3 The interface of the brand

Complex objects, interactivity and partial solutions

> The mass production of standardized commodities in the Fordist era could count on an adequate demand and thus had little need to 'listen' to the market. A feedback circuit from consumption to production did allow changes in the market to spur changes in productive engineering, but this communication circuit was restricted (owing to the fixed and compartmentalized channels of planning and design structures) and slow (owing to the rigidity of the technologies and procedures of mass production).
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> Toyotism is based on an inversion of the Fordist structure of communication between production and consumption. Ideally, according to this model, production planning will communicate with markets constantly and immediately. Factories will maintain zero stock, and commodities will be produced just in time according to the present demand of the existing markets. This model thus involves not simply a more rapid feedback but an inversion of the relationship because, at least in theory, the production decision actually comes after and in reaction to the market decision. . . . In general, however, it would be more accurate to conceive the model as striving toward a continual interactivity or rapid communication between production and consumption.
>
> (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 290)

Introduction

This chapter will outline and develop the claim that the brand is a complex object. This will be done by focusing on the argument that what has come to define the brand in the contemporary era is the organisation and functioning of *a dynamic set of relations between products*. These relations will be understood as complex – that is, as *probabilistic*, *global* and *transductive* (these terms will be explained in what follows). It will be suggested that the complexity of these relations is a consequence of the functioning of the brand as an *interface* of communication between producers and consumer. In general terms, an interface is the organisation of data by one system for communication with another (Manovich, 2001). It is the activity or functioning of this interface which introduces qualitative possibility into the abstract thing that is the brand (Massumi, 2002). And it is the introduction of qualitative possibility that makes the emergence of the brand – a complex object – a significant development in the contemporary economy.

The interface of the brand

So far, it has been suggested that the brand is an image instrument, a medium of translation or a new media object. In this chapter, it will be suggested that the brand is an object of the artificial sciences, an artefact. This is a term taken from the economist Herbert Simon ([1969] 1981), who developed an approach to the study of economics that drew on information theory and non-linear concepts in order to address issues of power in the economy (see Hayles, 1999 for an illuminating account of information theory).[1] In his influential discussion of the economy as an artificial system,[2] Simon provides the following fourfold definition of artefacts:

> Artificial things are synthesized (though not always or usually with full forethought) by man [sic].
>
> Artificial things may imitate appearances in natural things while lacking, in one or many respects, the reality of the latter.
>
> Artificial things can be characterised in terms of functions, goals, adaptation.
>
> Artificial things are often discussed, particularly when they are being designed, in terms of imperatives as well as descriptives.
>
> ([1969] 1981: 8)

He argues that an artefact can be thought of as a meeting point – *an interface* – 'between an "inner" environment, the substance and organisation of the artefact itself, and an "outer" environment, the surroundings in which it operates.' (To continue with the example of the car introduced in Chapter 1, think of its interface in terms of, minimally, the windows, the steering wheel and the pedals.) 'If the inner environment is appropriate to the outer environment, or vice versa, the artifact will serve its intended purpose' ([1969] 1981: 9) (that is, the car will transport its driver safely from A to B). For Simon, design is understood as the organisation of an (artificial) entity in terms of an intended purpose – that is, it is the organisation of an interface or surface of communication between inner and outer environments. As he says, the 'description of an artifice in terms of its organisation and functioning – its interface between inner and outer environments – is a major objective of invention and design activity' (ibid.: 13).

The main claim to be advanced in this chapter is that the management of the brand may be understood in terms of such an object-ive.[3] In this way, the brand is located as an artefact, or an interior milieu, in an artificial system: the economy. The aim of designers, marketers and brand managers to describe the brand (an object of the artificial system of the economy) organises what Simon calls the inner environment of production, while consumption or everyday life is constituted in this process as the outer environment. The object-ive is the organisation of an artefact that functions as a medium of exchange between inner and outer environments, 'producers' and 'consumers'. In other words, Simon's notion of design activity (and the pursuit of this object-ive) is used here to describe not simply the organisation of the functioning of specific products (such as a car), but the organisation of the brand. The surface of the brand is described as a meeting point or interface for the communication of information between 'producers' and 'consumers'.

The chapter will focus on the particular properties of the brand as they are produced by the communication of the interface, but before moving on to this let me make a number of preliminary points about the notions of the interface and design activity used here. First, the interface is an example of a frame, a term given by Erving Goffman (1971) to a boundary within which interaction takes place more or less independently of its surrounding context. The frame is a communicative surface or boundary that both connects and separates disunified or disparate spaces (Rodowick, 1994). The interface of the brand is not, however, to be located in a single place, at a single time. Rather, like the interface of the Internet, it is distributed across a number of surfaces (of, for example, products and packaging), screens (television, computers, cinemas) or sites (retail outlets, advertising hoardings, and so on).

Second, the interface is a particular kind of frame. It connects the producer and consumer and removes or separates them from each other in particular ways. Thus, on the one hand, brands have been widely argued to contribute to processes of identity formation by consumers; on the other hand, 'The tendency to emphasise the relationship between identity and consumer behaviour eclipses another crucial relationship – with those employed to produce the goods we consume.' In short, the interface of the brand 'is revealing of some relationships, but it keeps others very well hidden' (Pavitt, 2000b: 175). The interface is the basis of two-way exchanges between producers and consumers, informing how consumers relate to producers and how producers relate to consumers, but these exchanges, though they are two-way and dynamic, are not direct, symmetrical or reversible. Rather, the interface is a

site – or diagram – of intense mediation or, more accurately, interactivity (a term to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

Third, the interface has its own (recursive) logic or 'artificial depth', through which is organised a two-way, dynamic and selective communication of information. As Ezio Manzini puts it,

> The idea of a mute and static border is . . . replaced by an idea of the surface as an interface between two ambients, with a role involving an exchange of energy and information between the substances put into contact. The surface as semiotic membrane capable of promoting or inhibiting such an exchange thus becomes a component of the object . . . capable of standing between the inside and outside of the object itself, or to provide a range of performances of its own.
>
> (1989: 183)

From this point of view, then, the interface of the brand may be seen as both promoting and inhibiting 'exchange' between producers and consumers, and informing this asymmetrical exchange through 'a range of performances of its own'. The focus in this chapter is on the performativity of the interface of the brand.

