“With Great Power”: Spinning Environmental Worlds and “Green” Production in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*’s Marketing

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Abstract

Resonating with environmental advocacy such as energy reduction, Spider-Man’s infamous mantra “with great power comes great responsibility” was part of a marketing strategy endorsing the “green production” of the 2014 blockbuster The Amazing Spider-Man 2. Boasted as Sony’s most environmental film to date, this article explores how the film’s promotional campaign worked to both push and sabotage these environmental claims. Undertaking a material analysis of filmmaking, the article firstly locates how “power” can be conceptualised within the film, its production context, and the surrounding Hollywood industry. By scrutinizing the online marketing campaign via Twitter, in addition to promotional and industry collateral, the article then explores the contradictory and layered environmental messages within the campaign, focusing in particular on a cross promotion with the enviro-event “Earth Hour”. Questioning the production of environmental encounters throughout the marketing campaign, the article asks what worlds are produced in the process, and how.

Keywords: environment, superhero, paratext, marketing, world-building, greenwashing, franchising

“The grid is yours”: The words echo around the technologically saturated office loft as Electro (Jamie Foxx), the main antagonist in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (2014), holds his electric-blue hand over the power socket. With a stutter of sound and a flicker of current, he disappears into the electrical network. Such are the capabilities of this super-villain, who can travel through, harness, and weaponize the energy grid for New York City (NYC). Drawing upon the electrical power that residents rely on in their everyday lives, Electro wages terror against the city, short-circuiting Times Square and causing widespread havoc. Beginning the film as

an under-appreciated employee who designs renewable energy technology for the multinational corporation OsCorp, Electro—or Matt Dillon, as he was formerly known—suffers through an unfortunate mishap with the machinery. Transforming into a galvanic-mutant, Dillon's impulse to be recognized radicalizes him as he seeks to take control, or “power,” over the city. Spider-Man (Andrew Garfield) intercepts, and so ensues the battle for NYC.

In the current global landscape, where climate crisis looms and the overuse of natural resources profoundly impacts diverse populations, a super-villain who utilizes the symbols of “power” and “electricity” to damage a global hub such as NYC poses a dangerous threat. As this article will outline, *Spider-Man 2* makes reference to these hypothetical environmental catastrophes, utilizing a complex set of media industry collaborators in order to stage various environmentalist messages, products, and experiences that align energy reduction with the heroism of Spider-Man. Indeed, as the *Spider-Man* axiom “with great power comes great responsibility” attests,² the superhero phenomenon is commonly aligned with an innate sense of accountability to the people and their environments. Common to the superhero narrative is the threat of some looming calamity—nuclear (as in *The Dark Knight*, 2008), alien (*The Avengers*, 2012), or super-human (*Captain America: Civil War*, 2016)—threatening to wipe out a population, a city, or the Earth itself. In these films, super-human labor offers the only possibility for resolution. Following this logic in the age of climate crisis, it is fitting to pair the latter with the apocalyptic narrative at the center of the superhero story.³ In fact, Spider-Man's “great power” mantra is perfect for an environmental slogan, referencing energy, encouraging earth custodianship, responsible citizenship and super-human dedication. *Spider-Man 2* utilizes this pairing, integrating the slogan “A Superhero for the Planet” as part of the film's environmentalist promotional campaign, and drawing from the environmental resonances within the film in order to push these messages.

Announced by Sony Pictures as their most sustainable film ever produced to date,⁴ *Spider-Man 2* promoted itself as such through an online “EcoSpidey” campaign that included a dedicated Twitter account, several videos, an online game (now defunct) and a collaborative promotion with the environmentalist event “Earth Hour.” This article explores some of the ways in which these paratexts, specifically within *Spider-Man 2*'s marketing campaign, intersect and are entangled in the film's environmental and material production contexts. Utilizing a variety of paratextual material, such as publicly available images, tweets, and videos from the online advertising campaign, forms and procedures designed to facilitate sustainable production, and a series of internal marketing documents made available during the Sony leak of 2014, this article will piece together the promotional environmentalist processes and messages of *Spider-Man 2*. Focusing on this promotional discourse reveals a tension between the potential the campaign has to “greenwash” an environmental image for Hollywood, and the perceptive environmental worlds and encounters manufactured by the process.⁵ Crucially, while this study does locate some “greenwashing” in the film's promotions, and to highlight this tendency within the commercialized edifices of Hollywood film is arguably a predictable and banal task, it is a necessary means in order to then scrutinize what industrial processes and structures allow for it to occur. In doing so, this study not only teases out the inevitable contradictions within the environmental filmmaking model that conforms to the capitalistic logic of increased consumption and expansion, but also delivers some much-needed analysis into the industry's governance around environmental production and how this is interrelated to practical and lived managerial processes.

In order to illustrate how a Hollywood “green production” comes to fruition, this article first locates how “power” is conceptualized in relation to the film, its corresponding trajectory of material histories, and presents an overview of *Spider-Man 2*’s “green” production processes. With this as context, it then scrutinizes the paratextual Twitter marketing campaign, interrogating the material claims of *Spider-Man 2*’s environmental promotions in contrast to other marketing for the film. Finally, in order to further examine how environmental worlds are built and shared within these promotions, and the various global, industrial, and narrative “environmentalisms” they purport, the focus shifts to a particular cross promotion between Sony and the environmental event Earth Hour. Pertinent in a time when the effects of global climate change are enfolding different communities, politics, and geographies unequally, this study seeks to spur deeper investigation into discourses and contradictions of green consumption, and how they operate in the ever-expanding models of consumptive capitalism.

