation of consumption (e.g., "the electric car"); and national values based on self-aggrandisement (e.g., "Sweden has the world's most climate-smart mining industry"). It also shows how the campaign refashions twentieth-century advertising tropes of industrial modernity into the twenty-first–century context of the Anthropocene to create another round of nation-branding based on liberal views and conservative "green" values. In addition, I have demonstrated how media activist responses from mining-resistance movements can try to expose corporate takeovers of cultural and environmental discourses through counter-visualities that help situate The Swedish Mine campaign as an example of neoliberal and liberal-democratic – and also conservative – climate propagandas (Staal, 2020).

With the help of visual culture studies, feminist, and critical race approaches, it becomes evident how multiracial and LGBTQIA+ bodies in various stereotypical and caricatural representations are used deliberately in the campaign for decorative, but no less political, purposes. This is evidence of significant tokenism (Kanai & Gill, 2020) used as an attempt to reach younger audiences, exemplifying yet another case of corporate "wokeness". The campaign does this by imitating proven advertising genres with similar multiracial casting used by, for example, Swedish retailers like IKEA. However, these techniques are not just a tactics used by power elites to perform symbolic identity politics. They are also intended to publicly disarm oppositional publics (Ulver, 2020) and depoliticise contentious environmental issues by presenting the benefits of "green" mining in everyday scenes depicting play and entertainment. The effects of docility also helps avert current or future reputational risks. Furthermore, this is underscored by the jarring discrepancy between the more spectacular visual approach of racialised, genderised, and classed bodies used in the urban campaign, and the corporate, minimalist, text-driven austerity presented on the campaign's website. Even if the website more directly verifies the campaign's intent with its more informational approach, the way in which the overall campaign exploits the audience's emotional registers also leaks into this rational online space. Here, the "love letters" exemplify how the affective operations of liberal and neoliberal climate propagandas hijack intimacy and subjectivity as an arena for propaganda.

In terms of othered identities, it is noteworthy that the multiracial characters in the tableaux display a caricatural physicality and strong emotions that contrast starkly with the cautious sparsity and avoidance of naming Indigenous populations on the campaign website. With the turbulent histories of the exploitation of subaltern, racialised bodies in the global and colonial history of mineral extraction in mind, the deliberate attempt to exotify and sexualise Black women and people of colour in advertising tableaux serves to further entrench the practices of mineral extraction within a "green" version of racial capitalism,

and to advance an ideological statement about "climate-smart futures" as the *Swedish*, and therefore nationalist, solution to climate change.

A variant of green colonialism thus seems to lurk behind the attempt of "greening" the Swedish mines. This necessarily leads to problematising the very notion of a green transition, which, according to sociologist Maristella Svampa (2022), can be seen as a narrative that makes invisible the eco-social costs of extractivism needed for developed countries like Sweden to transform their energetic matrix. As a result, this invisibilisation contributes to depoliticising public debates, thus delegitimising climate as a *social* issue (Doyle et al., 2020), which in turn contributes to debasing social movements of mining resistance in the public eye. At the same time, it uses this opportunity for lobbying and changing environmental policies that allow the intensification of mining to continue.

Advertising will most likely continue to be used as a key medium of climate propaganda, leaving no stones – or human emotions – unturned as sites of capital extraction for surplus value. I have shown here how modes of representation, visual styles, and practices of looking directly continue traditions of extracting surplus value from historical practices of body or land dispossession. But my analysis also points to how emotions, feelings – even love! – have become sites of extraction, as if communicative acts by a mining company are both metaphorical and extensive of the practice of mineral extraction itself.

In the future, such campaigns may increasingly face the risk of backfiring due increasingly environmentally conscious and globally connected audiences. As some of the rhetorical tricks may become depleted, this can lead to the continuing exploitation of new channels and tactics for ideological and propagandistic manipulation. What next after love letters – a Tinder profile for the mine? Regardless of the mining sector's ability to financially mitigate its own risks, in this struggle of David against Goliath, one can also expect to see increased mining resistance from those most directly affected by mining extraction activities. This can lead to power asymmetries becoming more accentuated far from the city centres, where sophisticated advertising campaigns are deployed. The issue then becomes, how far are extractivist sectors in Sweden willing to go to get a "social license to operate", and what new types of climate propaganda can we expect to see emerging in the future? It is thus important to highlight the limitations of conservative and liberal approaches while advocating for a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the climate crisis. If we engage critically with climate propaganda and understand the importance of visual politics in the green transition, there may be a possibility to challenge existing power structures and promote genuine sustainability, so that, as the EU Green Deal has determined (European Commission, n.d.), no one is left behind.

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Notes

1. The Swedish Mine includes New Boliden, LKAB, Epiroc, Sandvik, ABB, Zinkgruvan Mining and Copperstone Resources and Svemin (Den Svenska Gruvan, n.d.-a). The campaign was created by Ingo Advertising (www.ingostockholm.se), who also created award-winning campaigns such as Moldy Whopper and The Swedish Number.
2. The slogan "I love mines!" coined by former Social Democrat industry minister Karl-Peter Thorwaldsson in 2021 (SVT, 2021), was appropriated by the newly elected conservative government's Energy Minister Ebba Busch in 2022 as "We also love mines!". The slogan has since been incorporated into Svemin's brand identity in events and targeted campaigns.

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