Fourth, while the claim that the brand is the outcome of design activity provides a way of acknowledging the purposive strategies of those involved in brand management, it relates that activity to the performativity of the brand. The argument here is that as the brand emerges as a set of relations between products, it begins to acquire a self-organising, recursive logic that cannot be reduced to the strategies of social actors. Or to put this another way, while there may be a struggle between social actors to impose specific goals, the functioning of an interface means that the properties of the brand cannot be reduced to the strategies of individual actors. In other words, the account of the activities of the marketers presented in Chapter 2 does not adequately describe the brand. Nor indeed would an account of the practices of designers (although it is undoubtedly relevant – see Julier, 2000), or a description of the activities of consumers. While all these accounts are a necessary part of describing the brand, they are not sufficient even when added together. They privilege purposive actions, and do not acknowledge the significance of the self-organising elements of the brand as a complex, indeterminate or open object.

A fifth point is that since design activity understood in this way is not defined in relation to a final goal, it inevitably leads to a continual reformulation of goals. This definition of design activity thus enables the emergence of the brand to be seen in relation to a production process that has no final goals, no natural target or final user, but rather continuously feeds on itself (Krippendorff, 1994). Another way of putting this is that through the activity of design the process of production provides information for itself about itself.[4] Simon writes:

> [O]ne goal of planning may be the design activity itself. The act of envisioning possibilities and elaborating them is itself a pleasurable and valuable experience. Just as realised plans may be a source of new experiences, so new prospects are opened up at each step in the process of design. Designing is a kind of mental window shopping. Purchases do not have to be made to get pleasure from it.
>
> ([1969] 1981: 188)

The significance of this point is that while brands may be set up in terms of some initial conditions, rules or procedures, the functioning of these procedures leads to the generation of new information, and this in turn contributes to the emergence of further behaviours. The correlate of this is that the organising logic described here may be understood in terms of a patterning of space and time, a logic of flows, and products and services themselves may be seen as (more or less frozen or fixed) manifestations of emergent patterns. The book seeks to explore the emergence and significance of some of these patterns in space and time – *the logic of flows* – that follows from describing brands as not simply objects but artefacts.

To some extent, a recognition of the importance of design activity as outlined here underpins a number of recent accounts of the contemporary economy in terms of flows (Lash and Urry, 1994; Castells, 1996; Appadurai, 1996; Lash, 2002; Callon *et al.*, 2002; Urry, 2003). As Callon *et al.*, put it, 'Design, as an activity that crosses through the entire organization [of production], is central' (2002: 212). What will be stressed here, though, is that it is helpful to see the brand as an increasingly powerful object-ive organisation of the logics of flow. This is largely because of the ways in which the organisation of the functioning of the set of relations that comprise the brand do not simply *mark*, but rather *make* time and space (Miller, 1987; Appadurai, 1996; Lury, 1999). Another way of putting this is to say that the brand has been a successful commercial strategy because it is produced interactively, because it is an artefact in which the dynamic qualities of relationality are managed in a process of design intensivity.

The interface as the organisation of asymmetrical communication

In what follows, the performativity of the brand will be described by focusing on the distinguishing characteristics or 'advantages' that Simon identifies in the organisation of all artificial systems. In the terms of the argument being developed here, these characteristics derive from the particular ways in which the brand divides and connects the inner environment of the process of production from the outer environment of consumption and everyday life. While Simon describes these characteristics as 'advantages', they are not necessarily advantageous (in the sense of beneficial) for everyone or indeed anyone involved. The paradoxical nature of the exchanges between producers and consumers that characterise the interface of the brand – of asymmetry, of partial separation and connection, of dynamism – is what makes it distinctive and commercially successful. But it does not mean that such exchanges are beneficial for those participating (actively or passively) in the economy or for society as a whole. Nevertheless, these characteristics usefully identify some of the distinctive properties or capacities of the performativity of the brand; they identify the key dynamics of its organisation of communication.

They are identified most clearly if they are explored first from the perspective of *outside in* (see the first of the following subsections), and then, second, from the perspective of *inside out* (see the second subsection). Both these views – from *outside in* and *inside out* – are analytical perspectives of 'the sciences of the artificial' (Simon, [1969] 1981); they are not to be equated with those of real consumers and real producers. Rather, they have as their concern the description of the interface of the brand as artefact. They have analytical purchase precisely because they recognise the significance of the asymmetrical communication of information that an interface affords an artificial system such as the economy, and provide a way of understanding the principles of this asymmetry.

Outside in

One consequence of dividing outer from inner environment in an artificial system is that behaviour can be predicted from knowledge of the system's goals and its outer environment, *with only minimal assumptions about the inner environment*. Two advantages follow from this for Simon. The first of these is that it is possible for those involved in design activity to identify and exploit quite different inner environments accomplishing identical or similar goals in relation to identical or similar outer environments. But in what sense can brands be understood in terms of this advantage or characteristic, and what is its commercial value? Consider the interfaces of the brands Swatch and Nike in this regard.

First, Swatch. A key component of the logo of the brand Swatch from 'outside in' is a consistent self-identification in relation to Switzerland. Swatch watches display not only the name Swatch (itself a contraction of 'Swiss' and 'watch') and the Swiss flag, but also the description 'Swiss' on their faces. In addition, much of the promotional literature accompanying products makes reference to the Swissness of the Swatch ethos. Such references are widely held to have the effect of strengthening consumer perceptions of trust in the quality of Swatch products in what is perceived to be a risky global commercial environment. Thus, Nicolas Hayek, one-time Swatch CEO, has gone so far as to claim that the buyers of Swatch are 'sympathetic' to the Swiss: 'We're nice people from a small country. We have nice mountains and clear water.' Indeed, he attributes the company's success to the fact that

> We are not just offering people a style. We are offering them a message. . . . Emotional products are about message – a strong, exciting, distinct, authentic message that tells people who you are and why you do what you do. There are many elements that make up the Swatch message. High quality. Low cost. Provocative. Joy of life. But the most important element of the Swatch message is the hardest for others to copy. Ultimately, we are not just offering watches. We are offering our personal culture.
>
> (Quoted in Taylor, 1993)

Here Hayek describes the way in which a place of origin may be deliberately designed into the interface of a brand. This design activity enables Swatch products to sell by securing the trust of (certain) consumers, providing a guarantee of quality, by tying the brand to an origin (a 'personal culture'). This guarantee requires – or at least implies – the use of Swiss labour in the manufacture of Swatch products. It thus limits the extent to which the Swatch company is able to move production of Swatch-branded products to take advantage of lower labour costs outside Swiss national territory. What is at issue is a limit (both enabling and restrictive) to do with the internal environment of the interface.[5] The location of the majority of the required labour force in a single country, Switzerland, is thus one aspect of the inner environment that functions 'as a necessity' (in Simon's phrase) in relation to the Swatch interface. It suggests that Swatch is best seen as a national, territorial brand.