Locating the “power” within *Spider-Man 2*

The concept of electricity appears in various guises throughout *Spider-Man 2*’s EcoSpidey marketing campaign, including a Twitter account detailing the environmental production measures for the film in addition to several cross promotions with other events and products. As a campaign that boasted energy savings, the film is deeply invested in the raw power of electricity in relation to its production as an environmental media property. However, in order to account for how the text is referenced in the advertising, it is important to first foreground how energy and electricity are mobilized within the film’s text and in contemporary environmental media scholarship. Despite the campaign at the center of this case study, *Spider-Man 2* does not overtly push an environmentalist message within its narrative. For example, while the techno-corporation OsCorp is a multinational company that traffics in the generation of renewable energy, its role as an environmental business is mentioned only once briefly in the diagnosis. Instead, the corporation is a useful plot device in other ways. Gwen Stacey, Spider-Man’s love interest (Emma Stone), is interning there. Spider-Man’s father was an OsCorp researcher who specialized in spider-human hybrid technology. As such, the company’s predominant role in the plot is not environmental but causal, as the technology that transformed Peter Parker, as Spider-Man was first known, into his super-powered alter ego, and Electro into his highly powerful nemesis.

While renewable energy is not central in the film, electricity is repeatedly utilized as a motif in relation to Electro’s ascent into power. For example, his power is discharged on screen in vivid blue lightning streams, accompanied by the sound of high-pitched electric buzzes. Blue electrical charges pulsate throughout his skin, conveying his conductive composition. Electricity is also repeatedly utilized to signify the extent of Electro’s capability, who is not only a threat to human mortality through his power, but effectively controls every citizen’s right to electricity through a mobilization of the power grid. The extent of his ability to control this is visually represented through wide-shots of the iconic NYC skyline in the dark without power, in essence dispossessing the city of its status as a cosmopolitan global destination (Figure 1). Overall, these symbols of “power” and “electricity” are not overtly associated with an explicit environmentalist sentiment within the narrative; yet as will be developed in later sections, exist within the plot in order to be extrapolated by particular paratexts.

Figure 1. Wide-shot from *Spider-Man 2* showing a darkened Manhattan skyline in the background, with electrified fuse station in foreground.

A connection to the physical environment is significant in any given filmmaking project, as a brief exploration into Hollywood's historical and industrial connections to energy and other raw materials will demonstrate. The heavy extraction of raw materials from the environment began in the chemical process of extracting cellulose from cotton and wood pulp in the late 1800s, in order to manufacture celluloid. Such processes involved large volumes of clean water and raw silver, established in records showing Eastman Kodak was producing over 200,000 miles of film stock on an annual basis from the mid-1920s. Industry of this nature required the *daily* extraction of twelve million gallons of water from Lake Ontario and the subsequent dumping of the chemical by-product into the Genesee River. Fast-forward to ninety years later, the industry's extreme dependence on resource exploitation and processing has not shifted.⁶

Recent scholarship offers methods in which to trace contemporary moving image technology from these raw material origins through to their far-reaching physical global impacts. Such works include Nadia Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint*, focusing on the material vestiges of the film text, and anthologies such as *Signal Traffic* and *Sustainable Media*, edited by Nicole Starosielski, Lisa Parks, and Janet Walker, which explore the materiality of media infrastructure and distribution. In *The Cinematic Footprint*, for instance, Bozak aims "to locate the energy in cinema"⁷ by analyzing the relationship between the moving image and the natural resources that are the material sustenance and support of the industry. In line with this scholarship, this article claims that cultural texts do not exist in a vacuum, "independent of the environments they mediate, but rather come into being through relational, ecological processes."⁸ When parsing *Spider-Man 2*, this considers everything from the raw substrate that is retrieved from the ground far from US soil and assembled into the lenses of the Kodak Vision 3 cameras used to shoot footage,⁹ to the immense amounts of food cultivated and processed to cater for cast and crew. This approach even considers the movement of signal traffic through the material matrix of undersea infrastructure necessary to sustain the film's various online marketing tools, such as Twitter. Therefore, by material relation, *Spider-Man 2* is a profoundly ecological project.

While much of this scholarship has focused on the profound interrelation between the materiality of film production and the environment, this study alternatively builds on this foundation by illuminating the self-reflexive industrial discourses around such a relationship. As Bozak argues, the image “is not only materially and economically inseparable from the biophysical environment, it is [also] the environmental movement’s primary pedagogical and propagandistic tool.”¹⁰ While she is referring specifically to the environmental discourse inherent in the activist film, often in critique of mass consumption and industry, her point highlights a tension between the environmental rhetoric within these examples and yet their inability to “unplug from the energy economy.”¹¹ As such, while this study concerns itself primarily with the textual content of the promotional discourse surrounding *Spider-Man 2*’s EcoSpidey campaign, it also maintains an underlying concern with the tensions between this promotional discourse and its material origins and movements. In other words, an interest in the origins of both the social impact “power” of the advertising and the raw “power” utilized to sustain the campaign. This is especially significant given the film’s investment in promoting itself as less environmentally harmful through a reduced resource-footprint.

In addition to the material resources required to conceive, disseminate, and “power” an environmental campaign such as this are the collaborative and creative labors of multiple industry actors across various sites of production. As such, this article places the development of such a campaign within the realms of “media franchising” as defined by Derek Johnston. In his monograph of the same title, Johnston places value in the processes of cultural producers, arguing that media properties are complex entities, created through social relations, market discourses, creative identities, and collaborative exchanges.¹² In order to undertake *Spider-Man 2*’s energy-reduction campaigns, negotiations occurred between Hollywood studios, non-profit environmental groups, environmental consultants, and environmentally engaged online users. Negotiations also occurred between varying actors within these institutions, sometimes resulting in oppositional strategies arising out of the same organization. The details of the relations behind these collaborations are particularly relevant in this case where multiple advertising strategies were launched, some that purposefully stressed the environmental advocacy angle—and others that ignored it entirely.

One such actor that was crucial for managing *Spider-Man 2*’s interest in environmentalism is the Environmental Media Association (EMA). Founded in 1989, the EMA is an organization based in Beverley Hills that aims to “mobilize the entertainment industry in educating people about environmental issues, which in turn, [will inspire] them to take action.”¹³ The EMA is principally responsible for the “Green Seal” certification program, the third party rating system that fosters sustainable film production practices to which *Spider-Man 2* is attributed. The Green Seal is the only such accreditation process currently available in Hollywood. In order to gain the award, out of a criteria scheme of 150 points, a minimum threshold of 60 points must be reached. The criteria cover “all facets of a production and provides a practical and comprehensive guide to environmentally responsible filmmaking and event planning. In each area of focus, the criteria include specific environmental actions in order to help producers focus their greening efforts.”¹⁴ Designed to be adapted to a film budget of any size, the application form is submitted online and is based on a self-assessment undertaken by the production company.¹⁵

The film gained an EMA Green Seal via a slew of environmental efforts that “were supported at every level—from producers and studio executives to cast and crew—and began as soon as the film went into pre-production.”¹⁶ On the level of production, this process was effectively carried out by hiring a devoted *Spider-Man 2* “Eco-Manager,” who met with the departmental heads in pre-production to break down what specifics within each area could be environmentally managed. These details are outlined in a promotional “Sustainability Sizzle Reel” video, produced by the studio (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8DbnRFtKbo>). Through talking heads, the clip demonstrates that sustainable practices were utilized throughout production. In terms of set design and construction, a data center set-piece within the film was sourced from pre-used materials to minimize overall waste. In other examples, the Special Effects and Stunt Department ensured that artificial snow procured for a scene was biodegradable to reduce chemical run off, and reuse, recycling and composting programs were implemented on set by the catering team. Figures published online demonstrate that *Spider-Man 2*’s green film production efforts reclaimed 49.7 tons of material for re-use in future productions, and prevented 193,000 plastic water bottles from becoming landfill waste due to re-use programs on set. Ultimately, the video provides evidence of *Spider-Man 2* undertaking material considerations that are above the standard protocol for the studio.¹⁷

The question remains as to how the above information was disseminated within the industrial and public sphere. Since the start of the program twenty-seven years ago, thousands of films and television series have completed the Green Seal process. Most recently, successful Hollywood mega-blockbusters such as *Rogue One* (2016) and Ridley Scott’s *Alien: Covenant* (2017) successfully gained accreditation. Notwithstanding this apparent achievement, a broad search delivers nothing about either film’s environmental qualifications. In fact, the only mention of the words Green Seal arises from the EMA and Green Seal website press releases.¹⁸ Despite not delivering a central environmental narrative, *Spider-Man 2* distinguishes itself from these films as it purposefully promoted the production as “green.”¹⁹ Boasted as “the most eco-friendly tentpole production in the history of Sony Pictures,”²⁰ the film rings true to Charles Acland’s notion of the “technological tentpole,” only in environmental terms.²¹ In other words, while fairly conventional in story and characterization, *Spider-Man 2* was promoted as a flagship text that demonstrates extreme innovation toward reducing the impact of the film industry on the environment. However, in contrast to Acland’s example of *Avatar* as a technological tentpole, the innovative angle of this film was a relatively small promotional push overall in terms of the film’s marketing.

What the studio did primarily promote on their EcoSpidey website was the positive economic benefits of their sustainability projects. Boasting an estimated cost savings of US\$400,000, president of Sony Pictures Doug Belgrand praised the efforts of the film, arguing that “what’s good for the planet can also be good for the bottom line.”²² Yet, while this discourse highlights the economic advantages of “going green,” it fails to contextualize that figure within the overall budget, which at US\$230 million does not indicate a significant reduction in overall costings.²³ This claim not only lacks economic transparency, but also clearly promotes a congratulatory environmental image that lacks accountability in reporting, especially concerning details (such as the raw data of water, energy and other materials used during production), which had to be found elsewhere. However, while capital gain is evidently the official agenda behind Sony’s upper governance, what other aspects of the

campaign are highlighted in the eco-promotions for *Spider-Man 2*, and what that might reveal in terms of the marketing process is the subject of the remainder of this paper.