In contrast, the origin-ality of the Nike interface is less clearly tied to a single national place of origin, or indeed to an origin at all. To some extent,

the physical location of the company itself, dedicated retail outlets such as Niketowns and sports events sponsored by the company may serve as such an origin. Certainly this perception of the flagship retail outlets, Niketowns, as origins is encouraged not only by the highly charged design of the stores, but also by the greater range of stock available, typically including all the most recent models of shoes, clothes and accessories. Alongside such intense and exclusive sites, however, Nike presents itself as original in relation to the almost endless multiplicity of the sites of its products' uses through the brand's elevation (and ownership) of an ethos of competition, determination and individuality. 'Just do it' is the brand injunction, and in this 'doing', multiple origins for the brand are brought into being. Of course, it is possible to argue that a culture of competition, determination and individuality is the national culture of the United States, and in this sense there is a parallel between the interfaces of the Nike and Swatch brands. But what makes the interface of the Nike brand so distinctive is that it appears as if there is no need to locate this ethos within territorial boundaries in order to secure its ownership or claim its effects. The interface is not tied to any specific inner environment in this regard; it is deterritorialising.

Nike: not territorial

Another way of putting this is to say that the relations between different stages of the processes of distributed production as presented at the Nike interface are *global*. That is, *the relations between stages of production are not presented at the interface as occurring in a discrete, sequential or step-by-step fashion* (resulting in a finished product with a fixed origin in a specific territory), but are intended to have their effect all at once, *in each and every presentation or use of the brand*. The commercial advantage to be derived from this is that since the brand's origins are not visibly tied to specific places of production, the Nike company is able to exercise enormous spatial flexibility in relation to the place of manufacturing of its products. This in turn is linked to the use of information and communication technologies, without which the precise control required to co-ordinate very complicated processes of production and distribution could not be exercised at a distance. Famously, or rather infamously, the Nike company has in fact continually shifted the sites of production from country to country within East Asia in such a way as to be able to take advantage of the low-cost and poorly protected workforces in these countries. However, while this account may support the view that Nike is a global rather than a national, territorial brand, it is not meant to suggest that the consequences of this spatial flexibility have been entirely beneficial for the company. The point of this comparison is not that the Nike brand functions without limits (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of the notion of limits). Rather, the aim has been to show that the performativity of the interface is such that the relation of a brand to an origin may be organised in many different ways.

A second advantage of the organisation of the surface of communication of the brand as an interface is that the face of an artefact may connote 'perceptual similarity but essential difference, resemblances from without rather than within' (Simon, [1969] 1981: 17). This, like the first advantage described above, follows from the fact that it is possible for those involved in design activity to identify different inner environments accomplishing similar goals in relation to similar outer environments. This second advantage enables the brand to function as *a mechanism of modelling, imitation or simulation*. Thus, Simon argues that

> the artificial object imitates the real by turning *the same face* to the outer system, by adapting, relative to the same goals, to comparable ranges of external tasks. Imitation is possible because distinct physical systems can be organized to exhibit nearly identical behaviour.
>
> (ibid.: 17; emphasis added)

Simon recognises that the artificial characteristic of simulation is viewed ambivalently in many quarters (see Baudrillard, 1994). He notes that the synonyms of artificial in the dictionary – affected, factitious, manufactured, pretended, sham, simulated, spurious, trumped up, unnatural – reflect 'man's [*sic*] deep distrust of his own products' (Simon, [1969] 1981: 6). But he is determined to use artificial in 'as neutral a sense as possible, as meaning man-made [*sic*] as opposed to natural' (ibid.: 6). He further notes that because of its abstract character and its 'symbol manipulating generality', the computer has greatly extended the range of systems whose behaviour can be simulated. And rather than seeing simulation in terms of representational models alone, he argues that phenomena such as the computer (and by implication the brand) are no less real for being abstract symbol-manipulating machines for generating simulations. As he says, 'Computers have transported symbol systems from the platonic heaven of ideas to the empirical world of actual processes carried out by machine or brains, or by the two of them working together' (ibid.: 28).

brand as capacity to simulate *

In the case of the brand, the face (see Chapter 4) presented to the outer environment is typically a logo or logos – the Swatch name, the Nike Swoosh. And in many cases the abstraction and generality of this face means that the brand is able to function as a machine for the simulation of product innovation. In other words, brand innovation need not derive or emerge from innovation in the organisation of the production process. Instead, it may be produced in the practices of simulation or behaviour modelling – that is, through qualification trials in which products are experimentally tested in relation to the goal or aim of reaching a target market.[6] (These processes will be described in more detail in Chapter 4 in terms of brand positioning.) What is

being suggested here is that innovation is no longer as tied to the production process, or indeed to the making better of specific products, but rather is understood in relation to meeting the needs of the market, understood in terms of information about the consumer.

A number of developments in the processes of production have made this mode of innovating more possible, including transformations in 'the material of invention'. In a book of this title, Manzini (1989) examines the changing way in which matter becomes material – that is, he looks at how matter becomes capable of being integrated into design activity, and in the end becomes products. He describes a move from a period in which technological knowledge was such that there was an 'enforced' complexity (in which the heterogeneity of materials such as wood and stone limited the possibilities of craft skills, enforcing certain kinds of uses of materials) to one in which complexity is first 'controlled' and now is 'managed'. Manzini describes this shift in modes of complexity as an historical increase in 'the depth of the artificial'. Formal properties such as flexibility, heaviness and heat- and stress resistance are, he says, no longer determining. Instead, materials are available that can relatively easily be adapted to the problems of design activity as described by Simon. In this process, the identity of products becomes a matter of (surface) communication. This is as a consequence of 'the increase in intensity of the information contained in matter' (Manzini, 1989: 45):

> Matter is no longer a system of classification of given and well-defined materials, but a continuum of possibilities – based upon which it is possible to design new materials as they are needed, with desired properties.
>
> This structure gives rise to materials 'made to order', with properties that are determined by altering their microstructures . . . the material does not exist prior to the object in which it is to be integrated. The material exists only after the manufacturing process, as a component of the finished product.
>
> (ibid.: 38)

Manzini points out that some materials – such as many composites – do not exist independently of either the object or the manufacturing process for which they were developed, and for this reason he suggests that design should be considered as a 'material–process system' (ibid.: 41). An exemplary case here is engineering plastics and super polymers, terms referring to a wide range of materials that have not only 'plastic' but also mechanical, thermal and even electrical properties. Discussing such examples, he concludes, 'In this context, a characteristic of invention and innovation is the profound integration between materials and processes' (ibid.: 70). In summarising the implications of these developments, Manzini, like Simon, argues for the centrality of the artificial to design:

> A new form of knowledge of the real is developing, whose code of reference is no longer that of the classification of materials according to their properties and intrinsic cultural meanings. Instead, the reference has become a recognition of the level of performances and of the evocative images generated as integrating parts of a manufactured product.
>
> (ibid.: 31)