The Contradictory Narratives of the Online EcoSpidey Campaign

In *Show Sold Separately*, Jonathan Gray argues that introduction to any given text can occur through any number of paratextual materials, whether promotions produced by the studio, by related collaborative agents, or informally by fans and other external producers. Each of these paratexts holds the potential to alter the “original” text, by creating various layers of meaning and interpretation.²⁴ However, with these various layers are “collisions threatening the encoded meanings of texts,” holding the potential to overtake and subsume one another.²⁵ An image circulated frequently throughout the promotional campaign for *Spider-Man 2* that conveys the superhero in movement flying through the air toward Electro demonstrates these contradictory tendencies. Against a blue background of a power station, flurries of electric current shoot across the image. Emphasizing the use of electricity as an environmental theme, the Twitter account for the film’s ecological campaign—@EcoSpidey—accompanied it on May 8, 2014 with the text: “Max Dillon designed clean energy, but Electro wants a world without power, without #SpiderMan.” One week earlier, the official Spider-Man Twitter account @SpiderManMovie posted the same image, albeit with text aligned to promote the film based on its entertainment value. This time the words “Spectacularly Entertaining” were emblazoned over the lower section of the image with the words “Only a few days left . . . do you have your tix for Thursday night?” (Figure 2). The following section explores and contrasts these conflicting paratextual materials produced by Sony and other actors, and analyzes how they interact, overlap, and contradict ecological discourses promoted by the EcoSpidey campaign.

The scope of the two *Spider-Man* twitter accounts outlined here differed dramatically in focus. @EcoSpidey’s activity on Twitter consisted of posting factoids on production-based measures (such as: “755 tons were diverted from landfill or reused while making The Amazing #SpiderMan 2—that’s the same as 3 Statues of Liberty”),²⁶ shout-outs to “Green Crew Members of the Week,” photos of the stars’ involvement in community activities such as tree planting or bike riding, and posts linking the film to environmental cross-promotions. These posts were often accompanied by a link directing the user to the aforementioned “Sizzle Reel” video concerning sustainability on set or more predominantly, to online ticket sales. Alternatively, @SpiderManMovie’s Twitter account focused more on general endorsement of the film through the generic promotion about the characters or the stars, although this too sought to turn followers into ticket holders.

Despite concertedly tweeting three times a day with exclusive content between March 2013 and October 2014, the @EcoSpidey Twitter campaign only amounts to a small fraction of the overall promotional strategy for *Spider-Man 2*. Since @EcoSpidey’s first tweet, the account has only generated 1,360 followers, and many of the posts have not been liked, re-tweeted, or engaged with at all. This is in stark contrast to @SpiderManMovie, which at the time of writing has over 680,000 followers.²⁷ While the latter has been functioning since 2011 (well

Figure 2. An image used for both @EcoSpidey and @SpiderManMovie Twitter campaigns.

before the EcoSpidey campaign) and is clearly the main reference point for news of all official *Spider-Man* franchise iterations,²⁸ the Twitter activity throughout the release of *Spider-Man 2* demonstrates the popularity of this account, on average getting hundreds of interactions with every tweet. Although there were occasions when @SpiderManMovie did refer to the @EcoSpidey campaign, they were not frequent, occurring approximately once a month across the film's promotion. As such, due to minimal user engagement, one can assume that the @EcoSpidey campaign saw limited media circulation or online "spreadability."²⁹

Moreover, the fact that the EcoSpidey campaign was only disseminated in the English language, despite the film's international marketing in Russia and China, among other countries, also demonstrates that the promotions were directed to a relatively small public of potential viewers. The story behind the publicly available campaign substantiates this. A confidential fifty-page marketing document for *Spider-Man 2* divulges complex strategies for international promotion including what narrative themes to push (namely: "when enemies unite, Spider-Man's greatest battle begins") yet only dedicates one half-page paragraph to the fact that it is an environmentally produced film, with an international

cross-promotion with Earth Hour.³⁰ Evidently, while some resources were dedicated to the EcoSpidey campaign, the promotion was clearly a tangential strategy to the predominant marketing arrangement promoting *Spider-Man 2* more broadly.

Yet, in spite of the marginal nature of the campaign, the studio's investment in these discourses is vital for business,³¹ with *Spider-Man 2*'s accumulative environmental paratexts operating as branding for the studio. Each @EcoSpidey Twitter post functions as "industrial self-theorizing," a form of "sense-making" for Sony to reaffirm its status as an environmental proprietor.³² Similarly, the "Sizzle Reel" video rationalizes the studio as an organization that is concerned and engaged with its impact on the environment. The logo "Sony Pictures—A Greener World" is a stamped watermark in this video, and its correlative placement across the various online assets works to generate consistent environmental branding for the company.

Crucially, the @EcoSpidey Twitter account also functions within the campaign as an important entry point to the film—and the box office—for environmentally concerned individuals. As various Twitter users who did not overtly identify as *Spider-Man* fans prior to the campaign demonstrated, many were compelled to enter the *Spider-Man* mythology, stepping "up 2 the challenge of being sustainable" and referencing *Spider-Man*'s "#withgreatpower-comesgreatresponsibility" mantra.³³ Similarly, pre-existing *Spider-Man* fans were coaxed into participating in an online environmental community.³⁴ Through paratextual engagement, the text's environmental concerns are mobilized to generate meanings within *Spider-Man 2* for particular publics that may not otherwise be engaged. In this way, the environmental paratexts add imperceptible value by offering a way for audience members to become socially and environmentally motivated.