(Nike history)

Let me illustrate the possibilities of the simulation or modelling of innovation with the example of Nike. The origins of Nike are in a company called Blue Ribbon Sports, which Phil Knight, a former runner at the University of Oregon and now Nike CEO, and Bill Bowerman, Knight's former track coach, created in 1962. The company initially did no more than distribute running shoes in the United States for a Japanese company (Onitsuka Tiger track shoes[7]). However, it soon shifted to designing its own shoes and outsourcing their production to East Asia (although the company did have factories in Exeter, New Hampshire, and Saco, Maine, until the early 1980s). At this stage in its history, the company's market competitiveness was characterised by a series of functional product innovations linked to developments in the production process – most famously the 'waffle' method of aerating the rubber sole of shoes – and an early mastery of the spatial dynamics of out-sourcing.[8] But in the mid-1980s, there was a turning point in the company's fortunes. Nike's growth during this period was fuelled by the expansion of its market brought about by the rise of jogging as a national pastime in the United States, but in the mid-1980s the company suddenly lost its footing. It was overtaken in market share by Reebok, which had tapped into the growing (female) aerobics market, deploying a new understanding of the trainer as accessory or fashion good. As Knight comments,

> We made an aerobics shoe that was functionally superior to Reebok's, but we missed the styling. Reebok's shoe was sleek and attractive, while ours was sturdy and chunky. We also decided against using garment leather, as Reebok had done, because it wasn't durable. By the time we developed a leather that was both strong and soft, Reebok had established a brand, won a huge chunk of sales, and gained the momentum to go right by us.
>
> (Quoted in Willigan, 1992: 92)

Nike was forced to accept a reframing of the market, in which the organising principles of product qualification were to do not with function, but with identity and communication with specific target groups of consumers. The setback

was a defining moment in company history, as Knight outlines in his description of the ensuing transformation in the company's understanding of itself:

> For years, we thought of ourselves as a production-oriented company, meaning we put all our emphasis on designing and manufacturing the product. But now we understand that the most important thing we do is market the product. We've come around to saying that Nike is a marketing company, and the product is our most important marketing tool. What I mean is that marketing knits the whole organization together. The design elements and functional characteristics of the product itself are just part of the overall marketing process.
>
> We used to think that everything started in the lab. Now we realize that everything spins off the consumer. And while technology is still important, the consumer has to lead innovation. We have to innovate for a specific reason, and that reason comes from the market. Otherwise we'll end up making museum pieces.
>
> (Quoted in Willigan, 1992: 92)

However, the consumer may be represented in more than one way. Rather than accept the organisation of the market in terms of the dynamic but arbitrary system of fashion, Nike adopted a strategy in which it sought to frame the market in terms of a little-developed (at the time) consumer category, the (sports) fan or enthusiast. This category was itself a largely media-based understanding of the consumer (see Chapter 2), and was linked to the growing importance of sport in television and other media schedules.

At one level, the self-transformation of Nike simply involved more promotion and more advertising (already in 1980, Nike had started what was to be a long-standing – and unusually close – relationship with advertising agency Wieden and Kennedy, also based in Portland, Oregon). Nike spent $5 million between 1984 and 1986 advertising a coloured leather shoe, the Air Jordan. In 1987, it launched a 10-model 'Air' line. The overarching aim of this advertising was to build an 'emotional tie' with the fan that would provide the basis for repeated purchase. But the increase in advertising was tied to a number of other transformations in the processes of product differentiation, led by innovations in design linked to a growing role for marketers within the company structure. In the years 1985–1988, Nike doubled its design staff and tripled its research and development budget, and its three hundred designers sustained a relentless flow of new product technologies and designs. As Knight puts it,

> Even though 60% of our product is bought by people who don't use it for the actual sport, everything we did was aimed at the top. We said, if we

get the people at the top, we'll get the others because they'll know the shoe can perform.

But that was an oversimplification.

. . . we do a lot of work at grass-roots level. We go to amateur sports events and spend time at gyms and tennis courts talking to people.

Beyond that, we do some fairly typical kinds of market research, but lots of it – spending time in stores and watching what happens across the counter, getting reports from dealers, doing focus groups, tracking responses to our ads. We just sort of factor all that information into the computer between the ears and come up with conclusions.

(Quoted in Willigan, 1992: 94)

The redefinition of the company as a marketing company was successful: in 1991, Nike – a real, abstract, symbol-manipulating machine for generating simulations – held 29 per cent of the global market for trainers, and sales topped $3 billion.

The commercial value of innovation by simulation more generally is that it provides a focus for the organisation of production for 'increasing returns' (Waldrop, 1994; Urry, 2003). At the most basic level, relatively small differences in brand preference – if shared widely among a significant group of consumers – can lead to large differences in product choice and therefore in the value of a brand to a firm. In other words, 'a brand need not be "powerful" (in the sense that consumers believe it dramatically superior and refuse all substitutes) to be extremely valuable to the business' (Barwise *et al.*, 2000: 89). There is no necessary proportionality between causes and effects here; instead, an economic calculus (or rationality) of statistical *probability* is at work. The potential for (disproportionately) capitalising on differences in preference is multiplied in the case of the brand in so far as it provides a mechanism for the exploitation of differentiation across product lines. This is one characteristic of the complexity of the brand noted above: the *probabilistic* effects of innovation as it is amplified in the relations between products (where probabilistic refers to statistical correlations between elements of a population). The amplification of slight transformations in the design, styling, promotion and delivery of a particular product (or service) has the potential consequence of non-linear increases in returns as it is exploited in the multiple relations between products that comprise the brand. 'The key here is that wealth comes not from scarcity, as in conventional economics, but from abundance' (Urry, 2003: 53).

The probabilities of benefiting from increasing returns are further increased by the exploitation of a number of linked brands by a firm, although such exploitation is typically organised in different ways in different industries.

Many industries (industrial products, industrial services, consumer services, frequently bought consumer products) market largely under a single corporate or umbrella brand, often with sub-brands or other detailed product descriptions. But more expensive, infrequently bought consumer goods are more often marketed by a company as two or more product lines at very different price ranges. These are often separately branded. Examples here include the car companies Toyota, Nissan and Honda, which have all launched luxury car ranges under separate brand names to their volume car ranges. Another current example of this kind of car-brand portfolio is VW's four-brand strategy (Audi, VW, Seat, Skoda) using a limited number of manufacturing platforms shared across the brands (Barwise *et al.*, 2000: 91–92). So-called diffusion fashion brands provide another example. As described by Smith (1997) and Moore (2000), successful American designers such as Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein have been adept in the development of a portfolio of brands, each of which is promoted using a distinct brand name, while still retaining some connection with the designer's name.[9] Each of the brands has a distinct visual identity and is manufactured, managed and distributed using quite separate channels to distinct customer groups. Moore emphasises the exploitation of a set of related distribution techniques to reach the middle retail market:

virtual brands?

> Where previously a fashion designer's store typically offered between two and three hundred product lines a season, the introduction of a diffusion brand at Ralph Lauren has swelled that company's product range to more than 6,000 lines per season. And where previously the fashion designer's ranges were distributed through a small number of company-owned stores in the fashion capitals of Paris, London, Milan and New York, as well as select department stores world-wide, the desire to attract the middle retail market has required that they adopt less narrow distribution methods. A more extensive market coverage has been achieved largely through the development of wholesale distribution to third party stockists. Through the extensive use of wholesaling, the Polo Ralph Lauren brand is now sold in over 1,600 department and speciality stores, as well as through 200 Polo Ralph Lauren shops and outlet stores world-wide, the majority of which are operated under franchise arrangements with local partners in over twenty countries.
>
> (2000: 267)

He further notes that many diffusion brands have become lifestyle brands, and some diffusion stores carry ranges that extend beyond clothing and include jewellery, perfume, eyewear (spectacles), luggage, furniture, paint, fabrics, sheets, towels and bedding. He writes, 'The primary aim of this product line extension is to allow a greater number of customers access to the brand, be it through a $5 candle, a $3 bottle of (branded) mineral water, or a $500 suit' (ibid.: 269). Similarly, the analysis presented here would suggest that what is important in a production process such as this is the management of relations between products rather than the products themselves. What emerges from the exploitation of such relations in the case of diffusion or lifestyle brands cannot simply be equated with the sum of the exchange of individual products, but is a consequence of specific system effects when one or more of the products becomes successful. Such effects do not stand in direct or proportional relation to specific causes. Thus, while diffusion ranges account for between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of companies' sales turnover, their contribution to gross profit may be as high as 90 per cent (ibid.: 267).

In all these cases, what is at issue is a particular mode of innovating (the simulation of innovation), linked to constructions of the market framed by information about the consumer. As was noted in Chapter 2, the effects of the brand are commonly attributed in the business community to creativity. Or rather, designers, producers and marketers claim that their contribution to the management of the brand or their design activity is the source of innovation (Nixon, 2003). But it may be helpful here to distinguish, as Andrew Barry (2001) does, between *innovation* and *invention*. He argues (following the social theory of Gabriel Tarde) that invention may be defined not as technical change but as a particular form of change that opens up new possibilities for action. It is possible to argue that the simulation of innovation, seen in these terms, *may have anti-inventive as well as inventive implications*. In any case, this mode of innovating cannot be exclusively linked to the purposive action of any particular individual or individuals at any particular moment or particular site, such as new product development or the marketing department. Rather, it is a consequence both of the organisation of the brand as an interface and of contestation within the production process. For example, the framing of the market as fast-moving is both an innovation itself and the basis of further innovation. As was described in Chapter 2, it was at the heart of many of the strategies during the 1980s and 1990s in which marketing experts systematically and repeatedly recategorised and fragmented target markets, combining, cross-tabulating and elaborating previously standard demographic variables to create multiple new permutations, market niches or lifestyles. In the terms adopted here, the activities of targeting provided a constantly changing set of goals or tasks, intensifying the pace of design activity and multiplying the possibilities for innovation. But the privileging of the simulation of innovation is a specific consequence of the performativity of the interface and the opportunities (or lack of them) this affords.

creativity →
myth ?

Inside out

Simon goes on to identify a further characteristic of the division of a system into goals, inner environment and outer environment, this time from the standpoint of the inner environment. He points out that in very many cases, whether a particular system will achieve a particular goal or adaptation *depends on only a few characteristics of the outer environment and not at all on the detail of that environment*. As a consequence, it is possible that the inner system – the production process in this case – may be insulated from the environment, so that an invariant relation may be maintained between inner system and goal, independent of a wide range of parameters that characterise the outer environment. Various forms of passive insulation maintain such quasi-independence from the outer environment, including reactive negative feedback, predictive adaptation (or feed-forward), or various combinations of these. As Simon points out, biologists are familiar with this property of adaptive systems under the label of homeostasis, but economists also recognise the price mechanism as another instance of an adaptive artifice. The suggestion here is that the brand is another.

Let me try to elaborate this claim by developing the comparison with price. In discussing the importance of the limits to market processes posed by the human capacity for information processing, Simon quotes from the Austrian neo-classical economist Friedrich von Hayek:[10]

> We must look at the price system as such a mechanism for communicating information if we want to understand its real function. . . . The most significant fact about this system is the economy of knowledge with which it operates, or how little the individual participants need to know in order to be able to take the right action. In abbreviated form, by a kind of symbol, only the most essential information is passed on, and passed on only to those concerned. It is more than a metaphor to describe the price system as a kind of machinery for registering change.
>
> (1945, quoted in Simon, [1969] 1981: 42)

From Simon's point of view, what is most striking about Hayek's formulation is that the price system is presented as a distributed cognitive device; it reduces and localises informational and computational requirements. Within this model, 'markets may be seen as rich information networks – even as a kind of "conversation" between buyers and sellers' (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 53). The brand, it is suggested here, is also a framing of this conversation, but in a number of very particular ways. It provides 'a communicative middle term – a meta-stability – affording exchanges and transmitting tension across many and varied systems of influence' (Kwinter, 2001: 47). As a consequence, the conversation between buyers and sellers may be seen as *interactive*, as noisy rather than mute.[11]

As is well known, Hayek was an exponent of the view that economics should concern itself not with stationary models, but with '"an explanation of the economic process as it proceeds through time"' (quoted in Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 52). And what might also be noted is Hayek's formulation of price as not simply a mechanism for communicating information, but also 'a kind of machinery for registering change'. If we adapt these terms, the interface of the brand may be seen as a mechanism for communicating information in a market that is (performed or brought into being as) *dynamic and noisy*. What is fundamental here, as Manovich (2001) notes in his discussion of the new media object, is the use of looping techniques. The developments in the brand described in earlier chapters in relation to marketing – the application of the marketing mix, the use of information about the consumer in the qualitative differentiation of products, and the use of the product as a marketing tool – are absolutely fundamental in this regard. In these developments, the brand emerges from attempts to address and manage precisely those aspects of relations between buyers and sellers that are not governed by price through the use of information about the consumer in product qualification trials. It is in this sense that the brand may be understood in terms of *transductive* relations, where transduction is 'a process whereby a disparity or difference is topologically and temporally restructured across some interface' (Simondon, quoted in Mackenzie, 2002: 25).