Whatever generative function the campaign performs, it is necessary to recognize the discursively formed limits of the @EcoSpidey Twitter account that while addressing some environmental issues, renders others invisible. For example, a cost-benefit analysis of environmental filmmaking shared on @EcoSpidey details the specifics of how to reduce landfill waste and recycling on set.³⁵ The report focuses on assets such as "water" (referring to disposable bottled water rather than potable water used during production) and waste generated from props, catering, and items like batteries and e-waste. Exemplary of how EcoSpidey prioritizes waste-related environmental strategies over other tactics, such as energy-based ones, the report never specifies how investing in renewable energy such as solar power could also provide long-term economic savings. This is a missed opportunity, not only in terms of environmental impact but also particularly because of the relevance to the "power" centric focus of *Spider-Man 2*'s narrative and campaign more broadly. Ultimately, this default to waste-related initiatives is revealing in terms of what forms of environmentalism are condoned within Hollywood environmental promotional discourse. The fact that there is no mention of "climate change" in any of these materials shows a discomfort in engaging with more political environmental debates. Moreover, the lack of information offered on alternative sources of energy is correlative to the industry's deep commitment to fossil-fuel economies,³⁶ as demonstrated through the campaign's purchase of carbon offsets, rather than any claim toward reducing or altering the industry's energy extraction methods.³⁷

Considering EcoSpidey's waste-concentrated efforts, and the determination of the Sony brand to be considered "green," there is by contrast minimal attention to the extended

impact of material paratexts that occur in the dominant @SpiderManMovie campaign. The latter promoted various confectionary products online, all integrated into the blue-red color scheme of the Spider-Man moniker, such as Baskin-Robbins ice cream and milkshakes (Figure 3), Pringles Chips, and Cheez-It Baked Snack Crackers. These products all contain ingredients such as palm oil, likely not sourced from sustainable plantations. In addition, they also all involve excessively high levels of plastic and paper packaging. None of these cross promotions are ever mentioned in the EcoSpidey campaign, and through their extended networks of environmental resource extraction, contravene the obvious environmental imperatives of keeping track of procurement and waste. In this way, the two campaigns intersect and collide in contradictory material ways.

These conflicting messages are the consequence of varying industry discourses, departments, collaborators, and the resulting disunited paratexts, overriding and subsuming one another in ways that complicate a clear environmental message. As Jonathan Gray has pointed to, conflicting paratextual meanings are a commonplace condition of the industry, where disparate groups within the production process undertake their creation, often without any communication or synergy to one another.³⁸ In this case, while some members of the production team, such as the Eco Manager addressed in the last section, were on task in terms of the environmental imperative, *Spider-Man 2*'s marketing team, for example, were not cohesively drawn into this plan. Such practices are perhaps representative of the messy reality of governance and labor networks required within large-scale filmmaking, yet they can have profound impacts on the way a film is received. In this case, as *Spider-Man 2*'s marketing broadly worked toward building opportunities through cross-promotions and merchandizing in order to maximize capital, the logic of accumulation was in opposition to the mindful consumption model presented by the EcoSpidey campaign. Moreover, not having the two campaigns meaningfully intersect is an indication of how a hermetic conceptualization of "the environment" operates within Hollywood. Instead of understanding that the physical environment is part of a relational ecology that entangles all things, and all aspects

Figure 3. Advertisement for Baskin-Robbins.

of filmmaking and thus, merchandizing, these separations are produced because “green” forms of consumption are often articulated to or imbricated within a system of consumer capitalism driven by the pursuit of profit and economic progress. This narrow environmentalism is demonstrated through the selective campaigns and the corresponding and presumably siloed work teams behind them. The final section explores these contradictions further, examining the disparate “environmental” world-building strategies within this campaign and how they are constructed.

“Use Your Power”: Earth Hour and Environmental World Building

The bulk of this article has considered the material basis of *Spider-Man 2*’s promotional campaign, and how the promotions address this materiality. Yet, while moving images and surrounding cultures are clearly embedded within the physical and material world, they also manifest cinematic worlds, and perceptive encounters with those who engage in them. Both these material and social arenas of understanding the moving image can be termed as “ecologies,” such as in the process-relational account of cinema Adrian Ivakhiv presents in *Ecologies of the Moving Image*. However as Ivakhiv argues, focusing only on the “material” components or alternatively on the “social” impact of filmmaking does not acknowledge how these two ecologies are profoundly intertwined through relational processes. Such thinking reinforces a nature-culture divide, a dichotomy rejected by a process-relational perspective.³⁹ Despite *Spider-Man 2*’s purported environmentalism, both campaigns are guilty of this dichotomy by not consistently considering the material or biophysical implications of their social promotions. However as material paratexts, objects such as the Baskin-Robbins ice cream still perform their role as access points into the fictional world where Spider-Man exists, and are therefore also implicated in a perceptive world pertaining to environmentalism. The following section considers what ecological worldings EcoSpidey and its corresponding campaigns traverse.

The term “world-building,” defined by Henry Jenkins as a form of story building across media forms in an established narrative setting, considers how Spider-Man is utilized and adapted across paratexts in order to communicate environmental discourse.⁴⁰ Similarly useful when accounting for the assorted actors at play within the organization of EcoSpidey’s environmental worlds, the term “world-sharing,” according to Derek Johnston, offers a “shared context” to be navigated by varying cultural actors.⁴¹ Consequently, EcoSpidey’s worlding does not occur in an exclusively fictional world as Jenkins would have it, but through an integration of the Spider-Man universe into real-world environmental actors and issues, collapsing the distinction between fictionalized narratives, non-fiction industries, and idealized global utopian worlds.