Let me elaborate what is involved here in more detail, once more by way of comparison of Swatch and Nike. In an early formulation underpinning its development, what was to become the brand Swatch was described as an '"economical" watch that was also desirable': a cheap watch that everyone would want to own. The production of such a watch was not itself antithetical to the Swiss watch-making industry, as the historical example of the 'Proletariat' suggests. This was a watch designed by a famous Swiss watchmaker, Abraham Louis Breuget, in the late nineteenth century, manufactured to give the working class an individual means of access to clock time.[12] Crucially, however, the economical watch of the end of the twentieth century was intended not so much as an affordable time-telling device for the thrifty worker as an expendable accessory for the fashion-conscious consumer. Indeed, it is this temporal framing of the market that defines the many characteristics of the interface of Swatch:

> It was a decision from the start to promote the Swatch as an accessory, following a study made in 1980 by one of the big marketing consultants which had confirmed the up-and-coming popularity of the fashion accessory. To make the product so that it would fulfil this requirement was an important point; it was something to be worn, to match clothing, mood, occupation, and easily changeable, like a scarf or a tie. Needless to say all of these ideas had been discussed, written down and drummed into everyone working on the 'non-watch' project, long before they had started to design anything concrete.
>
> (Carrera, 1991: 55)

What was innovative about Swatch then was that its reframing of the market for the Swiss watch-making industry concerned its temporal (and spatial) ordering.

The desire for production of a variety of models was integral to the design of Swatch from the very beginning. Franz Sprecher, a marketing expert brought in from outside the watch-making industry, prescribed a principle of unity-in-variation for the organisation of the qualification trials of Swatch products: 'they should be restrained but at the same time have an attractive appearance, with sufficient variety to please all tastes. Transforming the "crazy" idea into a mass-produced item' (quoted in Carrera, 1991). But while the introduction of the principle of fashion was systematic right from the start – the selection of colours adopted for the first range of Swatch was made after visiting the Paris ready-to-wear clothing fair – it has been hugely intensified over the course of the past twenty or so years. So, for example, Swatch, like the fashion industry, now typically organises the introduction of new models via 'seasons'. Each season's offerings are illustrated in brochures which are then differentiated by theme (for example, 'Irony') and then distinguished still further by type ('Big', 'Medium', 'Scuba', 'Chrono' and 'Ladylady'). Additionally, some new models are launched independently of these long-standing types; for example, some ranges are differentiated by the attribution of their design to named artists; others still are made available in special packaging. The annually renewable membership of the Swatch Club includes ownership of a limited-edition Swatch, a newsletter and opportunities to participate in 'a world of Swatch collecting'. In short, a distinctive feature of the Swatch is its reconstruction of the temporality of the market; indeed, it provided Swatch with not only the basis for a distinctive ongoing relationship with consumers, but also a distinct competitive advantage *vis-à-vis* competitors. This reconstruction is made visible in the attempt by Swatch to introduce its own time – the Swatch Beat – fixed in relation to its place of origin.

Swatch has invented a new universal concept of time that eliminates time zones and geographical differences: the Swatch Internet Time. Swatch divides the 24 hours of the day into 1,000 units. A unit is called a Beat.

Each day has 000 to 999 Beats. Each Beat lasts 1 minute 26.4 seconds. Internet time is displayed by @ and three digits and starts at midnight (wintertime) in Biel, the home of Swatch, with @000.

Everybody all over the world then talks about time in Beats, no matter what actual time it may be in their time zone.

(Publicity leaflet)

As an accessory – and not a time-telling mechanism – the brand Swatch has a very different biography or life cycle from that of the watch as it had been traditionally understood, and consequently it tells a different time. It is a contraction of tradition and innovation, an intervention in the (spatio-) temporality of the production of making, buying and owning watches. Swatch does not simply mark the stages of life – coming of age, birthdays, marriage, retirement; it is not only an index of such rituals. Instead, the Swatch name is also the mark – or symbol – of the ways in which the brand's organisation of relations between products *makes* time, notably the temporalities of fashion, collection and the ordered regimentation of the Beat.

In contrast to the relatively ordered world produced by Swatch in this way, the temporal restructuring of the market that characterises Nike as a brand has emerged in stages, many of which overlap, but others of which diverge, producing multiple markets or syncopated external environments, presenting both problems and opportunities. Fashion is one of the ways in which the dynamism of the market is imagined for Nike as well as for Swatch. So, Knight (the CEO) notes, 'We have people who tell us what colors are going to be in for 1993, for instance, and we incorporate them'. But what really distinguishes Nike as a brand is that it has simultaneously sought to escape the remorseless competitiveness of the fashion market. It does not simply attempt to anticipate the future through the realisation of the possible; instead, it seeks to approach the virtual, the limit of objectivity, the staging of time as event. In this regard, the decision to rename the company as Nike, the Greek goddess of victory,[13] was especially apposite. As described by Marina Warner,

The figure of Nike, flying in to land on the victor's ship or hovering overhead with the garland of victory, cancels time's inauspicious vigil on her subjects' lives; she materializes as form in art at the point at which the destiny of a single person converges auspiciously with time. Like time she is travelling at speed, but unlike time, she is not moving regardless of us. She has become conscious of our passage into the future. The arrest of Nike in mid-flight, her halt over the head of the victor folds together the moment of unutterable good fortune when we come to the attention of destiny instead of hurtling on willy-nilly while undifferentiated time streams by. When she comes to a standstill in mid-flight over us she tells us that time now augurs well. And for a moment time's dread fades.

(1987: 134–135)

Let me give two examples of how Nike does not attempt to come first in a race of product fashions but, rather, is organised so as to displace the temporality of fashion altogether: the artificial limitation of the availability of Nike products and the use of event marketing.[14]

First, consider the unpredictable and discontinuous availability of Nike products and those of some other brands. Alongside the compulsive innovation of a yearly cycle in which there may be as many as four seasons, Adidas recently reissued a 1984 shoe in very limited numbers (600 pairs in the United Kingdom). In 1996, Reebok trickled out 5,000 pairs of 'The Question', a hundred-dollar name shoe, before releasing an initial shipment of 250,000. Later that year, Converse distributed limited numbers of a shoe: 'The brand needs life injected into it. . . . We want edge and image. Market share will come with that' (Solomon, quoted in Vanderbilt, 1998: 73). For a long time, the company Nike routinely allocated limited numbers of Air Jordans to keep customers wanting. Additionally, Nike is said (but refuses to acknowledge the fact officially) to 'probe' the market, by letting it be known, by word of mouth, that a very small number of a certain kind of shoe (perhaps no more than three or four pairs) will be available at a certain retail outlet. In early 2001, Nike sought to tantalise its most avid consumers: it was promising, but not yet delivering, a shoe designed in collaboration with Junya Watanbe of Comme des Garçons. It had only been sighted 'in Japan and on the web' (Hill, 2000: 9). Putting all this together it becomes clear that as a brand Nike is available as both a matter of course and a matter of chance.