One such form of world-sharing arising from EcoSpidey was the cross-promotion with the not-for-profit campaign, Earth Hour. Now a global media event that occurs annually on the last Saturday night in March, the origins of Earth Hour began with a singular gathering in Sydney, Australia, in 2007. To encourage reduced energy consumption and raise awareness

for climate change, participants of Earth Hour turn off all lights and non-essential appliances for one hour, and find inventive ways to promote the cause in visual spectacle created off-grid, without electricity. Organized by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the movement has developed from its humble beginnings into a broad media sensation, inviting participants around the world to register their own local events, while also promoting international flagship occasions in major cities across the globe. These events are spectacular affairs, media stunts usually involving the powering down of often illuminated popular architectural icons such as the Sydney Harbor Bridge or The Eiffel Tower. The event also works as a platform to advocate for several other WWF annual campaigns on a range of regional and global environmental issues.

In 2014, the *Spider-Man 2* and Earth Hour partnership included a co-joined publicity tour and online campaign with several videos featuring Spider-Man and its cast endorsing the event and its correlative environmental engagements. Despite the link to the non-profit Earth Hour, Sony's internal documents reveal that the ultimate goal of the cross-promotion is "not philanthropy," but rather cost savings and US\$44 million in media value.⁴² While the Spider-Man Earth Hour campaign fundraised over US\$60,000 for WWF projects,⁴³ this is minimal compared to the projected media-related gains for Sony's Spider-Man brand. As such, when Spider Man became "the first superhero ambassador for Earth Hour"⁴⁴ during the timely event on March 30 (just four weeks before *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* hit cinemas in the United States), it was unmistakably an effort to expand the film's promotional horizon. World-sharing in this sense occurred between profit and not for profit industries, demonstrating how the varying and negotiated benefits affect various creative stakeholders unequally as they "navigate distinction, power, and fealty via their interests in shared cultural resources."⁴⁵ However, despite the uneven distribution of economic gain from the partnership and this drive toward an economizing of environmentalism for capitalistic expansion, the campaign stages the complex production of environmental worlds within the Earth Hour promotion that should not be entirely dismissed.

The main online features for the Earth Hour promotion also revolved around Twitter accounts and featured the circulation of various slogans, images and videos. The poster for the event shows the Earth Hour and WWF insignia adjacent to the immediately recognizable head and shoulders of Spider-Man, in addition to the text "use your power at Earthhour.Org." Evidently, this reference to "using power" is yet another entry point into the world of the Spider-Man and the Electro environmental narrative. As part of the strategy to coordinate specific environmentally interested publics access into this world, various hashtags were utilized to connect and organize the worldwide Earth Hour, inviting followers to participate in the power down on March 31 or donate to one of the more focused campaigns. In the spirit of "responsibility" and "self-sacrifice," all well-worn terms in the Spider-man franchise, a strategy that focused on user engagement asked followers to use "#YourPower" and "take an #UnSelfie" for the climate. Other allusions to the film included a photo of Times Square with its lights out during Earth Hour 2014, tweeted by director Marc Webb with the caption "Electro isn't the only one who can make Times Square go dark" (Figure 4). As a visual reference that is directly linked to Electro's narrative, such paratexts also add environmental meaning to *Spider-Man 2*, attaching an aura of ethical authenticity to the film, in addition to contributing a sheen of pop-culture approval to Earth Hour.⁴⁶

Figure 4. *Spider-Man 2* director Marc Webb visually recalls the film in this tweet about Earth Hour.

What political formulations the environmental Spider-Man world conveys is further developed in other materials. A video assembled of the highlights of Earth Hour 2014 offers footage from an extensive multiplicity of global locales (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDvrPY8rw1s>). The video operates as a rationalization of the event as a successful venture in international environmentalism. Showing only seconds of footage in each area (usually depicting a crowd and the act of turning the city lights), the video offers a narrative of hope for the future via images of cooperation and community. The addition of fans dressed in Spider-Man garb also engenders the “climate superhero” as central to this narrative. Moreover, in the weeks leading up to Earth Hour, several short videos were released on Twitter that promoted the event by intercutting scenes from *Spider-Man 2* with footage of other Earth Hours and WWF campaigns. Within these videos, a member of the cast is presented as an advocate for these campaigns. Scenes of Spider-Man sweeping spectacularly through Manhattan’s urban canyons are juxtaposed with footage of the WWF initiatives, including providing biogas to families in Nepal (advocated by Andrew Garfield) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG6S5NKFdXI>) or training sniffer dogs for Nepalese wildlife rangers known as “puppy protectors” (accompanied by Emma Stone). In opposition to the events themselves, which specifically refer only the event’s locale,⁴⁷ these videos utilize imagery of exotic environments, peoples, and animals to communicate an environmental “Otherness” to a mainstream audience with the resources necessary to contribute funds. Montages of this nature assume a direct correlation between Spider-Man, the cast of the

film, the participants of Earth Hour and the global activism of WWF various initiatives. In this sense, Spider-Man's Earth Hour works to unite environmental warriors on both a local domestic level, in the effort of turning off electrical appliances, and a global context through the endorsement of international initiatives.

To draw from Maurice Lazzarato, the production of worlds within capitalism exists as an "invitation to espouse a way of life" or in this case, enticement toward environmental and global citizenship.⁴⁸ Here, despite the peripheral nature of *Spider-Man 2*'s eco-promotions, the idealized and utopian worlds of environmental harmony projected by the Earth Hour campaign and its corresponding cultural actors have produced a universe in which a pop culture icon is transformed by association into a global enviro-hero. The environmental campaign does not become a secondary paratext to the "original" film, but a fluid shared-context for dreaming of sustainable future-worlds. However, this environmentally spirited world production comes once again, at the cost of its material underpinnings. In addition to the online collateral produced from the Spider-Man and Earth Hour partnership are the physical events that occur around the globe. In 2014, the flagship event for Spider Man Earth Hour was hosted in Singapore, with the stars in attendance. Such an event includes the resource heavy assembly of major scaffolding for film projections on buildings, major lighting rigs, podiums, and the plethora of audio-visual equipment that facilitates the colorful spectacle of the night—before the lights go off at 8:30 pm (Figure 5). The irony of a global environmental event aiming to minimize carbon consumption but that requires an excess of electricity to stage, and involves the energy expenditure of jetting stars around the world in the name of publicity, is lost on what is an imperative of contemporary Hollywood production. This example reveals irreconcilable contradictions behind environmentalist world production. Despite the disparate interests of the non-profit sector and the entertainment industry working in cohesion on a positive project that has the potential for social impact and environmental change, the relational ecologies behind the project are forgotten and a chasm of material collateral lies exposed underneath.

Figure 5. The spectacle before the lights go out for Earth Hour 2014 in Singapore.

Conclusion

The marketing slogan “use your power” is a strong reminder of the various forms of energy and fuel utilized throughout *Spider-Man 2*’s promotions. Most superficially, the concept of “power” works to resonate both with Spiderman’s mantra and Electro’s capability within the film’s narrative. Via a reference to responsibility, the slogan has also fuelled Sony’s commercial branding as an environmental operator, in addition to generating a sense of environmental awareness in the public, particularly via the Earth Hour campaign. Raw energy and materials also powered the physical infrastructure required to disseminate information and fuel the logistics of a worldwide publicity tour. Consciously drawing threads of power and electricity throughout the film and the campaign together, such as the image of the Manhattan skyline without power referenced in both the film text and in the Earth Hour promotion, the collective paratexts aspire to promote a resonance between the film and environmental advocacy. Yet considering these possibilities, ripe for imbrication into a coherent and thorough environmental initiative, the EcoSpidey campaign overall represents a series of missed opportunities and looms toward greenwashing.

This article has demonstrated how the film suffers a paradox between, to paraphrase Bozak’s *The Cinematic Footprint*, “using it’s social power” at the same time as “unplugging from the energy economy.” The first and second sections establish that the EcoSpidey campaign was a marginal strategy for *Spider-Man 2*’s plot and overall marketing. The peripheral nature of the campaign is exposed through contradictions that unfold throughout all stages of *Spider-Man 2*’s promotional discourse. Although the EMA Green Seal process has positive objectives, undertaking measures to minimize some of the resource-heavy production processes on set, many of the logical constituents of these practices, such as the consideration of the lifecycle impacts of the products, infrastructures, and events in the promotional campaign just external to the production itself, were not followed through. In addition, while genuine actors such as the Eco Manager on set demonstrate a practical commitment to environmental processes within the industry’s workforce, the variation of paratexts produced by the film overall and the lackluster detail in the marketing documents revealed by WikiLeaks indicate that there is a lack of acknowledgment and communication between various work groups within the studio and beyond. Despite the world-sharing of media properties between these departments and sectors, the shared context that would equalize goals between these groups seems to be unstable, resulting in a messy and incoherent paratextual narrative. Moreover, this malfunction results in a profoundly narrow conception of what is considered “environmental” within the industry’s ecological practice. Instead of contemplating the deep ecology and global impacts of every element of the complex network of resources, labor, social practice, and technologies within the production and post-production process, a closed sense of environmentalism is achieved.

However, despite these troubling background processes, EcoSpidey’s paratexts work to manufacture what may have been a peripheral environmental theme into a central one, utilizing this complex set of media industry collaborators in order to stage various environmentalist messages, products, and experiences that align energy reduction with the heroism of Spider-Man. Through overlapping the textual universe from *Spider-Man 2* with the philanthropic imagery of the WWF campaign, worlds are produced where various distinctive

fictional and non-fictional narratives can be understood together in a coherent manner.⁴⁹ In this sense, two worlds can be extracted from this case study. The first world, produced by the alternate utopian imagery of *Earth Hour*, represents a break from capital and suggests a possibility for the “power” of social movements and environmental communication in generating change. The second world, where the lived cultural labor of the studio and surrounding environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) occurred, and where the far-reaching material impacts of the publicity tour can be traced, is a continuation of the environmental exploitation standardized in the industry so far.

These disparate worlds reflect the impairment within the industry and pose the question as to whether the ecological model of filmmaking is insurmountable to the logic of profit-seeking and accumulation under capitalism, particularly when applying it to the excessively high budgets and resources oft-necessary in the contemporary Hollywood model. However, whether *EcoSpidey* is a purposeful grab to aim the marketing at a distinct environmentally interested public or build a narrative about Sony’s global environmental programs, the campaign offers an insightful window into the complexities of the sustainable production filmmaking model. Made evident by the genuine work on the level of set production, green production campaigns are not entirely a crude attempt to exploit environmental interest. Further research such as interviews and ethnographic investigation into the lived experience of these processes of environmental management and decision-making should be undertaken in order to locate more precisely where such mismanagement occurs. As catastrophic climate change looms closer to the lived reality of the American continent, “using the power” of public relations by understanding the relational and material vestiges of your filmmaking practice should not be taken lightly. Within this context, the Spider-Man axiom “with great power comes great responsibility” has never been more relevant.