Production has always involved a temporal framing of the market, but what is involved here is not the artificial limitation of the products in relation to artistic notions of uniqueness, authenticity or specialness, as in the case of Swatch. Rather, it is the multiplication of points of access to a complex object organised as a set of relations structured in terms of pattern and randomness, rather than presence and absence (Hayles, 1999). While the occurrence of randomness might be thought to undermine object-ivity, it is clear that brands such as Nike rely – to some extent at least – upon unpredictability as they monitor, respond to and sometimes appropriate the unintended effects of their products in use.

Second, consider the case of the use of event marketing by Nike (see Moor, 2003 for an interesting discussion of event marketing by Guinness). This includes both the sponsoring of already existing events, and the organisation of events by Nike itself. In both practices, Nike frames the market through the co-ordination of a series of occasions in which it seeks to ensure that time is on its side. In describing the Goddess Nike, Warner writes:

> Nike belongs to the salubrious, sunlit, upper air, and her wings mark her out as otherworldly, at one with the sky above and a spirit of concord and harmony. . . . But, most importantly, she represents a power for whom speed is of the essence, yet who hallows and glorifies the spot of her temporary halt. This makes Nike resemble an aspect of time itself, or more precisely a way we see her relation to time. She represents the propitious event that interrupts the ordinary flow and singles out the lucky winner.
>
> (1987: 133)

The attempt by Nike to resemble an aspect of time itself – to interrupt the ordinary flow – involves what might be called (un)control (Massumi, 2002). The 1998 World Cup saw ten national squads bearing the Nike insignia: the Netherlands, Italy, South Korea, the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, the United States, Portugal, Nigeria and Brazil. The last of these were the championship favourites. However, when the Brazilian national team returned home, after losing the final (to France), they were met at the airport by disappointed fans holding the national flag modified so that in place of the slogan 'Order and Progress' was the word 'Nike'. In January 2001, the Brazilian footballer Ronaldo was questioned by parliamentary investigators on the role that Nike had played in the performance of the national team. He was asked by congressmen why Brazil lost the 1998 World Cup final 3-0 to France. 'We lost,' he said, 'because we didn't win.' Questions focused on whether Ronaldo (who had a personal sponsorship deal with Nike), who had a convulsion (and had taken a tranquilliser) before the final, had been forced to play by Nike against medical advice. It was also suggested that without pressure from Nike, the player would not have had a convulsion at all. The commission called 125 witnesses, including other players, the team doctors and former FIFA president João Havelange. But the testimonies did not incriminate Nike; as Ronaldo put it,

> 'There is no clause [in the contract with Nike] saying what I had to do during the World Cup. My relationship with Nike is very good. They never demanded me to do anything. The only thing they wanted was for me to score some goals wearing their boots.'
>
> (Quoted in Bellos, 2001b)

Instead, criticism was ultimately directed towards the Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (CBF). The final report presented evidence to prosecute 33 people for corruption including CBF president Ricardo Teixeira (the former son-in-law of João Havelange) on 13 counts of fraud. The communist congressman Aldo Rebelo, who had called for the commission, commented, 'Disney didn't sell Mickey Mouse, but the CBF sold the national team to Nike. It should have sold the spectacle, not the product' (quoted in Bellos, 2001c). But the organisation of the Nike brand as an event is such that the spectacle is not of a different order to, or detachable from the product.

What is suggested by way of this last comparison of Nike and Swatch is that marketing is neither an image stuck on top of a product or something added on to production, in a linear fashion; rather, it may lead to a reconfiguring of its temporality. In comparison with price, the brand is a mechanism not simply for registering change and thus enabling reactive feedback, but also for anticipating, indeed producing, change and thus enabling predictive adaptation or feed-forward. In other words, the interface of the brand integrates, organises and co-ordinates the phenomenon of production through its qualitative possibilities – as transitions of phase or state, as the organisation of effects, not as price or quantities (Kwinter, 2001: 42). From this point of view – the inside out – the brand is thus a means of performing production not as a homogenising but as a (more or less) heterogenising process; not as a linear, but as a (more or less) non-linear process.

Complex objects and partial solutions

As a consequence of its ability to function as an interface in the market, the brand is both dynamic and indeterminate. It emerges as a real, abstract symbol-manipulating machine for the simulation of product innovation; it is an artefact that adapts through continuous feedback and feed-forward. As such, it is a complex object – or, more precisely, an artefact of managed complexity (Manzini, 1989). Simon suggests that in 'the best of all possible worlds', it might be possible to combine the two sets of advantages described above – that is, those deriving from the viewpoint of the outer environment, and that deriving from the viewpoint of the inner environment. He says:

> We might hope to be able to characterise the main properties of the system and its behaviour without elaborating the detail of either the outer or inner environments. We might look toward a science of the artificial that would depend on the relative simplicity of the interface as its primary source of abstraction and generality.
>
> ([1969] 1981: 12)

This is one way of describing the aims of the artificial science(s) of brand management. It holds up the possibility that the brand might enable the communication of information relating to a continuously evolving multi-dimensional system, including its ability to mutate in time (Kwinter, 2001: 47). That this aspiration is even conceivable is a consequence of the increasing role of information in the co-ordination and conduct of the processes of production (Castells, 1996, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lash, 2002; Mackenzie, 2002).[15]

However, while the informational economy is sometimes described in terms of real-time instantaneity, this temporality is typically restricted to certain highly invested spheres of activity (such as foreign exchange markets). Elsewhere, there remains a speed differential. Indeed, Adrian Mackenzie argues that time differentials are essential to the contemporary economy:

> Insisting on value, the very principle (and principal) of capital resides in different delays. Although the value of information rests in its speed, this speed only makes sense as a differential. There must be differences in speed for information to have any value.
>
> (2002: 160)

Drawing on Guy Debord's analysis in *The Society of the Spectacle* ([1967] 2002), Mackenzie argues that there must be different speeds of access to information or different rates of movement of information if capital is to market spectacle to consumers as a form of merchandise. The brand provides one mechanism by which such differences in speed may be staged as a modulation of production: the stylisation of power (Massumi, 2002: 88), not only as 'again and again', or as 'faster', 'sooner', but also as anticipation and nostalgia, fashion and collection, and, at its limit, as event.[16]

To talk in these terms is not to celebrate brands; nor is to suggest that the development of brands is the best response to the question of how to organise the economy in a rational way (the question that economics sets itself as a discipline). Simon is at pains to stress that while the conception of design he outlines is about the generation of solutions to problems, the solutions so produced will not necessarily be optimal (for any or all of the parties involved). Thus in relation to the operations of the price mechanism, he writes:

> One can marvel that the productive efforts and consumption activities of a great population can be brought into patterned order simply by allowing people to exchange goods at prices mutually agreed upon, without agreeing that the pattern will have optimal properties.
>
> ([1969] 1981: 40)

In a similar way, to describe the interface of the brand as a machine for generating solutions does not imply that the solutions it provides to the problems

posed by the management of the economy are optimal. It is in any case a characteristic of complex artificial systems that there is no fixed criterion of optimality, but the performance of contemporary brands suggests that the (multiple) solutions they provide are not simply not optimal, but less than satisfactory for many. Put baldly, brands do not produce more 'perfect' information than price.