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² While not actually quoted in Marc Webb’s iterations of the franchise (*Amazing Spider-Man* and *Amazing Spider-Man 2*), this popular quote first appeared in a *Spider-Man* comic in 1962, and has reappeared in various adaptations since.

³ As explored in detail in Ann Kaplan, *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

⁴ Alexa Girkout, “The Amazing Spider-Man 2’ Honored for Environmental Efforts,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 4, 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/amazing-spider-man-2-honored-692925>.

⁵ I define “greenwashing” as a form of disinformation that conveys an environmentally ethical and responsible public image.

⁶ For more information, see further historical accounts in Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, *Greening The Media* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72; Hunter Vaughan, “500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust: An Ecomaterialist Reframing of ‘Singin In The Rain,’” in *Sustainable Media*, ed. Nicole Starosielski and Janet Walker (NY: Routledge, 2016), 26–27.

- ⁷ Nadia Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 1.
- ⁸ Starosielski and Walker, *Sustainable Media*, 4.
- ⁹ Bryant Frazer, "10 Film Facts: The Amazing Spider-Man 2," *StudioDaily*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.studiodaily.com/2014/05/10-film-facts-the-amazing-spider-man-2/#kodak>.
- ¹⁰ Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint*, 3.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹² Derek Johnston, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (NY: New York University Press, 2013), 4.
- ¹³ "About Us," Environmental Media Association, <http://www.green4ema.org/about-us/> (accessed August 25, 2016).
- ¹⁴ "Environmental Media Association," *Green Seal*, <http://www.green4ema.org/GreenBusiness/EnvironmentalMedia.aspx> (accessed August 25, 2016).
- ¹⁵ Forms can be found at "EMA Green Seal," Environmental Media Association, <http://www.green4ema.org/ema-green-seal/> (accessed August 25, 2016).
- ¹⁶ "EcoSpidey and The Amazing Spider-Man 2," Sony Pictures, <http://www.sonymovies.com/green/act/green-film-making/ecospidey.php> (accessed July 18, 2016).
- ¹⁷ "The Amazing Spider-Man 2' Honored for Environmental Efforts."
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- ¹⁹ For discussion on other films that have promoted their production as environmental, see Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint*; 7–9, Maxwell and Miller, *Greening The Media*, 67–71; "Hulk' To Be First Movie with EMA Green Seal in Credits," *Ecorazzi.com*, June 13, 2008, <http://www.ecorazzi.com/2008/06/13/hulk-to-be-first-movie-with-ema-green-seal-in-credits/>.
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- ²² "EcoSpidey and The Amazing Spider-Man 2."
- ²³ Budget information is estimated and sourced from "The Amazing Spider-Man 2," IMBD, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1872181/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1 (accessed December 17, 2017).
- ²⁴ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts* (NY: New York University Press, 2010), 38.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ²⁶ EcoSpidey, Tweet, April 21, 2014, <https://twitter.com/ecospidey>.
- ²⁷ Data are correct as of December 2017.
- ²⁸ This includes Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* series (2002–2007), the two *Amazing Spider-Man* films of 2012 and 2014 (directed by Marc Webb), and *Spider-Man Homecoming* (2017, Jon Watts).
- ²⁹ Henry Jenkins, Joshua E. Greene, and Sam Ford, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (NY: New York University Press, 2013).

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- ³¹ Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 39.
- ³² John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.
- ³³ abcnnie, Tweet, April 24, 2014.
- ³⁴ HashtagTricia, Tweet, March 19, 2014.
- ³⁵ Emellie O’Brien, “Going Green and Saving Green: A Cost Benefit Analysis of Sustainable Filmmaking,” April 2014, http://www.greenproductionguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FINAL_PGA3142014.pdf.
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- ³⁷ “EcoSpidey and The Amazing Spider-Man 2.”
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- ³⁹ Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2013), 34.
- ⁴⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (NY: New York University Press, 2006).
- ⁴¹ Johnston, *Media Franchising*, 108–9.
- ⁴² Sony Pictures, “Sony Pictures Sustainability Global Internal Training,” n.d.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Sony Pictures, “The Amazing Spider Man 2—Earth Hour,” *Sony Pictures A Greener World*, <http://www.sonypicturesgreenerworld.com/articles/the-amazing-spider-man-2-earth-hour> (accessed August 7, 2016).
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- ⁴⁶ Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.
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- ⁴⁸ Maurizio Lazzarato, “From Capital–Labour to Capital–Life,” *Ephemera: Theory of the Multitude* 3 (4, 2004): 189.
- ⁴⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 294.

Filmography

Captain America: Civil War (2016, Joe Russo, Anthony Russo)

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (2016, Gareth Edwards)

The Amazing Spider-Man (2012, Marc Webb)

The Amazing Spider-Man 2 (2014, Marc Webb)

The Avengers (2012, Joss Whedon)

The Dark Knight (2008, Christopher Nolan)

Alien: Covenant (2017, Ridley Scott)

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