This less than optimal performance is clear when considering the brand both as an object within competitive market relations and as an object of consumption (Slater, 2002a). On the one hand, brands do not necessarily enhance competition between firms. Rather more often than not, the reverse is true – that is, brands allow markets to be controlled more effectively. For example, successful brands (for example, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Heinz) provide the basis for long-standing monopolies or dominance of certain markets and afford protection of long-term investment against risk. At the same time, the rise of brands has contributed to the emergence of a market environment in which the costs of new product development have developed so that they are more or less prohibitive in many cases. Thus, while around sixteen thousand new products are launched in the United States every year, 95 per cent of them are launched as extensions of existing brands (Murphy, 1998: 5).

There are many examples of the use of the dominant position of one brand in a market to enter (and dominate) others. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this is that of Microsoft, whose operating-system software is used to run between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of the world's computers.[17] Microsoft also controls nearly the same market share for applications such as word processors, spreadsheets, presentation graphic programmes and relational databases – the components of the suite of office applications that the company 'bundles' together to consumers. The company's practices have been the subject of a long and bitterly fought anti-trust case in both the United States and Europe (type in 'Microsoft' and 'anti-trust' to your preferred search engine and read!). In an attempt to gain control of linked markets, Microsoft is said by its critics to have used its strong brand identity and control over the PC operating system to eliminate or dominate a number of rivals in markets for desktop applications. Alleged tactics include selectively disseminating information about the operating systems's current and future functionality, thus requiring companies to enter into unequal relations with the company if they are to be able to design functional products; giving away copies of its proprietary browser, Microsoft Internet Explorer (MSIE), to undermine its main rival, Netscape (MSIE is now included in the Microsoft basic operating system); pre-announcement of non-existent products sometimes described as 'vaporware') to discourage consumer purchase of rival products; and predatory pricing of products to deprive rivals of revenue. The effect of such strategies, it is argued, is to drive rivals out of the market; to deter future entrants; to control a wide range of operating standards; and to play too large a part in the regulation of the Internet in relation to issues such as surveillance, copyright, personal privacy and the ability of Internet users to avoid commercial content. Supporters of Microsoft argue that the effect of its strategies is to reduce prices and reduce consumer uncertainty, while its critics believe it has stifled invention and reduced choice. While the case of Microsoft is unusual, it does seem that the brand organises 'a certain structuration of competition, which acts both as a constraint and a resource for the collective qualification–requalification of products' (Callon *et al.*, 2002: 201) – and that it does so in such a way as to extend the forms of market control exercised by large corporations.

On the other hand, while brands are sometimes represented as being more in the interest of consumers than commodities, this is also not necessarily so. For example, Stephen King of J. Walter Thompson claims, 'The difference between products and brands is fundamental. A product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a consumer' (quoted in Pavitt, 2000b: 73–75). And it is the performative discipline of marketing that is commonly held to have a pivotal role in the communication of what it is the consumer wants. But it is commonly argued – even by some within marketing – that the actual role of marketers has remained that of an adjunct to sellers, that marketing continues to be seller-centric (Mitchell, 2001; see also Chapter 5).

> Marketing teaches that organized efforts are needed to bring an understanding of the outside, of society, economy and customer, to the inside of the organization and to make it the foundation for strategy and policy. Yet marketing has rarely performed that grand task. Instead it has become a tool to support selling. It does not start out with 'who is the customer?' but 'what do we want to sell?' It is aimed at getting people to buy the things you want to make.
>
> (Drucker, 1998, quoted in Mitchell, 2001: 78)

So, for example, while the setting up and development of Swatch was dependent on market research, its 'non-watch' product is not used to mark the stages in the life cycle of the consumer. Instead, the time of the consumer is created in the relations between the products that comprise the brand: fashion, collection and the Beat. Similarly, while Nike may be described as a brand characterised by uncontrol, the managers of the brand do not respond to all the uses to which consumers wish to put its products. Indeed, the company clearly wishes to disassociate itself from some of its uses. At the same time, brand

owners are able to lay claim to the exclusive ownership of brands – including the multiplicity of their possible uses – through the legal protection afforded by trade mark (see Chapter 5). In short, while the account presented so far has suggested that information about the consumer is vital to the emergence of the brand, it has not implied that the exchange between producers and consumers is direct, impartial or symmetrical in its effects; rather the reverse.

Coda

Rather than seeing the activities of producers and consumers as the sole focus of analysis, this account has sought to show the importance of *the systemic properties of the relations between products* for an understanding of the brand's economic, political and cultural implications. The aim is to describe a dynamic, multi-dimensional model of the economy in which the brand functions as a complex object. It is thus a contribution to the discussion of the economy in terms of a circuit of production and consumption, or 'circuit of culture' (Johnson, 1986; du Gay *et al.*, 1997; Julier, 2000). Rather than seeing relations in terms of either determination or articulation, however, the suggestion is that the brand has the potential to function probabilistically, globally and transductively. As a consequence, it is able to work within certain *margins of indeterminacy* afforded by its abstraction and generality. This is what enables it to organise design intensivity, to manage the system of relations between products in such a way as to produce non-linear effects, and to co-ordinate the flows of disjuncture and difference of contemporary capital (Appadurai, 1996; Lee and LiPuma, 2002; Knorr Cetina, 2003). The argument being developed here is thus that the brand is an artefact of an economy in which the relations between the products or stages of production are not linear, but complex – that is, probabilistic, global and transductive. But this chapter has also suggested that the functioning of the brand as a complex object or artefact does not necessarily lead to more competitive relations between firms, or to greater equality in the relations between producers and consumers. For this reason, it is important to identify the social mechanisms for expanding the margins of indeterminacy (see Chapters 5 and 6). Intervening in such margins provides the possibility of effective social and political intervention in the objectivity of the brand.